

Yamabuki Castle Site

Iwami Ginzan was controlled by local warlords from its discovery in 1527 until the beginning of the seventeenth century. The silver mine changed hands repeatedly during this period of constantly shifting alliances and rivalries among warrior families. The center of these battles was Yamabuki Castle, which stood on the summit of the 414-meter Mt. Yogai. The castle was built in the early 1530s by the Ouchi family; they flattened the confined summit and repurposed existing fortifications on it, constructing a rectangular keep with towers. The castle was encircled with dry moats and terraced fortifications and had high ramparts and other obstacles to discourage attack along the steep path up to the keep.

Yamabuki Castle commanded unobstructed views over the mine and its original center of activity, the Sannai settlement, as well as over the road to the port of Tomogaura on the Sea of Japan. Control of the castle was therefore key to dominion over the mine. The rival Amago and Ogasawara families managed to invade the castle on several occasions, but none was able to establish lasting supremacy until 1562. In that year, the Mohri family assumed total control over Iwami Ginzan and fortified the castle further. Yamabuki never saw a major battle again: in 1600 Iwami Ginzan was taken over by the Tokugawa clan, who three years later went on to unify the entire country under its banner, founding the shogunate that was to rule Japan until 1867. The new government chose to establish its center of control in the Omori area, and Yamabuki Castle was gradually abandoned.

Today only stone foundations and remnants of the ramparts of the castle remain on and around Mt. Yogai. The site of the main keep has been reclaimed by nature, but it is possible to make out some of the other fortifications on the summit if you know where to look. The summit commands a view of the coastline. It is about an hour's climb from the starting point of the Tomogaura Road, but visitors should note that some sections of the trail can be difficult to traverse.