

Michishirube Jizo

This *jizo* statue, built circa 1806, was a useful guide for travelers due to its position along an old trade route. Head to the right and you will end up in Tokyo after several days of walking. Head to the left and you will reach the mountains. The engraving reads, “Edo on the right” (Tokyo was once called Edo), and, “Mountain road on the left.”

There is a strong historical connection between *jizo* statues and travelers. These stone guardians often act as directional markers or waypoints along walking or hiking routes. You can see them at intersections, in cemeteries, and on the grounds of temples, either standing in rows or occupying a seat in wooden or stone shelters. The red bibs and knit caps that often adorn them give them a childlike aspect, and, in fact, the statues also hold spiritual significance as protectors of children. In addition, they are said to confer good luck upon passersby.

Many famous visitors to Nagaoka during the early nineteenth century made mention of the Michishirube Jizo in their travels. To this day, it remains a beacon of guidance and good fortune for people passing through the Settaya area.

A small festival is held each year to help preserve the statue and give thanks for the safety of all those who have encountered it over the course of the year. This festival has taken place every August since 1890, sometimes on a reduced scale, regardless of events elsewhere in the city. The festival and the *jizo* statue it honors represent the courage, tenacity, and determination of the people of Nagaoka.