

A History of People and the Park

Archaeological discoveries from sites within the park and neighboring regions provide evidence of human activity on the Tokachi Plain from around 30,000 BP. The land has sustained human life over millennia, offering bountiful grounds for hunting, rivers and lakes for fishing, woodlands for foraging, and tillable soil for farming, although agriculture was not begun in Hokkaido until the nineteenth century. The history of modern-day Shikaoi begins in the early twentieth century against a backdrop of increasing ethnic Japanese (Wajin) settlement in Hokkaido. Vestiges of the island's indigenous culture remain in the names of landmarks and the name of the town.

Ainu culture

Ainu people traditionally lived in villages called *kotan* around the lakes and along the rivers and coasts of Hokkaido. They fished for salmon and trout and hunted and foraged on the land.

Records from Shikaoi's early settlers indicate there were 10 Ainu villages in what would later become the town. Many Ainu communities were forced to relocate and abandon their homes as Hokkaido became increasingly settled and land regulations and cultural assimilation policies were introduced by the central government. Ainu culture suffered as a result of these and other policies, but its legacy is upheld in the names of many towns and landmarks throughout Hokkaido. These include Shikaoi (literally "deer chase"), which is derived from the Ainu name meaning "the place with many deer traps."

Settlers and a new way of life

In the late nineteenth century, the government launched a development drive in Hokkaido, inviting people from other islands to settle and cultivate the land. Settlers were given a plot of land in return for clearing and developing it for farming. The first settlers in Shikaoi arrived in 1902, and by 1920 more than 4,000 people had moved to the area. They labored to cultivate the land, felling trees and clearing fields with rudimentary tools and only horse-drawn plows for tilling.

Railroads serving Shikaoi opened in 1921 and 1928. In the years that followed, agriculture and the timber industry boomed. The township of Shikaoi was founded in 1959 and continued to develop. In the latter half of the twentieth century, the agricultural industry developed with the introduction of modern farming machinery and new technological advancements. Today, the town's lucrative farming industry provides supermarkets all over the country with a wide variety of products, including dairy

products, beef, buckwheat, wheat, potatoes, sugar beets, and several other kinds of fruit and vegetables.

Scenes depicting the early struggles of Shikaoi's settlers and the harshness of the environment are captured in the works of Kanda Nissho (1937–1970), an artist who moved to the area with his parents at the age of seven. The Kanda Nissho Memorial Museum of Art in Shikaoi has a large collection of his paintings and sketches.