Nishimikawa Alluvial Gold Deposits

The history of gold and silver mining on Sado Island goes back to ancient times, when gold mining at the Nishimikawa Alluvial Gold Deposits was recorded in the book “Tales of Times Now Past” in the late 12th century. It was widely considered the very beginning of gold mining on Sado.

Production at the Nishimikawa Alluvial Gold Deposits, having reached a peak in around the 17th century, decreased after the 18th century and the operation was closed finally in 1872. However, the remains of mining sites, waterways, dikes and official houses bring vestiges of its prosperity to us.

Niibo Silver Mine

Major development of production systems began in the middle of the 16th century with the development of silver mines in Tsurushi and Niibo through surface mining, and later peaked with the discovery of Aikawa Gold and Silver Mine.

Tsurushi Silver Mine

Silver production in Tsurushi Silver Mine increased dramatically thanks to advanced mining and smelting techniques, tunnel mining, and cupellation, which were believed to be introduced from Iwami Silver Mine. Tsurushi prospered in the late 16th century as it was called “Tsurushi Sengen,” or “one thousand houses in the Tsurushi area.”

Tsurushi Silver Mine set a precedent for the development of Aikawa Gold and Silver Mine. Its mining camps and settlements prospered with the growth of the mine, but its prosperity ebbed away rapidly after the 17th century because those camps and settlements moved to Aikawa, where gold and silver mines were newly exploited. However, operation at Tsurushi Silver Mine continued until 1946.
Aikawa Gold and Silver Mine – in the Edo Period

Full-scale mining and development of Aikawa Gold and Silver Mine began in 1601, and Sado Island was placed under the direct control of the Tokugawa Shogunate. Tokugawa Ieyasu, the first shogun of the Edo Period, developed Sado Gold and Silver Mine by bringing mine proprietors from all over Japan, including the Iwami, Ikuno, and Kai areas. These mine proprietors introduced advanced technologies in many production processes including surveying, underground mining, ore smelting (cupellation, cementation process with sulfur, cementation process with salt), and made it possible to produce the world’s top gold output. These and other new mining technologies fostered on Sado Island were later transferred to mines nationwide.

“Doyu-no-warito”, a hand-dug outcrop
A large-scale opening on top of the mountain was created as a result of surface mining in the Doyu vein. The distinctive wedge-shaped cutout on the top of the mountain is the symbol of the Sado Gold and Silver Mine. Many tunnels still remain and their mouths can be viewed from outside.

Sodayu Mabu Tunnel
Sodayu Mine was developed during the early stage of mining in Aikawa. It is now open to the public as a museum.

Kami-Aikawa mining town remains
A town of mine workers and their families was situated at the foot of mines. During the early development of the gold and silver mine, the community was located in a mountain area next to Tsurushi Silver Mine. Mining to smelting was done by the community. It is said that there were 1,000 houses during its prime in the 17th century.

“Kinzan Horiko-no-zu”
An old painting of the mine

Sado Bugyoshō, Magistrate Office

The goldmine administration headquarters was originally located in Tsurushi. It was relocated to the present location from 1603 to 1604 by administrative head Okubo Nagayasu. Unlike other magistrate offices across the country, Sado’s office had mining business facilities including storage houses for gold and silver, fuel, timber and lead rather than just rice.