Life in the Park

The mountains and plains of Tokachi Shikaoi Geopark support a wide variety of life, including relict ice age species such as a subspecies of the northern pika, uniquely evolved fish species, cold-climate vegetation more commonly found in Arctic regions. Archaeological discoveries from sites within the park and neighboring regions provide evidence of human activity on the Tokachi Plain from around 30,000 BP. As with many animal and plant species, humans likely migrated to Hokkaido from the Eurasian continent via land bridges during the last ice age (c. 115,000–11,700 BP).

Land bridges

Between 80,000 and 10,000 BP, Earth's temperatures were much lower than they are today. More of the planet's water was ice, and during the coldest period (c. 20,000 BP) the sea level was up to 120 meters lower than today. Lower sea levels exposed shallow seafloors, and these became land bridges that connected islands and continents. Hokkaido was linked to the Eurasian continent via Sakhalin, and the islands of Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu were connected via the Korean peninsula. Animals such as mammoths and northern pikas migrated to Hokkaido via the northern land bridge.

Two distinct biogeographic regions

The plant and animal life of Hokkaido differs significantly from that of Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu, Japan's other main islands. This is partly due to the deep Tsugaru Strait, which separates Hokkaido and Honshu. No land bridge connected Honshu and Hokkaido, even when sea levels were at their lowest. Many species were therefore unable to migrate between the two islands. Blakiston's Line is the name given to the biogeographic boundary between the islands. The northern pika, Ezo red fox, and Blakiston's fish owl, the world's largest living species of owl, are some of the animal species found in Hokkaido but not anywhere else in Japan.