

## **Washinoki Stone Circle**

The Washinoki Stone Circle, in the town of Mori in southern Hokkaido, is the island's largest known stone circle, with a circumference of 37 meters. It dates from around 2000 BCE and displays similarities with stone circles discovered in Aomori and Akita from a similar period. Archaeologists believe the stone circles in northern Tohoku and southern Hokkaido are evidence of a shared culture between the two regions.

### *The composition of the circle*

The circle is composed of two outer rings and an oval-shaped stone arrangement in the center. Many of the 602 stones that comprise the circle are dug into the ground and positioned upright or pointing inwards at different angles. The stones would have been gathered from the mouth of the Katsura River, about a kilometer away. Burial pits and artifacts such as miniature clay objects in the shapes of bells have been found near the circle.

### *Saving the circle*

The stone circle, built on top of a hill, was discovered in 2003 ahead of construction work for a highway. Plans to bulldoze the hill were abandoned after the local community campaigned to preserve the circle. Instead, a tunnel was constructed, with great care taken not to displace the stones or the layer of soil in which they are buried. Vibrations were constantly monitored, and some of the tunneling work had to be done without power tools or machinery. The stone circle remains undisturbed in its original location, now above a highway.

### *Visiting the circle*

Due to its location, the archaeological site is not open to the general public. It can only be visited on tours organized by the Mori Town Office for Archaeological Excavation and Research, a center with exhibits about the stone circle and the artifacts uncovered at the site. The exhibition space at the center is free of charge. Information is provided only in Japanese.