

Mt. Kaikomagatake

A destination for mountain ascetics

This granite-topped mountain with a pyramidal summit is located about 6 kilometers north of Mt. Kitadake. The first syllable of its name refers to Kai Province, the former name of Yamanashi Prefecture, while *koma*, meaning “horse,” suggests a resemblance between the mountain and the animal.

The route from Yokote Komagatake Shrine along the Kuroto ridge up to the 2,967-meter summit was first climbed in 1816, after which Mt.

Kaikomagatake became a pilgrimage site for practitioners of *Shugendo* mountain asceticism. Up until the start of the Second World War, white-robed pilgrims would make the ascent while swinging bells and chanting a Shinto purification prayer and the Buddhist *Heart Sutra*. The route is dotted with monuments and there is a tiny secondary shrine, or *okumiya*, on the summit. Some pilgrims still make the climb today, though in far smaller numbers than before.

Since Yokote Komagatake Shrine is at a height of 770 meters, the elevation gain when hiking to the summit is just under 2,200 meters. The climb is ranked as one of Japan's three hardest climbs, along with the Bunatate ridge of Mt. Eboshi in the Northern Alps and the Nishikuro ridge on Mt. Tanigawa. While the whole route from the shrine to the summit and down to Kitazawa Pass is only 12 kilometers, visitors are advised to split the climb over two days, as all the ladders, chains, and steep rocky slopes make it difficult to complete in a single day.