

What Was the Furubochu?

Saigandenji Temple is said to have been founded in 726 by a monk from India named Saiei. Over time, the temple became established as a major center for volcano worship and mountain asceticism. By the fourteenth or fifteenth century, several hundred *yamabushi* mountain ascetics occupied the relatively flat stretch of land extending west of the temple, which was divided into 92 plots of differing sizes. They are said to have constructed 37 substantial wooden temples and 51 simple thatch huts there. This loose community of ascetics and monks became known as the Furubochu. *Bochu* means “an assemblage of monks,” while the prefix *furu* means “old.”

The ascetics would spend their days meditating, fasting, and chanting sutras; inspecting the pond inside the crater for signs of the volcano deities’ moods and intentions; and guiding pilgrims to the highest permitted point, where they would worship the crater from afar.

Small stone pagodas were found here in the 1960s when a farmer bulldozed the area to make it easier to graze his cows. In the 2000s, Watanabe Kazunori, a professor of vulcanology at Kumamoto University, conducted some preliminary excavations. He discovered burnt pampas grass roof thatching from *yamabushi* huts, as well as wooden pillars from the temple buildings.