

Hokkaido's Eastern Timber Hub

Hokkaido's timber industry developed during the Meiji and Taisho eras (1868–1926) due to the vast forests across the island. Kushiro Port opened in 1899 to transport lumber and agricultural products by sea. In 1901, a train service connected Kushiro with the Tokachi region of central Hokkaido and Kitami to the north, and Kushiro became the main transport hub of eastern Hokkaido.

Lumber yards opened in Kushiro as logs arrived from the forests by train or were floated down the rivers. Most of the lumber was shipped to other parts of Japan or overseas, but some was processed into paper and pulp at factories in Kushiro, a few of which still operate today.

During the winter, when the ground was covered with snow, the logs were brought from the forests to railway stations or river barges on horse-drawn sleds called *bachibachi*. There is a theory that the name derives from the word *bachibachi*, meaning “short” in Tohoku dialect. The design was simple but effective. Instead of one fixed-length sled, two short sleds were strapped to the log, one at the front and one at the rear. These could be adjusted to fit any log and slide it smoothly across the snow.