

Toyotomi Hideyoshi and *Yakusugi*

Yakusugi, the iconic cedars of Yakushima, first attained national prominence in the late sixteenth century after the warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–1598) learned that there was good cedar on the island and ordered the use of *yakusugi* for the construction of a temple hall in Kyoto.

Hideyoshi Sets His Eyes on *Yakusugi*

Hideyoshi unified Japan under his rule in the late sixteenth century after a long period of civil war. In April 1586, he ordered a search for cedar and cypress with which to build a hall for a great Buddha statue at Hokoji Temple in Kyoto. The Shimazu family, which then controlled most of Kyushu, were rivals of Hideyoshi and initially did not comply with the order. In 1587, however, Hideyoshi defeated the Shimazu, and the family head, Shimazu Yoshihisa (1533–1611), was instructed to send tribute of *yakusugi*.

Hideyoshi asked his aide, the daimyo Ishida Mitsunari (1560–1600), to have chief retainer Ijuin Tadamune (d. 1599) and Shimazu Tadanaga (1551–1610) go to Yakushima and conduct a survey of timber on the island. The two men inspected several trees under the guidance of islanders and found that *yakusugi* was a high-quality, durable timber with beautiful burls, suitable for construction material. This survey is mentioned in an edict issued in 1595 by Yoshihisa and his brother Yoshihiro (1535–1619), which states, “The trees recorded in the timber survey for the main hall of the great Buddha statue shall be left untouched.”

It is unclear if the *yakusugi* Hideyoshi ordered ever reached Kyoto, as transporting trees of such large size was a logistical and financial challenge. The deployment of military forces under Hideyoshi in 1592 left the Shimazu family with insufficient ships to transport the wood from Yakushima, and perhaps with only the economic resources to send processed timber for boards and pillars to Kyoto. The story has yet to be fully revealed.

Wilson’s Stump

One of the *yakusugi* cut down for the temple is thought to be Wilson’s Stump, named after British plant hunter and botanist Ernest Henry Wilson (1876–1930), who discovered the stump in 1914 and introduced it to the world. Tashiro Zentaro (1872–1947), a Japanese botanist who met Wilson in 1917, visited Yakushima for his first academic exploration there between 1918 and 1923, stating in his 1926 report that the stump’s state of regeneration suggested the tree was cut down in the early eighteenth

century.

The stump is located at an altitude of 1,030 meters along the Okabu Trail in the special protection zone of Yakushima National Park. The original tree is estimated to have been over 2,000 years old. The stump is over four meters in diameter. Its hollow interior contains a small spring as well as Kodama Jinja Shrine, which enshrines Hikohohodemi no Mikoto, a deity of the mountain, Kukunochi no Kami, a deity of the tree, and Oyamatsumi no Mikoto, a deity of the mountain and sea. There is a replica of the Wilson's stump on the premises of the Seaside Hotel in Miyanoura, where visitors can get a sense of the immense size of the actual stump.