

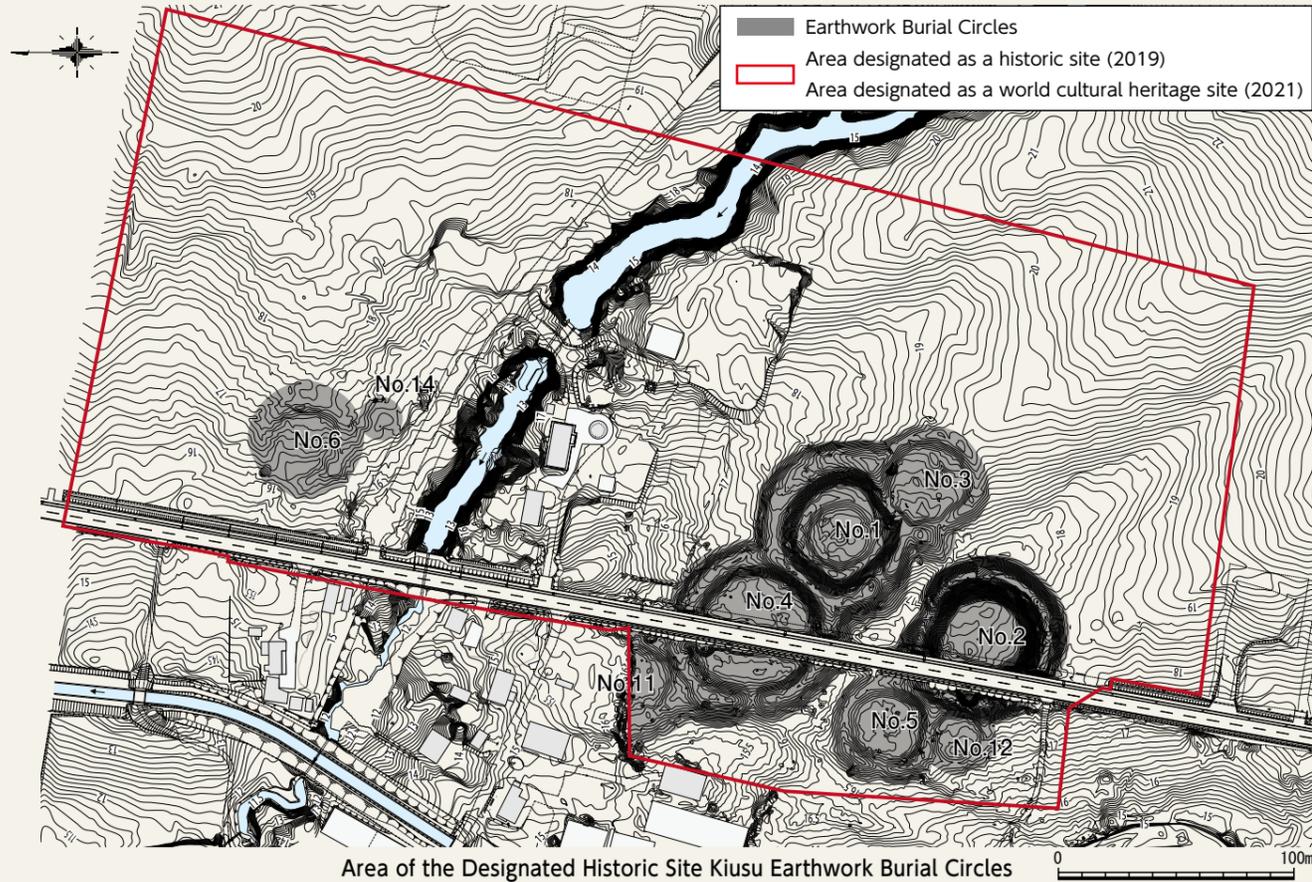
# World Cultural Heritage

## Designated Historic Site

# Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles



# What are the Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles?



Area of the Designated Historic Site Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles

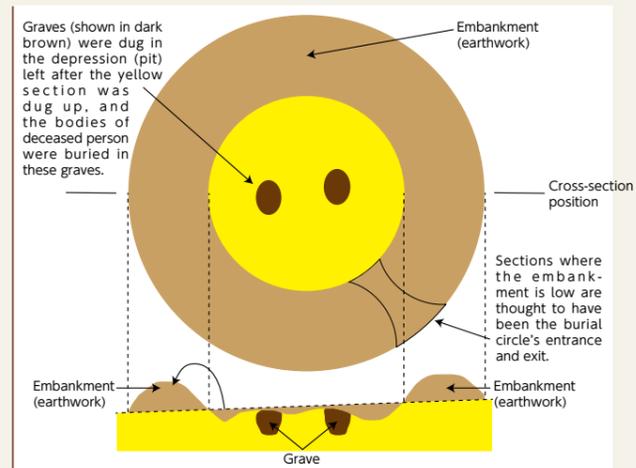
## What Are Earthwork Burial Circles?

Near the end of the Jomon Period (latter half of the Late Jomon period (approx. 3,200 years ago)), unique communal graves were built in Hokkaido. Known as "Earthwork Burial Circles", these sites were created by digging large circular holes (pits) in the ground and then using the dug-up soil to build an embankment (earthwork) around the edge of the pit, with between one and several tens of graves located on the embankment and inside the pit.

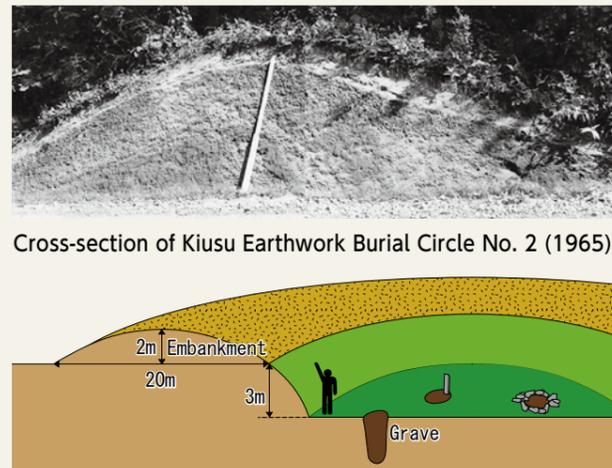
Except for a few earthwork burial circles located in Eastern Hokkaido and present-day Ashibetsu City, construction of the majority of these communal graves has been concentrated in the southern area of the Ishikari Lowland in present-day Eniwa City, Chitose City, and Tomakomai City.

In general, earthwork burial circles usually measure between 10 m and 30 m in diameter. However, a major characteristic of the Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles is that they comprise a cluster of large burial circles measuring more than 50 m in diameter, the outline of which is visible from ground level.

The Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles were designated as a National Historic Site in 1979, and the area designated as a historic site was expanded from 4.9 ha to 10.9 ha in 2019. In 2021, the Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles were registered on the UNESCO World Heritage List as one of the "Jomon Prehistoric Sites in Northern Japan".



Structure of Earthwork Burial Circles

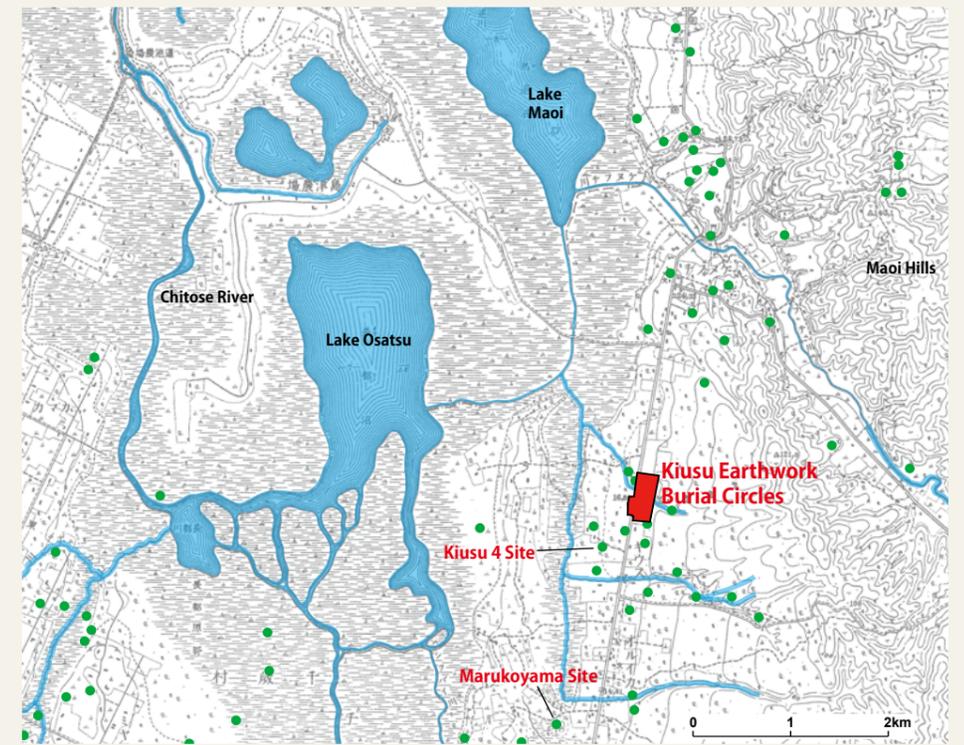


Cross-section of Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circle No. 2 (1965)

## "Kiusu" is Ainu language area name

Ainu place and area names express the characteristics of that particular locality. In Hokkaido, there remain many place and area names that retain the original Ainu language pronunciation. The name "Kiusu" is thought to derive from the Ainu word "ki ushi" (meaning "reed/clustered together"). The landscape at that time probably comprised fields of reed spread out around marshes and wetlands.

1:50,000 topographic maps issued by the Land Surveying Department, the Empire of Japan "Izair" (issued in 1920) and "Oiwake" (issued in 1921) were added.



Map of the Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles and the Surrounding Area during the Taisho Period (1912-1926) (Sites are marked with green dots [●])

## Topography and Historic Sites of the Kiusu Area

The Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles were constructed on gentle slope at an elevation of 15 m to 21 m around the foot of the Maoi Hills in the southeastern part of the Ishikari Lowland. In the past, hill was surrounded by vast wetlands, with the Lake Osatsu and Lake Maoi spreading as far as the eye could see. Today, there marshlands have been reclaimed, and virtually no lake, marshes, or wetlands remain.

Around the foot of the Maoi Hills, many relics of human life and

activity (sites) dating from the Paleolithic Period onwards have been discovered. Moreover, earthwork burial circles have also been discovered at the Kiusu 4 site, located at the Expressway Chitose-Higashi Interchange, as well as the Marukoyama site located 2.4 km to the southwest, and archaeological excavations are being carried out at these sites.

## Earthwork Burial Circles Research Today

Earthwork Burial Circles have long drawn researchers' interest. While research in this field is ongoing, the following are theories regarding the origins of earthwork burial circles.

It has been pointed out that earthwork burial circles derive from stone circles that were constructed in Northern Tohoku and Hokkaido at the beginning of the Late Jomon period. Stone circles were large memorials in which pebbles were laid out in circles, and they closely resemble earthwork burial circles in that graves and ritual relics have been found at the sites. However, there is no clear continuity between the periods in which the two were constructed, no clear overlap in their areas of distribution, and differences in the locations where the sites tended to be constructed, and so it has also been pointed out that no direct genealogical relation-

ship has been identified. There are also various other theories about the origins of earthwork burial circles, including that earthwork burial circles are based on dugout dwellings; that they emerged due to the influence of communal graves; and that they began being built as a form of joint labor to strengthen ties (unity) among people living in the same village or area as the result of settlements decentralizing as the climate cooled.

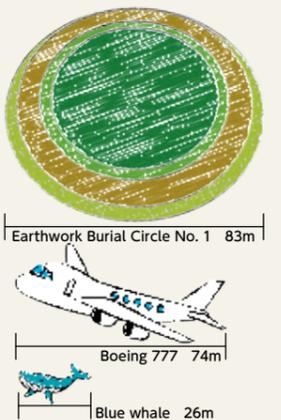
Subsequently, in the late Jomon Period, people suddenly stopped building earthwork burial circles. Why did this practice end? What happened to the people who had been building them? Built during a specific period (latter half of the Late Jomon period) in a specific location (Hokkaido), earthwork burial circles remain shrouded in these and many other mysteries.

## The Surprising Size of the Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles!

Of the Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles, Circle No. 1 has a maximum earthwork diameter of approx. 83 m, making it one of the largest Jomon Period graves visible from ground level.

Blue whales measure 26 m in length, and the world's largest passenger aircraft, the Boeing 777, measures 74 m in length, so you can see just how large Earthwork Burial Circle No. 1 is by comparison.

The highest of the Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles is Circle No. 2, which measures approx. 5 m from the grave surface (ground) level to the top of the embankment. It has been calculated that building Earthwork Burial Circle No. 2 required the movement of approx. 3,000 m<sup>3</sup> of soil. If it took one person one day using Jomon Period tools to dig up, transport, and stack up 1 m<sup>3</sup> of soil, it would have taken 25 people 120 days to build this huge burial circle.



Earthwork Burial Circle No. 1 83m

Boeing 777 74m

Blue whale 26m

# Timeline of Research on the Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles

**Approx. 1,200 years B.C.** The Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles were built

**Approx. 500 years B.C.** Area was covered in volcanic ash (Ta-c) due to the eruption of Mt. Tarumae

**1739** Area was covered in volcanic ash (Ta-a) due to the eruption of Mt. Tarumae

**1890** Construction of the Yuni Rord (present-day National Route 337) running through the Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles were completed

**1901** A field survey was conducted by Tsunekichi Kono.

**1917** A field survey was conducted by Tsunekichi Kono [Fig. 1]; a field survey was conducted by Masaki Abe; a reconnaissance survey was conducted by Shugo Matsuzaka [Fig. 2].

**1922** A survey was conducted by Tsunekichi Kono (interviews).

**1930** The Hokkaido Government provisionally designates Earthwork Burial Circles No. 1 through 5 as "Historic Site Kiusu-no-Chashi (fort)" under the Law for the Preservation of Historic Sites, Places of Scenic Beauty and Natural Monuments (area of historic site: 3.8 ha) [Photograph 3].

designated as a national historic site in 1979.

A detailed distribution survey conducted between 2013 and 2017 newly discovered Earthwork Burial Circle No. 14 (10), which was added to the designated National Historic Site area in 2019. In 2021, the Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles were registered on the UNESCO World Heritage List as one of the "Jomon Prehistoric Sites in Northern Japan".

In the first half of the 1900s when research was in the early stages, historian Tsunekichi Kono created a sketch (1) of the unique topography seen around the Kiusu area based on field and interview surveys, introducing the site as an Ainu chashi (fort). Also, around this time a monument marked Chashi-kotsu (fort relics) has already been erected in the local area. Subsequently, the Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles were provisionally designated as "Historic Site Kiusu-no-Chashi (fort)" in 1930 (3), and for a long time the mainstream thinking was that the site was a fort.

Hiromichi Kono—Tsunekichi Kono's son—conducted of Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circle No. 7 and the Shuen-Kurisawa site in Shari Town. From the results of surveys, he determined that these sites were actually Jomon Period gravesites and named them as Kanjo-dori (earth circles for burial). Furthermore, Toshio Oba and Toru Ishikawa discovered graves when excavating Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles No. 1 and 2 and around sites, (4 - 9), reporting the sites to be communal gravesites of the Jomon Period due to the layering of the soil. However, because of the vast size of the Earthwork Burial Circles, it took time for them to become widely recognized as dating from the Jomon Period.

Following subsequent reconnaissance surveys, the name of the site was changed to "Earthwork Burial Circles" to enable better understanding by members of the general public, and the site was

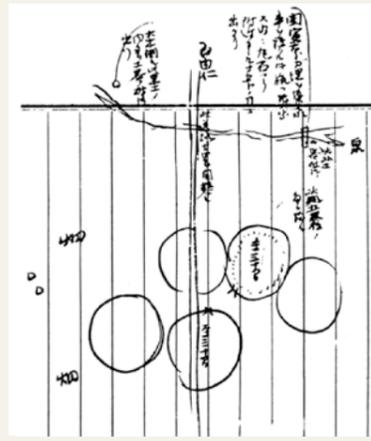
Advocacy by Tsunekichi Kono and many other researchers largely contributed to the Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles being repeatedly designated and protected as a historic site, and they have long been cherished by local residents. We need to continue carefully protecting this historic site in the future for many more people to be able to see and experience.

※From Shokumin Koho. According to the sketches in Tsunekichi Kono's Notes, construction was completed in 1891.

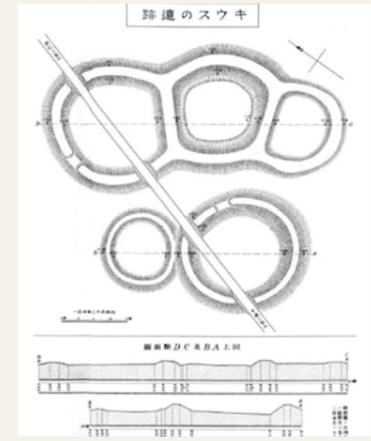


Chitose City's Cultural Property Character MAMACHI-KUN

- Excavation-related events
- Preservation-/designa-tion-related events



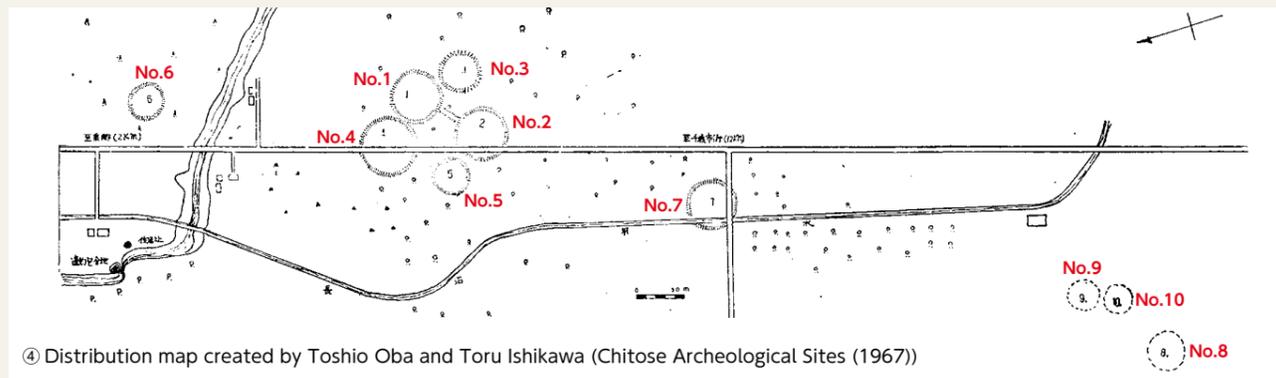
① Sketch created by Tsunekichi Kono (from Tsunekichi Kono's Notes, edited by Udagawa (1981), which was published in Kono's later years)



② Survey map created by Shugo Matsuzaka (from Appendix of Maps to Hokkaido History (1918))



③ Signboard erected when the burial circles were provisionally designated as the "Historic Site Kiusu-no-Chashi (fort)" (photographed between 1930 and 1934)



④ Distribution map created by Toshio Oba and Toru Ishikawa (Chitose Archeological Sites (1967))

A theory formulated that the site is an Ainu chashi (fort).

A theory formulated that the site is a Jomon Period communal grave.

## Earthwork Burial Circles No. 7 through 10 and 13

Here we explain about the numbering of the earthwork burial circles not included in the Designated Historic Site. As shown in the figure above, No. 7 is located a distance of 300 m to the southwest of the historic site. From the time of their discovery, No. 8, 9, and 10 were already flattened and their exact locations later became unclear. Furthermore, it became clear that No.13 located 3km away to the south of the historic site didn't have earthwork burial circle and its name have been changed to "Oruika 1 site".

**1950** A survey of Earthwork Burial Circle No. 7 was conducted by Hiromichi Kono (a grave with a stone pillar spread with red iron oxide was discovered). Provisional designation lifted

**1964** A survey of Earthwork Burial Circle No. 1 (five graves were discovered) was conducted by Toshio Oba and Toru Ishikawa [Photographs 5 and 6]; Earthwork Burial Circles No. 6 through 10 recognized and diagrammed [Fig. 4].

**1965** Surveys of Earthwork Burial Circle No. 2 (one grave was discovered; cross-section (previous page) recorded) [Photographs 8 and 9] and a grave (a stone rod was excavated) [Photograph 7] located outer rim of Earthwork Burial Circle No.4 were conducted by Toshio Oba and Toru Ishikawa the outer rim of Earthwork Burial Circle No. 4.

**1968** Based on the survey results of Oba's team, Earthwork Burial Circles No. 1 through 6 were designated as Cultural Properties of Hokkaido as "Chitose-Kiusu Kanjo-dori (earth circles for burial) Group" (designated area: 41,615.05 m<sup>2</sup>).

**1978** A joint reconnaissance survey was conducted by the Chitose Board of Education and Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties (Earthwork Burial Circles No. 11 and 12 were discovered).

**1979** Earthwork Burial Circles No. 1 through 6, 11, and 12 were collectively designated as a national historic site as the Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles (designated area: 49,441.00 m<sup>2</sup>).

**2009** Chitose City becomes the managing organization for the Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles.

**2012** The Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles were added as a component part of the "Jomon Archaeological Sites in Hokkaido, Northern Tohoku, and other regions", which is entered on the Tentative List of UNESCO World Heritage Center.

**2013 | 2017** A detailed distribution survey of the historic site and surrounding area was conducted (Earthwork Burial Circle No. 14 was discovered). [Photographs 10], and a topographic reconnaissance survey was carried out.

**2021** Re-excavating Earthwork Burial Circle No. 2 (2021)

The designated area of the national historic site was expanded to include Earthwork Burial Circle No. 14 (designated area: 108,772.06 m<sup>2</sup>). October 16, 2019

The Japanese Government (Agency for Cultural Affairs) submitted recommendation to UNESCO that the Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles be registered on the World Heritage List as one of the "Jomon Prehistoric Sites in Northern Japan".

Registered on the World Heritage List as one of the "Jomon Prehistoric Sites in Northern Japan".

Re-excavation of Earthwork Burial Circle No. 2 [Photograph 11] and remain confirmation survey for preservation purposes



⑤ Excavating Earthwork Burial Circle No. 1 (1964)



⑥ A stone pillar discovered in a grave within the Earthwork Burial Circle No. 1 (1964)



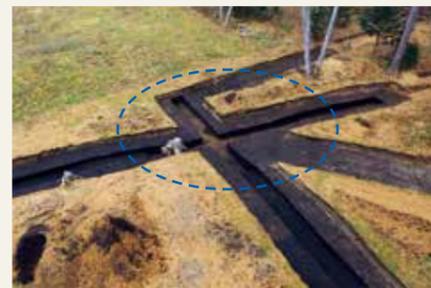
⑦ A stone rod buried in a grave on the outer rim of Earthwork Burial Circle No. 4 (1965)



⑧ Excavating Earthwork Burial Circle No. 2 (1965)



⑨ Area around a grave in Earthwork Burial Circle No. 2 (1965)



⑩ Earthwork Burial Circle No. 14, buried in the ground (2017)

# On-The-Spot Report! The Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles Today

## Earthwork Burial Circle No. 1

Earthwork Burial Circle No. 1 has the largest outer diameter of the others. The embankment links with No. 3 and 4, which preserved the shapes of two burial circles. The center of the depression (pit) inside the circle is raised.



Cross-section of Earthwork Burial Circle No. 1

## Earthwork Burial Circle No. 3

Although the embankment is low, the depression (pit) in the center is clearly visible.



Currently, nine earthwork burial circles have been identified and designated as a national historic site. Earthenware, stone tools, and clay figures indicating the period in which they were made have been excavated from the earthwork burial circles. In addition, a stone rod and a stone pillar thought to have been erected as grave-marker have been discovered in graves at the sites.

Each embankments have a lower part (indicated by the blue arrows). These parts in the embankment are thought to be built as entrances/exits for accessing the depression.

Embankment Size (Unit: meters)

Earthwork Burial Circle	Outer diameter	Inner diameter	Embankment height*	Embankment width
No.1	83	36	2.8	23.5
No.2	73	30	4.7	21.5
No.3	51	27	0.8	12.0
No.4	79	43	1.5	18.5
No.5	51	24	0.8	13.5
No.6	52	22	0.6	15.0
No.11	53	23	0.6	15.0
No.12	33	16	0.4	8.5
No.14	19	11	0.6	4.3

\*This is the largest comparable height difference between the crown of the embankment and the bottom point of the depression (pit) where the earthwork does not overlap with that of another burial circle.

## A Mysterious Mound

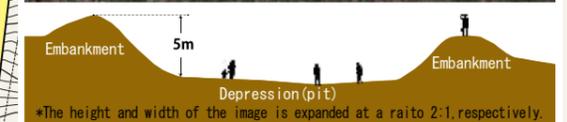
There is a mysterious mound of soil adjacent to No. 1 and No. 3. As this mound is positioned on an extended line of the outer circumference of No. 1 on its northern side (red dotted line), it is possible that it was originally part of the embankment of No. 1.

The following is a list of the points of interest for the main earthwork burial circles. As you walk around viewing each actual site, check each point while picturing life in the Jomon Period in your mind.



## Earthwork Burial Circle No. 2

The embankment of No. 2 is the highest of those among the Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles. Seen from inside the burial circle, you will likely to be surprised the height of the embankment is overwhelming.



Cross-section of Earthwork Burial Circle No. 2

## Earthwork Burial Circle No. 6 and 14

The embankment of No. 6 is low and its shape is slightly unclear. No. 14 was discovered in the distribution survey conducted in recent years. The site has since been reburied. Both these sites are on private land and therefore cannot be visited by the general public.

## Earthwork Burial Circle No. 4

The inner diameter of this burial circle is the largest among the Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles, so you can realize the depression is spacious.



## Order in which the Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles were built

Because neighboring earthwork burial circles partially share embankments, it is possible to estimate the order in which they were built from the layering of the soil. The group on the southern side was constructed in the order No. 12 → No. 5 → No. 2. The central group was constructed in the order No. 11 → No. 4 → No. 1, No. 3 → No. 1. The northern group was constructed in the order No. 14 → No. 6. In all of the groups, it has been pointed out, the earthwork burial circles constructed later become large.

## Path to the Earthwork Burial Circles

The detailed topographical survey conducted between 2013 and 2017 discovered a depression sandwiched between two parallel rows of low mounds running north-south from the western side of the Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles. Because of its shape and the fact that the entrances/exits for No. 4, 5, and 12 all face onto this depression, it is thought to be a man-made "path". A similar path leading for the Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles has been discovered at Kiusu 4 site, located 500 m away to the southwest of the Kiusu Earthwork Burial

Circles. It is possible that these two paths were connecting. Furthermore, because the entrances/exits for No. 1 and 2, it is thought that the shallow valley-shaped depression running east-west between the two sets of entrances/exits must also had been used as a path. And this path connected and merged with the north-south "path" mentioned above.

- Area of world heritage historic site (Red line)
- Area open to visitors (Blue line)
- Original entrances/exits to burial circles (Blue double arrow)

# Excavated Relics from the Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles

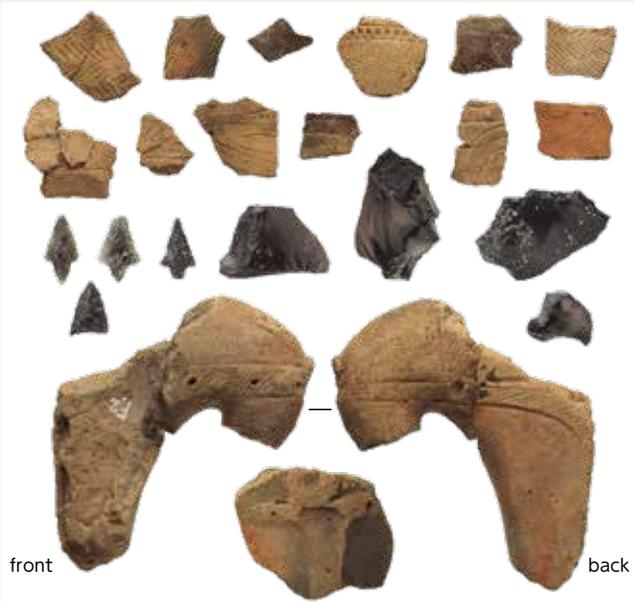
The excavated artifacts pictured are on display at the Chitose Buried Cultural Property Center.



Jomon Potteries excavated from Earthwork Burial Circle No.1



A saddlequern excavated from Earthwork Burial Circle No.2



Earthenware, stone implements, and clay figures excavated from Earthwork Burial Circles No.1 and 2



A stone rod excavated from a grave at the outer rim of Earthwork Burial Circle No.4 (City Designated Cultural Property)

## Access to the Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles

- **Addresses** 2777 Chuo, Chitose City, Hokkaido and other locations
- ※10 km from JR Chitose Station, 12 km from New Chitose Airport
- ※Turn left after the next traffic lights after the Chitose-Higashi Interchange on the DOTO Expressway and drive 400 m in the direction of Naganuma; the carpark is on the right-hand side of the road.
- ※No public transportation available.

## Chitose Buried Cultural Property Center

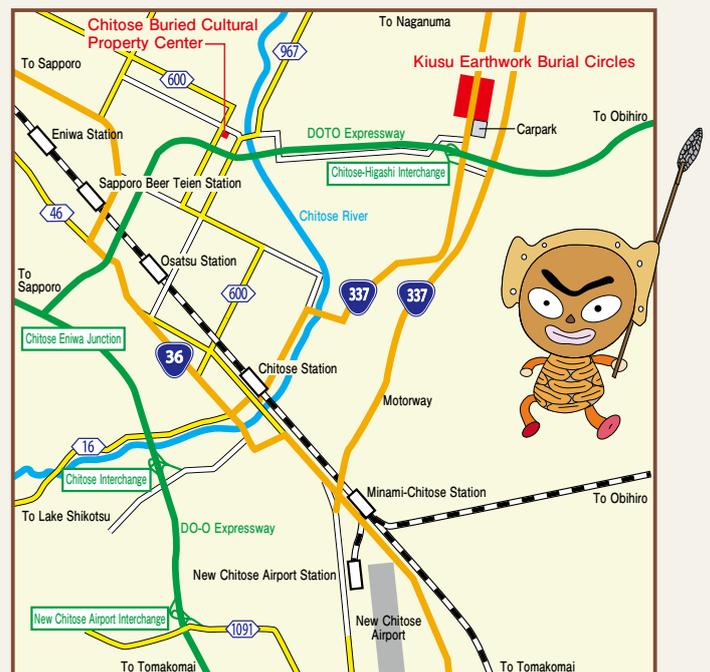
- **Addresses** 42-1 Osatsu, Chitose City, Hokkaido, Japan 066-0001  
TEL 0123-24-4210
- ※8 km from JR Chitose Station, 5 km from JR Osatsu Station, 7 km from Kiusu Earthwork Burial Circles
- ※No public transportation available.
- **Opening hours** 9:00 - 17:00
- **Closed** Saturdays, Sundays, public holidays, Year-end/New Year (December 29 - January 3)  
\*Open on the second Sunday of every month
- **Admission fee** Free of charge



Official Twitter account



Chitose Buried Cultural Property Center



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Chitose Buried Cultural Property Center PR materials for promoting public awareness of cultural properties  
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