

Ochudo Circuit: Pilgrimage Halfway Up the Mountain

The Chudo, or Middle Road, was a circular pilgrimage route around Mt. Fuji at an elevation of 2,300 to 2,800 meters. It was considered a greater test of willpower and devotion than climbing to the peak. The route was dangerous, crossing the Osawakuzure (Osawa Collapse) and many other valleys, so only the most skilled pilgrims attempted it. Fuji-ko pilgrims called the practice of traversing this route the “Ochudo,” adding the respectful prefix “o.” Over time, people began to call the route itself the “Ochudo” as well.

Pilgrims generally walked the Chudo on the way back from worshiping at the summit. The route branched clockwise off the Yoshida Ascending Route at Fujogatake (elevation 2,500 meters). Pilgrims spent one night on the south side of the mountain, crossed the Osawa Collapse, worshiped at Komitake-jinja Shrine, and then rejoined the Yoshida Ascending Route. Because the Chudo rejoined the trail below Fujogatake, it was not a perfect circle.

Special equipment was also used. Pilgrims wrapped a piece of white cloth almost two meters long around their head as headgear. In an emergency, this also served as a climbing rope. They also carried a staff more than two meters long called a “Chudo staff” (*chudo-zue*).

Osawakuzure (Osawa Collapse)

The most dangerous part of the Chudo route was the Osawakuzure, a V-shaped valley on Mt. Fuji’s west face. Pilgrims spent the night on the mountainside and crossed the collapse at dawn. (Today, many parts of the Chudo are difficult to pass, and visitors are only permitted to walk a small, well-maintained section on the north face.)

Beyond the Osawakuzure was the Osawa Muro, a small hut where pilgrims rested after the stressful crossing. Next to this was a small shrine called Mihashira-jinja, which was lined with wooden votive tablets (*manegi*) left by Fuji-ko groups as gratitude for their safe passage and proof of their achievement.