

The Miracle Pine Tree

The 2-kilometer-long beachfront of Rikuzentakata was once the site of Takata Matsubara, a forest of some 70,000 pine trees. It served the coastal area as a windbreak and was a treasured natural feature for around 350 years. The powerful tsunami that followed the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011, devastated the forest, leaving only one tree standing. To survivors of the disaster, this “miracle pine” became a symbol of hope and recovery. When the tree died in May 2012, support came from throughout Japan and overseas to preserve its memory. Today, a towering 27.5-meter reconstruction using much of the original tree stands at the same spot, a short walk from the Iwate Tsunami Memorial Museum. Several research institutes were able to grow saplings from seeds taken from the tree (which was determined to be 173 years old). These saplings have been replanted along with thousands of others where the previous pine trees stood, in hopes that a reincarnated forest will be enjoyed there by future generations.

The crumbling edifice of the Rikuzentakata Youth Hostel nearby was preserved in the same condition in which it was found after the tsunami. Largely destroyed by the massive waves, the building is thought to have absorbed the brunt of the onslaught, helping to protect the miracle tree from destruction. Another building left standing after the tsunami is the former Kesen Junior High School just across the river, which has also been preserved as a memorial to that tragic day.