

Minecarts

Before the age of modern mining equipment, workers carried ore out of the tunnels in large bags made from straw. That changed with the introduction of rail-mounted minecarts in the late nineteenth century. The minecarts ran on tracks that led to the aboveground processing plant, where the ore was crushed.

The first minecarts were pulled by men or horses. Small, gasoline-powered locomotives came into use in 1932, followed by electric locomotives in 1939. Some sections of the tunnels were only wide enough for one set of tracks. To prevent collisions between carts traveling in opposite directions, the operators signaled each other with a system of red and green lights. The lights were operated by lever switches installed at the points where the tracks narrowed.

Looking Up at Dōyū Open Site

The gold rush at Sado Island Gold Mine began in 1596, after three prospectors discovered a rich vein of gold in Aikawa. Within a few decades, miners using nothing more than chisels and hammers had removed enough rock to create a large, V-shaped gouge in the mountain. This unique feature is called the Dōyū no Warito, or “Dōyū Open Site.” It has become a symbol of Sado Island Gold Mine and the monumental scale of the mining work that went on there. At 30 meters across and more than 70 meters deep, it is one of the largest such sites in the world.

The arrival of new technologies greatly improved the mining process. One such technology was dynamite, which was introduced from England. Miners used dynamite to blast rock from the mountainside. The blasted rock (or “muck”) fell down through the open gap into the tunnels, where it was loaded onto minecarts.

Takatō Jinja Shrine

Takatō Jinja Shrine honors the spirit of Ōshima Takatō (1826–1901), known as the father of modern Japanese mining. Ōshima served as director of the Sado Mining Bureau in the 1880s and significantly expanded and modernized the mine. It was Ōshima who reopened excavation of the Dōyū Open Site using dynamite and ushered in a new wave of activity. New facilities built under his leadership include the Takatō Shaft, an ore processing plant, and shipping infrastructure at Ōma Port.

Takatō Jinja Shrine is a subsidiary of Ōyamazumi Jinja Shrine, which was founded in 1605 by the first magistrate of Sado. That original shrine was built to bring prosperity to the mines,

and Ōshima himself worked hard to achieve the same goal. A Shinto ritual is held at Takatō Shrine every July to pray for safety at the mine.

Takatō Shaft

This 659-meter shaft is the longest vertical access tunnel at Sado Island Gold Mine. It opened in 1887 and is named for Ōshima Takatō, the pioneering mine director who oversaw its construction. Vertical shafts like these were used to efficiently access the horizontal mining tunnels far beneath the earth.

The Takatō Shaft was equipped with a powerful 180-horsepower hoist that took workers and supplies down into mine tunnels and lifted ore up to the surface. At its deepest point, the Takatō Shaft stretched 659 meters below ground, more than twice the height of the Eiffel Tower. A huge steel winch tower, or “headframe,” once stood over the entrance, but it was replaced with a smaller one in 1952.

Minecart Depot and Repair Shop

The minecarts that hauled ore and miners through the tunnels were powered by electric locomotives. At the end of each day, the fleet of battery-powered locomotives was hauled to the surface for recharging in this building. The structure also served as a repair shop for carts, pneumatic drills, headlamps, and other mining equipment. The machinery displayed there dates mostly from between 1935 and 1944, and much of it remained in use until the mine ceased operation in 1989.

Takatō Park

This park provides a panoramic view of Dōyū Open Site, the distinctive cleft in the mountain above Sado Island Gold Mine. The gap is where the mine’s richest seams of gold once lay. In the mid-1700s, the magistrate of Sado chose eight official “sights of Sado Island.” Paintings of these vistas included an image of the harvest moon rising above the Dōyū Open Site. Ore-processing facilities were built in the area that is now Takatō Park beginning in the late nineteenth century, and the ruins of an ore-crushing plant can still be seen on the cliff in front of the Dōyū Open Site.