

The *Yumori* of Dake Onsen

To keep the waters of Dake Onsen flowing from Mt. Tetsu, the 8 kilometers of conduits and pipes must be regularly inspected and repaired. This is the job of the *yumori*, or “guardians of the springs”: local residents who perform these duties in addition to their regular work.

A Year-Round Job

In winter, the *yumori* climb into the mountains weekly. The trek to the hot springs’ source in the snow can take several hours. This is followed by around three hours of digging through a few meters of snow to access the pipes and cleaning them, before heading back down to town.

When the weather warms and the snow melts, the *yumori* begin visiting the mountains more frequently. By summer they are there daily, except when

the weather is bad. At this time of year, the work includes clearing vegetation and debris from the access trail and checking for leaks in the pipes along the way.

Unsung Heroes of Dake Onsen

In September 2011, after torrential rain on the mountain, the flow of hot-spring water to Dake Onsen stopped. A landslide on the mountain had damaged the pipes. The *yumori* led an emergency repair effort, with much of the town pitching in to help. After several days of work, the flow was restored, but the *yumori* had to monitor and maintain the affected areas for years thereafter as the debris from the landslide settled.

There is no manual for any of this work. Younger *yumori* learn from more experienced colleagues on the job, then teach new recruits in turn. *Yumori* culture, passed on from generation to generation, has played an invisible but vital role at Dake Onsen since the town's founding.