

Tomori Petroglyphs

Sailing ships and arrows are recurrent images on the Tomori no senkokuga, or Tomori Petroglyphs, near the Akirigami River. The etchings on these three rocks are the most detailed of the five sites discovered on Tokunoshima, and no other petroglyphs have been found across the Amami archipelago. The precise age of the images, as well as their purpose and meaning, is unclear. They are believed to date from the early Edo period (1603–1867), and their existence is recorded in a book about Tokunoshima from 1895.

Stone Journals?

The complexity of the images and the width of the lines steadily decreases from the first rock to the last. Two of the rocks were discovered by local people in 1923. The first is a deep etching of nine ships and 48 arrows. The style of sails on the ships appears to have been in use from the Edo period, providing a major clue to their origins. Three types of arrows are shown, suggesting the artist had considerable knowledge of archery. One theory is that the petroglyphs were made by a local person to record significant events, such as ships arriving from an unusual destination.

Pleasure Boats

The petroglyphs on the second rock are less deep but with more detail and depict 10 ships and nine arrows. Among the images are what appear to be *yakata-bune*, the pleasure boats of shoguns. The Japanese characters for such vessels mean “house-shaped-boat,” which have been in use since the Heian period (794–1185). The third rock was discovered buried in the ground during a survey of the site in 2012. It features six ships and eight arrows, similar to the other two rocks. It includes some unusual grid patterns, the meaning of which is still being debated. Experts believe that some of the petroglyphs on the third rock may have been made at different times.

Academic Attraction

A symposium dedicated to the petroglyphs was held on the island in 2016, exploring the tools and methods, who was responsible and the possible meanings of the images.

Similar images have been found elsewhere in Japan at *kofun*, the burial mounds which were constructed more than a thousand years earlier. The Tomori Petroglyphs are a designated Cultural Property of Kagoshima Prefecture.

Getting There

The Tomori Petroglyphs are in the Nishi-agina district, approximately a 25-minute drive from the airport and 30 minutes from the town of Tokunoshima. Free car parking is available, but there are no facilities or shops nearby. The twisting roads to the site, which cut under Route 83, are not well signposted and may prove difficult to navigate. Visitors can contact the Amagi Town Board of Education for assistance.