

Sugaya Ironworks Village

Sugaya Ironworks Village (Sugaya Tataru Sannai) was once an ironmaking community where teams of workers used a traditional clay *tataru* furnace to smelt iron sand into high-quality steel. This arduous process took three to four days of continuous work and consumed many tons of charcoal as fuel. Ironmaking was practiced here for nearly 130 years between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. Today, the village has Japan's only extant example of a *takadono*, the building in which teams of workers smelted iron and steel. The site manager and *murage* (foreman) lived near the all-important *takadono*, while most of the workers resided in rowhouses across the river to the east.

Ironworks like this one were often established in the mountains, where both iron sand and charcoal could be easily sourced. Sugaya Ironworks was founded by the Tanabe family in 1751. The site annually produced roughly 200 to 300 metric tons of iron and steel, and at the height of production, the furnace was used 50 to 60 times each year.

The *takadono* and several of the surviving buildings were designated Important Tangible Folk Cultural Properties in 1967. Although the mountain village is now peaceful and quiet, there was a time when the air was filled with the shouts of workers and the roar of the furnace.