

Hair Rope

This massive rope is made out of human hair and hemp. It is one of many that were used to transport timber for the reconstruction of Higashi Honganji in the late nineteenth century after the temple's structures were burned down in 1864. The standard hemp ropes in use at the time were of low quality and often snapped when pulling the giant beams and columns needed for the temple's halls and gates, leading to serious accidents. To overcome this problem, female devotees from throughout Japan donated their hair so that stronger ropes could be made, an act symbolic of believers' willingness to make sacrifices for the holy cause. A total of 53 ropes were laid using donated hair; the largest of these was 110 meters long, 40 centimeters thick, and weighed about 1 ton. The rope displayed here is 69 meters long, 30 centimeters thick, and weighs 375 kilograms.