

Maegawa Channel

The stone-paved channel called Maegawa that runs the entire length of Kumagawa-juku was built in the early seventeenth century as part of the official effort to develop the small village into a post town. The channel was a blessing for the residents, serving as a source of pure water both for field irrigation and the necessities of daily life. Stone steps with a platform just above the water level, called *kawato*, were built intermittently along the channel to provide easier access for everyday tasks such as washing clothes or vegetables. People and horses traveling through the post town would use the water running by the storefronts to quench their thirst and replenish supplies.

Another use of the Maegawa was for *imoarai*, waterwheel-based devices for peeling potatoes. A pole placed through the center of a paddled wooden barrel would be set in the gaps in the stone walls on either side of the channel, suspending it over the water. The flowing water would hit the paddles and spin the barrel, tumbling and peeling the potatoes inside.

With the advent of modern plumbing, the channel is no longer used as a source of drinking water or a place to do laundry. However, it serves to wash away snow in winter, provides a much-needed reprieve from the summer heat, and is an integral part of the traditional atmosphere of the townscape.