

Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles

The Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles (c. 1200 BCE) date from the latter part of the Jomon period (13,000–400 BCE) and are located in forestland outside the town of Chitose, southeast of Sapporo. They range in size from 30 to 75 meters in diameter and are arranged in a manner suggesting significant planning. The earthworks attest to complex burial practices in the settled communities of prehistoric northern Japan.

A path leads through the site, around the earthwork circles and along some of their embankments. Artifacts excavated from the burial circles and other nearby archaeological sites are displayed at the Chitose City Buried Cultural Properties Center [\[link\]](#).

Large-scale earthworks

In certain parts of Hokkaido, particularly here where the Kiusu circles are located, large circular areas of land were hollowed out and enclosed with earthworks measuring several meters in breadth and height. Archaeological surveys suggest they functioned as cemeteries for multiple communities. Earthwork Burial Circle 2, one of the largest of the Kiusu circles, measures 73 meters in diameter, with embankments over 4 meters tall and more than 20 meters thick at the base. Archaeologists estimate it would have taken 25 people approximately 4 months to construct this circle.

Of the nine Kiusu earthwork circles, seven are grouped together, with some sharing embankments. A path appears to lead between the circles, and the embankments are lower in certain sections, possibly indicating entrances to the individual burial areas.

Archaeological findings

Extensive surveys and partial excavations beginning in the 1960s have revealed burial pits within the circles and around the outer edges of the embankments. Five such pits were discovered 60 centimeters below the ground during a survey of Earthwork Burial Circle 1. One contained a standing stone, suggesting a marked grave. Pits from around and within the other burial circles contained broken pieces of clay figurines (*dogu*) thought to have a ritual function, circular stone arrangements, traces of red ochre, and a polished stone staff with intricate engravings that may have served some ceremonial function.

The scale of the Kiusu burial circles and the effort that would have been required to complete them have special importance. Earthwork circles like these and the stone circles of Washinoki [\[link\]](#) (Hokkaido), Oyu [\[link\]](#) (Akita), Isedotai [\[link\]](#) (Akita), Komakino [\[link\]](#) (Aomori), and Omori Katsuyama [\[link\]](#) (Aomori), point to the increasing complexity of burial practices and significance of funeral rites from 2000 BCE.

Artifacts on display

Artifacts highlighting different aspects of life during the Jomon period (13,000–400 BCE)—including diet, pottery, stoneworking, and burial practices—from the Kiusu burial circles and other nearby sites can be viewed at the Chitose City Buried Cultural Properties Center [\[link\]](#). The facility is a 10-minute drive from the Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles. Admission is free. Some information is provided in English.