Overview of the Ruins of the Iwami-Ginzan Silver Mine

- Sakunouchi area - the nucleus of Iwami-Ginzan

Literally "inside the fence," Sakunouchi is the 22nd century site of start-of-the-silver production, from digging to refining. The name came from the fact that silver was built around an area that included Mt. Sakunouchi and Yaginada in the 20th century. This is where traces of silver production that lasted from the 16th to the 20th centuries are intact, complete with small mines, a miner's life, religious beliefs, and labor by the authorities.

Over 600 miles of ditches can be found in the mountains, along with over 1,000 small flat wooden boxes in their general vicinity. It was the site where miners' lives and work went on, from dressing the ore to refining it. The many complex, difficult, and dangerous techniques inside the fenced area are evidence that the mine workers led their lives here. Signs of the mining system, too, can be seen in the ruins of Takayama Castle on the peak of Yaginada, the Yamanashi Prefectural Office (descendants of the Omori Intendancy's Office), the town of Sakunouchi and the guard stations, providing an idea of the changes to the functions and locations of these administrative organs over time. The remains of the mines that operated in modern times, from the late 19th century until its eventual closure in 1893, are also preserved.

- Omorin mining town

[Omorin-Ginzan Important Preservation District for Groups of Historic Buildings]

Omorin is a mining settlement in the river valley running west to the mine. The town, which covers approximately 2.8km, can be divided into the Omori Zone in the northeast and the Ginza Zone in the southwest, according to the Edo period (1603-1868) administrative districts of Omori Town and Ginza Town, the latter inside the Sakunouchi area. The balance of power between the two gradually shifted in favor of Omori when the first commissioner, Okabe Nagayasu, started developing Omori Town in the Edo period and moved the Commissioner's Office to its current location. The Town prospered as the center of about 100 villages around Iwami-Ginzan under the direct control of the Takahata shogunate. Many of the buildings were lost in the Great Fire of 1890, but were rebuilt according to the landscape plans of the early Edo period, characterized by the coexistence of samurai houses, merchant houses, and temples.

- Commissioner's Office. Muting-structure administrative districts with well-defined areas under the Takahata shogunate.

[Okabe Nagayasu. One of the commissioners who served Takahata shogun, the first shogun. He recorded in the development and management of mines. Following his appointment as the first commissioner of Iwami-Ginzan, he was later appointed commissioner of the sake and rice district.

Located on the northeastern side of the Omori Town are the remains of the local operating center of the Takahata shogunate. On the 240m site are the Omorinmen, a stone-walled, single-story gate flanked on both sides by terraced, unpaved streets. Both these structures were rebuilt after the Great Fire of 1890. The center of the site is the former Minomoto Public Office, built in 1902 and now converted into the Iwami-Ginzan Museum, the loci for research, a store and archival exhibit of materials along with guidance on Iwami-Ginzan.

- Myano area

Site of a silver mining colony 20km northeast of the Ruins of the Intendancy’s Office at the northeastern terminus of the Omori Town streets.

Reconstructions have uncovered the remains of roads and buildings from the late 16th to the early 18th century. One of the building sites, which housed as many as 24 small refineries in a concentrated area, is believed to be a refining workshop. The workshop, located 3km from Mt. Sakunouchi, was presumably charged with improving the quality of the silver mined from the mountain.

-Kumagai Family Residence, Important Cultural Property

500 meters southwest of the Intendancy’s Office is the largest residence house on the main street of the Omori-Ginzan district. Headed by a local financier who served as the town official and enjoyed the patronage of the local Intendancy, the Kumagai Family was among the most influential merchant families in the town during the 19th century. The residence was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1890 and has been rebuilt in stages over time. Today this valuable piece of architecture gives us a glimpse of the lifestyle of the times and changes in the style of the building [Open to the public in April 2008].

- Gohyakurakan, Rakani Temple

A site of popular worship near the Ōnigamigumi Temple in the Sakunouchi area towards the southern end of the Omori Zone. Over 500 stone statues are enshrined in the three stone caves on the sloping bedrock. There is a Shinto shrine in the central cave and 200 seated statues in the caves on each side. Construction began in 1757 at the behest of the chief priest of Rakani Temple and officials of the Intendancy’s Office, and was completed in 1766 with donations from Iwami-Ginzan and influential samurai and merchants in Iwami and other regions. The temple complex, complete with three stone bridges and a memorial tower, displays the sophistication of the Kamakura period.

- Ruins of Mountaintop Castles around the Silver Mine

[Ruins of Yataki Castle]

Yataki Castle, 2km southwest of the Iwami-Ginzan area, was built in the 16th century on a mountain peak 680m above sea level. Strategically situated for the defense of Iwami-Ginzan, the castle overlooks the Gouradake main road where the Yubetsu/Mine apron Fort Route of the Iwami-Ginzan Silver Mine Road runs through on the north side, leading to the Yabashi Castle Ruins. Records indicate the castle served as the stronghold of the Ohashi clan who controlled the area from 1528 to 1607.

- Ruins of Yabashi Castle

Yabashi Castle, 2km west of the Sakunouchi area, was built in the 16th century on a mountain peak 579m above sea level. Strategically situated at the southeastern end of the town near the Sea of Japan, it served as a key stronghold for the defense of the Iwami-Ginzan. According to some records, the castle served as an important trading post for the southern coast of Japan.

- Ruins of Iwami Castle

Iwami Castle, 3km northwest of the Sakunouchi area, was built in the 16th century on a rocky mountain peak 332m above sea level. Strategically situated at the southern end of the Iwami-Ginzan Silver Mine Road, leading to Yataki Castle, it served as the stronghold of the Oshita clan who controlled the area from 1500 to 1528, and was taken over by the local lords of the Onokowa clan in 1592, who took control of the silver mine thereafter.