

## **Odai Yamamoto Site**

This prehistoric site on the Tsugaru Peninsula in northern Aomori yielded stone tools and some of Japan's earliest pottery. The artifacts unearthed here show how life changed for northern Japan's prehistoric peoples during the final phase of the Paleolithic period (Old Stone Age) and became more sedentary at the dawn of the Jomon period (13,000 BCE).

### *Stone tools and what they tell us*

Axes, knife-like blades, scrapers for skinning animals and working wood, and sharp-pointed tools most likely used for hunting are among the stone tools unearthed at the Odai Yamamoto Site. They vary in shape and size, ranging from larger, more rudimentary tools to more technically refined blades and arrowheads, designed to hunt fast-moving animals such as deer.

Most of the tools are made from slate, which would have been available locally from nearby rivers. Analysis of the tools indicates diverse stoneworking techniques, including regional techniques associated with prehistoric sites in Hokkaido, as well as central Japan (Kanto). The variety of tools and techniques suggests significant interaction with other regions and communities.

### *Pottery and the transition to a new way of life*

The earthenware fragments found at the Odai Yamamoto Site are among the oldest known in the world. A handful of the potsherds, believed to be from a single vessel, were found to have carbonized residues. Carbon dating of these fragments suggests they are from 13,000 BCE, thousands of years before pottery was being used in Europe or the Near East.

The Jomon period is named for the "cord-markings" that characterize the earthenware typical of this period, but the fragments found at the Odai Yamamoto Site have no patterning. Originally, this pottery is likely to have served a purely utilitarian function such as cooking. Pottery is not transported easily, and its emergence signifies a transition towards a more sedentary lifestyle. The earthenware fragments from the Odai Yamamoto Site are from the very beginning of the Jomon period, when Japan's prehistoric peoples were beginning to lead more settled lives.

*Where to view the artifacts*

Potsherds and stone tools are on display at the Sotogahama Oyama Furusato Shiryokan [\[link\]](#), a former elementary school located across the road from the archaeological site. Admission is free of charge. Some basic information is in English.

*What to see next*

The Tsugaru Peninsula is the location of many prehistoric sites including the Kamegaoka Burial Site [\[link\]](#), where some of the most refined examples of Jomon-period earthenware have been discovered, and the Tagoyano Site [\[link\]](#). Find out more about the Jomon period (13,000–400 BCE) and the development of prehistoric settlements at these and other sites in northern Japan.