

Discovering the History of Tagajo Castle

Tagajo Castle was once a major center of power, administration, and culture in the Tohoku region, although little remains of this once powerful edifice today. Despite its name, this was not an actual castle, but rather the headquarters from which the Tohoku area was governed. In addition to the authority it exercised over the region, Tagajo Castle was also the site of important governmental functions and ceremonies.

The original structure was built in 724, during the Nara period (710–794), on a 30-meter hill to ensure clear views of the surrounding area. The compound was built in a square, measuring around 900 meters on each side, and was protected by 4.5-meter-tall walls of rammed earth. The structure was rebuilt and expanded three times over the centuries.

For 300 years, laws and policies were decided here. However, after the eleventh century, Tagajo Castle was abandoned due to changes in power, and much of the land was turned over to agricultural use, although local farmers were careful not to touch the original stone foundations. The site was rediscovered in the Edo period (1603–1867), and Sendai domain scholars under the auspices of the ruling Date family brought more historical evidence to light, such as a number of inkstones.

At the bottom of the hill, where a reconstructed castle gate is scheduled to be completed in 2024, visitors will find the Tagajo Castle Monument, protected by a small wooden hut. This large 1.96-meter stone stele was carved to commemorate repairs made to Tagajo Castle in 762. In literature, the monument is known as the Tsubo no Ishibumi, and the haiku poet Matsuo Basho (1644–1694) was so deeply impressed by the stone's permanence, compared to the ever-changing world, that he wrote about it in his work *Oku no hosomichi* (The Narrow Road to the Deep North). The stele is a designated Important Cultural Property.

About 1 kilometer southeast of this site are the ruins of a temple complex (Tagajo Haiji). The original temple, which may have been called Kannonji Temple, is thought to have been built at the same time as Tagajo Castle. The former temple grounds are now a pleasant park, and visitors can see the foundation stones of the temple and of the large pagoda that once stood beside it. The complex was designated a Special Historic Site in 1966.