

## **Takachiho Shrine: Iron Guardian Statues and Sacred Stone**

*Komainu* are guardian statues found in pairs at the gates of Shinto shrines and some Buddhist temples. Originally carved from wood and sheltered, the guardian statues were first placed outdoors in the fourteenth century, when they began to be made of stone. The *komainu* at Takachiho Shrine are distinctive in being made of iron. Their rarity, quality, and cultural value are such that they were given the Important Cultural Property designation in 1971. The statues were dedicated to Takachiho Shrine by first Kamakura shogun Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147–1199). It was here that Yoritomo sent his retainer Hatakeyama Shigetada to pray for future of his rule, and here that the Chichibu Cedar was planted to commemorate that visit.

Another sacred artifact of the shrine is a foundation stone, enshrined to the side of the main sanctuary and known as the *shizume-ishi* (“quelling stone”). Enclosed within a plain wood lattice structure, the stone is said to possess divine power. Praying to this stone is believed to relieve suffering and quell disorder in the world.