

Kamaya Mine Tunnel and Surroundings

The Kamaya tunnel is the source of one of the greatest success stories in the history of Iwami Ginzan. It was dug in 1602 by a prospector named Yasuhara Denbei, who soon discovered an abundant silver vein within. During the following year, Kamaya produced a remarkable 13.5 tons of silver for the shogunate, the central government in Edo (present-day Tokyo), which had assumed direct control of the mine a few years earlier. This contribution was so great that Yasuhara was granted an audience with shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616) and an honorary title, and he was presented with an ornate *dofuku* jacket and fan. The jacket was donated to Seisuiji Temple, where Yasuhara is said to have prayed before his discovery, and is now designated an Important Cultural Property. A reproduction of the jacket is on display at the Iwami Ginzan World Heritage Center.

Several mining sites from the early 1600s have been discovered in the vicinity of the Kamaya tunnel. In some, miners appear to have dug directly into the hillside rather than use tunnels, because the silver veins in this area were often very close to the surface. Cliffs were also cut into to flatten the ground and make room for buildings. Nearby, pits were dug into the rock to collect rainwater, which was needed to wash the ore so that silver-containing bits could be collected effectively. These remains, along with byproducts of the silver-refining process found here, indicate that both sides of the valley that centers on the Kamaya tunnel were mined heavily from the time of Yasuhara Denbei through to the Meiji era (1868–1912), when the last shafts in the area were dug.