

## **Shinkiri Mine Tunnel**

Routing water out of the silver mine was one of the greatest challenges for miners throughout the history of Iwami Ginzan. As mining tunnels were made longer and deeper, they would inevitably hit pockets of groundwater in the rock and flood, impeding the extraction of ore. By the early 1700s, the groundwater problem had become so severe that the local magistrate's office, which represented the central government in Edo (present-day Tokyo), had to take action to maintain the viability of the mine. The solution was to dig two new parallel tunnels at an elevation lower than any existing mining sites. Water would flow down into these new interconnected tunnels via shafts and be released into a river. This ambitious undertaking, called the Shinkiri ("New Cut," as the tunnels cut horizontally through the base of the mountain), was financed with a government loan and completed in the 1720s.

The Shinkiri project was a success: the water release system allowed for the discovery of new silver veins and more efficient mining in existing tunnels. Veins were also found within the Shinkiri tunnels, one of which came to be mined while the other performed water release and ventilation functions. Silver production at Iwami Ginzan increased significantly as a result, if only for a limited period. Though the Shinkiri tunnels have been left all but untouched for nearly a century, they still gather water and release it into the Ginzan River, hinting at the builders' engineering prowess.