

Hondani Settlement Site

Although it is now heavily forested and serene, Hondani (“main valley”) was one of the most important mining centers at Iwami Ginzan from the latter half of the 1500s to the late 1700s. A sizable settlement extended through the valley, where houses that also served as workshops for processing silver were built on flattened and terraced ground. Near the entrance to the valley is the Okubo tunnel, the largest system of mining tunnels and shafts at Iwami Ginzan, and further down is the 800-meter-long Kinsei tunnel, dug to release groundwater from the Okubo system. Uphill along the valley, both sides are dotted with narrow tunnels and sites where miners appear to have dug directly into the cliff, because the silver veins in this area were often very close to the surface. Most of these sites have been reclaimed by nature and are difficult to spot, but some have been excavated around the Kamaya tunnel, which, in the early 1600s, sparked a dramatic increase in the mine’s silver output. Some of the stone walls built to fortify the terraced ground can also be seen here. Even further up is the entrance to the Honmabu (“main tunnel”), dug above one of the most abundant silver veins in the area. From here, the valley narrows as it continues up toward the summit of Mt. Sennoyama and Ishigane, the site of another major seventeenth-century settlement. Visitors should note that the path from Honmabu to Ishigane is not well maintained and can be difficult to traverse.