**The Beginning of *Yakusugi* Logging**

*Yakusugi* cedars were revered as sacred trees and the embodiments of deities, and were rarely cut for lumber. This changed in the seventeenth century when Tomari Jochiku (1570–1655), a Neo-Confucian scholar and a Buddhist monk of Yakushima, saw the economic potential of timber resources and proposed logging to help lift the islanders out of their economic woes.

*Pre-Edo Period (1500s)*

The Shimazu family, who controlled southern Kyushu, including Yakushima, between the twelfth and nineteenth centuries, banned the selling of *yakusugi* wood to other domains in 1586. A survey of *yakusugi* was conducted in 1587 by order of the warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–1598).

*Edo Period (1603–1867)*

The ruling Satsuma domain under the Shimazu imposed an annual tax on its subjects, usually paid in rice. Since Yakushima’s land was unsuited for rice production, islanders paid with *yakusugi* roof shingles, called *hiragi*. The tribute tax was a heavy burden on the islanders, requiring delivery of about 5.8 million shingles every year. The islanders, however, hesitated to cut down cedars deep in the mountains, believing that they belonged to the domain of the gods, and so Jochiku sought to allay their reservations.

Jochiku received training in the Hokke school of Buddhism at a local temple, and later in Kyoto, Osaka, Edo (modern-day Tokyo), and the Ryukyu Kingdom (modern-day Okinawa). Well-traveled and knowledgeable, he was aware that cedar was valued in other parts of Japan. In 1640 he proposed the felling of *yakusugi* cedar to the Shimazu lord, and made a pilgrimage into the mountains to pray to the gods. Upon his return he told the villagers that he had received permission from the gods to cut down the trees.

For additional reassurance, the villagers performed rituals to seek permission to log the trees from the mountain deities. They leaned an axe against the tree they wished to fell, and if the axe toppled overnight, they interpreted it as a denial of approval. They placed rice, salt, and *shochu* liquor at the base of the tree and asked the deities for permission before cutting it down. After the tree was felled, the villagers placed branches on the stump to comfort the tree’s spirit and planted cedar seedlings as a token of their gratitude.

The *hiragi* shingles remaining after payment of the tribute tax could be exchanged for rice, wheat, barley, and other necessities. The Shimazu also sold the shingles in Osaka and Kyoto, which brought considerable revenue to the family. Jochiku is respected to this day for helping improve the lives of the islanders, and his grave, located in his birthplace of Anbo, has been carefully maintained by villagers over the years.

*Meiji Era (1868–1912) and Later*

At the beginning of the Meiji era, Yakushima’s forests came almost entirely under state ownership, and the islanders were forbidden from cutting down trees. They continually appealed for the return of their communal forests and filed several legal actions unsuccessfully between 1899 and 1920. Unable to collect firewood or make charcoal, villagers struggled to have fuel for cooking and heating. In 1921, the Agriculture and Commerce Ministry at last allowed Yakushima residents to use part of the state-owned forest under a policy known as the Yakushima Constitution.

*Kosugidani Village*

Timber cutting rose again in the early 1920s as a result of islanders regaining access to the forests. A trolley railroad was constructed to transport timber from the mountains in the interior beyond the village of Anbo in 1923, and a base camp for loggers, Kosugidani, was established on the upper Anbo River in 1924. Elementary and junior high schools were built to accommodate the families that moved in. As many as 133 households with a population of 540 lived in the camp at the peak of logging activities in 1960, during the postwar construction boom. Eventually almost all the *yakusugi* in the area were cleared, prompting calls for conservation, and the base camp closed in 1970. Kosugidani was one of two settlements that were established in Yakushima and later abandoned amid the decline of the timber and charcoal industries.