

Fukujinyama Mine Tunnel

Fukujinyama is one of the top tunnel systems at Iwami Ginzan in terms of the quantity of silver extracted. It consists of three tunnels: two that are interconnected and pass underneath the Ginzan River toward Mt. Sennoyama, the center of the mine, and a ventilation tunnel directly above them. Located along the road to Ryugenji, the only mine tunnel at Iwami Ginzan open to visitors year-round, Fukujinyama cannot be entered but merits attention for a different reason: its history demonstrates how ownership and management patterns at the silver mine changed as production began to decline in the 1700s.

The tunnel was dug by an independent prospector, who chose the spot, received permission to excavate from the magistrate's office that administered the mine, and financed the project himself. After proving his ability to make the required contributions of silver to the magistrate, the prospector was granted property rights to the tunnel. This arrangement was common during the 1600s, when the silver mine flourished and tunnel owners were able to make a profit despite the significant level of investment required for maintenance. By the 1700s, however, most of the accessible silver deposits had been depleted and profitability declined. Many of the tunnels still considered viable, including Fukujinyama, were acquired by the magistrate's office using public funds, which were also used to finance the tunnels' operation. This partial "nationalization" of the mine was accompanied by a range of public works projects aimed at increasing silver output, but ultimately it failed to restore Iwami Ginzan to its former glory.