

Seven Cauldrons of Tashiro

The dynamic landscape of snow country has many unusual geological formations. One of them is Tashiro no Nanatsugama, or the “Seven Cauldrons of Tashiro”—seven cascades spilling into a series of “cauldrons” (waterfall basins) in the Kama River Valley.

The falls are located on a roughly 1-kilometer stretch of the Kama River, a tributary of the larger Kiyotsu River, which flows through the center of Tokamachi. The river runs between steep, stone walls that resemble thousands upon thousands of angular columns laid together like thatch.

Suzuki Bokushi, a native of Niigata and famed nineteenth-century chronicler of life in snow country, described the rocks in his seminal work *Snow Country Tales: Life in the Other Japan*. He called them wonderfully strange in their straightness, marveling that nature could produce the same regularity as a stonemason. Today, we understand that these peculiar formations are examples of “columnar jointing,” groups of roughly hexagonal pillars of igneous rock formed by cooling magma.

Perhaps due to the uncanny atmosphere created by the strange rock formations, the falls feature heavily in local folklore. In one well-known story associated with the uppermost falls, a huntsman from a nearby village came to fish in the basin only to find it protected by a large serpent. The man promised the serpent he would cast his net only once, but he was so excited by the large catch that he cast a second time. For breaking his promise, the man was cursed and tormented by the serpent until he lost everything.

Hiking trails run along the river for those who want to see the falls up close. Sharp eyes may spot the mythological serpent in the neighboring Nanatsugama Park, but it poses no threat—this version is an art installation called *Snake Path* by Australian artist Anne Graham.