

Shipping Iron and Steel

During the Edo period (1603–1867), iron and steel were shipped in wooden boxes wrapped in thick straw rope. Loops braided into the rope were used to grab the boxes from any side. If a careless worker dropped one of these heavy packages overboard while the boat was being loaded, the box could quickly be retrieved by snagging the loops with a boathook.

Shipments leaving Yasugi originally headed southwest, along the Sea of Japan coast, before circling east through the Kanmon Strait and up across the Seto Inland Sea to Osaka. This shipping route was extended in the mid-eighteenth century, and merchant boats called *kitamaebune* began heading northeast from Yasugi, looping clockwise around Japan's northernmost islands and thereby creating a maritime network that linked Osaka and Hokkaido. As a result of the increased flow of goods and people, Yasugi became a thriving port town.