

## Hedo Village Walking Route and Sai On Pine Conservation Park

The walking route on the east side of Hedo Village dates back to the dynasties of the Ryukyu Kingdom, which flourished from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries. It includes the path traveled by emissaries from Shuri Castle in Naha on their pilgrimage to perform the “water-fetching” (*o-mizutori*) ritual in December. These envoys make offerings at Asumui Utaki (Mt. Hedo), believed to be the oldest *utaki* (sacred site) in the Ryukyus, and take back water from the Ukka River to the east of Hedo.

The *o-mizutori* ritual begins at the sacred place within the village known as the *kami asagi*. The emissaries formally receive the water in the *nundunchi*, a building used for rituals by the village priestess or *nuru*. Although the Ryukyu Kingdom itself is no more, the tradition of *o-mizutori* was recently resurrected after a short hiatus, and attracts many visitors to Hedo.

The *kami asagi*, *nundunchi*, and other historic sites such as the festival space known as the *shinugu-zo* can still be viewed on the route. One of these is the Sakuma Residence, which figures in the tale of King Gihon. According to legend, this thirteenth-century ruler abdicated the throne and fled to Hedo. There he fell in love with a daughter of the Sakuma family. The pair’s infant son was spirited away to Izena Island, where some claim he became the ancestor of Sho En, founder of the Second Sho Dynasty in 1470. Ever since, the Sakuma family has cared for a mausoleum just northwest of Hedo Village said to be the final resting place of the fugitive king.