

Aibiki River

The Aibiki River is a five-meter-wide channel separating Yashima from the island of Shikoku. As its name implies, Yashima (“roof island”) was once an actual island in the Seto Inland Sea. It was prized as a strategic site for its easily defensible terrain and its views of approaching ships. The Aibiki River also separates Yashima from Mt. Goken and the town of Mure to the east. In 1637, Ikoma Takatoshi (1611–1659), the daimyo lord of Takamatsu at the time, ordered landfill work to develop new fields that ultimately connected Yashima to Shikoku. However, a later ruler, Matsudaira Yorishige (1622–1695), wanted Yashima to once again be separated from the mainland, and in 1647, the Aibiki River was dug for this purpose.

Both the eastern and western ends of the Aibiki River connect with the Seto Inland Sea. Before the river was dug, the water in the shallows into which it now empties would flow back into the sea at low tide, going in both directions and creating a ford. This phenomenon is thought to have led to the river being named *aibiki*, or “mutual pulling.” Another theory about the name is that it was inspired by the Battle of Yashima (1185), which was fought between the Taira and Minamoto clans. The battle took place at Dan no Ura, located to the east, near the current mouth of the river. In this explanation, “mutual pulling” refers to the fact that neither side wanted to give in during the hard-fought battle. As the river now has automatic tide gates, its flow is no longer linked to the sea. Local residents, however, like to joke that the Aibiki River allows you to cross the sea in just a few steps.