Shimotako's Historic Old-Growth Cedars

The Shimotako Planted Forest was likely established some 500 years ago, making it one of the oldest (if not *the* oldest) planted forests in Japan. Across the 3,700 square meters of manmade forest, Japanese cedars and *hinoki* cypresses stand in orderly rows on a mossy, fern-covered slope, where only the occasional stump reminds visitors that the trees provide something more than scenic beauty. Among the Shimotako trees are three giants estimated to be around four centuries old. One tree looms large among the rest: a roughly 410-year-old cedar called the Rekishi no Shōnin, or "Witness to History."

Over the centuries, the forest has seen continual harvesting and replanting. Trees lower on the ridge tend to be younger, as their proximity to the road makes them easier to cut down, haul out, and replace. Near the top of the ridge, however, the trees are larger and older. That is the domain of the Rekishi no Shōnin, which stands approximately 55 meters tall and is 5.4

meters in circumference.

A trail leads from the road to the great tree near the top of the ridge. However, the trail passes through private property, and entry to the forest requires an official guide. The 1.3-kilometer hike to the ridge takes about an hour and is moderately strenuous. Guided tours can be arranged through the Kawakami Genryū Tourism Office, which donates part of the tour fee to support maintenance of the village's forests.