

Discovering the History of Tagajo Castle

Tagajo Castle was once an important seat of government administration and culture in the Tohoku region. Despite its name, it was not an actual castle, but rather the headquarters for control of the region. In addition to overseeing the Tohoku area, 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). It was constructed on top of 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 rammed earth walls 4.5 meters tall. The castle was rebuilt three times over the centuries.

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

Toward the bottom of the hill, a reconstruction of the castle gate is scheduled to be completed in 2024. Nearby is 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. It is known in literature as *Tsubo no Ishibumi*, and the haiku master 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 famed work *Oku no hosomichi* (The Narrow Road to the Deep North). The stele is a designated Important Cultural Property.

Around 1 kilometer southeast of the site are the remains of a temple complex (Tagajo Haiji). The original structure may have been called Kannonji Temple and 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.