

### **【Arato Castle Site】**

Arato Castle was built in 1578 on the orders of Uesugi Kagekatsu (1556–1623), son of the powerful warlord Uesugi Kenshin (1530–1578). Kagekatsu constructed the castle as a defensive fortification during a dispute with his brother Kagekatsu (1552–1579) over who would succeed their father as lord of Echigo.

Though Arato Castle was built in the late sixteenth century, mountain castles (*yamashiro*) like this one were one of the earliest forms of large-scale fortification in Japan, and they became the precursors of the larger castles that daimyo built on hilltops or on Japan's open plains during the Warring States period (1467–1568). Compared to later castles, whose construction often involved dramatically reshaping the landscape, mountain castles like Arato involved minimum engineering and made clever use of the existing terrain.

At the top of the stairs is a path that was once the Mikuni Road, the major highway that connected Edo (now Tokyo) to the Sea of Japan. The path to the castle's main gate leads off the Mikuni Road to the right and passes embankments that were dug to forestall attackers. The first of several leveled areas was once the castle's second bailey. During construction, the vegetation here would have been left untouched to prevent soil erosion and to provide a defensive barrier. The remains of a well can be seen between the second and third baileys on the opposite side of a dry moat. Farther up the hill, on the summit, is the main bailey where defenders would have made their final stand.

During the castle's construction, the trees on the slopes surrounding the main bailey were stripped away to be used as building materials and to clear the lines of fire. Earthen walls were constructed around the main bailey's northern side, and a raised clearing that once held a signal tower is visible in one corner of the enclosure. The baileys were encircled by wooden palisades with loopholes and gun ports through which the defenders could fire on the enemy. The highway was once visible in all directions from the main bailey, but with the forest now regrown, only Yuzawa is visible to the north.