

The Early History of Umi Jigoku and Kannawa Hot Springs

The earliest written record of Beppu's steaming hot spring pools (called *jigoku*, or "hells") is the eighth-century *Bungo no kuni fudoki* (Record of Bungo Province). This record mentions, among other features, a "red hot spring," which is likely today's Chinoike Jigoku (Blood Pond Hell).

According to legend, the traveling Buddhist monk Ippen Shonin (1239–1289) created Kannawa Hot Springs in 1276. Ippen is said to have been told in a dream to visit the Kannawa area, where villagers were troubled by the dangerous, boiling hot springs. Ippen was instructed to "subdue" (fill in) the hot pools by writing lines of sutra on countless rocks and hurling them into the springs. After he had filled in most of the pools, he was told in another dream to create a bath, fed by the remaining hot springs, that would heal people's maladies through the combined effects of prayer and hot spring waters. This became the area's first medicinal bath; many more were built in later centuries.

During the Edo period (1603–1867), traveler and geographer Furukawa Koshoken (1726–1807) recorded in 1783 a spring named Ike no Jigoku, or Pond's Hell, (today's Umi Jigoku). When discussing this unusual name with a local resident, he received a humorous response: "If an inanimate, wordless pond can be sent down to hell, then surely humans can be sent there as well!" The term "hell" was used for many other local springs, including Aburaya no Jigoku (Oil Merchant's Hell) and Sakaya no Jigoku (Sake Shop's Hell). These no longer exist, and their former locations are unknown.

A later pictorial record from 1845, *Tsurumi shichito no ki* (Record of the Tsurumi's Seven Hot Springs), shows that area residents used the hot water and steam from Kannawa's hot springs to cook food and for bathing and medicinal purposes. It also depicts teahouses, a garden, and other facilities built around the steaming pools, showing that by this time the pools were an established part of local culture.