

The story of Takahashi, certified Japan Heritage

The charming earthy red houses

After crossing through steep mountainous trails to reach Fukiya, visitors will be enchanted by the earthy red-tiled roofs and bengara-coated lattices bordering each side of the road. Located on the Kibi Plateau (Mid-Western Okayama Prefecture), Fukiya stands out for its harmonious earthy red streetscape. Fukiya was a mining town that prospered from bengara manufacturing and the copper mining industry. It is located on the Old Fukiya Road, which connected Bitchu Nariwa (Nariwa Town in Takahashi, Okayama Prefecture) and Bingo Tojo (Shobara City, Hiroshima Prefecture). As the Fukiya area was a transit hub that produced and distributed resources, the Old Fukiya Road was a busy thoroughfare that attracted many businesses, such as inns, wholesalers and shops for mine workers. Later, wealthy merchants called on the skills of the miya-daiku (carpenters mainly in charge of constructing of temples and shinto shrines) and roofers from Iwami Province, now Western Shimane Prefecture. This gave birth to this unique district made of earthy red houses.



The origins of Japan Red - Fukiya Bengara

Japan is known around the world for being associated with the color red. Since ancient times red has been considered a holy color and a source of life. Bengara, the earthy red pigment, was used for making Imari and Kutani porcelain, or Wajima and Yamanaka lacquerware. These high-quality crafts are renowned the world over, and contributed to bringing Fukiya and Japan Red global recognition.

Bengara is made of iron sulphide ore extracted from the mines along with copper ore. Then, the roha (green iron sulfate crystals) was extracted from the iron sulphide and heated up in iron pots.

The roha was later put in water tanks so the impurities could be removed. It was ground into a fine powder and deoxygenated. After it dried in the sun, the powder turned red, producing bengara. Fukiya started to produce bengara from the middle of the Edo Era, and monopolized the market. It was used as a pigment for ceramics and lacquerware, and to coat wooden buildings and boats to prevent them from molding and rotting. Bengara received a Certificate of Excellence during the first National Industrial Exhibition in 1877, becoming famous throughout Japan. "Fukiya Bengara" became an essential ingredient for making ceramic paintings and red lacquer. This national recognition put Fukiya on the map, making the area the birthplace of Japan Red.

One of Japan's best copper sources

According to a local song, Fukiya is the place where the more you dig, the more you find gold. Indeed, in Japanese "copper" is translated to "akagane" ("red gold"). Fukiya was counted among one of the most important copper production sites in Japan.

It is believed that the Yoshioka Copper Mine opened there in 807. From the middle of the Edo Era, it had been one of the most productive mines. At the beginning of the Meiji Era, Iwasaki Yataro (founder of the Mitsubishi Group) bought and modernized the mine. He used a massive infusion of capital and innovative foreign techniques to upgrade the Yoshioka Copper Mine. It became well known for its modern mine management.

The Yoshioka Copper Mine was managed by two famous Japanese companies, Sumitomo and Mitsubishi. It closed in 1972. Some areas are open to the public, such as the Sasaune Tunnel (a tunnel in Yoshioka Copper Mine), the area where the ore was sorted and the metals were extracted, and other tunnels where the trolleys once ran. Some sedimentation tanks are also on display.



Time travel to the Copper Age

An area of about 1.5 km in Fukiya has been designated as a Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings. Visit the Former Katayama Residence, a house that once belonged to a wealthy family involved in bengara production. Stroll around the earthy red homes and take in the atmosphere of the ancient town packed with a rich history.

The environment offers a trip back in time to the origins of Japan Red with:

- The Bengara Museum, which educates visitors about bengara manufacturing,
- The Hirokane and Nishie Residences, two grand homes belonging to wealthy families who ran the Fukiya Bengara production
- The Sasaune Tunnel a Yoshioka Copper Mine tunnel

-The Former Fukiya Elementary School, which is typical of the Meiji Era architecture.

Special Fukiya events held throughout the year

-Fukiya Bengara Akari : Every third Saturday and Sunday night in September, a Dance Troupe wearing bengara-dyed kimonos performs an elegant dance called The Fukiya Kouta Odori. The dancers weave their way through lit lanterns during this once a year fall event

-BengarArt : An exhibit by artists capturing Fukiya (displayed on the afternoons during the Fukiya Bengara Akari)

-Hill Climb: a bicycle race (late summer)



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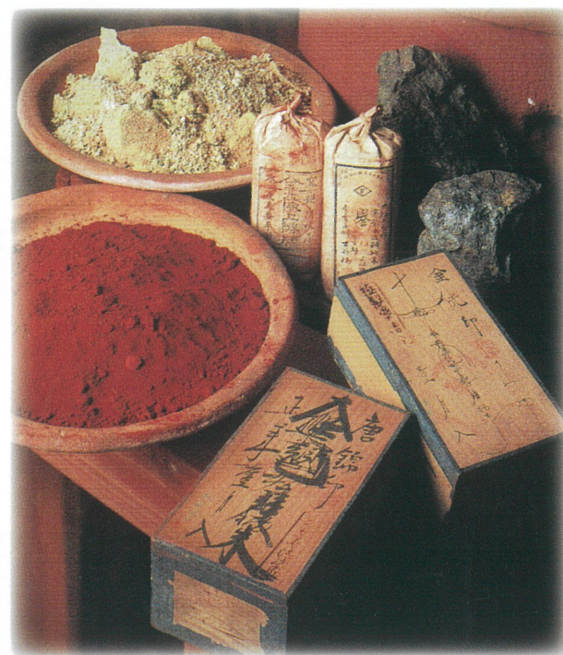
The birthplace of Japan Red

Bitchu Fukiya, the land of bengara and copper

[Summary]

Fukiya is a former mining town located at an attitude of more than 500 meters in the mountains. It thrived on the production of copper and bengara, a reddish brown pigment, the quality of which was exceptional in Japan. This attracted people from all over the country to buy bengara. It was used in the red color for Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines, as well as for traditional Japanese art objects, such as Kutani and Imari porcelain, and Wajima laquer. It gave birth to the symbolic color of Japan, known as Japan Red.

This district built by rich merchants has been passed down through the centuries, remains unspoiled and is known for its red-tiled roofs and bengara-coated koshi lattices. Nowadays it thrills visitors with its unique charm and traditional appeal in a rustic setting. Several spots are open to the public, such as the Bengara Manufactory or the copper mine. Seeing these old artifacts transports visitors to the prosperous days that gave rise to Japan Red.



[What is Japan Heritage?]

The Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs launched this program in 2015 to promote diversity in all Japanese regions. By putting the cultural assets of an area into a "story," the Agency designates them as "Japan Heritage." In total, 104 stories have been selected throughout the country.

As such, in June 2020 the Agency has designated some Takahashi assets and put them into a "story" entitled "The birthplace of Japan Red: Bitchu Fukiya, the land of bengara and copper."

Takahashi City

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Japan Heritage - The birthplace of Japan Red

[22 cultural assets are part of Takahashi's "story"]



① Takahashi Fukiya, a District of Preserved Traditional Buildings



② Former Katayama Residence



③ Fukiya Folk Museum



④ Former Hirokane Residence



⑤ Nishie Residence Main Building and Other Structures



⑥ Bengara Museum



⑦ Yoshioka Copper Mine



⑧ Sasaune Gallery



⑨ San Jinja Shrine



⑩ Yama Jinja Shrine



⑪ Kogane Yama Castle Site



⑫ Enmeiji Temple



⑬ Doeiji Temple



⑭ Ruins of Miners' dwellings



⑮ Former Fukiya Elementary School Buildings



⑯ Old Fukiya Road



⑰ Trolley Road Site



⑱ Ikawa Power Plant Site



⑲ Bitchu Kagura (dances based on Shinto mythology)




⑳ Koshiore Jizo



㉑ Tools used for Sekishu Tiles Manufacturing




㉒ Katayama Residence's Documents



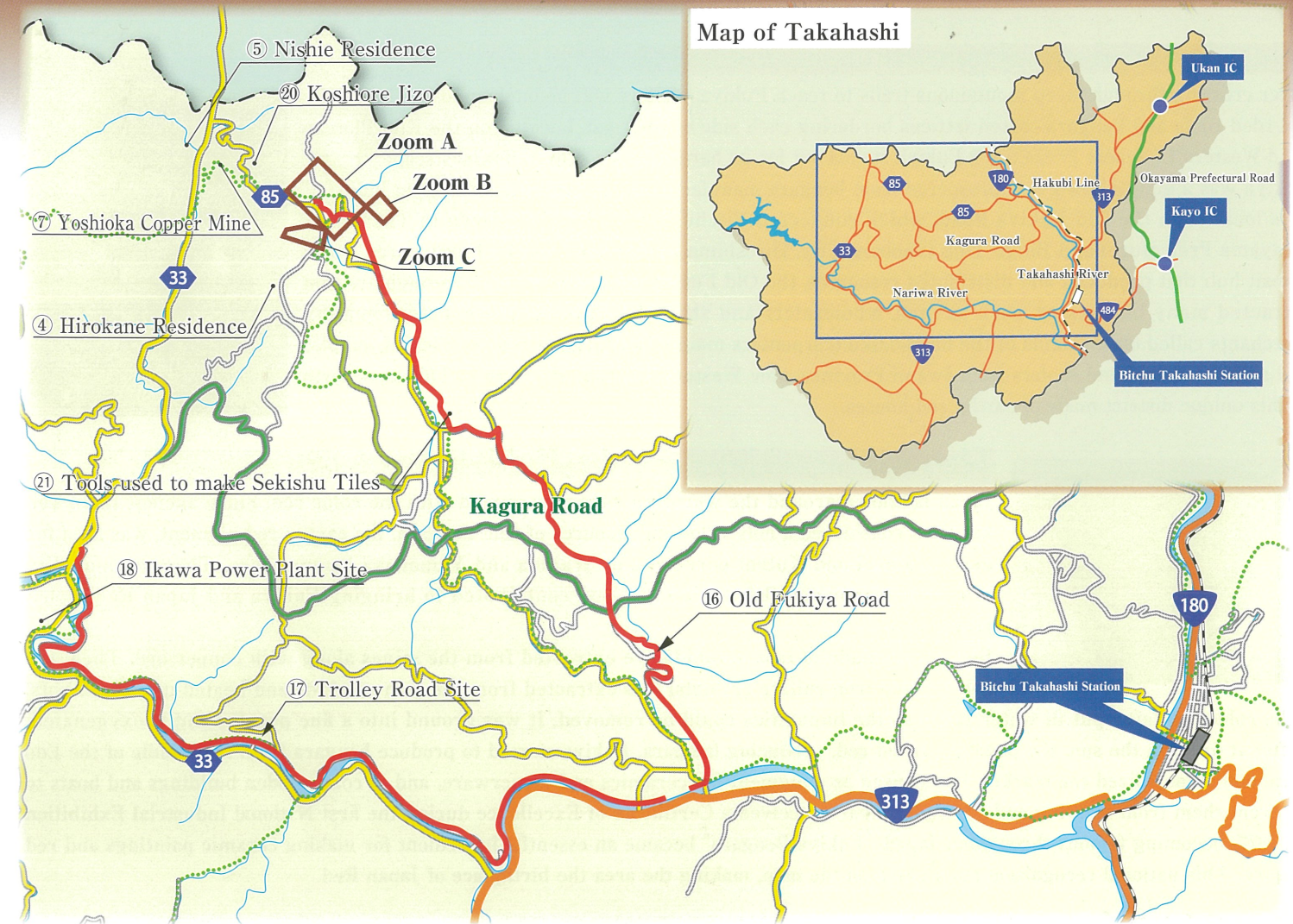
Takahashi City (Okayama Pref.)

Japan Heritage

2020, June 19th



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Map of Fukiya

- ① Fukiya's historic district is circled in red
- ⑥ Bengara Museum
- ⑧ Sasaune Tunnel
- ⑱ Bitchu Kagura is a traditional artform passed down throughout the Bitchu Area