

Oname and Motome - The Tragic Origins of Goshogake Hot Springs

Looking into the depths of the hot spring, you will see several vigorously erupting steam vents and gushing jets of steaming water. Direct your attention to the 2-meter-wide hot water vent located at the front right. This is known as “Oname” which in the local dialect means “mistress”; the small, violently steaming vent to its right is called “Motome,” or “(legal) wife.” These names have their origin in a tragic love story that lives on in this tempestuous landscape.

A young man, the tale goes, was transporting goods by ox when he was set upon and beaten by robbers. A young woman on a pilgrimage found him, carried him into the hot springs to heal his wounds, and nursed him back to health. The two fell in love and began living together.

But the young man had a secret: He already had a wife and son in the city of Kuji (in modern-day Iwate Prefecture). One day, having heard that her husband was alive, his wife traveled to the hot springs and met her husband’s mistress. Realizing she had been deceived, the young mistress threw herself into the vents. The wife, in turn, shattered by the depth of the mistress’ sacrifice and hoping to be reunited with her husband in the afterlife, swiftly followed. The spring was then named after this act of self-sacrifice, “gosho o kakeru” (to place one’s faith in the afterlife), which was contracted over time to the current name, “Goshogake.” The vents are called “Oname” and “Motome” to remember the sacrifice of both mistress and wife.