

History of Hokkaido

(公財)北海道埋蔵文化財センター(2019)
『北の発掘物語 遺跡と遺物は語る』より一部改変

History of Honshu	Year	History of Hokkaido
Upper Paleolithic period	BCE 25000	Upper Paleolithic period
	BCE 11000	
Jomon period		Jomon period
Yayoi period	BCE 300	Zoku-Jomon period
Kofun period	400	Okhotsk culture period
Asuka period Nara period	600 800	
Heian period	1,200	Satsumon period
Kamakura period	1,300	Middle ages
Muromachi period	1,600	
Edo period		Early Modern period
		Ainu culture period
Present day	1900	Present day

National Historic Site
"Shirataki Sites"

Engaru Archaeological Center

Museum Guide



Engaru Archaeological Center

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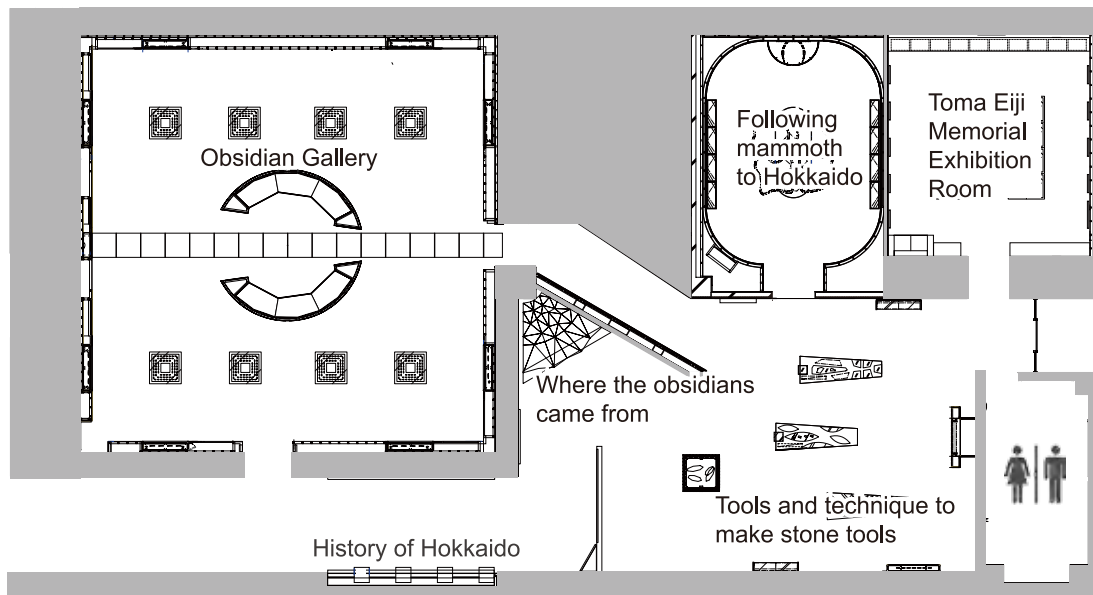
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The exhibitions of Engaru Archaeological Center

Engaru Archaeological Center houses and displays artifacts found through excavations in archaeological sites in Engaru Town. The archaeological sites and artifacts, or Buried Cultural Properties, include stone tools and potteries made by ancient people, as well as remains of dwellings and bonfire. They are the keys to discover what happened during the ancient time when no historical records are left. The center is working to document the daily lives of the ancient people and pass them down to the future generation.



What is obsidian?

Obsidian is a type of volcanic rock, formed by volcanic eruption. Although its Japanese name is *kokuyoseki*, it has several local names such as “Tokachiishi,” “Hoshikuso,” or “Bateiseki.” In Ainu language, the Indigenous language of Hokkaido, it is called *Anchi* or *Anshu*.

In principle, obsidian is black. However, some of them are red- or brown-mixed color, and others may have many white crystals inside.

Obsidian is seen not only in Japan but throughout the world. It was used to create stone tools in the ancient time, and is still used today for various accessories.



photo : Hokkaido Archaeological Center

National Historic Site “Shirataki Sites”

Since the 1950s, many Upper Paleolithic sites were excavated in Shirataki area of Engaru Town. In particular, numbers of huge obsidian stone tools and their flakes have been found on river terraces on the right bank of Yubetsu River. Many researchers have attempted to discover their uses and ages.

In 1995, an area of 50 meters width and 12 kilometers length was excavated, in the occasion of construction of an expressway on this terrace. From a total of 22 sites, 7.68 million artifacts of 15 ton in total were excavated, of which 99% were made of obsidian.

This survey provided many clues to discover the Upper Paleolithic period in Hokkaido. One of the key findings was climate change. Climate change has affected the lives of people, such as the manufacturing method of stone tools, how to gain obsidian, and the distance that obsidian was carried.

As of now, seven sites, including those excavated in 1950s and in 1995, are designated National Historic Site “Shirataki Sites.”



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Obsidian Gallery

Obsidian Gallery is the main exhibition room of Engaru Archaeological Center. Important Cultural Property “Artifacts from Shirataki Sites in Hokkaido,” excavated from six sites in Shirataki area of Engaru Town, is displayed in this room.

These materials, from the largest obsidian source area in Japan, are important keys to discover how the Upper Paleolithic people made stone tools from obsidian, and where they carried those tools out.

In this room, you can learn the transition of stone tool making methods during the 20,000 years in Upper Paleolithic period in Hokkaido. Such changes are in line with climate change, and will be a valuable lesson for us to think about our future, how to live together with the mother nature.

