

A Forested Mine

The Iwami Ginzan Silver Mine was closed and abandoned in 1923, and the hills and valleys that the mine occupied have been almost entirely reclaimed by nature. Large swaths of Mt. Sennoyama, the peak at the center of the mine, are now covered by dense forest that obscures many of the hundreds of mining tunnels and shafts.

Native trees such as red pines (*akamatsu*), bamboo-leaf oaks (*shirakashi*), jolcham oaks (*konara*), and ring-cupped oaks (*arakashi*) grow among cryptomeria trees (*sugi*) planted in the twentieth century. This suggests the area's plant life is slowly returning to a natural state without human intervention. Fast-growing, hardy bamboo has taken over former settlement sites in the forest, many of which receive little sunlight due to the surrounding tree cover.

The wet and temperate climate has encouraged the relatively quick

recovery of vegetation around the old mine. However, the fact that native trees thrive on and around Mt. Sennoyama is also the result of the way local forests were managed while the mine was active. Vast amounts of firewood and charcoal were needed for heating houses and fueling facilities for smelting and refining, but the mine's administrators prohibited the cutting of trees for charcoal production within the mining zone to prevent landslides. Wood was sourced instead from forests around nearby villages, where cutting of timber was regulated to secure a steady supply. These policies allowed native trees to survive around the center of the mine and enabled the local ecosystem to recover rapidly after its closure.