

Michinoku Times

Shirakawa's icon fully restored.



Restored three-tier turrets of Komine Castle

Komine Castle's Stone Walls for the future

Reflecting on the masons who worked on the castle wall before them

Komine Castle, an officially-designated historical site in Shirakawa City, was fully restored in April, 8 years after the Great East Japan Earthquake destroyed the stone walls. Our team visited the historical icon of Shirakawa City that was revived from the disaster, and interviewed Mr. Kazutoshi Suzuki (45), the chief inspector of the City Cultural Assets Section who was involved in the restoration, about the extent of the disaster and the hardship of the restoration.

An estimated 100,000 stones were used for the stone walls of Komine Castle, of which about 7,000 were destroyed by the earthquake. A total of 10 stone walls including the south side of the Honmaru (main compound) had collapsed, and a total of 6

locations including Shimizu Gate had undergone major deformations. Out of 2 km of the stone walls, 160 meters of it were damaged. About 50 people per day were involved in the restoration, including city officials, civil engineers, and masons from all over Japan. It cost around 5 billion yen for the full restoration. The year before the earthquake, it was designated as a historic site by the government, so the expenses were covered by tax subsidies.

During the restoration, citizens visited daily, some lowered their heads after surveying the completely deformed castle site, making workers realize how big the impact was. After the earthquake the situation was assessed and the restoration strategies were examined over

a two-year period. Each stone was numbered and recorded in charts before they removed the stone walls. Over the next five years, the stone walls were fully restored with traditional methods. Emphasis was on restoration and safety measures, as the castle was a cultural asset.

Last year, the restoration progressed and attracted attention. The number of tourists at the Komine Castle Ruins reached 88,000, which was bigger than the previous record of 66,000 in 2010. The number of tourists from overseas, such as Asia and Europe, is increasing year by year. In April, the History Museum opened,



Mr. Suzuki shows photos of destroyed stone walls after the earthquake, and explains the hardships of restoration (Honmaru South side, Komine Castle, Shirakawa City)

displaying the history of Komine Castle and the records of restoration.

Mr. Suzuki said, "There is a lot of cooperation in the restoration of Komine Castle, and a variety of thoughts and input is being put into it. I want visitors to come to the site and feel it for themselves." (Yuuka Shiga)

Edo Shogunate, the fort of the north

A historic castle

Komine Castle has a long history and prospered as an important base between the Tohoku region and the Kanto region.

It is said that the castle was built around 1350 in the period of the Northern and Southern Courts, by Yuki Chikatomo, the warlord ruling the Shirakawa area. It is said that the name of the castle comes from "Kominegaoka," the name of the place. By the Edo period, the lord changed several times, and Niwa Nagashige, who became the first lord in 1627, renovated and built a large-scale stone wall that is the foundation of the present stone walls. Because it was a crucial castle in fighting rebellions led by Tohoku daimyos such as the Date family, the Tokugawa Shogunate dispatched their relatives and hereditary daimyo retainers as lords to 7 different areas to keep control for 240 years.

Shirakawa became a field of combat during the Boshin War in 1868. During the battle of Shirakawaguchi, which lasted 100 days, Komine Castle burned down.

In 1991, Shirakawa City had Sanju Yagura (three-tier turrets) restored based on the design drawn up in the Shirakawa oya-gura ezu. Some of the cedar trees used as the material still had lead bullets and bullet scars from the Boshin War. In August 2010, the building was designated as a historic site by the government and as rare stone castle ruins in the Tohoku region. (Momoka Nakamura & Hinari Saito)

VR theater: Komine Castle in the Edo era



Komine Castle in CG at VR theater



Diorama of Komine Castle showing the structure of the stone walls

The Komine Castle History Museum opened on April 20 in conjunction with the restoration of the ruins of Komine Castle's stone walls. This facility allows visitors to experience Komine Castle about 200 years ago in the Edo period in virtual reality (VR) and has attracted more than 10,000 tourists since its opening. In addition to panel displays showing the history of Komine Castle, new attractions are drawing attention at the History Museum. The first is the VR theater. A large screen that expands 270 degrees to your front, left, and right recreates the site of the Edo period with CG, making you feel as if you have travelled to the past. It also shows the exciting gate opening and the tragedy of the Boshin War with narration.

The diorama at the center of the facility recreates Komine Castle, including the stone walls. When you touch the panel, the model glows and the current castle's photos are shown on the panel.

Next to the diorama, there are two VR telescopes through which the scenery is recreated in CG. One of them shows the four seasons in the area surrounding the castle, and the other shows a Daimyo procession going through the castle. Sound effects make it even more realistic.

There is also a video showing the records of the restoration of the stone wall that collapsed during the earthquake. (Riko Suzuki)

Reported by: Promoting Shirakawa nationwide

Team "Let's climb Sanju Yagura"

- (From right in the photo)
- Momoka Nakamura (Shoryo Junior High 1st grade)
- Hinari Saito (Bange Minami Elementary 6th grade)
- Yuuka Shiga (Koriyama Higashi High 2nd grade)
- Riko Suzuki (Azuma Elementary 5th grade)

