

Dakedai Education Forest

Dakedai Education Forest displays two seemingly contradictory aspects of Shirakami Sanchi's environmental history: old-growth beech forests and extensive lumber plantations. Akita Prefecture is known for Akita cedar, a highly prized variety of Japanese cedar (*Cryptomeria japonica*), and logging companies have been active in Shirakami Sanchi for centuries. But due to the remote location, much of the core zone was spared from the huge postwar reforestation projects that replaced many local forests with Japanese cedar.

Many of the beeches surrounding the Dakedai Education Forest were replaced with cedar about 70 years ago. Since then, however, the plantations have been maintained only sporadically, and the beeches are making a gradual comeback. Farther in, where no clear-cutting has occurred, are old-growth beeches, including one of Shirakami Sanchi's oldest trees, an ancient beech estimated to be 400 years old.

In the old-growth beech forest, where the natural succession has not been interrupted by planting and lumbering, many different generations of beeches grow alongside each other. Older trees die and decay, creating nutrient-rich earth from which younger trees grow in a constant, centuries-long cycle. These beech forests offer a superb chance to experience Japan's natural landscape. In fact, Dakedai Education Forest was one of the visual references used by Studio Ghibli in making the animated film *Princess Mononoke*.