

## ***Honyarado* Snow Huts**

*Honyarado* are igloo-like snow huts built in Tokamachi as part of a winter event called *torioi*, or “bird chasing.” *Torioi* is traditionally held on the night of January 14. During the event, children parade through town, loudly clapping wooden blocks together and singing the *torioi* song to scare away crop-devouring birds. Residents reward their efforts with mochi rice cakes and other sweets. The children then gather inside a *honyarado*, where they can roast the mochi over a charcoal brazier and share the fruits of their labor late into the night. While the origins of the event are agricultural, today the event is another way to enjoy the snow and build community.

There are two different types of *honyarado*. The first, referred to as “castle type,” consists of three snow walls topped with a roof of bamboo poles. The second, called “hollowed-out type,” is as the name suggests: a mound of snow that has been hollowed out to create a small room inside.

Snow huts similar to *honyarado* are found in other snowy areas of Japan, where they are usually called *kamakura*. The Tokamachi name likely comes from the *torioi* song, which includes shouts of the onomatopoeic word *honyara!* to drive off the birds. Loosely, one might translate *honyarado* as “shoo-shoo huts.”

Experiencing the surprising warmth of squeezing into a *honyarado* to sing and clap with Tokamachi residents is a rare treat awaiting winter visitors.