

Izumo's Ancient *Tatara* Ironmaking Heritage

Different forms of *tatara* ironmaking have been practiced here in the Chūgoku region for over 1,000 years. The region's natural abundance of iron sand and wood, two basic ingredients for ironmaking, is one major reason for this continual production. At one point, the ironmaking industry in this area accounted for nearly 80 percent of all iron produced in Japan.

The industry shaped local culture and society, and its presence had a marked impact on the region's natural environment. Iron was produced throughout the region year-round and on a massive scale, and resources like wood and iron sand had to be carefully managed to avoid depletion. In the case of wood, which was necessary for producing charcoal, plots of forest were systematically cut down and then allowed to regrow.

In some cases, the effects of this widespread industry permanently changed the landscape. The process of collecting iron sand leveled entire mountains, after which the flattened terrain was converted into fields for agriculture.

In 2016, historical centers of *tatara* ironmaking in the municipalities of Yasugi, Unnan, and Okuizumo were designated Japan Heritage Sites. In addition to Wakou Museum and Kanayago Jinja Shrine in Yasugi, the sites include Sugaya Ironworks Village in Unnan and Nittōho Tatara in Okuizumo. More information on these and other nearby *tatara* ironmaking heritage sites can be seen in this display.