

Tokugo Mountain Pass

The Tokugo Pass is part of a mountain trail that runs between the Kamikochi valley and the village of Shimashima to the south. During the early 1600s, local residents used the trail for mountain access to cut and gather timber and collect medicinal herbs. The trail was one of the only ways to get to Kamikochi from Shimashima and neighboring areas, and travel along the almost 20-kilometer route was undertaken on foot.

Mountain climbing for pleasure was relatively unknown until the arrival of William Gowland (1842–1922), a British mining engineer and one of many Western experts recruited by the Japanese government to help industrialize the country. Gowland coined the term “Japanese Alps” after being guided to the peak of Mt. Yarigatake. British missionary and enthusiastic mountaineer Walter Weston (1860–1940) followed in Gowland’s footsteps, helping popularize mountaineering in Japan and introducing the Japanese Alps to the rest of the world. Both Gowland and Weston hiked over the Tokugo Pass during their time in Japan; Weston walked the Tokugo Pass trail 11 times.

Access to hiking areas was improved as recreational climbing became more popular, and a paved road to Kamikochi was completed in 1927. An old mountain lodge constructed on the trail in 1923 to accommodate hikers is still available for use today, and was registered as a Tangible Cultural Property by the Nagano Prefectural Government.

It takes about four hours to hike the Tokugo Pass trail from Kamikochi, or about eight hours from Shimashima, which is four kilometers from Shin-Shimashima railway station. The Hotaka mountain range can be viewed on the pass from an elevation of 2,135 meters.