

Shojingaike

Shojingaike is a pond just off the road that crosses through Hakone from north to south. In medieval times, this path was part of the main thoroughfare between Yumoto, the gateway to the area, and Hakone Shrine. Pilgrims making the trek had to endure a treacherous journey: the dirt road was often both steep and narrow, and would turn into a muddy mire after heavy rain. Volcanic activity nearby could paint the sky in ominous shades and cause unfamiliar noises and smells, further unsettling travelers, the more dramatic of whom would describe their experience as a “descent into Hell.” Hoping for divine protection from the dangers of the road, some believers sculpted Buddhist statues using the rocks around Shojingaike, where many of these figures—including some carved more than 700 years ago—can still be seen. A small museum by the pond details their history and hints at the hazards travelers had to face before reaching their goal.