

Furiwake-ishi: The Parting of the Pilgrimage Routes

On the grounds of Kumano Sansho Omiwa-yashiro Shrine stands a stone pillar called the Furiwake-ishi (Parting Stone). This marks the intersection of three of the Kumano Kodo's main pilgrimage routes: the Nakahechi, the Ohechi, and the Iseji.

The **Nakahechi** (Middle Road) runs east-west across the entire Kii Peninsula from Tanabe to Nachi-Katsuura and Shingu, connecting all three of the Kumano grand shrines. It is also known as the Imperial Route, and was used by retired emperors and other nobility in the medieval period.

The **Ohechi** (Large Road) also connects Tanabe and Nachi-Katsuura, but it is a longer route, as it follows the coast. It is a difficult route, but the ocean views are pleasingly different from the mountainous terrain of the Nakahechi.

The **Iseji** (Ise Road) runs south from the Ise Grand Shrine and forks to reach both Kumano Hayatama Taisha Grand Shrine and Kumano Hongu Taisha Grand Shrine.

A Wayside Deity

Historically, the Furiwake-ishi was worshiped as a wayside deity and a god of boundaries, not unlike the *dosojin* (tutelary deities) worshiped at small roadside shrines.

The current Furiwake-ishi is the second to stand in its location. The original was erected in 1358, with instructions to replace it every 300 years. These instructions were obeyed faithfully in 1658, but changing ideas about historical conservation precluded a second replacement in 1958.