- Shipping Ports and Port Town for Silver and Silver Ore

[Tomogaura Area]

On the coast of the Sea of Japan, 8km northwest of the Sakushinai area, Tomogaura was the port from which silver ore was shipped to Hakata, Kyushu, during the years when Iwami-Ginzan began to develop in the early 16th century. Early records show a flourishing port visited by many trading ships from Hakata to load silver ore. In the early Edo period, it became more than a fishing village, and the consequent lack of major projects meant the original shape of the medieval port was preserved. Among the remains are moorings on both banks of the port, a kiln dedicated to the safety of sea traffic, settlements in the valley where the land is still divided into square administrative zones, silver ore storehouses, administrative buildings, and wells for use by vessels.

[Situated on the coast of the Sea of Japan 8km west of the Sakushinai area, Okidomari is in the port through which silver was shipped and supplies received for Iwami-Ginzan during the late 16th century, when the Polish clan took control of the mine. Both banks had moorings and there were mountainous caves that served as military bases perched on the hilltops at both ends. The port was joined to a beach. Far up the valley from the port is a squared-off settlement dating back to the 16th century. Other remains include a shrine dedicated to safe navigation, wells for use by vessels, and a small village for the protection of the settlement from fire.]

[On a mountain near the coast of the Sea of Japan, Yogetsu is a port town adjacent to Okidomari. The town became active in the latter part of the 16th century as the administrative center of Iwami-Ginzan and its surrounding areas. Yogetsu is also an old hot spring town that hosted local residents, prominent social lords, writers and artists. Houses line four alleyways and the main road along an 800m stretch extending from the Port. The layout of the houses remains unchanged from the early Edo period, with land allotted in narrow, narrow strips. Land use in this narrow valley area provides a vivid picture of how the town must have developed through dealings with Iwami-Ginzan.

-Roads Connecting the Silver Mine with Shipping Ports

[Tomogaura Route, Iwami-Ginzan Silver Mine Road]

The shortest route for transporting silver ore from the Sakushinai area to the Sea of Japan in the early 16th century, when silver ore was shipped from the Tomogaura Port. Starting from the Hatashu and Yoshikazuguchi entrances on the Mine side, this narrow, sloping 8km passage through the mountains is well preserved. Along the roadway one discovers arched stone bridges, the remains of the construction site of a cut earth road, stone monuments and Buddha images for the safety of passengers, and places associated with legends about silver ore transport and road traffic.

[Otidomari Route, Iwami-Ginzan Silver Mine Road]

Used to transport silver and supplies in the late 16th century, when the Yonetsu-Otidomari Port served as administrative center for Iwami-Ginzan and its outer port. Stretching over 300m, the Route starts at the Sakashima entrance on the Mine side, passes over the steep slopes of Goshikan and through Nishida, Shimizu and Mashuitaru, before branching into routes for Yonetsu and Okidomari. Along the way are well-preserved structures of stone pavements and earthen bridges, signposts and stone Buddha images, as well as a Kanon to ward off fire at Nishida and Kanazakakyo Spring at Shimizu.

Excavations at the Iwami-Ginzan Silver Mine

Shimane Prefecture, Ohda City, Yunotsu Town, and Nima Town began collaborating on a comprehensive research project in 1996 to shed light on the overall features and value of the Iwami-Ginzan Silver Mine Ruins. Investigations are being carried out in the following areas:

- Excavations

A key element of the comprehensive study, designed to uncover the history of the 900-year history of Iwami-Ginzan. The chief objective is to elucidate the systematic mining and mining techniques. More recently, the focus has shifted to the maintenance and use of the ruins. To date, a variety of natural structures and artifacts have been uncovered, including the remains of the mining workers, consumption and circulation of silver, the ruling systems, and popular beliefs.

- Paleographic and philological research

Aimed at elucidating how Iwami-Ginzan was operated and how the silver mined from Iwami-Ginzan and silver mines in Japan was circulated worldwide, together with the socio-economic relationships with neighboring areas and other mines. A broad range of archives, collected from both the site itself and outside, is being studied and catalogued, accompanied by photographic and historical analysis. The findings are being compiled into a chronology, a collection of academic papers, and a database.

- Scientific research

Materials collected from the excavations, etc. are being evaluated scientifically to shed light on the series of techniques, from mining to refining, that were employed at Iwami-Ginzan. Specific projects include using artifacts to reconstruct a demonstration of the Balancing cupellation method, creating a new chart of the refining process, and 3-dimensional measurement, chemical treatment, and removal of the remains to study methods for their preservation and exhibition.

- Stone structure research

Tombs and other stone structures are examined to see how Iwami-Ginzan was developed and study the social hierarchy and population changes of the people there. The research project can be subdivided into distribution research to visit such ruins to make a rough figure, and detailed research to find any characteristics in the gravestones based on such parameters as religious sects, locations and how well they are preserved, and research related to individual facets of the excavation.

- Silver Mine Roads research

Research on the two roads used to carry silver ore and supplies in. Designed to determine routes and shed light on characteristics and historical changes in the roads through investigation of archives, stone constructions, buildings, folk customs, and nature. Facilitating themes include remains indicating popular beliefs, ruling systems and lifestyles, including the morphological characteristics of the two ports, monuments, and mountainous valleys, shrines, common well in the surrounding hills and in the narrow valley; the history of the settlements by the ports; and the cultural value of the overall landscape.

- Other research

Other research subjects include the ‘mabi’ mine shafts and entrance shafts in the Sakushinai area, ruins of carpenters that served as defensive positions for key footholds and so played roles in the late Iwami-Ginzan takanetsu, data on the cultural upheaval of the people living in the silver mine and surrounding areas and Tomogaura and Okidomari Ports, where silver and silver ore were shipped.