

Tomogaura Port

According to legend, the silver mine at Iwami Ginzan was discovered by the merchant Kamiya Jutei, who in 1527 noticed a mountain peak glittering in the sun when sailing along the coast nearby. Based in the southern city of Hakata (present-day Fukuoka), Kamiya reported his find to the Ouchi family that ruled those lands, and the Ouchi quickly assumed control over this mountain of riches. To transport the silver ore mined at Iwami Ginzan to Hakata and then to the Korean peninsula to be refined, they established a port at Tomogaura, the closest suitable cove, which offered protection from the Sea of Japan's fierce waves and harsh north winds. The Ouchi cleared a 7.5-kilometer road from the mine to this port, building earthen bridges in the hilly terrain and making the path suitable for transporting the heavy ore. This road was used for some 30 years.

When the Ouchi lost Iwami Ginzan to the rival Mohri family in 1562, Tomogaura was abandoned in favor of another port and the road fell into disuse. Local residents reverted to fishing and agriculture, which still sustain many here today. The only reminders of Tomogaura's glory years are the protruding rock formations along the shore, which were carved out of the soft stone to function as mooring devices for the Ouchi ships that once transported silver ore from this port.