**Sannai Maruyama Site**

Traces of pit dwellings, foundations of large structures, mounds containing large quantities of earthenware, burial areas, and clay mining pits for pottery production tell much about prehistoric life and society at Aomori’s Sannai Maruyama Site. The site is one of the largest settlement sites of the Jomon period (13,000–400 BCE) discovered to date, and archaeological surveys indicate that a sizeable settlement existed here for over a thousand years between 3900 and 2200 BCE.

*Development of settlements*

Food sources and environmental factors led to changes in the scale and form of settlements over the course of the Jomon period (13,000–400 BCE). They began at the end of the last glacial period as seasonal bases for foraging and hunting. As temperatures rose and food became more abundant, settlements became more permanent. They grew considerably in size between 5000 and 2000 BCE, with large ones like that at Sannai Maruyama emerging around 3000 BCE. From 2000 to 400 BCE, the climate cooled and settlements became smaller.

*Pit dwellings large and small*

The population of the Sannai Maruyama settlement is difficult to estimate, but surveys of the site suggest it could have reached several hundred. The foundations of more than 500 pit dwellings have been identified to date, including those of “dwellings” that measured up to 32 meters in length. A number of these pit dwellings have been recreated and are open for visitors to enter. Archaeologists believe the larger dwellings may have functioned as community spaces, workshops, or communal winter living spaces.

*Burial areas*

Burial areas, surveys show, appear to have been separate for adults and children. Some 500 burial pits have been found lining certain paths running through the settlement. The size of the pits indicates that these would have been for adults. Infants and younger children were interred in burial jars. More than 500 of these vessels have been found buried near the North Mound, one of three artificial mounds containing large quantities of potsherds.

*Trade and crafts*

Artifacts uncovered at the Sannai Maruyama Site indicate trade with other regions of Japan. Items made of jade, amber, and obsidian, and tools glued using asphalt are among them. The materials to make such items would not have been available locally, and would have originated as far away as 500 kilometers. Jade beads, amber accessories, and obsidian spearheads, as well as unworked raw materials and incomplete items, have been unearthed. Such discoveries imply the presence of craftspeople with the skills to work these materials.

*Sannai Maruyama Jomon Culture Center*

Entrance to the archaeological site is through the Sannai Maruyama Jomon Culture Center, a museum with exhibits introducing life at the settlement through artifacts found there. Tickets to the museum allow access to the archaeological site. The museum features the Jomon Big Wall, a 6-meter-high wall embedded with more than 5000 potsherds; Jomon-themed workshops such as clay figurine making; and a viewing gallery where visitors can see archaeologists at work in restoring earthenware vessels. There is a gift shop and cafeteria on-site. Information is provided in English throughout the museum and its facilities.

*Related archaeological sites*

Several of the Jomon Prehistoric Sites in Northern Japan are located in Aomori Prefecture. The Komakino Stone Circle [link] is in Aomori City, only a few kilometers from the Sannai Maruyama Site. The Korekawa Site [link] in Hachinohe has a museum exhibiting highly refined pottery and lacquerware from the final centuries of the Jomon period.