

Kirarium Sado, Sado Island Gold Mines Visitor Center

Your journey to the "Sado Island Gold Mines" begins here.

This facility serves as a gateway to the "Sado Island Gold Mines", providing information about the site and tips for visiting. The exhibition room is equipped with large screens, information panels and replicas that explain in simple terms the value and attraction of the "Sado Island Gold Mines". A Tourist Information Desk is also available, offering bike rentals, guided tours, and apps to help explore the surrounding area.

Address: 18-1, Aikawa Sanchome-Hamamachi, Sado, Niigata 952-1562

About 50 minutes by car from Ryotsu Port and 1 hour and 15 minutes by car from Ogi Port.

Tel: +81(0)259-74-2215

Open: 8:30 AM 5:00 PM Last admission at 4:30 PM.

Closed: December 29 through January 3

Admission Fee: 300 JPY for adults, 150 JPY for ages 7-15

Groups (15 people or more): 250 JPY for adults, 100 JPY for ages 7-15

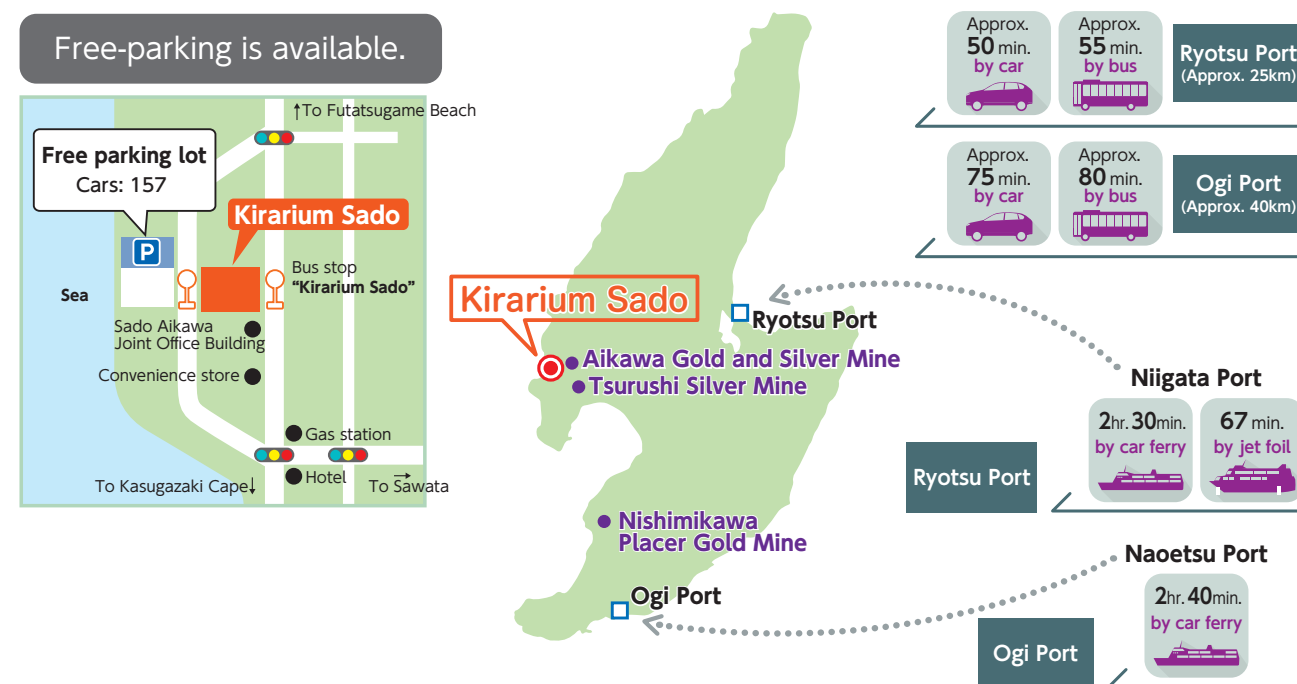


Facade of Kirarium Sado



Exhibition Room

〈Transport Access〉



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For more information on the "Sado Island Gold Mines"



Tell me more!

Sado Island Gold Mines

World Heritage Guidebook

Two Areas of “Sado Island Gold Mines”



Gold Ore



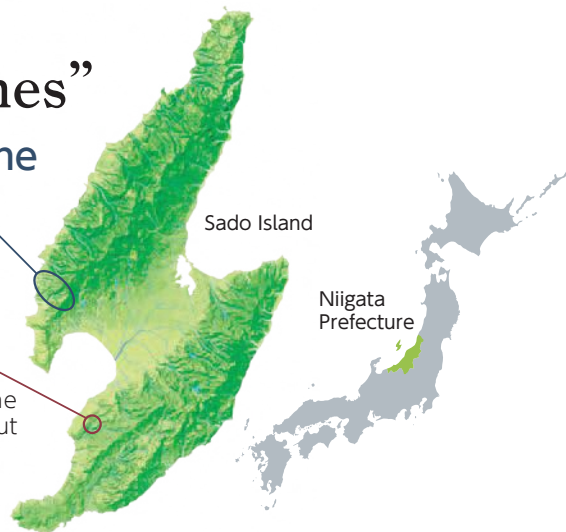
Placer Gold

Aikawa-Tsurushi Gold and Silver Mine

In Aikawa-Tsurushi Gold and Silver Mine, various technical and social systems were established to obtain "invisible" gold in the hard gold ore.

Nishimikawa Placer Gold Mine

This mine has been known as the oldest mine in Sado. The unique mining method "Onagashi (great flow)" was carried out to obtain "visible" placer gold effectively.



Three Characteristics of “Sado Island Gold Mines”

Three characteristics of the “Sado Island Gold Mines” demonstrate manual gold production technology. As a result, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee decided to inscribe the “Sado Island Gold Mines” on the World Heritage List on the basis of Criteria (iv) of Outstanding Universal Value on July 27, 2024.

1 Traditional unmechanized mining technologies improved adapting to the characteristics of deposits

Introduction and development of technologies suited to the characteristics of the mines in the two areas can be seen.

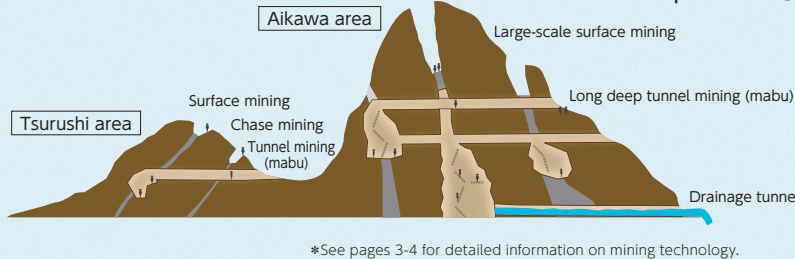
Nishimikawa Placer Gold Mine

[Sediment placer gold deposit: placer gold mining method “Onagashi” [great flow]]



Aikawa-Tsurushi Gold and Silver Mine

[Hard-rock lode deposits [ore]: from Tsurushi to Aikawa, large-scale mining and technical improvement]



*See pages 3-4 for detailed information on mining technology.

2 A series of production processes that enabled high-purity gold production

The established division of labor has increased the specialization and technical precision of the workers in each process.

Nishimikawa Placer Gold Mine

Mining



Scrape the deposit on the mountain side and conduct “Onagashi” (great flow)

Dressing



Obtain placer gold from the bottom of the waterway using gravity concentration

Source Nishimikawa Placer Gold Mine: “Nishimikawa sakinzan kasegikata no zu” (Property of Niigata Prefectural Museum of History)
Aikawa-Tsurushi Gold and Silver Mine: “Sado no kuni kanahori no maki” (Property of Aikawa Folk Museum)

Placer gold from Nishimikawa is transported to the magistrate’s office in Aikawa

Aikawa-Tsurushi Gold and Silver Mine

Mining



Excavate ore

Dressing



Crush and grind ore to obtain gold and silver

Smelting



Add lead to extract gold and silver (cupellation)

Refining



Add salt and heat to purify gold (cementation with salt)

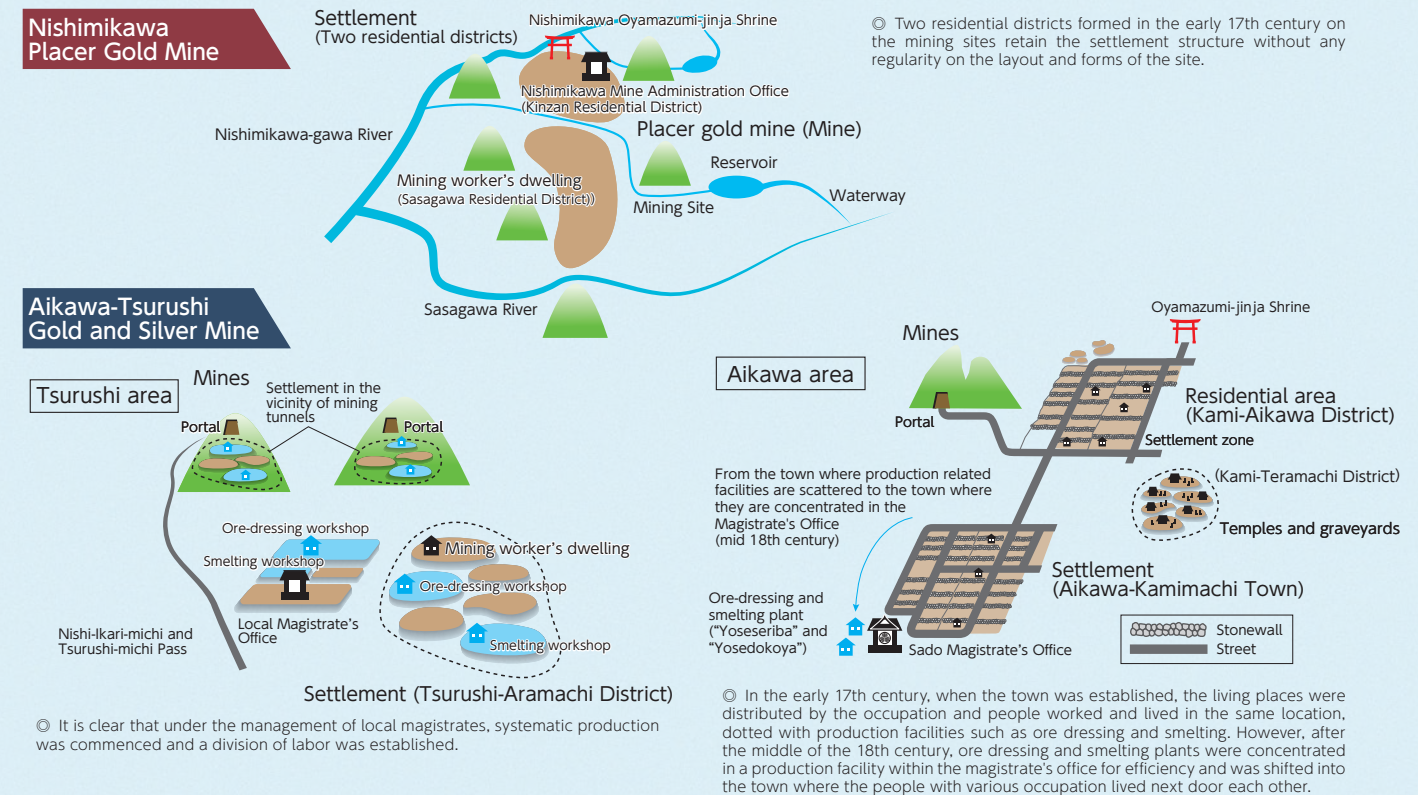
Minting



Roughly-cut coins are shaped into oval “koban” coins by hammering

3 A testimony to the strategic management by the Tokugawa Shogunate and to the social system integrated on a large scale

Remains related to production organization and remains of settlements show the situation at the time.



The Value of the “Sado Island Gold Mines” as a World Heritage Site Under Criteria (iv) of the Outstanding Universal Value.

Criteria (iv) : to be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history

【Physical Evidence Indicating the Important Phase in the Gold Production Technology】

The “Sado Island Gold Mines” represents a unique and precious cultural heritage site in Asia, where advanced manual mining and smelting techniques were practiced for over 250 years, from the late 16th to the mid-19th century, during a period when mechanization of mining was advancing in other parts of the world. The management system and social organization established by the Tokugawa Shogunate on Sado Island, from the 17th century to the mid-19th century, allowed for the extraction and processing of significant amounts of high-quality gold that met global standards during the 17th century. This is proved in the mining area and settlement organization.

The Unique Culture Nurtured by the People of the Mining Community

The cultures and traditions brought by people from all over Japan developed into a unique culture. The rituals and festivals deeply connected to the mines are still being passed down to this day.



Yawaragi-A Shinto Ritual and Performing Art Associated with Mining
(Aikawa Gold and Silver Mine)



A Festival Held in a Mining Town
(Aikawa Gold and Silver Mine)

The Gold of Sado Island: Backbone of the Tokugawa Shogunate's Finances

~The Mining Town of Unprecedented Success~

Gold mined on Sado Island was used to mint koban coins. This was unique among domestic mines in Japan. The koban coins were brought to Edo, where they formed the backbone of the Tokugawa Shogunate's finances.

The Shogunate placed great importance on the gold mines of Sado Island. As a result, it made significant investments and implemented measures to improve the working environment, enabling gold production to be carried out efficiently over a long period of time.

In particular, Aikawa Town, once a tiny farming and fishing village, became a center for mining operations. When gold was discovered, Aikawa Town was further developed into a prosperous mining town with a systematic land allotment and well-planned streets. The town became one of the country's largest, with a population of up to 50,000 people.



“Sado koban coins” transported to the Netherlands

[Property of Dutch National Numismatic Collection, Amsterdam]

The koban coins minted in Sado were carried to Edo (present-day Tokyo). In the 17th century, a large amount of koban coins were brought out, and some were even transported as far as Europe.

Overview of Nishimikawa Placer Gold Mine and Aikawa-Tsurushi Gold and Silver Mine

《Nishimikawa Placer Gold Mine; Placer Gold Deposit, “Onagashi” (great flow)》

◎Nishimikawa Placer Gold Mine is a mine described on a record “Tales of Times Now Past” compiled in the 12th century as the oldest gold mine on Sado. Large-scale mining began at the end of the 16th century. In the early 17th century, when the mine came under the direct control of the Tokugawa Shogunate, villagers mined placer gold as a joint work under the control of the Sado Magistrate's Office.

◎A distinctive mining technology called the “Onagashi” (great flow) method, in which the stratum containing placer gold was scraped to have the placer gold collected by hydraulic power, was carried out. The remains demonstrating the whole image of the “Onagashi” operation such as headraces, reservoirs, mining sites and tail races still remain in good condition.

◎Two residential districts were established on the flat lands of mining sites formed after the “Onagashi” operation. The features of the settlements are the layout and the forms of the houses and lands were irregular and didn't change significantly throughout the Edo period.

◎In the settlement, there remain the Mine Official's Residence Site related to management and the residence of Kaneko Kanzaburo Family who managed the mining operation as the village head, as well as the Nishimikawa Oyamazui-jinja Shrine which enshrined the deity of mining and Noh play theater. You can feel the atmosphere of a mining village in the period of mining operation.

◎The placer gold mine was closed in 1872. However, the people stayed here without being discrete and shifted their occupation from mining to agriculture and forestry. The descendants are still residing here.



Distant view of Nishimikawa Placer Gold Mine



Placer gold mining sites and mining settlement

《Aikawa-Tsurushi Gold and Silver Mine; Lode Deposit, Mining Hard Rock》

◎The Aikawa-Tsurushi Gold and Silver Mine is the mine in which the gold and silver in the hard rocks (ore) called lode deposits were extracted. In the Tsurushi area, mining commenced in the mid-16th century, and the full-scale mining began in the latter half of the 16th century like the Nishimikawa Placer Gold Mine.

◎In the Tsurushi area, we can see the transition of mining methods: from “surface mining”, mining an outcropping of veins on the surface, and “chase mining”, digging for veins on the ground surface; to “tunnel mining”, digging for multiple veins. The remains of “ore-dressing”, crushing and sorting the excavated ore; and “smelting”, extracting metals with chemical treatment (“cupellation”, using lead) are left, showing the introduction of the mining technology and the period of establishment of the processes of gold production. We can see the situation in the early mining settlements, when production began with an organized division of labor.

◎In the Aikawa area, which was discovered by some miners from the Tsurushi area, the full-scale mining began at the beginning of the 17th century. The mine had one of the largest and deepest concentrations of deep underground veins in the country. Therefore, it soon became the center of the development and mining operations covered an extensive area.

◎The veins in the Aikawa area were electrum, which contain much silver in gold. Therefore, complex processes to separate silver from gold in the ore-dressing, smelting and refining were developed. In order to produce high quality gold (as pure as up to 99.54%) in the only mine in Japan where koban coin minting was permitted, the Shogunate continued the investment to improve the technology and working environment.

◎The Sado Magistrate's Office was established in the Aikawa area, which was the center of the management of Sado Island Gold Mines by the Tokugawa Shogunate. A large-scale mining town was also established along the main street connecting the mine and the magistrate's office.

◎Sado Island is rich in its unique mining cultures, such as Oyamazumi-jinja Shrine Site, which enshrined the mining deity, temple sites of various denominations, rituals in the mine and festivals held in the mining town. These revitalized the local people and strengthened the human bond in the organization as the place of emotional support, playing an important role to support for continuing the production organizations for a long period.



Distant view of Aikawa-Tsurushi
Gold and Silver Mine (From the southwest)



Tunnel mining site
(Ogiriyama-mabu Tunnel Site, Aikawa area)

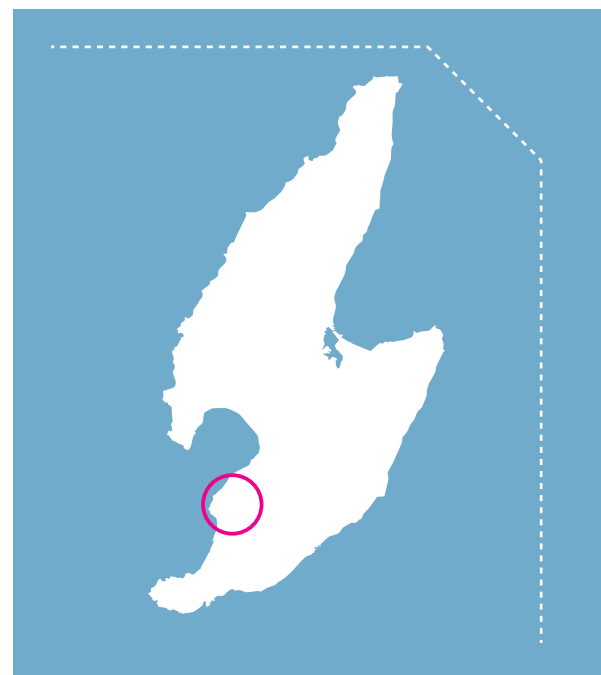


Townscape of Aikawa-Kamimachi Town (foreground)
and mountains where mines are located (background)



Sado Magistrate's Office Site
(The base for management of the Tokugawa Shogunate)

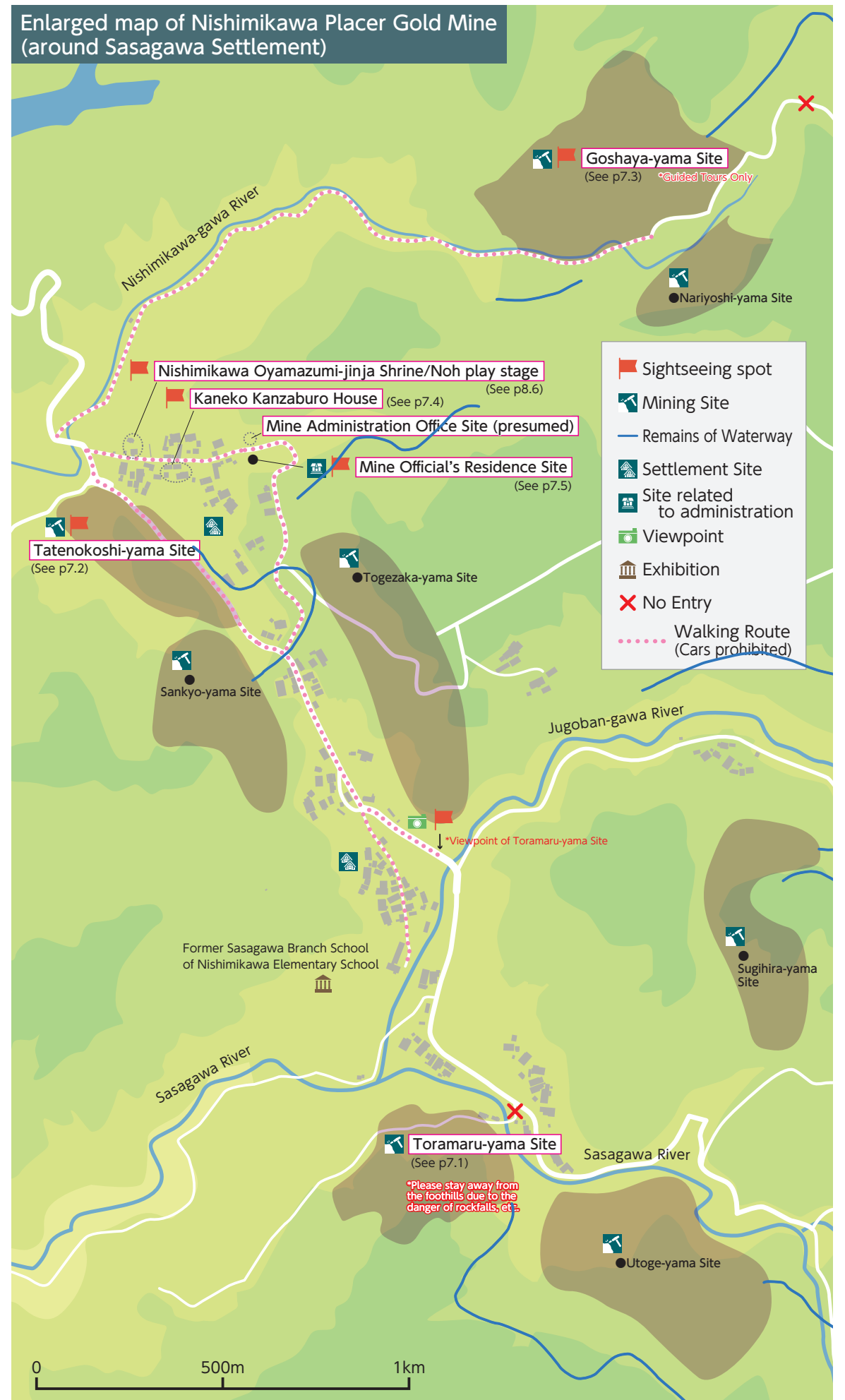
Map of Nishimikawa Placer Gold Mine



- The Nishimikawa Area(Sasagawa Settlement) is still inhabited by residents who primarily live off agriculture. Unlike typical tourist destinations, there are no facilities for tourists other than signposts and informational boards.
- Due to the lack of safe routes for visiting mining sites and in the mountain, including headrace, it is recommended that you visit there with a tour guide.



Enlarged map of Nishimikawa Placer Gold Mine (around Sasagawa Settlement)



"Sado Island Gold Mines" Introduction of main spots in the Nishimikawa Placer Gold Mine

1. Toramaru-yama Site 《open to the public》 ※Due to the risk of rockfall and other hazards at the base of the mountain, please have a look from the viewpoint.



This is the largest mining site in the Nishimikawa Placer Gold Mine. This is also a symbolic site at which the reddish mined outcrop can still be seen formed by scraping the mountainside from the "Onagashi" operation. A picture map shows that mining was carried out up and down the mountain.

2. Tatenokoshi-yama Site 《open to the public》



This is one of the placer gold mining sites. On the steep slopes and at the foot of the mountain you can see the remains of large waterways that were formed by scraping the mountainsides from both sides of the mountain. You can also see the remains of waterways and reservoirs that supplied water to the mining sites.

3. Goshaya-yama Site 《limited public access》 ※Open for guided-tours only.



The Goshaya-yama Site is a place where placer gold mining was carried out throughout the Edo period. Remains showing a series of the entire processes of placer gold mining by the "Onagashi" method, such as the sites of headraces, reservoir, race, mining sites, and piled-up stone structures, are concentrated in a small area.

4. Kaneko Kanzaburo House 《open to the public》 ※Currently conservation and repair work is being carried out and entry is not allowed.



This is the residence of the Kaneko family who acted as the village head of the gold mine from the late Edo period until 1872. They served as intermediaries between the officials from the magistrate's office and the settlements with responsibility for assembling the mine workers and managing the work of the "Onagashi" method. It is comprised of the wooden main building, storehouse, shed and cow barn, all of which were constructed around the 19th century. You can understand how they managed the operation of the "Onagashi" as well as the process of occupational change from mining to agriculture and forestry after the closure of the placer gold mine.

5. Mine Official's Residence Site 《open to the public》



The Mine Administration Office was established at the Nishimikawa Placer Gold Mine and two officials were dispatched for management of the mine from the Sado Magistrate's Office. The Mine Official's Residence Site is a residence site for the officials dispatched to the Mine Administration Office. A terrace surrounded by the stone walls remains in the exact place depicted in the picture maps of the Edo period, and the field across from the Residence Site is presumed to have been the Mine Administration Office Site.

6. Oyamazumi-jinja Shrine and Noh play stage 《open to the public》



This shrine was enshrined in 1593, wishing for the prosperity of the placer gold mine and for the safety of the mining operations. The main building of the shrine and its related facilities have been rebuilt over time. The present shrine building was reconstructed in 1928. It is said that the precinct of the shrine was dug down and lowered by placer gold mining. In the precinct, located is Noh play stage that was constructed in the late 1800s.

7. Sasagawa Settlement (Kinzan and Sasagawa) 《open to the public》 ※Currently this is the living area for residents. Please refrain from entering private property.



This is the settlement run by the people involved in placer gold mining and it is still the living and working area for their descendants. It was originally two residential districts called Sasagawa and Kinzan, and started to be called the "Sasagawa-juhachimai-mura Village" around the end of 16th century and came to function as one settlement. It is located in the mountains surrounded by placer gold mining sites. The residents changed their occupation to agriculture and forestry after the closure of the mine, but it still retains traces of the mining settlement of those days without alteration to the land plotting and form of life from the Edo period.

"Onagashi" Placer Gold Mining Method in the Nishimikawa Placer Gold Mine

"Pictures of Gold and Silver Mines in Sado"
(Property of Niigata Prefectural Museum of History)

The Nishimikawa Placer Gold Mine had a sedimentary placer gold deposit containing placer gold in the sediment layer of the mountain, so it was essential to scrape the sediment layer and get rid of unwanted gravels to obtain gold. Therefore, the "Onagashi" mining method was carried out in this area by scraping the layers of the mountainsides by hand and washing away the gravels with gravity concentration using the force of accumulated water from a distant water source. "Onagashi" was conducted every month, and all the gold collected there was taken to Aikawa for refining.



1) Scrape off the gravels containing placer gold toward the race built at the foot of the mountain.



2) Dam up the stones in a row in the race and release the water from the reservoir to flush out the unwanted dirt. Heavy placer gold remains at the bottom of the race.



3) Remove the stones which were not washed away.



4) Gather the sand collected at the bottom of the race on *Nekoda* mat, a woven straw mat, and collect the minute sand by sifting through the mesh of the *Nekoda* mat.



5) Put the collected sand on the *Yuriita* panning board and catch placer gold in the water with gravity concentration. It is tallied and sealed.



6) On the last day of each month, the sealed placer gold is opened at the Mine Official's Office, and the share for the magistrate's office and the villagers is determined. (Payment to the workers is made in silver and all the gold is carried to the magistrate's office).

Map of Aikawa-Tsurushi Gold and Silver Mine



Requests to those visiting the Tsurushi Silver Mine

Please note that in Tsurushi Silver Mine (current mountainous area of Sawane district) some areas are difficult to walk in, and can also be dangerous. Additional caution is also required for bees and snakes.

As there are no facilities for tourists, it is recommended that you visit there with a tour guide.



Aikawa area seen from Kasuga-zaki

Enlarged Map②⇒p11

Aikawa area

Sado Magistrate's Office Site

Aikawa-Kamimachi Town

Kirarium Sado

Northern line of the Kuninaka regional forest road

Nakayama tunnel

Enlarged Map①⇒p11

Aikawa area

Aikawa Gold and Silver Mine Mining Zone

"Historic Site, Sado Gold Mine"(Golden Sado)

Doyu-no warito
Opencut Site

Kami-Aikawa District

Kami-Teramachi District (See p14.6)

Nishi-Ikari-michi and
Tsurushi-michi Pass

Otaki Mining Zone

Shidekisawa Mining Zone

Tsurushi area

Enlarged Map③⇒p12

Hyakumaidaira Mining Zone

Tsurushi-Aramachi District

Tsurushi Silver Mine
Local Magistrate's Office Site

Tsurushi Park
(Honguchi-mabu Tunnel Site)

Northern line of the
Kuninaka regional forest road

Byobusawa Mining Zone

Tanaka-michi Pass

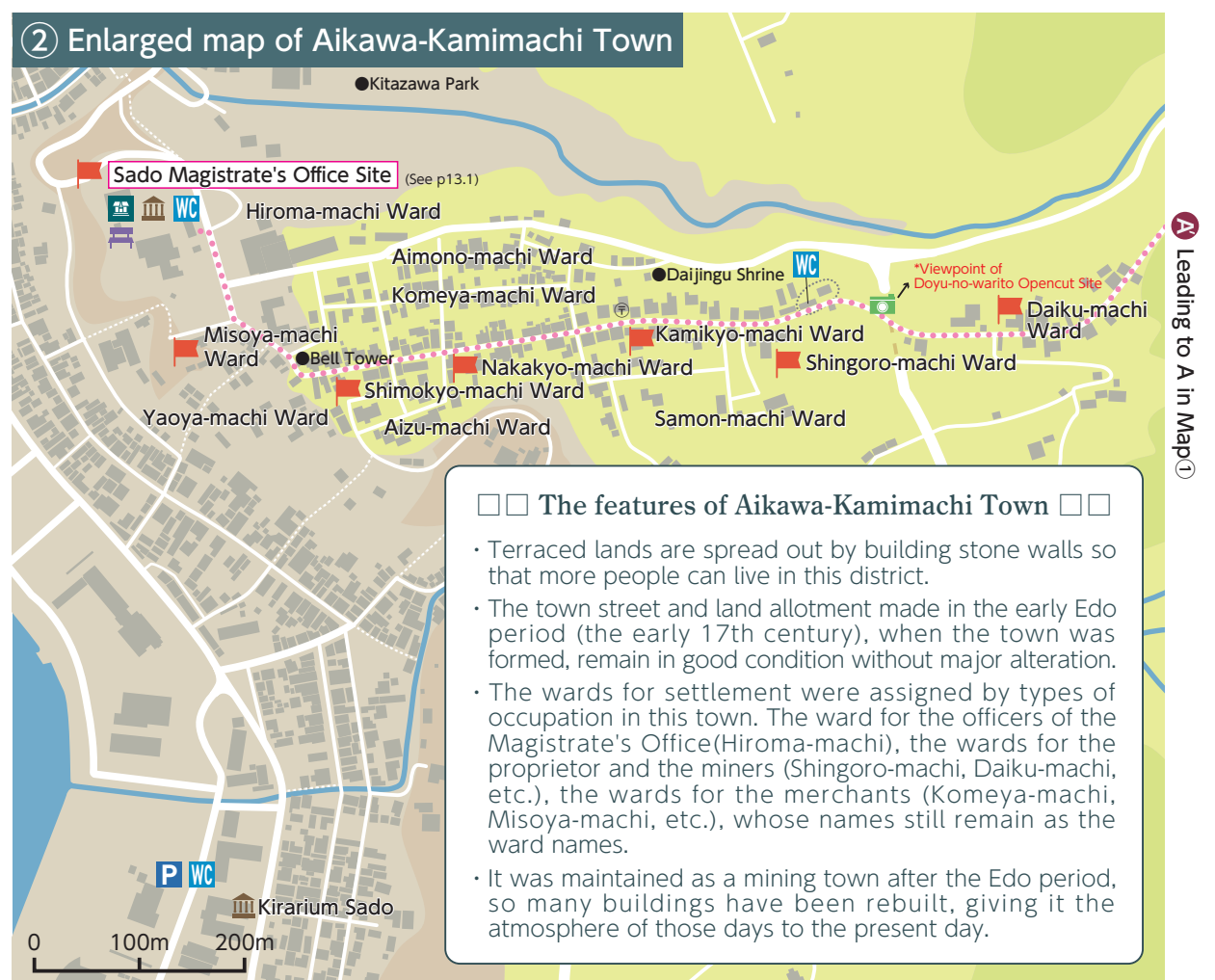
Nishi-Ikari-michi Pass

Tsurushi-michi Pass

Hyakumai-michi Pass

※Since it is difficult to secure a safe route to Byobusawa, Shidekisawa and Otaki Mining Zones, where mining sites are concentrated, please refrain from entering the sites for the time being.

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Request to All the Visitors: Rules and Manners for Tours

- ◆ Please mind your manners so as not to disturb residents or other visitors.
- ◆ There are dangerous areas in mining sites and other places. Please do not enter no entry areas.
- ◆ Damaging ruins or buildings, or taking any excavated artifacts, soil, stones, animals or plants are prohibited.
- ◆ Please take litter with you.
- ◆ Fire is strictly prohibited at the tour sites. Smoke in designated smoking areas only.
- ◆ Please follow traffic rules on a tour of the sites.
(Please refrain from parking on the street or on private land.)
- ◆ Please refrain from driving into the "Walking Route" area on the map.

"Sado Island Gold Mines" Introduction of main spots in the Aikawa-Tsurushi Gold and Silver Mine

1. Sado Magistrate's Office Site 《open to the public/fee required》



The Tokugawa Shogunate dispatched their officials as magistrates to Sado Island to manage the mines, as well as to manage the entire island under its direct control. The office was established in 1603 for the base of the management. In addition to facilities related to administration, the site also housed a plant to produce gold and silver, including ore-dressing, smelting and refining. Five fires destroyed the building, and it was reconstructed each time. The present building is a reconstruction of the magistrate's office at the end of the Edo period.

2. Doyu-no-warito Opencut Site



This is the largest surface mining site in Japan (120 meters long, 10-30 meters wide, and 74 meters deep). The central part of the mountain is cut into a V-shape because only the part of veins was dug out by hand. The chasm appears to literally slice the mountain in two also in 18th-century picture scrolls. The peculiar landscape of the Doyu-no-warito Opencut Site is a symbol of the Aikawa Gold and Silver Mine that can be seen from various places in Aikawa.

3. Sodayu-mabu Tunnel Site 《open to the public/fee required》



This is a representative example of the large, inclined mining tunnels of the early Edo period. The tunnel was excavated with a gentle inclination at the shortest distance and at the most efficient slope for ore transport and drainage operations. You can see traces of excavation by hand with chisels left within the tunnel. Tanuki-ana, racoon dog tunnels (small tunnels to explore veins) and mining tunnels branching out at many points and so on help understand the procedures of exploitation in those days. "Historic Site, Sado Gold Mine" (Golden Sado Inc.) makes use of the tunnels from those days to faithfully recreate the workings with moving robots and open them to the public today.

4. Ogiriyama-mabu Tunnel Site 《limited public access/fee required》



It is said that work on the tunnel began in 1634, finally reaching a vein 14 years later. The main feature of this tunnel is that another ventilation tunnel was excavated in parallel with the main tunnel where people work and pass through. The two were connected by connection vents to improve air circulation within the tunnel. "Historic Site, Sado Gold Mine" provides limited public access to the tunnel through a guided tour course.

5. Kami-Aikawa District 《open to the public》 ※Guided tours and other activities are available.



The district was a mining settlement developed on a slope of 800 meters from east to west, 300 meters from north to south, and with a height difference of approximately 100 meters between east and west, with streets and terraces systematically laid out. The district was at its peak from the end of the 16th century to the 17th century, when the Aikawa Gold and Silver Mine was in the early stages of development. Afterwards, it declined until it was abandoned after the Edo period. Remains and artifacts related to ore-dressing and smelting can be found throughout the district. They indicate that it was a mining town where engineers and workers led by mine proprietors (mining engineers and managers) worked and lived together.

6. Kami-Teramachi District 《partially open to the public》 ※Please check public information at Kirarium Sado.



This is a district where temples were built side by side along the steeply graded land of a mountain. The temples are said to have been built by priests and people who migrated to Sado Island from all over Japan. In addition to being religious facilities, they are said to have functioned as community shared places for people to gather. By comparing the site with drawings and records, we have identified the location and ruins of six temples in addition to the existing Mansho-ji Temple, including the foundations of the temple buildings, stone walls, and stone steps, as well as numerous gravestones.

7. Aikawa-Kamimachi Town 《open to the public》 ※This is the living area for residents. Please refrain from entering private property.



This is a mining town established on a ridge to the southwest of the Aikawa Gold and Silver Mine. In the early 17th century, Okubo Nagayasu, a Sado magistrate, established a magistrate's office, later the Sado Magistrate's Office in Aikawa. Also, he promoted the development of a town with a highly standardized and planned land allotment along a main road connecting the magistrate's office and mining sites. Then, the town was divided into wards for different occupations, such as management, production, and commerce, and people were arranged to live in these wards. There still remain the streets and land allotment that show the vestiges of these establishment days, and ward names that indicate occupations and people related to the mines. They convey the atmosphere of the mining town.

8. Tsurushi Silver Mine Local Magistrate's Office Site 《open to the public》



The office was established at the end of the 16th century for the management of the silver mine by the local magistrate in accordance with the rule of the daimyo warlord Uesugi clan over Sado Island. When the Tokugawa Shogunate took over in 1603, the management functions were transferred to Aikawa. However, it is believed that the office continued to serve as a local agency of the magistrate's office in Aikawa until the mid-17th century. An excavation survey has revealed that the office site consists of three areas with different functions (upper: ore-dressing workshop, middle: smelting workshop, and lower: management facility).

9. Tsurushi-Aramachi District 《open to the public》



The district is the site of a mining settlement adjacent to the east side of the Tsurushi Silver Mine Local Magistrate's Office Site. Irregularly shaped terraces in various sizes were created on the steep slope of the mountain ridge. This shows the rapid establishment and expansion of the settlement as the number of mine workers increased in the late 16th century, when operations expanded. It is thought that the district has been abandoned in the mid-17th century with the decline of the silver mine, and many people have moved to the Aikawa Gold and Silver Mine.

10. Hyakumaidaira Mining Zone 《open to the public》 ※A guided tour is recommended. Equipment for trekking is required.



In the Tsurushi Silver Mine, the distribution survey revealed 556 surface mining sites, four chase mining sites, and 108 tunnel mining sites (mabu tunnel sites). Among them, the Hyakumaidaira Mining Zone is a representative mining site that is thought to be the earliest to be developed in the Tsurushi Silver Mine. Large surface mining sites in the early stages of mining are concentrated around the ridge called Hyakumaidaira.