

# My O Henro San - 2009

## Acknowledgement, thanks and notes to this diary

I wish to express my deepest gratitude and love to the Kooboo Daishi, the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and Jizoo Bosatsu for being with me on the O Henro San. I thank them from the bottom of my heart for their guidance, protection, blessings, teachings, patience and support they gave me during this journey.

I also am grateful and offer my thanks to the henro that I met on this pilgrimage for their friendship, support and advice along the way, especially Hanafusa-san and Koji, as well as the kind people of Shikoku for their hospitality, generosity, and the many osettai they bestowed on me.

My special thanks go to Nahoko who shared with me the highs and lows of my pilgrimage, provided me with love and support at all times, and made me laugh at my own misery when things were tough. And I am especially grateful to her for making the daily bookings at hotels, ryokans and minshukus, without which I might have had to sleep rough at times.

The diary, as it is written here, is basically what I wrote whilst being on the journey. It has a minimal number of edits, as I wanted for my emotions and feelings to be reflected that I experienced at the time of writing.

My love, gratitude and blessings go to all.

Armin Howald

October 2009

## The Heart Sutra

佛說摩訶般若波羅蜜多心經

**BUSSETSU MA KA HAN NYA HA RA MI TA SHIN GYOU**

**The Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra.**

觀自在菩薩,行深般若波羅蜜多時,

KAN JI ZAI BO SA GYOU JIN HAN NYA HA RA MI TA JI

When the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara was practicing the deep Perfection of Wisdom,

照見五蘊皆空,度一切苦厄,

SHOU KEN GO UN KAI KUU DO ISSAI KU YAKU

he intuitively perceived that the five aggregates are all empty; thus passed beyond all suffering and difficulty.

舍利子,色不異空,空不異色,

SHA RI SHI SHIKI FU I KUU KUU FU I SHIKI

Sariputra, form does not differ from emptiness, and emptiness does not differ from form.

色即是空,空即是色,

SHIKI SOKU ZE KUU KUU SOKU ZE SHIKI

Form is emptiness, and emptiness is form;

受想行識,亦復如是,

JU SOU GYOU SHIKI YAKU BU NYO ZE

the same is true for feelings, perceptions, formations, and consciousness.

舍利子,是諸法空相,

SHA RI SHI ZE SHO HOU KUU SOU

Sariputra, these are the characteristics of the emptiness of all dharmas:

不生不滅,不垢不淨,不增不減,

FU SHOU FU METSU FU KU FU JOU FU ZOU FU GEN

They neither arise nor cease, are neither defiled nor pure, neither increase nor decrease.

是故空中,無色無受想行識,

ZE KO KUU JUU MU SHIKI MU JU SOU GYOU SHIKI

Therefore, in emptiness there is no form, no feelings, perceptions, formations, or consciousness;

無眼耳鼻舌身意,無色聲香味觸法,

MU GEN NI BI ZESSHIN NI MU SHIKI SHOU KOU MI SOKU HOU

No eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind; No form, sound, smell, taste, touch, or mind object;

無眼界,乃至無意識界,

MU GEN KAI NAI SHI MU I SHIKI KAI

No eye sense-sphere, until we come to no consciousness sense-sphere,

無無明,亦無無明盡,乃至無老死,亦無老死盡,

MU MU MYOU YAKU MU MU MYOU JIN NAI SHI MU ROU SHI YAKU MU ROU

SHI JIN

No ignorance nor the ending of ignorance, until we come to no old age and death nor the ending of old age and death;

無苦集滅道,

MU KU JUU METSU DOU

No Truth of Suffering, Cause of Suffering, Cessation of Suffering, nor Path to the Cessation of suffering.

無智亦無得,以無所得故,

MU CHIYAKU MU TOKU IMU SHO TOKKO

There is no wisdom, nor is there attainment, for there is nothing to be attained.

菩提薩埵,依般若波羅蜜多故,

BO DAI SATTA E HAN NYA HA RA MI TA KO

Because Bodhisattvas rely on the Perfection of Wisdom.

心無罣礙,無罣礙故,

SHIN MU KE GE MU KE GE KO

Nothing obstructs their minds. Because obstructions exist not,

無有恐怖,遠離一切顛倒夢想,究竟涅槃,

MU U KU FU ON RI ISSAI TEN DOU MU SOU KUU GYOU NE HAN

they have no fear and pass far beyond all illusions and imagination and awaken to ultimate Nirvana.

三世諸佛。依般若波羅蜜多故,

SAN ZE SHO BUTSU E HAN NYA HA RA MI TA KO

All the Buddhas of the past, present, and future, by relying on the Perfection of Wisdom,

得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提,

TOKU A NOKU TA RA SAN MYAKU SAN BO DAI

attain Unsurpassed Perfect Enlightenment.

故知般若波羅蜜多,

KO CHI HAN NYA HA RA MI TA

Therefore, know that the Perfection of Wisdom

是大神咒,是大明咒,是無上咒,是無等等咒,

ZE DAI JIN SHU ZE DAI MYOU SHU ZE MU JOU SHU ZE MU TOU DOU SHU

is the great mysterious mantra, the great mantra of illumination, the supreme mantra, the unequalled mantra

能除一切苦,真實不虛,

NO JO ISSAI KU SHIN JITSU FU KO

which can remove all suffering, and is true and not false.

故說般若波羅蜜多咒,即說咒曰,

KO SETSU HAN NYA HA RA MI TA SHU SOKU SESSHU WATSU

Therefore is said the Mantra of the Perfection of Wisdom:

羯諦羯諦,波羅羯諦,波羅僧羯諦,菩提薩婆訶,

GYA TEI GYA TEI HA RA GYA TEI HA RA SOU GYA TEI BO JI SO WA KA

GATE GATE PARAGATE PARASAMGATE BODHI SVAHA

般若心經

HAN NYA SHIN GYOU

The Heart Sutra.

\* \* \*

20 June 2009

The 'Heart Sutra' . . .

The words that I will be speaking many times over the next few months, at least 176 times, twice at every temple.

I have had the desire to walk the O Henro San for close to three years, ever since Nahoko and I visited the City of Kochi in 2006. While we were there I felt a strange sense of *déjà vu* about having been in Shikoku in a previous life and, on seeing the occasional 'henro' on the road, created in me the desire, maybe the need, for embarking on this journey of 1,200 kilometres and 88 temples.

Much has happened since that time. My relationship with Nahoko has become more beautiful, deeper, and freer, despite a very scary moment last year in the UK that I had thought would spell the end of our relationship.

What was just a fleeting thought and desire in 2006 became, over time, reality. I was permitted to take 4 ½ months' leave without pay from work, and I tried to read as much as there was about the journey ahead. Realising that nothing I'd read would realistically prepare me for the experience.

I realise that learning the Heart Sutra off by heart would be a challenge, but I am hopeful to be able to master it by the time I finish my journey.

Apart from the Heart Sutra, there is the pilgrim's oath that I need to take before embarking on the journey.

## Pilgrim Oaths

During the pilgrimage

1. I will believe that the Kobo Daishi will save all living beings and that he will always be with me.
2. I will not complain if things do not go well while on the pilgrimage, but consider such experiences to be part of ascetic training.
3. I believe that all can be saved in the present world and I will continually ask to be able to achieve enlightenment.

The Ten Commandments seem a little easier for me but, given my propensity for exaggeration and boasting, some might be a little more difficult to achieve than others. A couple of them at least, the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> I don't think I should have too many problems with – though I'd never know what challenges and tests the Kobo Daishi will be throwing my way.

## Ten Commandments

1. I will not harm life.
2. I will not steal.
3. I will not commit adultery.
4. I will not tell a lie.
5. I will not exaggerate.

6. I will not speak abusively.
7. I will not equivocate.
8. I will not be greedy.
9. I will not be hateful.
10. I will not lose sight of the Truth.

## The Henro's Gear

- Kongozue – the walking stick, signifying the Kobo Daishi and the support he will give me during the journey. Also the grave marker in olden days, when the pilgrim died on the journey.
- Hakui (long sleeved) or Oizuru (short sleeved) white vest – also the henro's funeral shroud.
- Wagesa – the stole, indicating one's commitment to the O Henro San – some say it signifies a 'holy person'.
- Sugegasa – the conical hat, signifying one's coffin.
- Juzu or Nezu – the rosary.
- Nokyocho – the temple stamp book.
- Osame-fuda – name slips.
- Zudabukuro – the bag for the temple paraphernalia.
- Kyoochon – the sutra book.
- Incense and candles.
- Jirei – small bell to help the henro to focus on the journey.

It is also customary for a pilgrim to make a wish to the Kobo Daishi before setting out on the journey. Mine is very simple, I believe: I NEED TO KNOW WHAT I NEED TO LEARN.

Today in four weeks' time I shall be at Sydney Airport, waiting to clamber aboard a QANTAS flight. It will be the beginning of a very special journey.

## 6 July 2009

I spent part of the weekend thinking about what to take to Japan, and this morning I woke up feeling a little overwhelmed about the coming adventure. Maybe running scared. I couldn't decide on what to take on the O Henro San, and reading about what others had taken makes me even more confused. Do I take a sleeping bag? Will it be too hot, too cold? Is my backpack going to be too heavy? If I want to stay over night in a Minshuku, will there be one? Where can I wash and dry my clothes, which are sure to get very dirty and smelly? Can I wash myself if I sleep out at night?

All pre-departure nerves, so I tell myself. I'm sure all will be well at the end.

## 7 July 2009

My friend Franny from Baltimore M D, whom I met at MacDonald's in Geneva in 1990 when I was on an extended tour of Europe sent me this message last night:

"Hey Armin-don't be nervous. If my memory serves me correctly, didn't you climb the Himalayas? Well, know you are older, wiser & have that experience under your belt . . . so this O'henry San (whatever;) it'll be a cinch for an ole pro like you. Plus in the old days there were no phones, fancy dry weave clothes etc. . .when are you leaving? And Nahoko, not going with you? It'll be rejuvenating & terrific! For you, this is just another chapter, or for that matter another book in the Encyclopedia's of the Adventures of Armin Howald. I look forward to reading some chapters ; ) Relax...there's always <http://www.facebook.com/I;hotels.com>. Kidding! Well, not really. You rock! Ciao! Count down. . . "

## Day 1 - 2 August - Kamiita Town

Distance (km) 16                      Vertical (m) <100                      Time Taken (hrs) 6

- Temples
- Ryoozenji - 1 (Vultures Peak)
  - Gokurakuji - 2 (Pure Land)
  - Konsenji - 3 (Golden Spring)
  - Dainichiji - 4 (Temple of the Great Sun)
  - Jizooji - 5 (Earth Bearer's)
  - Anrakuji - 6 (Everlasting Joy)

### *Day One* of my journey.

I got a shock when I boarded the overnight bus at Shinjuku and realised the curtains were to be closed during the journey, there were no toilets on the bus, and my blanket had the faintest smell of vomit on it. Contrary to earlier intentions I popped two sleeping tablets and got at least a few hours' rest.

The rain pelted down as the bus drove through Osaka in the dark, and it was pleasantly cool when it pulled into Tokushima at 0600 hrs. I had a cup of coffee and a sandwich, but this meant I'd missed the train to the Bando Station and had to wait for 45 minutes for the next. Trains in Shikoku don't run as often as they do in Tokyo!

Yesterday had been a lovely day, even though Nahoko and prepared ourselves for not seeing each other for three weeks. I'm sure I'll miss sleeping with her, as she will be with me.

Naotaka and Yaoko came late morning, just in time to try to assist with the installation of the washing machine (without success, Nahoko will have to find a tradesman to do this). We had lunch with them, and then took a quick trip to Shinjuku to purchase a Lonely Planet phrase book (a great relief to me, because the electronic book that I have doesn't seem to do what I need) and a battery charger for my little Canon.

I guess I've done all that I could have done. Now I am ready for the first step of thousands.

Later in the day -

I arrived at Temple #1 and it took me some time to figure out where the store was to buy the henro essentials, and to get the order of things at the temple right. I even spotted the young, serious man who'd been sitting next to me on the overnight bus from Tokyo. He obviously is also doing the O Henro San. I'm sure neither of us would have guessed that the other was also about to embark on this journey.

Finding the way to Temples #2 & #3 was quite straightforward. Number 4 turned out to be a little trickier, mainly because I can't read the street signs, which puts me at a considerable disadvantage<sup>1</sup>. So I ended up in the wrong valley, much to the amusement of two locals who offered me cold tea then drove me in their little van to the Dainichiji. There were donuts on the car park, a clear sign there must also be hoons among the Japanese youth.

This lift I received was the second osettai<sup>2</sup> I'd received on the day. The first I received between Temples #2 and #3 when I stopped at the local barbershop for a head shave (well, almost, my head is now covered with a 0.5mm fur). When I wanted to pay for the service, the elderly woman refused to accept the money, saying it was an osettai. Such generous people! At Temple #5 the woman in the stamp office offered me a rice cake.

By the time I'd reached Temple #5, the heat had become oppressive. The route to Temple #6 looked straightforward on the map which it really wasn't, and a very slim Japanese woman and I kept following each other in turn, and losing our way.

Nahoko had booked me for the night into Temple #6, and I got a really nice room with air-conditioning. What luxury! The coin operated laundry was also very much appreciated.

There was a service in the Main Hall conducted by the head priest, a very kind man, who later served us beer and sake in the dining hall.

There were about ten henro in the dining room, six of which are 'walking henro'. Three of them spoke excellent English, and two had even been to Tasmania.

In the shower I noticed I'd developed a horrible heat rash on my thighs. I might wear short pants tomorrow. Got a bit of sunburn on my arms (and possibly head – I haven't checked), but my legs and feet are fine.

Breakfast will be at 0630 hrs, and then it's a 21-kilometre walk to Fujiidera (#11), which will be the springboard for tackling the 'dreaded' #12 (Burning Mountain) the following day.

## Day 2 - 23 August - Yoshinogawa City

Distance (km)	21	Vertical (m)	300	Time Taken (hrs)	10
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Temples	●	Juurakuji – 7 (Ten Joys)
	●	Kumadainichi – 8 (Bear Valley)
	●	Hoorinji – 9 (Dharma Wheel)

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<sup>1</sup> At that time of my pilgrimage I hadn't as yet learned to look for the little 'red arrows' and other tell tale signs that mark the path

<sup>2</sup> Gift to henros – it is actually considered a gift to the Kooboo Daishi, and it is not allowed for a henro to refuse an osettai

- Kirihataji – 10 (Cut Cloth)
- Fujiidera – 11 (Wisteria)

Breakfast was at 0630 and most henros were on the road by 0700. I met the English speaking couple at Juurakuji again, and we took photos of one another<sup>3</sup>. A monk's chanting could be heard from far away, which gave the valley a very special ambiance.

It became hot as I trundled towards Temple #8.

Two old women offered me cold tea after Temple #9, and I admired their single, pink cactus flower of which they seemed to be very proud. Unfortunately I left the guide book and maps behind, and after a brief scare about what I'd do without the maps I walked back one kilometre to retrieve this vital tool.

Temple #10 looked very benign on the map, but no one had told me there would be more than 250 steps to climb in the merciless heat. That left me exhausted.

I'd been wondering why I hadn't heard much from Kooboo Daishi, but he was clearly there when I stopped at a small store to get some food. The elderly shop keeper asked me into the coolness of the shop, then cut up ¼ of a huge water melon into pieces and asked me to sit down to eat them. As I was filling my water bottles, the five henros from last night also walked by including a young man from Tokyo, Koji, who will be walking for seven days before returning back to work. There was also a henro who was carrying a 2 kg heavy Canon camera (he'd sent his PC back that morning, he said), a young couple, and a man of about my age who is doing the O Henro San in one go.

I crossed the fertile Yoshino-gawa (river) flats as clouds were gathering on the formidable mountain ranges that I'll have to cross tomorrow.

I was nearly responsible for the injury or worse of a woman in Yoshinogawa City, but she was saved by the Kooboo Daishi's intervention. I'd asked a woman in a parked car for directions, and she kindly got out to show me the way. After thanking her and returning my bow, she walked backwards onto the road, into the path of an oncoming car. In a flash I grabbed her arm and yanked her out of harm's way.

The first drops of rain began to fall as three henros (Koji) and the one who is doing the O Henro San in one go said our prayers at Temple #11. But as we walked back to the Yoshino Ryokan the sky was blue again.

Later – just had a very nice conversation with Hanafusa san (the man with the camera) and Nakayama the man who is doing the O Henro San in one go – he is 64 years old.

We talked about many things, Japan, Australia our lives etc. As to the question of what my wish for the O Henro San was, I replied that I was trying to find out what I need to know, and I want to learn more about myself. As for them, they both hoped for happiness in their lives and good health for their families.

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<sup>3</sup> At this temple I also met a man with only one tooth who had done the O Henro San an incredible 406 times in 62 years, including 40 walking)



## Day 3 - 4 August - Tokushima City

Distance (km)	34	Vertical (m)	1,500	Time Taken (hrs)	11.5
Temples	●	Shoosanji – 12 (Burning Mountain)			
	●	Dainichiji – 13 (Temple of the Great Sun)			

Today was tough!

It began at 0430 hrs with the ascent of the first mountain range in total darkness, using my head torch. I was a little nervous being in the forest on my own, not knowing anything about the woods and the (slight) chance of getting lost.

I made steady progress to the Choodo-an (about 600 metres high) where the track flattened out to a lovely ridge walk, then it descended a few hundred metres (vertically) to the Ryuusui-an (temple), then it was up again to the 762 m high Jooren-an.

I clearly felt the presence of the Kooboo Daishi, for I was flying up the mountain. I was convinced he was carrying the pack for me! On the way down, again several hundred metres vertical, I stopped and shouted on a loud voice ‘Kooboo Daishi, arigatoo!’ – ‘. . . toooo’, came back the echo from the surrounding mountains. Then I said prayers of thanks:

- To my father for his guidance and what he had done for me, and I said sorry for never trying to understand him.
- To my mother for the love she’d given me, and I said sorry for never showing my appreciation.
- To my brother Christophe for helping me to become what I am.
- To my brother Hans-Peter for his eternal forgiveness even though I had often been spiteful and cruel to him over long periods of time.
- To my sister Irene for being the one of my siblings who’d best understood me most of the time and for being my ‘sister-in-arms’.
- And I thanked and sent my love to Nahoko, the true love of my life, and the star that is looking after me.

Various reports I had read talked about the ‘horrors of the Burning Mountain Temple’, and to be prepared to walk for six hours from Temple #11. Again I flew up the last two kilometres of steep track, and found myself on a beautiful, wide graveled path overlooked by impressive granite sculptures of Deities and their protectors.

The temple itself is very beautiful, nestling in a 650 year old cedar forest. I must have been one of the first ones there, for there were only five candles burning, and none of them lit by walking henros.

I got a real thrill seeing the ‘Burning Mountain’ stamp put in my ‘nokyocho’, the temple book. Then I headed down the steps from the temple. At the beginning of the walkway I met a very sweaty Koji whom I’d first met at Temple #4, who’d left at 0500 hrs and also intended to walk to Temple #13.

The trail lead steeply downward from the mountain for a few kilometres, then went up again for a while. About as steep as the Trugannini Track in Hobart, only 1 ½ times as long. Once on top, a paved road led to Kamiyama Town, about seven kilometres further on, on the valley floor. It was pleasantly warm, with a cooling breeze coming from the mountain.

Once I reached the searing heat of the valley floor, though, I felt my energy draining away. The heat reflecting off the pavement seemed to suck up any oxygen there was. But there were still eight to ten kilometres to go.

The stops became more and more frequent, and finally I had to rest every 300 metres or so. I had reached the point of exhaustion. At last, at around 1600 hrs, I reached the 'Temple of the Great Sun'.

The Minshuku Myozai is located right next to Temple #13. I'm happy, because I couldn't have walked much further. The grandmother took my wet clothes off me (how bad they smelled!!!) and showed me to the 'ofuro' – bathroom.

Dinner is about to be served, and I've almost finished a bottle of Asahi Dry. I've become very partial to Japanese beer – that and ice cream!

## Day 4 - 5 August - Komatsushima City

Distance (km)	30	Vertical (m)	400	Time Taken (hrs)	9.5
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Temples	●	Joorakuji – 14 (Everlasting Peace)
	●	Kokubunji – 15 (Official State)
	●	Kan-onji – 16 (Avalokitesvara)
	●	Idoji – 17 (Well)
	●	Onzanji – 18 (Gratitude Mountain)
	●	Tatsueji – 19 (Arising a Bay)

Today was long and relatively flat, and not quite as hot as the previous days had been.

The O Henro Road took me northwards from Temple #13 to Temple #17, where I again turned south. For the following two hours I walked through the city of Tokushima.

I had been looking forward to a glass of iced coffee and a Mont Blanc Cake (topped with chestnut puree) and an apple pie, but no coffee shops were to be found en route, even though I was walking through the capital of the prefecture of Tokushima. Plenty of pharmacies and hairdressers, but that wasn't what I was after.

Noon came and I hadn't eaten for six hours, and not drunk sufficient water. I felt I was beginning to act and feel irrational, a sure sign of dehydration. So I ducked into a fruit shop and bought six mandarines, which I ate at the next corner, just sitting on the pavement. That must have been a sight! A little further down the road I bought a sandwich that I gobbled up as I was walking.

I had just reached Route 55 (the Road to Muroto Cape) when a young man on a bike stopped and offered me a bottle of ice cold Pocari Sweat. When I offered him the 'osame-fuda', my

name-slip that contains the blessings of Kooboo Daishi (as is the required custom), he reached into his pocket and offered me a 1,000 yen note. I thanked him with tears in my eyes and felt uplifted as I continued my journey. And I bowed to the Kooboo Daishi and asked him to give that man his special blessings.

Temple #18 took a bit of searching which I eventually found after half an hour of following false trails, then I set out for the last four kilometres for the day. Initially the trail lead through a beautiful bamboo forest with a deep hollow road having been eroded by henros' feet over hundreds of years.

In order to reach the Tatsueji, it is necessary to cross the Tatsue-gawa. The bridge spanning the river is a 'spiritual check point', where it is said that people with an impure heart will be refused to cross. I stopped at the bridge and thanked the Kooboo Daishi for his guidance and being with me since the commencement of the journey, and asked him to give me the pure heart to enable me to cross. Then I walked across, carefully ensuring I would not tap the 'kongozue' on its surface<sup>4</sup>.

#19 is an absolute gem of a temple, and a really lovely place to finish the day's walk. The people at the Minshuku Funa-no-Sato are really friendly, and the meal (ten dishes including a special local soba) is simply amazing. I told them of my plans of leaving at 0500 hrs tomorrow, and they said they'd give me an obentoo as an osettai.

## Day 5 - 6 August - Anan City

Distance (km)	24	Vertical (m)	1,000	Time Taken (hrs)	9.5
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Temples	●	Kakurinji – 20 (Crane Forest)
	●	Tairyuji – 21 (Great Dragon)

The O Henro San is a little like the Tour de France: long, boring stretches of flat ground, interspersed with hard mountain top finishes. Today was a mountain stage!

Last night I had asked the hostess at the minshuku to prepare me some rice balls (mochi), because I'd intended to skip breakfast and be on the road at 0500 hrs. However, I hadn't reckoned with the hospitality of these nice people. As I sneaked down the stairs at 0500 hrs, she brought out a magnificent breakfast that could have fed two hungry henro (7 dishes). On top of that, she gave me the mochi as an osettai.

It had rained on and off all night long, and was still raining when I was about to leave at 0520 hrs. The man offered me an umbrella as a gift (asking me to leave it somewhere when I didn't need it any longer) and gave me a bottle of frozen water to cool myself in the mountains.

I walked along the valley floor for 9 km to the town of Katsuura, then turned left and up the mountain.

Temple #20 was said to be one of the more difficult ones, but I found it relatively easy. A concreted path and occasional steps led to the top.

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<sup>4</sup> There is a belief that Kooboo Daishi might be sleeping under the bridge. The origins of this belief go to a time when the Kooboo Daishi was refused accommodation on one of his journeys, and was required to sleep under a bridge.

‘Birth goes with Death, and Fortune with Misfortune’, I read on a little inscribed plaque halfway up the mountain.

The heavens opened up as I said my prayers at the temple. But it was warm and I didn’t mind getting a little wet.

After the nokyocho (temple book) was signed I donned the poncho and headed down the mountain. I nearly stepped on a huge toad that seemed to enjoy the wet weather more than I did. Little frogs jumped out of my way, and blue and brown-bodied crabs held up their claws in a threatening manner.

I soon reached the valley floor and crossed the Naka-gawa. Then the path went uphill again.

Temple #21 was said to be one of the most difficult ones for walking henro (including #12 and 20), but I beg to differ. A concreted path and steps led all the way to the top through a magnificent old cedar and cloud forest, where I bowed at the temple gate.

I began my temple routine – putting my pack on a seat, resting my walking staff and donning the sugegasa (sedge hat), putting on the wagesa (stole), wrapping the juzu (rosary) around my wrist, and putting the zudabukoro, the white bag with the temple paraphernalia on my shoulders. Then I went to cleanse myself at the fountain, both hands and the mouth.

Next was the ringing of the huge bell to announce my arrival at the temple to the Deities – just once. I always get particular pleasure ringing the bell and, at this temple, the bell tower was particularly beautiful.

Then I went to the Hondo where I lit a candle and three sticks of incense. I read the Heart Sutra, recited the name of the Kooboo Daishi three times, and bowed and said ‘arigatoo gosaimasu’. After that I went to the Kooboo Daishi’s Temple and repeated the prayer routine.

As for the temple itself, the Tairyuji is a real jewel! It is styled after Koya San as I have read (and for this reason also called the ‘Western Koya San’) and occupies a large area on top of a 610 metre high mountain. The site is covered with enormous cedar trees, some said to be more than 1,000 years old, and the swirling clouds created a mystic atmosphere. The energy emanating from this site was, simply, amazing!

After saying my prayers I rang the Sakaguchi-ya in Anan City to secure a bed for the night.

At that time it was around noon, and I decided I deserved the afternoon off. So I wandered around the temple grounds, soaking up the energy of this sacred site. I felt I was becoming one with the energy.

I was also introduced to ‘organised O Henro Travel’. As I was waiting for my temple book to be signed, I noticed a man stowing away dozens on signed books into two sports bags. A short time later the cable car arrived, disgorging a group of ‘bus henro’ who went directly to the Hondo (main temple) without the ritual washing or ringing the bell. There the leader recited the sutras and others tried to follow, to the rhythm of a small clap stick. Then they rushed back to the Rope Way Station for their journey down the valley and presumably the next temple.

As I am writing, a group of about 20 elderly Japanese (mainly women) just came off the ‘Ehime Bus’ and trudged into the ryokan. I couldn’t help feeling a little superior, having conquered two of the more difficult temples on foot.

As to my staff, the kongozue, it looks tattered and definitely worse for wear. It is frayed at the bottom and I've lost the bell on the way. The staff must be cleaned at the end of the day and placed in an 'honored' place, possibly the alcove, in the room.

My bottle of Asahi Dry is empty. Tomorrow it will be Temples #22 and 23, and I'll be seeing the sea again.

Later – The Sakaguchi-ya isn't too bad a place to stay. Mid afternoon I again met Koji who was also finished for the day. He'll be walking to Temple #23, then go back to work in Kanagawa.

## Day 6 - 7 August - Mugi Town

Distance (km)	43	Vertical (m)	1,100	Time Taken (hrs)	12
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Temples	●	Byoodoji – 22 (Temple of Equality)
	●	Yakuooji – 23 (Medicine King)

If there was ever a tough day, this was the one!

It began in a very benign manner, walking up a beautiful valley with an abundance of rice fields. This gave way to walking on a ridge, on the left of which was a dense cedar forest, on the right bamboo.

I was early at Temple #22, then headed for Temple #23, 19 kms further on. Near the Awa Kukui I had to decide whether to go to the seaside town of Yuki, or do the shorter walk along Route 55. I chose Yuki.

I stopped for a prayer when I caught the first glimpse of the sea. As I was in communication with the Kooboo Daishi, a buzzard came flying close by. The elements of water and air. Nahoko's and mine. . .

I reached Yuki around lunchtime and posted some of the things I hadn't used (and was unlikely to use) back to Nahoko: towel, belt, singlet, and a long sleeved skivvy. I'd never need this in this heat! Other items, such as the drinking cup, chopsticks, fan, thongs had found their way into rubbish bins earlier.

The coastline around Yuki was breathtakingly beautiful, and I would have loved to take more time to take pictures.

I initially walked up on the wrong side of the stairs at Temple #23, but a woman pointed that out to me and I hopped over the rails to do the right thing (left on the way up). There were 117 steps in all, including 42 special ones for men, 33 for women (that corresponds with 'critical years' for both sexes. But men and women seemed to be happy (or just ignorant) in using either stairs.

The friendly monk helped me to make a reservation at Azuma Minshuku in the township of Mugi. I *could* have finished my day near #23, but it was only 1600 hrs and the weather was fine, and not too hot.

As I walked on I reflected on what I had learned and received to date on my journey. If nothing else, I would have learned about human kindness. From the smile and bow from the flagman on the road in his blue suit and white helmet, to the young man who gave me money and a cold

drink at Tokushima. It had never before been possible for me to look into the eyes of a flagman driving past, and I really appreciated them for what they were doing.

The temperature was still in the mid-30s when entered the 640 metre long Hiwasa Tunnel. The cold air provided some relief.

A car was parked at the end of the tunnel, and a woman got out as I walked past, asking me whether I was 'Ha-waa-do san'. She and her husband, the owners of the Azuma Minshuku, had driven to this spot to take my backpack, to make the last 10 kms easier for me. I was really touched by this generous gift, and I flew the rest of the way. A true gift from the Kuukai to me!

I was a little worried about finding the minshuku in Mugi Town, because I had left the mobile and maps in the backpack. But the woman came out of the door as I came near, she must have been on the lookout for me.

Even though I was hot sweaty and smelly, the hosts insisted in planning for tomorrow for me. I had been planning on not walking more than 40 kms, but there doesn't seem to be any accommodation around in that area. Better possibilities exist at around 25 and 47 kms. At 47 kms, there was a minshuku run by one of their friends, who too would come and pick up my backpack *en-route*, she said. It was hard to refuse this offer.

As to my physical condition, I have heat blisters on my head, and thighs the lower arms and legs are sunburnt, but apart from that I'm O.K. Amazingly, my feet are fine! I haven't developed a heat rash between my legs even though I haven't used the anti-chafing cream for two days. The tube might be the next candidate for the rubbish bin to lighten my load.

Nahoko just rang; she was walking through a thunderstorm. I know I have never received so much love as I am receiving from this amazing woman.

## Day 7 - 8 August - Sakihama Port

Distance (km)	47	Vertical (m)	400	Time Taken (hrs)	11
Temples	●	None			

An other tough day, but the next four should be easier. In 11 hours I covered 47 kms, no temples, got five blisters on my feet, am badly sunburnt, slightly drunk after 1 ½ bottles of Asahi Dry and I *am* exhausted.

It was 0630 hrs when I left, too early for breakfast at the Azuma Minshuku, but Miyauchi san packed me in two boiled eggs as osettai. I bought some bread at the nearby Lawson Station, where an elderly woman gave me 1,000 yen as an osettai.

I had decided to treat this as a 'business day', so I stuck to Route 55, ignoring the many scenic routes. The only purpose was to reach my goal by the end of the day.

The route was generally flat with many gentle rises, which made up for the vertical distance of the day.

I stopped at the border of the Tokushima and Kochi Prefectures (the dividing line between the Dojos of *Spiritual Awakening* and *Ascetic Training*) for a brief prayer. I thanked the Kooboo Daishi for guiding me through the initial dojo, for the kindness that others have shown to me, and for allowing me to grow. Then I turned west and asked him for his ongoing guidance, and to enable me to achieve what I was meant to achieve during this pilgrimage.

Somewhere along the way a buzzard and a crow were following me. The buzzard first, flying from pole to pole, the crow following. The buzzard's shrill 'piiieeee' shattering the silence. I took that as a good omen.

I walked through Toyo Town just after lunch, and was ready to tackle the last 14 kms of relatively flat road to the Minshuku Tokumasu. As always, the last ten kilometres are the hardest. When I finally dragged myself into Sakihama Port with three kilometres to go, I would have gladly accepted a ride in a car or caught a taxi, alas there was none on offer. As to the pick-up promised by the lady at last night's minshuku, that didn't eventuate, as much as I'd hoped it would.

A 'car henro' doing the O Henro San in reverse (gyaku-uchi) stopped his little van and offered me a mochi as an osettai. Then he gave me a copy of the Heart Sutra that had been written 1,200 years ago and had the Kooboo Daishi's name on it. What a wonderful gift!

Reciting the Kuukai's name with every step (Namu Daishi Henjoo Kongoo) seemed to give me an extra lift for the last kilometres.

The Minshuku Tokumasu is a real find! It faces the ocean and I can hear the huge, pounding surf, stirred up by an approaching typhoon. It is on a very popular surf beach with 2-3 metre waves. The son of the owner is an avid surfer, and his attractive wife speaks good English. They were kind enough to book my accommodation for the next two nights at the Muroto Misaki (Cape).

I only got five hours' sleep last night because my body just wanted to keep on walking. It just didn't realise it needed a rest. I finally reached for the sleeping tablets at 2330 hrs. Tonight, I think, the body will be just too tired to care and I should be able to sleep. . .

## Day 8 - 9 August - Muroto Misaki

Distance (km)	14	Vertical (m)	300	Time Taken (hrs)	4
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Temples	●	Hotsumisakiji - 24 (Cape)
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Today was a breeze. After four days of hard walking I decided just to walk to Cape Muroto (Muroto Misaki), followed by a rest day.

It rained heavily over night, and the rain was still pelting down, as I got ready to leave at 0830 hrs. It rained heavily throughout the day; it was like standing in a warm shower. Reason for it is that the centre of a typhoon is not too far away from the cape and, though there was not much wind east of the Cape, it caused very heavy rain (and even serious flooding near Okayama on Honshu).

Thanks to my poncho the backpack and shirt were kept reasonably dry, but my shoes, socks and shorts were wringing wet. But at least the temperatures were well down, and at the Cape a strong breeze was coming off the ocean.

I made it to the Cape just after mid-day, then took the short and steep track up to the 'Cape Temple'. I always enjoy ringing the bell to announce my arrival. This time however I rang it so strongly that it reverberated for a minute or two, causing a dog nearby to bark.

The Hotel 808 is located adjacent to the temple, and I'd arrived well before check-in time. So I left the pack in the lobby and walked down the tight hairpins of the main road to the cape. I had a long awaited coffee at a small café, and later on a second one with a piece of cake. I must have looked like a drowned puppy dog as I walked into the café during a thunderstorm, because the kind lady gave me a towel to dry myself, and an umbrella as I was about to leave.

As I am writing, I just saw the weather report for tomorrow – more of the same, lots of rain caused by the typhoon. At least it won't be too hot. . .

The main purpose of the day for me was to visit the Mikoradoo (cave) where the Kooboo Daishi had trained after leaving the university of Nara. He was 19 years old at that time. Here he experienced a mystical experience during meditation, which he described as 'the morning star which shines in the sky entered my mouth'. He also recorded saying 'whenever he looked out of the cave, the only thing he saw was the ocean and the sky' – the theme of water and air recurring for me?

I prayed to the Kooboo Daishi and bowed deeply three times before entering the cave. A small altar is at the end, about 30 metres into the mountain. I prayed and touched rocks that could have been touched by the Kuukai 1,200 years ago. Then I turned around and tried to imagine what he would have seen when he lived in the cave, trying to ignore the road, guide posts and crash barriers.

I felt a strong throbbing in my temples as I stood in the cave taking in the incredible energy of the site. Tears welled into my eyes as I said sorry for all the misdeeds I had done in my life. Against my father, mother, brothers, sister, children, grandchildren, wives, partners, friends, colleagues, people I had come into touch throughout my life. Even to the old drunkard at the Braidwood Pub whose hat I'd stolen.

A busload of sightseers disturbed my meditation, so I left the cave and waited for them to leave. As I re-entered, the throbbing in my temples began again.

Later on I walked down to the foreshore outside the cave. I wondered on which of the big rocks the monk Kuukai would have sat on and meditated, looking across the sea.

Then I walked up to the hotel again to check in, wash my clothes and take a bath (in that order). Sitting in the hot water and relaxing I struck up a conversation with an other walking henro who recalled fondly his experiences in Tasmania. He too was on his first pilgrimage, and was hoping to gain an insight into Kooboo Daishi's teachings.

Over dinner with the walking henro we were joined by a car and a cycling henro. They found it incredible that someone could walk 47 kms in one day. The walking henro was happy to do 30, the cycling one 80.

The room at the hotel is western style, and just outside the window is a grapefruit tree. The hotel is 'so-so', and dinner was definitely on the mediocre side. But I have my own toilet, and tomorrow is a rest day!

## Day 9 - 10 August - Muroto Misaki

Distance (km)	10	Vertical (m)	200	Time Taken (hrs)	2
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Temples ● Shiushooji – 25 (Illuminating Seaport)

Today had been a designated rest day. I'd thought of finding an internet café at Muroto City, but there are none in this town. Plenty of fishing boats, hundreds of them in fact sheltering from the typhoon, three harbours and 15–20 meter high sea walls protecting the harbour and city from typhoons and tsunamis.

I used the day to wander down to say my prayers at the 'Illuminating Seaport' Temple, its chief purpose being to protect seafarers. This means I can leave tomorrow at 0500 hrs.

It was hot and steamy all day long. And the heavens opened again at 1400 hrs. The climate around the cape is amazingly tropical. It reminds me of Hawaii. Lots of red hibiscus flowers, huge oleander bushes, and masses of white trumpet lilies that cost a fair bit in Hobart, and grow here as weed by the roadside.

I'm spending the afternoon writing postcards and drinking beer. I'm also watching on TV a direct telecast of the Kochi Dance Festival. Great skill and energy is put in by the participants, but it isn't quite the same spectacle as the carnival in Rio.

## Day 10 - 11 August - Yasuda Town

Distance (km)	43	Vertical (m)	1,000	Time Taken (hrs)	12.5
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Temples ● Kongochooji – 26 (Vajra Peak)  
● Konomineji – 27 (God Summit)

A true marathon distance, and I couldn't help comparing this day to the second last day of this year's Tour de France: a long, flat stage with a couple of low category climbs to give warning to riders of things to come, then a mountain top finish on the dreaded Mt Ventoux that kills riders (figuratively and literally).

I began walking at 0500 hrs, having decided to do without breakfast. Last night's dinner *really* was below par, and I suspect the meat they served was whale. The thought of these huge animals being hauled onto the whalers, bleeding, was enough to put me off the food.

So I walked downhill, singing with a full voice all the rousing songs I knew, like 'Die Himmel Rühmen des Ewigen Ehre' and 'You'll Never Walk Alone'.

I only stopped briefly in front of Temple #25 to pray in front of the Jizoo Bosatsu, asking for the Kooboo Daishi's protection and guidance on this day.

I reached Temple #26 just after 0700 hrs, and was the first on the day to ring the bell, light a candle, and say the Heart Sutra. Then the journey took me north, mainly along Route 55 and the seashore.

Yesterday's pounding seas had given way to a calm, flat sea, reflecting the blue of the sky.

My spirits began to flag as I approached Nahari Town after seven hours of walking. The Minshuku Kinsho at Yasuda Town was still more than an hour away, and I still had one temple ahead of me.

I left the backpack at the minshuku and commenced the four-kilometre walk to Konomineji, 632 metres up. Rain came pelting down just as I commenced the steep section of the walk, and whatever clothes weren't wet with sweat soon were soaked with rain. One of the learnings I'll be taking from this journey is that I am capable of doing much more than I'd ever thought possible. And I know that Nahoko is playing a very big part in this.

There were a few car henro at the top, two even with a professional guide. They looked so clean and neat in their pure white clothing (they even wore straw sandals!!), the stuff one sees in O Henro San pamphlets. I'm sure that the likes of me and an other walking henro I met on the way down wouldn't get our pictures into the magazines: sweaty, panting, smelly, dirty, burnt by the sun, washed by the rain, buffeted by the wind, fallen to the ground – touched by the four elements. But that's what the pilgrimage is all about, *desu ne?*

Temple #27 was an other 'spiritual checkpoint' (though I didn't realise it at the time – but thankfully the Kooboo Daishi let me in). The temple itself is quite impressive, and the gardens exquisite.

When I finally got back to the Minshuku Kinsho, I was told it was actually closed. But the kind man on crutches took me by car to an other minshuku (I think it is the 'Drive-In-27'). As I had dinner, the walking henro from yesterday walked in and went straight to his room. Poor man – he still has #27 to do tomorrow.

Feet-wise, I got a new blister next to an old one on the left foot, a 'double blister' (one on top of the other) on the right, and the one on the heel is so big I had to drain it to get into the shoes.

Nahoko called just as I was about to go to dinner. There had been a 6.2 strength earthquake in Tokyo this morning.

P.S. Just checked my weight. If the bathroom scales are correct, I'm down to 67 kg, 2-3 kilos less than my normal weight. Not that I'm ever hungry, just getting 'lean and mean'.

## Day 11 - 12 August - Kochi

Distance (km)	38	Vertical (m)	100	Time Taken (hrs)	10
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Temples	●	Dainichiji – 28 (Great Sun)
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Today was the hardest of all so far!!! It was 38 km of mainly flat road along the Tosa-wan (Bay), sort of a 'longish beach stroll'.

The fact that I'd only slept four hours didn't help. And the temperature, under a covered sky resembling a heat bubble was in the low 40s.

It was already boiling hot when I left at 0630 hrs, and the sweat was pouring freely when I had my first stop at Central Aki. I found a coffee shop and stopped for my first coffee, plus an apple cake.

The Kochi Festival will be ending tomorrow, and accommodation is hard to come by. Rather than running the gauntlet of refusals, I called Nahoko who was able to secure me a bed at the Kochi Kuroshio Hotel, two kilometres south of Temple #28 (that turned out to be a great choice – I'm on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor looking across mainly farmland and homes to the distant sea). Buoyed by the thought of knowing where to sleep tonight, I resumed my walk. Akaoka, where the Ekin Museum is located, was only two hours' away, so I thought. And I was even contemplating 'bagging' #29 later in the afternoon. . .

Alas, it **WAS** VERY hot and I was going much slower than I would have liked to go or was aware of. I frequently stopped for water and sweets to keep my body going.

Then I came to a land feature that looked like (Mt) Tsukimiyama on the map. The town's name sounded about OK, though there wasn't the petrol station on the corner that the map showed. So I presumed it would have been closed down.

It's amazing what an exhausted body and mind will conjure up. I finally realised I was more than ten kilometres south from where I'd hoped to be, and the realisation was a bitter pill to swallow. But road signs and railway station names don't lie, no matter what tricks the brain tries to play! So I looked with despair at the long, straight, hot road ahead.

Three kilometres south of Yasu Town I sat down in the middle of the cycle way, because my legs wouldn't carry me any longer. Though I soon jumped up, because the tarmac burnt my bottom. So I struggled *downhill* to the Ya-Sea Park.

There was a fruit and vegetable shop at the park where I sought refuge, mainly to get out of the searing heat. I saw the checkout girl putting a small pack of ice with the fish for a customer, so I asked her for a pack as well.

Sitting outside the shop on a bench munching grapes, ice pack on my neck, something broke in me and tears began to flow. This was not the journey I had imagined or hoped for! This was brutal stuff intended to break henros, and I felt there were plenty of reasons (and excuses) to throw in the towel right now and then.

I silently cried for a while, and as my body began to cool down I began to think clearer. Wasn't the Kochi Prefecture the 'Shugyoo Dojo', the place of 'Ascetic Training'? And what right did I have to expect an easy passage?

Some time later a friendly, gentle man came to my bench for a chat. He had been to many places in Australia in his capacity as a travel advisor.

About an hour after coming to the shop I again felt ready to move. The sun was burning down with amazing fierceness, but my walking pace had lifted. I thanked the Kooboo Daishi for not having failed me in this trial.

A little before 1500 hrs I checked in at the hotel. My clothes were ringing wet, and I smelled so badly that I was embarrassed to use the lift. I took a long, cool shower, then headed for Temple #29, just in time before the stamp office closed.

## Day 12 - 13 August - Katsurahama Beach

Distance (km)      33                      Vertical (m)              600                      Time Taken (hrs)              11.5

Temples

- Kokubunji – 29 (Official State)
- Zenrakuji – 30 (True Joy)

- Chikuruinji – 31 (Bamboo Forest)
- Zenjibuji – 32 (Ch’an Master’s Peak)

An other long day, though I *did* have had intentions to follow Nahoko’s advice to take it easy.

I had arranged with the hotel staff to collect my obentoo before I set out, but I couldn’t find it in the dining room. So I left without it. Three hundred metres from the hotel a panting front deskman caught up with me, carrying a plastic bag with rice cakes, tea and frozen water. Just at that time a very old lady crossed the road to wish me good luck. I took that as a good omen. A little further down the road a man stopped to give me a container of delicious berry yogurt and a croissant. I was really touched.

It was well after 0700 hrs when I said my prayers at Temple #29. A car henro gave me three cigarette lighters as an osettai which, because I didn’t have any use for them, I passed on to a man working in a rice field.

It was getting hotter and hotter as the day went on. Just north of the Kochi Botanical Gardens (Godasian Park) a meter reading lady gave me a frozen drink. And a little later, whilst waiting to cross a street, a man opened the car window and gave me a mandarin. I asked Kooboo Daishi to give his blessings to these people.

The ascent to the Bamboo Forest Temple wasn’t particularly arduous, but the heat was sapping my strength. Then it went down the other side, over some very ancient henro steps where I slipped and fell and sent my kongozue flying.

The next few kilometres were along the banks of the Shimoda-gawa, then the road turned south again and up and down some hills.

Temple #32 was, like many of its counterparts, built on a hill, this one 200 metres high. It must have to do with the Gods’ preference for higher places (which probably explains why there are no temples in, for example, the Netherlands). A friendly local allowed me to leave the pack at her house and offered me cold tea before I used (almost) all of my last energy to scale the hill to say my prayers.

The last five kilometres of the day were into a fierce afternoon sun, but a (relatively) cool breeze had sprung up and I made good time.

An elderly lady runs the Minshuku Senmatsu. A friendly local on a pushbike guided me to her home. The minshuku is next to the bridge that crosses to the Katsurahama (Moon Viewing) Beach. My corner room faces the ocean and river, and felt beautifully cool when I walked in. Though the thermometer still read 32 degrees. Maybe I’d been walking in temperatures much higher than I had imagined.

## Day 13 - 14 August - Tosa City

Distance (km)	20	Vertical (m)	200	Time Taken (hrs)	6.5
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- Temples
- Sekkeiji – 33 (Snowy Cliff)
  - Tanemaji – 34 (Sowing Seeds)

Today I had the easy day I'd promised myself for some time. I don't think I got much more sleep than four hours – again. The road my window was facing wasn't a very busy one, but the occasional loud vehicle engine, voices and cats robbed me of any meaningful sleep. At one stage a very sharp voice next door yelled for someone to shut up – cat? – boyfriend? – husband? – neighbour? – child?

The old lady was really sweet and insisted on a 0600 hrs breakfast, so I could catch the first ferry (0640 hrs) to Nagahama, the western side of Urado-wan (bay) on which Kochi is located.

I reached Temple #33 in very quick time, just after 0700 hrs. Five walking henro were already there (such creatures had been a little scarce for the last few days).

I did the 6 kilometres to Temple #34 in a little more than an hour, overtaking a few more henros. The road was flat, and much of it was on a hard surface and going through rice fields that were about to be harvested. Somewhere after #34 I bought a bag of very expensive mandarines of which I gave three to a struggling henro as I overtook him. I also met again the henro I'd met at #24. He is travelling at a *very* slow pace, but puts in incredibly long hours of walking. He is doing his 4<sup>th</sup> O Henro San. He's only carrying a pack of two kilos (!) but by his own admission, he carries most of the baggage in the form of a 'spare tire' around his waist (*his* words, I didn't know that expression exists in Japan).

The Business Inn Tosa (in Tosa City) is directly on the Henro Road, so I dropped the pack there before going on to Temple #35. Just for once, the temple was located on the slopes of the mountain, not on top.

There is a 15-metre statue of the Deity Yakushi Nyorai in the grounds of the temple. Eighty-eight dark steps lead up to the temple which, once walked, help to ward off misfortune.

Leg-body wise, I'm not doing too well! They just didn't work today. Maybe it is the heat. On top of it I stubbed the left big toe in the shower, causing the blister to turn into a blood blister. I am a little daunted at the thought of doing 40 kms tomorrow, but I intend to be on the road by 0400 hrs.

## Day 14 - 15 August - Susaki City

Distance (km)      40                      Vertical (m)              600                      Time Taken (hrs)              9

Temples              ●                      Shooryuuji – 36 (Glue-Green Dragon)

I left the hotel in darkness after an excellent sleep of eight hours. The two sleeping tablets and a wonderful massage I received the night before surely helped. The therapist gave me an amazing 50 minutes treatment for only 4,000 yen, using his hands, forearms, elbows and knees on my poor, aching muscles.

I enjoyed the silence as I headed south. There was just the sound of my footsteps, quiet breathing, the tinkle of my bell, the cry of an owl, and the occasional cawing of a crow.

I would have been happy to use the Tsukajizaka Tunnel to get to the town of Usa, but the old pilgrim route led over a small mountain range, so I went this way.

Then I crossed the Usa Bridge, and soon was at Temple #36. The Shooryuuji (Blue-Green Dragon Temple) is the one that a clairvoyant friend had said I'd been connected to from a previous life. Its Deity, Nakiri Fudoo Myoo is also the protector of sea faring people and mariners, something close to my heart from my yachting days.

If I said there was an instant recognition, then I would be lying. Though I found the energy to be very agreeable and peaceful, as I walked down the many steps after prayer. I also met the 'Two-Kilo Pack Henro' again. He told me he'd be returning to Nagoya tomorrow, and continue the journey some time in the future. We wished each other 'o kyoo tsugette' and 'gambatte kudasai', 'take care' and 'have courage'. I'll be missing his companionship.

The temple is located on the Yokonami Peninsula. To get to the next temple, 59 kms away, one can go along the flat route north of the Uranouchi-wan (Bay) or follow the skyline along the spine of the peninsula. I chose the high road.

There is the Okuno-in Fudodo, the auxiliary temple to Temple #36, and I didn't know what made me notice the sign to it, and why I followed. The trail took me to a very old, small temple perched on the side of a cliff. At this place I *did* have the distinct feeling I could have been there in previous lives.

I soon realised why most henro shy away from the skyline walk, because it is 19 kms of going up and down, mostly following the ridge. That took a few hours, and I stopped somewhere for an iced coffee.

The Ippuku Ryokan is really neat, and the hosts made me very welcome. Tomorrow is going to be an other early start and long day.

## Day 15 - 16 August - Shimanto Town

Distance (km)	40	Vertical (m)	600	Time Taken (hrs)	10
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Temples	●	Iwamotoji - 37 (Rocky Root)
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Rain today!

That about sums up the weather. From the moment I stepped out of the ryokan until I emerged from the Kubokawa Tunnel, 700 metres from the Iwamotoji temple, it poured. Heavy at times like standing under a shower, lighter at times, but never ceasing.

Due to the weather I decided to stick to Route 56 rather than taking the 'pilgrim route'. The Yakesake Tunnel south of Susaki City was slippery and wet with road grime and dangerous, but the traffic wasn't all that heavy at that time. But it saved me going up the steep Yakesaka-toge (Pass), and an hour's walking.

It rained very heavily when I had breakfast near the Tosa-Kue Eki (Railway Station). I considered my options: continue the beat along R56, take the 'northern route' supposedly closed until late 2008, or take the 'Osaka Pilgrim Route'. I chose the latter, even though the map contained a warning about attempting it during rain because of slippery conditions.

The route took me along the Osakadani-gawa through a beautiful valley with bright green rice fields and steep, dark hills on either side.

The last 1,000 metres of the trail went steeply upwards, along a very narrow, sloping, slippery track. It was very dark and difficult to make out the track at times. Just a wild bear was missing, it crossed my mind. It was clear the track was hardly ever used, and it crossed my mind as to what would happen if I fell and injured myself. I (or my body) probably wouldn't be found for quite some time. I thought what my friend Jude would think if she knew what I was up to. She always seems to worry about me.

After a while of steady climbing I heard the sound of car engines, and I soon re-joined the R56 at Nanako-toge.

There was an abandoned service station with a huge roof and large dry area to where I fled for rest and food. The thought occurred to me, and I laughed out aloud at it, about what 'normal' people of my age of almost 65 were normally doing in Australia – or indeed the world. Walking hundreds of kilometres, up slippery trails in the pouring rain, not a stitch of dry clothing on, fingers wrinkled like those of an old washerwoman?

From here it was gently downwards for the next 12 to 15 kms. For five kilometres the Henro Road went parallel to R56 on small roads, and I enjoyed walking through fields and forests and past houses, not seeing any other living beings except butterflies, dragonflies, frogs, crabs (dark red with light red legs and claws), and the occasional dog too lazy even to wag its tail.

I felt a sense of being connected with this land, and the land with me. And I felt a little sorry for the people driving in their cars, probably cursing the weather that was ruining the Sunday drive.

I re-joined R56, walking through drenching rain. The poncho provided good protection against the wet from above, but I copped huge amounts of water side-ways from cars driving on the road awash with water.

I said my prayers at the Rocky Root Temple, then went to the nearby pharmacy to get something against the itch caused by dozens, maybe hundreds, of mosquito bites on my back, arms, legs, and front. I couldn't really explain to the assistant what I needed, so I rang Nahoko and we held a three-way conversation (Nahoko of course making sure I would get 'natural', not 'chemical' medication). My gratitude to Nahoko increases daily, and I mused, as I was sitting in the bath, what I would do without her on this pilgrimage.

The Maruka Ryokan isn't one I'd take Nahoko to in a hurry. But, hey, I've had it worse in South America and Africa, and I just had a nice bath! Tomorrow it's an other long day, that means an early start.

## Day 16 - 17 August - Shimanto City

Distance (km)	46	Vertical (m)	300	Time Taken (hrs)	11.5
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Temples	●	None
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Today I passed the 500 kilometre mark on my journey!

Yesterday's rain was gone, and saw the waning Moon and Venus as I said my prayers outside the ryokan, ready for the day's walk.

I had deliberately chosen to walk a big distance, so I could have a rest day in Kochi before Nahoko arrives the day after tomorrow.

I made good progress. Clambering down the Ichinose Pilgrim Route in the second hour made me realise just how much height I must have gained in the last day or so.

After the 'big slope' it went steadily down through a lovely valley, until I saw the sea again as I exited the Yokohama Tunnel. From here I followed the coast south until the road turned right and took me through the Inomisaki Tunnel to a large bay, renowned for whale watching.

Elections must be in the air, for there are many posters with serious (oh so honest!) faces staring into passer-by's eyes. There is even a 'Happiness Realization Party' – wonder how they will make their goals come true<sup>5</sup>.

I was dying for a cup of coffee or a meal break, but all cafés along the way were closed, being Monday. Finally I came to the Minshuku Big Marine where I had lunch.

After lunch it got hot again, draining my energy. The last eight kilometres, of which one half went 'gently' uphill (how I hated it!), the other down (too exhausted to enjoy!) took a long time.

I finally staggered into Nakamura Station in Shimanto City in mid-afternoon, where I booked a train ticket for Kochi tomorrow morning.

No more walking for three days! WOW!!! I am so much looking forward to seeing my beautiful Nahoko again. We've changed some of our bookings, so we can stay for one night at the Ashizuri-Misaki (Cape).

I haven't heard much from Kooboo Daishi in the last couple of days; maybe he is resting before the busy O Henro San time in autumn. Or maybe he is disappointed in me because I seem to be too interested in doing kilometres rather than my spiritual development. But I knew he is with me at all times during this journey.

The Hotel Sunroute seems to be quite OK. The room is tiny, but it is quiet, clean, the TV works, I just had a hot bath, and Nahoko has just called me. Life is good for the weary henro. . .

## 18 August - Kochi

I returned from Shimanto City to Kochi this morning to spend two days of R & R with Nahoko. The Limited Express just took 1 hour 40 minutes what had taken me three days! On the way to the Nakamura Station I had breakfast at the Rino Café, which the kind people gave me as an osettai. I asked the Kooboo Daishi to give them his blessings.

I spent the day looking around the shops and checking the internet. As well, I tried to get some of the fat I'd lost back on my bones. I visited the Bakery Café at Kochi Station twice for coffee and apple pastries.

Proof that hunger and tiredness aren't the best bases for decision-making was proven as I had to decide on an evening meal. I finally settled for what I believed to be tuna sashimi and 'nabe' (stewed pot) containing some attractive red meat. I felt I needed a dose of protein. As I reflected on my choice, it suddenly dawned on me that were in one of Japan's major whaling town, and I realised where the meat was from. Needless to say, the nabe went uneaten.

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<sup>5</sup> The election was actually won by the Japan Democratic Party, after 50 years' of conservative rule. Many of my friends were delighted.



## Day 17 - 21 August - Shimanto City / Central Tosa Shimizu

Distance (km) 14 Vertical (m) 200 Time Taken (hrs) 3

Temples ● Kongoofukuji – 38 (Everlasting Happiness)

I am waiting at the Nakamura Station for the local bus to take me to Ashizuri-misaki, which should leave in about an hour's time.

The two days with Nahoko were very special – again. We spent the first night at the *7 Days Plus Hotel* in Kochi, and then hired a car for the three hours' drive to Ashizuri-misaki. It is a lovely tropical paradise, jutting into the Pacific Ocean.

We visited the Tojindabra Stone Circles, which date back to 5,000 B.C., then the Usubae Cape. We took off our clothes and sat on a half submerged stone, and let the warm waves wash over us. At sunset we visited the Haksantomon (Stone Gate) near the Cape.

We also ritually washed the bracelets that Sadako, Kiyoko, Masako and Yoshiko had made for us, and asked for nature's blessings. The bracelets are made from Blue Tiger's Eye (Hawk Eye), a stone connected to the Dainichi Nyorai (who is also the Deity of temples #60 and 61, as well as the protector of those born in the Year of the Monkey – our birth years). Nahoko's bracelet has 23 smaller, mine 21 larger stones.

We stayed at the luxurious Ashizuri Thermal Hotel, which Nahoko insisted would be her osettai for me. I simply should learn to accept gifts, she said.

Nahoko said she'd noticed a change in my energy. My head had become very 'light and shining', almost like a halo, and my vibrations and voice more resonant and beautiful.

I told her I'd been practicing singing, especially the song 'You'll Never Walk Alone'. Her response brought tears of laughter in my eyes: 'you really can't keep a note. It's not a vibrato you have in your voice, it's just bad singing. . .'. So much for an honest opinion!

This morning we drove back to Nakamura Station where we left the car. Nahoko is now on the train to Kochi, where she'll catch a flight back to Tokyo. This is the text of the message she just sent to me: 'I got a seat (on the train)! Happy! Lots of love, my holy man. I wish you a fantastic journey (picture of walking feet). Nahoko'.

Later –

The bus took about two hours to get back to Ashizuri-misaki. It took a tortuously long route through small villages and towns, picking up and dropping off (mainly) elderly shoppers, then followed the 'Sunroute' on the western side of the peninsula from Tosa Shimizu, that I would be taking for the afternoon's walk.

The kind lady at the #38 stamp office gave me a little memento, a tiny henro to put on a key ring or purse. I was touched.

Then the walk began. Initially it was hot and steamy, but I soon entered a dense forest that made for pleasant walking. Approaching Tosa-Shimizu I decided to take an old henro road rather than the hot road, but soon questioned my decision because I got covered with hundreds of spider webs (and, certainly, countless spiders). Forever I was trying to wipe the sticky, strong, elastic threads from my head and face.

I was a bit concerned about soreness on the ball of the left foot, and a pain low on my right leg. It feels like a shin splint. No additional blisters, as I can see. Weight-wise, I would have thought that the food indulgences (meaning 'sweets by the ton') in Kochi would have put fat on my bones – a quick check today revealed that I am down to 66 kgs. Hmmm – I might send my recipe to Jenny Craig – Japanese food, sweets as much as U can stuff yourself with, and walking 40 kms<sup>3</sup> daily in tropical heat seems to work. . .

The Minshuku Seiryu in Tosa-Shimizu is quite OK. Everything looks a bit tired, but the bath was hot, the dinner excellent, the beer cold, and they have a washing machine. I'll be hitting the road at 0430 hrs tomorrow.

## Day 18 - 22 August - Sukomo City

Distance (km)	42	Vertical (m)	700	Time Taken (hrs)	11
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Temples ● No Temples

Today promised to be a good day to get back into the 'office'. A marathon run's distance with not too many hills, paved roads (Route 321) and the weather forecast was fine. I also knew I could rely on the cooling breeze from the ocean to keep the temperatures down.

I left in complete darkness, coming across only very few bicycle riders and cars in the first hour. My right shin was bothering me badly, it looks like an inflammation. I took two Voltaren Rapid tablets during the day that seemed to do the trick.

I made excellent progress to the Kuroshio Observation Deck near a lighthouse, then to the nearby fishing village of Oura.

Here I had two choices: follow the R321 or take the old henro road.

The trusted map told me the O Henro road was quite benign. Mainly on flat ground, straight, and definitely shorter than the main road. That made the choice easy.

I walked through Oura, then through a large cemetery, and quickly found the henro road. There weren't any spider webs, and made a mental note to mention that in my diary – especially given my experience with spiders yesterday.

Alas, the State of Nirvana didn't last. Soon I was covered in spider webs, thicker, heavier, stickier than yesterday. But I pushed on regardless, because the henro road was quite good. Then the marked trail took a sharp bend to the left, and I went along. For the next 700 metres the trail resembled a steep, washed out creek-bed with sharp stones that hurt my feet. But I had no other choice but to keep walking. Then I came to a creek crossing with slippery rocks then, unexpectedly, I came to a paved road that took me past the Gassan Jinja (shrine).

From here the road went up the hill and away from the coast, then there was an other henro marker pointing to the left. At this stage I didn't know where I was and had no other choice, so I followed. It was obvious the map was wrong! The path took me down a slippery slope and, finally, I ended on a rocky beach with two signs pointing into directions I didn't want to go to. I swore – the first<sup>6</sup> time on my O Henro San.

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<sup>6</sup> and last time, as it turned out

I crossed the rocky beach because there was no other way to go then, surprisingly, I came upon an other henro marker that seemed to point about into the right direction, and a paved road that ultimately took me back to R321 and the Ryokan Oshimaya.

As for the map, on this occasion the cartographer had got it wrong. I suspect he may have done what early mapmakers had done when they weren't sure what to draw – they simply drew a straight line, and added a few fish and dangerous monsters and left it to the adventurer to find their own way.

As to the forest's fauna, they all gave me a bad time. I got a huge welt inside my left arm and two white spots where I was bitten, and ants were clinging to my body even after the shower. I also got a big heat rash on the inside of both legs and the big old scar on my belly is badly inflamed. Weight is still 66 kgs, but no new blisters.

I got a room on the first floor overlooking a tiny harbour. Maybe I'll even have a view of the sunset from my room. Tomorrow it will be Temples #39 and 40. I hope to walk similar distances as today, without spiders, ants and similar beasties.

There were no henros on the road yesterday and today. Who would want to walk in such an environment anyway??

## Day 19 - 23 August - Ainan Town

Distance (km)	45	Vertical (m)	600	Time Taken (hrs)	12
Temples	●	Enkoji – 39 (Emitting Light)			
	●	Kanjizaiji – 40 (Kannon)			

An other tough day. They seem to be getting harder and harder, but this time it is related to my physical condition, mainly feet. They look a real mess, with skin hanging from the small toes, and blisters so numerous I stopped counting. Though my main concern is the swelling on my lower right leg, it feels like the muscle having come away from the bone. As to the various rashes between my legs and on my arm, they don't bother me too much. Having discarded the appropriate medication because of its weight, I put on 'Blistex' on the heat rash between my legs that seemed to do the trick (butter probably would have also done the trick). I also decided not to wear underpants, which turned out to be a good idea. In this amazing heat, who needs to carry a wet sponge between his legs anyway?

I also decided to follow R56 rather than trusting cartographers and their maps. But, more importantly, I wanted to be on a busy road and not on some dark forest trail if my legs collapsed from underneath.

The lady at the ryokan was up despite the early hour, and gave me rice cakes to take on the way. I ate one and an orange at 0530 hrs, because I wanted to lighten the load as much as possible.

It took me a little longer to reach Sukomo than anticipated, and as I walked along the banks of the Matsuda-gawa a very bubbly woman in her 40s stopped me. Tomie Kodama (Tama Chan to her friends) was on her way to work and we struck up a conversation. She insisted on giving me her breakfast as an osettai, three bananas, a cold coffee, and a vegetable drink. So I munched my second breakfast as I headed for the Emitting Light Temple.

I met one walking henro three kilometres from the temple, and an other one at the temple itself. There were plenty of bus henros around, it being Sunday. After my prayers I headed back to Sukomo, then hit the 'old R56'. From here the road simply went up and up and up.

At about 1130 hrs I stopped at the border of the Kochi and Ehime Prefectures, the Dojos of *Ascetic Training* and *Enlightenment*. With tears in my eyes I thanked the Kooboo Daishi for guiding me through the former, and leading me to enlightenment.

It was very hot as I headed down into Ehime. At one stage, as I sat desolately on the side of the road and munching an (Australian) orange, a woman stopped her car and gave me a cold drink and loaf of bread as an osettai. Initially I was concerned about the weight but, then, I reasoned that the gift had been to the Kuukai and not to me, and so he would help carry the load – which I'm sure he did.

My feet were hurting badly. The walk slowed down to a shuffle, and I still had 17 kms to go. The temperature stood at 33 degrees, despite a cooling breeze coming up the valley.

I finally struggled into the Ipponmatsu area of the Ainan Town, where I stopped for an ice cream. An old henro in tattered clothes and wearing gumboots shuffled over to me, and we began to talk as much as my limited Japanese would allow. He said he was on his third O Henro San, and had God in him or was God (I'm not exactly sure which one it was, but both seem pretty much the same to me). We talked for a while, and he taught me how to hold the rosary properly during prayers. Then he noticed my almost empty water bottle and went to one of the shops to fill it. And when we said goodbye, he reached down and handed me the staff.

The last ten kilometres were bad. The pain in my feet was incredible, and I hardly made any headway. Eight hundred metres from the temple I sat down heavily in front of a drink machine and got myself an ice cold Coke. I hadn't drunk this stuff for many years, but now I needed an artificial boost.

At the Kannon Temple I met both henros I'd encountered this morning. So my walking pace hadn't been too bad after all and, most likely, I had done more kilometres than they had done. I chatted briefly with Yoohsoke Izumi who'd commenced his pilgrimage one day after me, and had been 'shadowing' me, including frequently using the same places over night as I had done. My respite with Nahoko had finally enabled me to overtake me. The other henro I recognised as the young man whom I had given fruit as I had been waiting at the Nakamura Station.

Today I also went past the halfway mark of the journey. Temple #40 is the furthest away from #1. So I guess it's downhill from now on, even though the really 'big' ones, #60 and 66 are yet to come. Temple #40 is also a 'spiritual checkpoint'. I'm sorry I didn't say my prayers before entering, but I hope the Kooboo Daishi found me worthy of entering this special place.

## Day 20 - 24 August - Uwajima City

Distance (km)	40	Vertical (m)	600	Time Taken (hrs)	10
Temples	●	Nil			

Today was an other hard business day; there are no other words for it. No temples, no osettai, barely a 'konnichi wa' being exchanged. Though the weather was a little cooler than three weeks ago, and the sky was blue and clear.

There were again alternate henro routes available, but I decided to stick with R56. The henro road went over some awesome hills that I decided to give a miss.

The first part of the day went along the Uchiumi-wan (Bay) which is famous for its pearl production. Then the road turned inland. I noticed the swelling on my right leg going down, but the left little toe began to bother me. It was seriously inflamed, so I discovered later on.

To the uninitiated, my preoccupation with body parts, especially feet, seems to be bordering on hypochondria. Maybe it is, but the feet are the main body part on whose co-operation the success or otherwise of the O Henro San depends.

I made good time until I hit the outskirts of Uwajima, when I 'hit the wall'. The last few kilometres were slow and painful. As I sat outside a LAWSON STATION eating a miserable soba meal, Nahoko rang. She told me how much she was looking forward to having me back in Tokyo, then mentioned a list of things I was lined up to do for her. She said she was 'chaos' in the home, I was 'stability'. I had to laugh about this very honest self-assessment. How I love her!

I found a really nice restaurant near the hotel not cheap but the meal was excellent. As for the Business Hotel Shirakabe, it certainly has seen better days. But, hey, for 4,200 yen with private bath and toilet and the free use of the washing machine, who could possibly complain?

## Day 21 - 25 August - Uwa City

Distance (km)	25	Vertical (m)	600	Time Taken (hrs)	7.5
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Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Ryuukooji - 41 (Dragon's Ray)</li><li>● Butsumokuji - 42 (Buddha's Tree)</li><li>● Meisekiji - 43 (Brilliant Stone)</li></ul>
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Today was a good day, even though I walked slower than usual and covered a shorter distance than I am accustomed to. I'd also slept almost nine hours (with the help of a sleeping tablet), I must have needed it.

Just after setting out I bought myself two cheese rolls and two apple Danish at the Uwajima Railway Station. That would be my breakfast.

For the first hour I wandered up the valley along the Mistuma-gawa, steep hills on either side of the valley floor. At Muden the valley widened to a large, flat area that was mostly covered by rice fields that were being harvested.

There was a really lovely energy at the Dragon's Ray Temple. I was also the first visitor to the temple for the day, my candle and incense burning alone. I spent more time at the temple than I usually do, just enjoying myself *being* there.

A very old lady sat in the stamp office, and she didn't mind me taking a picture of her as she signed my book. I gave her the remaining Danish as an osettai. As I sat on a bench eating a

cheese bun and a grapefruit, she shuffled over to me to give me a can of cold coffee. I hadn't expected anything in return! She was crippled with a very bent back, her upper body almost horizontal to the ground. Such a kind woman!

Butsumokuji was only half an hour away. This temple is very important to Nahoko and I, because its Deity is the Dainichi Nyorai, one of our main Deity and protector. Instead of holding the rosary as I usually do, I held the bracelet that Sadako had gifted me. Wonderful energies surrounding me!

The Meisekiji was a further eleven kilometres away, and the choice was between the R31 (including the Hanaga Tunnel) and the Hanaga-toge (Pass). Since my feet had improved a little since yesterday and I was tired of tunnels, I settled on the henro road.

It was a beautiful walk through a mixed forest, with some very steep sections (about twice as steep as the Trugannini Track at its steepest). But it was worth it, though my feet began to pain again on the way down.

The last six kilometres were painfully slow. At a little fruit shop three women treated me to two large nashi pears, one already peeled so I could eat it easily on the way.

Walking up the hill to the Meisekiji was a bit of a struggle, but the 'Buddha's Temple' was surely worth it. Then it was a *very* slow walk down the stony path to the Daichi Business Hotel in Uwa City where I am staying for the night.

Later –

Dinner at the adjoining ryokan was great, with about eight separate dishes being served. One dish even contained a small speck of gold leaf, though I'm not sure what the culinary value of this metal is. There was only one other guest, a young man from Matsuyama, in the dining room.

I wondered about the state of the hospitality trade in western Shikoku, because I always seem to be the only guest, or one of very few. Many formerly plush resorts are abandoned and are slowly turning grey, with weeds taking over.

As I walked from the dining room, the ever-attentive receptionist pressed my washed and dried clothes, nicely folded, into my hands – such wonderful service!!

As to my blisters, the ones on the right foot are truly amazing. The left small toe is still inflamed, though no worse than yesterday. The swelling on the right shin is almost gone, and I'm getting movement back into the ankle.

## Day 22 - 29 August - Matsuyama

Distance (km)	29	Vertical (m)	500	Time Taken (hrs)	7.5
Temples	●	Nil			

There are probably no easy days, but today's 29 kms would rank among the less demanding to date.

Compared to last night's gourmet meal, today's breakfast at the business hotel was a rather meager affair, but at least it filled my stomach.

The sun was already above the horizon when I stepped outside, and the clear sky promised yet another glorious day.

There were plenty of school kids on their way to school as I made my way up the valley towards the Tosaka Tunnel. The ball on my left foot was still a little tender, so I swallowed a Voltaren Rapid that improved the condition very quickly.

At the first Jizoo Bosatsu statue that I encountered on the day I stopped, as I always do, to ask for the Buddhas' protection on the day's journey. The Jizoo Bosatsu are the protectors of travellers *and* aborted babies, I believe – talking about multi-skilling of the Gods! After the prayer I noticed a little green frog with golden eyes tucked away inside a white artificial lily. I'd never realised before what intelligent eyes frogs have. They probably know much more than us humans pretend to know.

1-½ kilometres outside Uwa City I stopped for a coffee and apple cake. Further up the road, on the other side of the mountain, and just out of the Tosaka Tunnel, I scrambled up through a little pine forest to a road that would lead me down the valley towards Oozu City. The walk through the forest, on my own and down a gently sloping hard surface, was a henro's dream. Once again I sang in a loud voice all the songs I knew, from those I'd learned in Switzerland a long time ago to 'You'll Never Walk Alone'. I know that Nahoko thinks I can't sing, but I'm sure the cicadas that accompanied me didn't mind.

Further down the valley I stopped at the 'Coffee House Woody Life' for an iced coffee and Mont Blanc Cake. The cake *really* was 'to die for', it was beautifully presented with *real* cream, ice cream, passion fruit and berries – all for 700 yen.

Oozu City is renowned for its cormorant fishing, but that only happens at night. I stopped at the 'Joyfull' chain restaurant for a nabe that came to 499 yen, drinks were free.

My left small toe began to sting with two hours to go on the walk, so I took two pain tablets that worked quickly.

The last two kilometres into Uchiko were along a grassy trail through small farms, then the road went down the hill and into town. Two women at a fruit shop, whom I asked for direction to the station, gave me a huge bunch of sweet smelling grapes as an osettai.

This day marks the end of the first phase of my O Henro San. In the 22 days on the road I have walked just over 700 kilometres, with 500 still to go. It had been much harder than I had anticipated, because I had never envisaged the many mountains and hills that I would encounter, and I never could have imagined the 'heat factor'. Still, I am delighted with my achievement to date.

I am aware of the many changes that have occurred within me, though I prefer others to notice them and maybe be kind enough to point them out to me. I have also begun to wear the wasega, the stole that 'holy' people wear, while I'm walking. A few weeks ago I wouldn't have thought of wearing it outside a temple, wearing it now seems just natural. As to my poor kongozue (staff), I'm afraid it has received rather rough treatment. It is at least 15 centimetres shorter since it was new, and bent like a banana. But I know that, through it, the Kooboo Daishi supported me during the pilgrimage.

My deepest and sincere thanks go to the Kooboo Daishi, who taught me many invaluable lessons, and was with me every step of the way. And to Nahoko for her love and encouragement, for helping me laugh at my own misery at times, and of course for ensuring I had a place to sleep at every night. I think I will sleep well tonight.

## 27 August - Matsuyama

I'm waiting at the Matsuyama Airport for the flight to Haneda, almost too tired to think or write. The much needed sleep last night didn't come, and I was still awake at 0200, then woke up just after 0600. The excitement of seeing Nahoko again kept me awake (she is the only women ever to stop me from falling asleep), and nobody had told my body the walking was over for a while, and it was time for a rest. I spent the time watching TV which is even dumber than the Oz TV), and sending email messages around the world. I also allowed myself the luxury of an other massage, with an overweight iron-thumbed woman flawlessly reciting the preamble and Heart Sutra during the massage when she realised I was a henro.

Nahoko had booked me into the Terminal Hotel for two nights (at my request). Then it dawned on me, just minutes before check-in, that I would be returning to Tokyo *tomorrow*, not after a rest day at Matsuyama. Where had the planning gone wrong?

The answer is, simply, that at Ashizuri Misaki I had decided to walk to Unomachi (5 days), then take the train to Matsuyama. At some later stage, my walking-focussed brain made that six days, and so I ended up in Uchiko, 30 kilometres further up the henro road than originally planned. This means I'll be able to reach Temple #44 within 1-½ days' walking when I return to walking. Quite a bonus, though my feet are complaining bitterly.

## 3 September - Uchiko

I'm on the road again.

I left Tokyo just after lunch for a flight to Matsuyama, then travelled by train and taxi to the Minshuku Kiraku, about 15 kms from Uchiko City. The village in which I'm staying is perched on the banks of the Oda-gawa, and flanked by steep wooded hills on either side. I think I might have to climb some of them tomorrow.

The taxi driver had quoted me 2,800 yen for the ride, and when the meter came to 2,700 he switched it off, even though we were still far from our destination. I insisted on paying him 3,000 yen, because the ride was worth it.

The minshuku is in a very old, traditional house. I've got a floor space of about seven by seven meters all to myself, and there is a mosquito net over the futon, which I very much appreciate.

So, it's Temple #44 tomorrow. The midway mark as far as temples are concerned, though much less distance-wise.

## Day 23- 4 September - Kuma Kogen

Distance (km)	23	Vertical (m)	700	Time Taken (hrs)	7
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Temples	●	Daihooji - 44 (Great Treasure)
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Today the O Henro San resumed in earnest even though the day was relatively easy.

The seven days with Nahoko were very, very special, though I somehow missed the temples, the heat, the achievements, even the loneliness of the henro road. I know I'll be missing it too once the entire journey has been completed.

I remember that my daughter Melinda said, a few weeks ago, that I might not resume the pilgrimage after having had the break with Nahoko. Well, here I'm walking again.



I'm also keeping in touch with some of the henro I'd met when I can get to a computer. To some who stayed at the same ryokans as I did, the proprietors expressed surprise and amusement about that *gaijin's* 0430 hour starts, and I am generally considered a 'tough guy' (so named after a popular Japanese TV show).

My feet seem to have recovered, for the time being anyway. The blisters on the left are OK, and the swelling on my right ankle and gout have gone. Nahoko's theory is that the swelling is part of the cleansing routine that my body is going through, brought about by the energy released through the meeting of the Eurasian and Pacific Plates at Cape Ashizuri. I am no medico and I am hard to convince at times, but I wouldn't dare dismiss Nahoko's views out of hand. I've done that too many times, only to be proven wrong afterwards.

Today's walk led along the banks of the Oda-gawa, then turned left to follow the Oohira-gawa. It went steadily uphill, and the gradient, colours, and steepness of the surrounding hills resembled the valley around Zweilütschinen near Grindelwald in Switzerland.

After three hours of steady climbing, I crossed into the neighboring valley. A walking henro, in his 20s and from Kobe, overtook me on the ascent. He was the only henro I saw all day long, apart from a gaggle of elderly bus henros at #44, who were being commandeered around by a loud-voiced professional guide with a megaphone.

One of the notable features of Temple #44 is the pair of huge straw sandals at the gate, which are being replaced every 100 years.

I finished my walk in early afternoon, though I knew I could easily have made it to Temple #45 or beyond. But, maybe, it wasn't such a bad idea to take it easy on my first day back. Tomorrow it's going to be an other longish walk.

I am into my second pair of walking shoes, having worn out the pair I'd bought in Australia. The new pair seems to be OK.

Later –

The accommodation here at the Fuegataki is amazing value: for 6,000 yen I'm getting a bed-sitter apartment (not too clean, but who cares) and dinner was out of this world! There were twelve dishes including nabe (stew pot), river fish (which I destroyed rather than gracefully picked at like Japanese people do), sashimi, two kinds of aubergine, goya (Okinawa cucumber), tomato and cheese. I didn't touch the piece of meat that suspiciously looked like whale, but ate the surrounding pickles, and left the chicken pieces in the nabe. I had a bad conscience because, when I did the washing, a handkerchief was sucked down the drainpipe blocking the works. When I confessed this accident to the host and offered to pay for the damage, rather than getting angry, it was *she* who apologised for the inconvenience it was causing me, and offered the key to the adjoining apartment so I could have a shower. This I didn't need, though.

## Day 24 - 5 September - Matsuyama

Distance (km)	42	Vertical (m)	1,100	Time Taken (hrs)	11
Temples	●	Iwayaji – 45 (Rock Cave)			
	●	Jooruriji – 46 (Pure Emerald)			

I'm well and truly stuffed. This day wasn't meant to be an easy one, but what I'd experienced went beyond my imagination.

It was still dark when I set out from Kuma-Kogen along Route 12 which went, not surprisingly, upwards. Thick fog in the Naose-gawa valley greeted me as I emerged from the Toonomidoo Tunnel. Near the Kogen Golf Club I met yesterday's young henro from Kobe. He'd been smarter than me because he went to Temple #45, and today intended to walk to #46, meaning 2 ½ hours' less walking time on the day.

Despite the early hour of my arrival at the Rock Cave Temple (0700 hrs), there were already quite a few henro there. They obviously wanted to make the most of the weekend.

The temple clings to a huge rock face, maybe 80 metres high. A few caves had been dug into the rock, serving as the earliest temples.

A poem written by the Kooboo Daishi survives to this day. It says, roughly translated from Japanese,

'A high peak in the morning, mist of the valley looks like the sea. The wind which blows through the pines looks like a wave'.

Worship over, I headed down the steep steps to the valley floor, to retrace my steps to Kuma-Kogen. I was also looking for a sock hat had dropped from the backpack's 'clothesline', without any success.

I made it back to Kuma-Kogen by 1000 hrs, and enjoyed a slice of pizza, two apple Danish and a hot coffee at the local shopping centre. The proprietor of yesterday's ryokan spotted me sitting there and came over to greet me and wish me good luck for the journey. She must have forgiven me for the thing with the handkerchief.

In the meantime, it became hot again. Not quite as bad as in early August, but still hot. I also noticed the first autumn colours on a few maple trees.

From Kuma-Kogen to the Misaka-toge it went uphill for seven kilometres. Relentlessly, energy sapping. So I just tucked my head in and concentrated on the white line on the side of the road, focusing on every single step I took.

I reached the pass at around 1230 hrs for the long descent to the outskirts of Matsuyama. But rather than enjoying the downhill walk through the forest, every step on the steep, slippery path required full concentration and soon the feet and toes began to hurt. Further down, where the path flattened out, I was stopped by three men at an 'osettai hut'. They treated me to sweets and (very welcomed) cold tea. They told me this house used to be an accommodation place for henro, but now it operated just as a place to provide refreshments to henro on weekend.

I still felt OK as I neared Temple #46. It boasts a 1,000 cedar tree, and the hand and footprints of Buddha, engraved in a rock.

Nahoko rang me just as I was contemplating the tree. She kindly offered to ring the Terminal Hotel in Matsuyama to secure me a bed for tomorrow night. I really love her for doing this – this, and countless other things.

I left my pack at the Chochin-ya opposite the temple, and walked one kilometre to Temple #47. Then my feet began to hurt. Really badly! They even hurt after I returned to the Ryokan and sat for a long time in the ofuro, alternating between the hot and cold bath.

There were four or five other henro on the road today, including Dr Tatsuhiko Ine. He is doing his 5<sup>th</sup> O Henro San, this one in reverse, and only walks on weekends. Today he is walking from Matsuyama to the Misaka-toge where he will catch a bus back to Matsuyama, then return home tomorrow. Same routine next weekend. I pointed to the 900 metre high pass facing him but, having done the O Henro San four times, he must know what he is in for.

## Day 25 - 6 September - Matsuyama

Distance (km)	18	Vertical (m)	100	Time Taken (hrs)	6.5
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Temples	●	Sairinji - 48 (West Forest)
	●	Joodoji - 49 (Pure Land)
	●	Hantaji - 50 (Great Prosperity)
	●	Ishiteji - 51 (Stone Hand)

Today could have been an easy day, had it not been for my feet. The right foot is swollen at the metatarsals and the ball of the left inflamed. Though not as bad as it was yesterday, when I could barely move. This afternoon I took a Ringl capsule (said to be half as strong as Voltaren - I'm keeping the remaining Voltaren for 'real' pain); let's hope it helps.

I was dead to the world last night, and slept for eleven hours (without sleeping tablets). This must be some record!

Today's walk was to four of the six temples located in Matsuyama. The walk was mainly on flat, suburban and city streets. There were very few walking and, surprisingly, being Sunday, no bus henro. Plenty of car henro, though.

Temple #51 was particularly impressive, and an obvious favourite destination for locals for a Sunday outing. The temple used to hand out free grilled mochi (rice cakes) to pilgrims, but this is no longer the practice. Though the friendly woman at the stall selling these delicacies must have felt sorry for the skinny, ageing 'gaijin-henro' and gave me one as osettai. There was also an old man in henro gear at the gate begging for alms and, judging by the gear head had with him and the smell he must be a homeless person.

Matsuyama seemed to be inside a heat bubble, and it was very hot and uncomfortable. Though the forecast for the next few days is a little cooler - only a little, though.

Near Temple #51 was a restaurant, and I decided to stop for lunch. The plastic model of seafood, vegetables, quail eggs and rice looked very appetising, so I ordered this dish. What I got instead was a bowl of rice covered with a viscous gelatin with embedded pieces of vegetables, mushrooms and meat.

I'm usually pretty good at eating what I'm given, but this stuff I just couldn't handle. I knew this would be an embarrassment to the host, but I felt my health came first. I offered to pay for the entire meal, though, but the lady would only accept 500 yen.

On the way to the Terminal Hotel I stopped at the Mitsukoshi Department Store to buy provisions for tomorrow – bread, cheese, as well as two apple and a grapefruit Danish.

P.S. I had to retire my kongozue, my walking stick today and replace it with a new one. Heavy use has reduced its length by 18 centimetres, too short to be effective for going down steep paths. According to established tradition, I left the staff in front of the main hall at a temple (in my case #46) among other retired sticks. It will be burnt by monks at an annual ceremony.

## Day 26 - 8 September - Near Asanami Station

Distance (km)	24	Vertical (m)	100	Time Taken (hrs)	8.5
Temples	●	Taisanji – 52 (Big Mountain)			
	●	Enmyooji – 53 (Circular Illumination)			

This morning, as I had breakfast at the Terminal Hotel, I noticed a very limping Japanese henro slowly make his way to the Matsuyama Eki. He could barely move his feet and pushed his pack in a shopping trolley in front of him. I guess it is from now on that bodies begin to feel the strain of the long, hard henro road.

Who said a holy man doesn't have a sense of humor? Well, the Kooboo Daishi certainly displayed his in teaching me a lesson in patience at Temple #52.

I arrived at the temple at around 0830 hrs to find three large buses in the parking lot and this usually means long delays at the stamp office to have the temple book signed. One of the buses was just disgorging its load, so I decided to beat the crowd by going to the stamp office first, and do the worshipping afterwards.

I rushed up the shaded path, and past the stamp office (which admittedly wasn't very well signposted – Nahoko would say that was my excuse) and even missed, in my haste, the cleansing fountain near the temple's gate.

Once at the Main Hall I desperately searched for the stamp office that, no surprise, I couldn't find because it was 250 metres down the hill. And I had to go down a long flight of steps to go to the fountain to ritually clean myself before I could say my prayers.

At the Kooboo Daishi's Hondo near a large stone which, unknown to me, was to be tapped by a smaller stone for a purpose unknown to me. As I was reading the Heart Sutra, bus henros began to jostle around the stone and push me around to get to the stone.

Suddenly I nearly broke into a fit of laughter, as I became aware of the folly of my impatience, and realised I was being taught a lesson by the Kooboo Daishi. But I hadn't reckoned with his sense of humor on the day.

When, after my display of impatience, I got to the stamp office there was one very bored looking woman looking for customers. Either the 'tour groups' didn't bother about having their books signed or, alternatively, had them signed by some other means.

The rest of the day was quite pleasant, heading north along the shores of the Itsuki-nada (sea) that is part of the Seto Inland Sea. The weather was warm and sunny, though tempered by a strong breeze coming off the ocean.

The 'Costa Blanca' where I am staying is a Karaoke Place that definitely had seen better times, and in the *very* distant past. My bed is a 'Dream Bed – De Luxe' quality brand, but the mattress must have tolerated many, many occupants and under varying circumstances.

I couldn't sleep (again) at the Terminal Hotel last night. I was still awake at 0200 hrs, and that was *with* a Japanese sleeping tablet. I think the sleeplessness was caused by some kind of vibrations that I am very sensitive to, I was acutely aware of a low humming sound that went on throughout the night. Interestingly, I hadn't been able to sleep either when I stayed at the hotel a week ago.

Today I decided to do something about my weight, which seems to be going down and down (I'm usually about 70 kg, currently about 66). At 0930 hrs I had a large piece of bread, cheese and an apple, followed by coffee and cake one hour later. This was later followed by a tub of yogurt and an apple, ice cream, ice coffee and four blue plums (*Zwätschge*). Not to mention the many lollies I sucked as I was walking.

The swelling on my right foot has gone down, there are no new blisters, and the only small soreness is on the sole of my left foot. Things are looking up!

Today I reached the 800 kms mark and, most likely, during the past few days I must have clocked up the 1,000,000<sup>th</sup> step of the journey. Small wonder walking shoes don't last the distance. From now on it's going mainly east and south, with a few exceptions. Jacinta called me a 'machine' in yesterday's email. Probably quite an apt description.

Later –

Just returned from photographing the sunset over the Seto Inland Sea. I've photographed many sunsets before, but this one was '*amazing*'!!! Lots of marine traffic to the ports of Osaka, Kobe and other Seto Sea Ports.

## Day 27 - 8 September - Imabari

Distance (km)	35	Vertical (m)	400	Time Taken (hrs)	11
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Temples	●	Enmeiji – 54 (Long Life)
	●	Nankooboo – 55 (Southern Lights)
	●	Taisanji – 56 (Peace Mountain)
	●	Eifukuji – 57 (Good Luck)
	●	Senyuuji – 58 (Hermit in Seclusion)

Today was a first: a long walk without blisters, real pain, and I didn't use any medication. Though I didn't sleep well again. The Japanese sleeping tablets most likely did the opposite of what they were intended for, and I was up again at 0400 hrs. The hotel manager rushed outside at I said my morning prayers to give me something for breakfast (yogurt, rice and rice crackers and a banana) and insisted on giving me a 500 yen refund – what for, I didn't know because I had only paid for accommodation and dinner in the first place.

That was the first on the 'osettai day'. The next osettai was a red and gold memento that the man at the stamp office at Temple #55 gave me (he also asked me to sign the visitors' book), then an

elderly woman stopped her scooter to give me 500 yen, then I received a bag of snacks from a car henro near Temple #58, and finally a bottle of milk coffee from a woman on a bicycle as I neared my hotel (Cosmo Osamu). I also had a nice chat to Hiroshi as I had an other coffee and sweets at the Imabari Railway Station.

As to the walk itself, it was rather uneventful. For the first hour I was accompanied by the deep-throated sound of ship engines far out at sea, then I traversed a few small coastal towns whose main industries appeared to be shipbuilding and petro chemical.

Near the Iyo-Kameoka Station and the local police station I had an 'instant recognition from a past life' experience. I came to a small river which, together with the nearby sea and distant mountains I recognised from a previous life. I know I had been there before, some time during the time of the samurai when various clans fought one another over control of the areas (I wasn't a samurai, just an ordinary warrior). A new bridge had been built, of course, and the old one renovated, and there were new houses, but otherwise everything was unchanged.

I finished prayers at Temple #54 by 0900 hrs, and from here on it was a fairly leisurely walk through the City of Imabari, with temples spaced about three kilometres from one another. The only real challenge presented Temple #58, perched on a 400 meter high mountain, higher and steeper than Mt Nelson. The last 500 metres up through a gully (on a paved track and staircase) was especially trying for weary legs.

On tomorrow's menu is just one temple, then a 'transport stage' to position myself to climb up to the 'dreaded' Temple #60 the following day.

## Day 28 - 9 September - Saijoo City

Distance (km)	19	Vertical (m)	100	Time Taken (hrs)	6
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Temples ● Kokubunji – 59 (Official State)

Today was sort-of a 'coffee and cake' run in anticipation of much harder days to follow.

At the Kokubunji there is a statue of Kooboo Daishi who is offering his stone hand to those who want to touch it. Those who touch his hand, and afterwards, rub the highly polished black granite urn next to the statue, may make one wish – only one, though, because the Kooboo Daishi is a very busy man.

I asked the Kooboo Daishi to teach me what I needed to learn, so I can progress with my personal journey.

A short while later I stopped for coffee and cake that I very much enjoyed and one kilometre further I stopped for an other 'C & C'.

Walking was easy as it wasn't too hot, and all was on sealed roads.

The lady at the ryokan that I am staying at (Sakae-ya) asked me for a copy of the passport (the first time I've encountered such a request), and even rang Nahoko to ensure I'd give her a copy. Apparently the local cops have asked her to do this.

The ryokan is very old but spotless, and feels very comfortable. In the alcove of my room hangs a portrait of the Kooboo Daishi, and a sheet with stamps from all 88 temples. Someone in the family must have done the O Henro San in the past.

P.S. I slept very well last night. It's amazing what clean sheets and an adjustable air-con system can do for one's sleep – that and being very tired. No blisters and pains etc., now for two days in a row!

## Day 29 - 10 September - Iyo Mishima

Distance (km)	27	Vertical (m)	800	Time Taken (hrs)	9
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Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Yokomineji – 60 (Side Summit Peak)</li><li>● Kouonchi – 61 (Incense Garden)</li><li>● Hoojuji – 62 (Temple of Wealth and Happiness)</li><li>● Kichijooji – 63 (Mahasri Laksmi)</li><li>● Maegamiji – 64 (Front God)</li></ul>
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Today's main challenge, the Yokomineji, is considered a *henro korogashi*. This, literally, means 'where henro fall down' and refers to particularly difficult terrain facing pilgrims.

I can't say all the horror stories I'd heard about #60 came anywhere near the mark! There may have been 'henro fall down' spots in the past when people walked in straw sandals, but I found the ascent very comfortable, with the steepest bit being well maintained and furnished with many concrete steps. Though it could also be that I've become 'battle-hardened' and have become ready to tackle any obstacle on my journey to complete the O Henro San.

Most importantly, however, was the knowledge that the Kooboo Daishi was with me as I ascended the mountain. Like the time I climbed #12 on day three of my journey, I moved with incredible speed up the mountain and in great comfort, and only needed three hours for the 12 kilometres and 700 metres altitude (I had planned for four).

The valley leading up to the mountain was very beautiful. The steep and high mountains on either side prevented the sun from touching the valley floor long after I had commenced its journey across the sky, but the higher slopes were bathed in clear sunlight.

The first ten kilometres were along an increasingly steep road along the valley, and only the last two consisted of a steep mountain trail. I was almost at the top when the sun finally appeared, bathing the temple in brilliant light.

The energy at the temple was very special too – gentle, yet very strong. It is the temple of the God Dainichi Nyorai, 'our' special Deity and protector.

I soaked up the beautiful atmosphere until a gaggle of cackling 'tourist' henro dressed up in white and conical hats made their appearance. I felt a little sorry for them, because it may not be possible to come a close to the Kooboo Daishi as I am able to do, doing the pilgrimage the hard way.

The monk who signed my temple book was also really nice. He gave me a piece of sponge cake with sweet bean paste rolled in, a local delicacy said to have been brought from Kyushu at the time the Portuguese were still allowed to call on Japan.

There were still four temples to visit as I came off the mountain. Temple #61 is a large, modern concrete structure (I found it a little difficult to think of it as being a temple, as it reminded me at the National Gallery in Canberra). It is also an other of Dainichi Nyorai's temples. The other temples were scattered along the main road, about three kilometres apart.

I cheated a little in late afternoon when I took the train from Ishizuchiyama Eki to Iyo-Mishima, cutting out 40 kms of walking. But I had to 'position' myself for tomorrow to do the Unpenji the following day, then spend the next two days with my three friends climbing Ishizuchi-yama.

Feet-wise, there could be a small blister on the little right toe. Otherwise I'm fine.

Later –

The hotel Daichi Mishima may be the city's biggest (if not the best), and the rates are very cheap, 5,300 yen, breakfast included. I've just ended the meal that consisted of salad, *shabu shabu*, shaved cow's meat (marbled with fat!) and pork that I boiled in water at the table (like a fondue) and ice cream. Quite horrible<sup>7</sup>, but I was just too tired to look elsewhere, and everything seems to close at 1800 hrs.

### Day 30- 11 September - Miyoshi City

Distance (km)	20	Vertical (m)	800	Time Taken (hrs)	6.5
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Temples ● Sankakuji – 65 (Triangular)

Nahoko rang me last night. She had been at a concert she particularly enjoyed, and said she would have liked for me to be there too. We talked for more than half an hour about ourselves, us, our relationship, our need for each other, our independence, and our ever increasing and deepening love for each other. I went to sleep a happy man. . .

In the morning I woke up with a sick feeling in my stomach and diarrhea, and the sickening taste of last nights' fat and meat in my mouth. I felt like throwing up, but only spent time in the toilet dry reaching.

I slowly gathered my stuff and checked out, forsaking the breakfast, even though I had paid for it. I just couldn't face the dining room or the hotel's food a second time. Next to the hotel I bought two French loaves and a jar of orange marmalade as my 'iron ration' to survive the day.

Near Mishima Park a very attractive young woman pulled up in her car and gave me an osettai of 1,000 yen. I was really touched, and asked the Kooboo Daishi to give her his blessings as she drove off. A short while later I nearly had a little 'accident', but fortunately I was near a park that had a public toilet.

Half way up to the temple I caught up with a 64-year-old engineer from Osaka (Tami), who is doing his 1<sup>st</sup> O Henro San. He is doing it in stages, having commenced two years ago and isn't quite sure when he will finish.

The area surrounding the temple was covered with discarded plastic and rubbish, and there was a strong smell of sewage. The temple, though, once I climbed its 77 steps was quite lovely,

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<sup>7</sup> I learned later shabu shabu is considered a delicacy by many



though the toilet was of a 'hole in the ground' version. My companion headed off, while I was trying to get some food into my stomach, and swallowed a Lomotil.

From the temple the route went through a nice forest, gently up and down (mainly down) until I came to the valley of the Umaji-gawa that would take me back into the Tokushima Prefecture.

My physical condition was still quite poor, the body feeling and performing like a diesel engine that had been fuelled with ULP. Somewhere up the valley I sat down/collapsed and must have made a miserable sight, for a man on a scooter went out of his way to give me three rice crackers and a bottle of yogurt.

I was actually beginning to feel better on the four-kilometre ascent to the top of the valley, and when I crossed from Ehime into the Tokushima Prefecture, I realised the tunnel I'd just traversed could be the last long one on my journey.

Only an other 1.5 km remained until I came to the Minshuku Okada. I stopped on the way for an ice cream, which tasted surprisingly good.

The minshuku is a bit on the old side, but very comfortable. Bed, bath, washing machine, food (not necessarily in that order of importance) are all there.

I'd just stepped out of the shower when Tami walked into the minshuku. He too intends to do the Unpenji tomorrow, even though rain is forecast for the afternoon.

Just stepped off the scales, still 66 kgs. Saw four other walking henro today, and lots of 'clean' bus henros. The weekend must be near.

## Day 31 - 12 September - Bottom of the Unpenji Ropeway

Distance (km)	11	Vertical (m)	800	Time Taken (hrs)	4.5
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Temples ● Unpenji – 66 (Hovering Clouds)

What has generally been written about the 'most feared' of temples turned out to be quite wrong. It certainly did not prove to be the 'henro fall-down' as had been variously expounded. Indeed, I would rank, in terms of difficulty, Temples #12 and #60, and Unpenji wouldn't even get a rating. But then I might have become battle-hardened and almost invincible since commencing the journey.

I'm sitting in a little café at the bottom of the Unpenji Ropeway, where a kind-hearted lady is feeding me cakes as an osettai. It is lunchtime, and I can't check into the Minshuku Aozora until 1500 hrs, and there are only three kilometres to go from here. It is raining heavily, and for the first time since commencing the pilgrimage, I'm wearing a long sleeved top.

I felt much better this morning, and could even face breakfast. I stepped outside at 0645 hrs and my friendly host, a man in his 60s accompanied me onto the street to wave good-bye. I said my prayers as I always do, facing where I had come from the previous day, thanking the Kooboo Daishi for his blessings, then facing in the direction of my path ahead and asking for his continuing support and blessings for me, Nahoko, my family, relatives, friends, the people of Japan, Australia and the world.

I thought yesterday I probably wouldn't need all that much time to reach the Unpenji, but I still reckoned with about three hours to the top. But, like with Temples #12 and 60, I flew up the

mountain and reached the temple in half that time. At the top I caught up with Tami who'd left right after breakfast when I was still thinking about packing and getting ready.

The stillness and power of Unpenji was almost overwhelming. High on a mountain top, amidst an ancient cedar forest, clouds swirling around the treetops.

I decided to stay at the top for a while; there was so much to see. Almost by accident I discovered the Hondo. Nearby was an area with a huge number of life-sized Buddha statues, I was told 500 in all. I took time to walk past every one of them, looking into their stony eyes. They had happy, angry, wise, benevolent expressions, and many held animals ranging from dragons to snakes to birds. Three of them had the rings on their earlobes pulled by little dogs and grimaced, and three listened attentively to what frogs had to say. As I had discovered some time ago, frogs *must* be intelligent, because they have intelligent eyes.

I had previously intended to apologise for my wrongdoings throughout my life from the top of Ishizuchi-yama, but I felt Unpenji was the place. Near the main Hondo, facing the clouds swirling deep below me, I said the following to those I had wronged.

'I say in all honesty and from the bottom of my heart, that I am sorry to the following to the people that I have wronged in my life:

- To my father for not truly appreciating him, for not returning his love, and for not appreciating that without him I would not have become what I am, and for the many untruths and negative exaggerations I'd told about him.
- To my mother, for not returning her love, for stealing her household money from her purse, and for never appreciating how much she was on my side and tried to help me in my troubled youth.
- To my brother Christophe for being jealous of him, for being cruel and unfair, and the lies I told about him.
- To my brother Hans-Peter who dies in his twenties for being cruel to him and hurting him, for the unfair treatment I meted out to him, and for not appreciating him for the beautiful person he was.
- To my sister Irene for any unhappiness I caused because I could not always be the person she needed, and wasn't always able to provide the support she needed.
- To my children Stephen and Melinda whom I did not give the upbringing they deserved, for leaving them for an other family, and for the many, many disappointments that I caused them to suffer.
- To my grandchildren to whom I may have been less than the 'perfect' grandfather.
- To Carol, Suzanne, Pam, and other partners for my selfishness and for not being the person they wanted me to be. And for the selfishness on my part, and the part I played in the relationships not succeeding.
- To my friends and former friends whom I disappointed, let down, and was unfaithful to.
- For the many, many lies, untruths and exaggerations I told throughout my life.

- To the countless sentient beings whose lives I have taken, either intentionally or unintentionally.
- To Nahoko, for not always being the person she would like me to be.
- For any mistakes, omissions, bad things that I have done throughout my life.
- For being a bad example to my children, and friends at times.
- For my drinking excesses during certain periods in my life.
- For not showing true appreciation for the love I have received, and am receiving, from those around me.
- For my arrogance and lack of humility.
- For not always sufficiently protecting the environment in which I live.
- For any bad deeds, thoughts, actions, that caused grief and unhappiness in others.
- For any neglect where I could have done better, given more, and for any actions or omissions that ended in less than optimum outcomes.

Then I tried to sing ‘You’ll Never Walk Alone’, but my voice failed me. As I struggled with the last notes, the clouds began to close in, and tears came into my eyes.

. . . this is embarrassing – I’d asked the lady at the café whether there are any postcards for sale, but there were none in any of the shops around here. Half an hour later a man from the Ropeway Company came in and gave me a set of ten postcards as an osettai. The cakes are very nice, and I was just given a cup of hot tea. And, because of the rain, the lady at the café offered to drive me to the minshuku – which I simply couldn’t accept. . .

The walk down the Unpenji wasn’t too demanding either, neither too steep nor too slippery. Though somewhere I took a big tumble that easily could have resulted in injury.

Right now it is still too early to leave, and the rain is becoming heavier. I’m thinking of having a third cup of coffee.

Later –

The Minshuku Aozora is a real find! It is located in a fertile valley covered with rice paddies, fields and orchards on either side of the road, and is modern, clean and quiet, and the (young) proprietors speak a little English. They have six small dogs (mainly Dachshund) that like to bark at henros but are harmless. Just saw an other bedraggled henro arrive, he looks a little worse for wear than I do, I think, but I haven’t looked into a mirror for a while.

I’ve just had a lovely talk with Nahoko (when I called her earlier she ended it abruptly because she was with a client). She said she was tired because Yuki had needed to talk with her last night (adjustment issues of a new marriage), so it had become a very late night. We talked about being strong, focussed, tough in what we were doing, and agreed we were fortunate to have strong personalities that added to each other’s life without detracting from it (does this mean we ‘deserve’ each other?).

## Day 32- 13 September - Matsuyama

Distance (km)	8	Vertical (m)	0	Time Taken (hrs)	2
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Temples ● Nil

Walk to Temple #67 to meet Kiyoko, Yoshiko and Masako, to climb the Ishizuchi San, one of the seven holiest mountains in Japan.

## Day 33 - 14 September - Kan-onji

Distance (km) 9 Vertical (m) 0 Time Taken (hrs) 2

Temples ● Daikoji – 67 (Great Growth)

I slept really well at the Minshuku Aozora a couple of nights ago, tho' I had to close the windows because the adjoining fields had recently been fertilised. That morning (yesterday) I walked to the Daikoji Temple to meet up with Kiyoko, Yoshiko and Masako. Unfortunately Sadako, who had arranged it all, was ill and unable to participate.

It was really nice to met the three women again, whom I'd met for the first time earlier this year on a Tasmania tour.

We headed east towards Matsuyama, then turned into the mountains that I'd seen on the way through to Temple #66, then took the Ishizuchi Ropeway to an attitude of 1,300 metres. Our aim was to climb Ishizuchi San, the highest mountain in western Shikoku (1982 m), one of the seven holiest mountains in Japan, and also a mountain that the Kooboo Daishi had spent on during his training. So it wasn't strictly part of the O Henro San, but a very important adjunct to it.

The walk itself wasn't too hard; it was on a well-maintained track, but just going up and up and up. We reached the first peak at around noon, then followed the knife-edge like crest to the second peak. To the left (on the ocean side) the mountain falls down vertically, and was covered by a thick blanket of clouds. To the right the terrain was still quite steep, and the sky was milky white, sunny, with clouds floating by, disappearing, and new ones forming.

I had previously thought of saying the 'sorry' words at Ishizuchi San, but having done that at Unpenji I felt no need to repeat it again. But I still felt I'd need to sing 'You'll Never Walk Alone' as promised to myself, the song that so much linked me to the Kooboo Daishi, because he accompanied me on every step of this pilgrimage.

I don't think I'd ever sang a song so beautifully and with so much feeling, as I sang to the air, the spirits and the Deities at the shrine that marks the top of the mountain. Tears were in my eyes as I sang the last note, and my heart was filled with love and gratitude. I was just happy and grateful to be on the mountain.

I joined my friends near the peak, and as I walked past a group of climbers, a man said one word - 'subarashi' (amazing).

It took us some time to let go of the mountain and return to the valley. There we enjoyed a hot onsen before returning to Matsuyama for the night.

The plan for today was for my friends to drop me off at Temple #67, before going on to visit a mountain and two shrines in the Tokushima Prefecture, then returning to Matsuyama for their trip back to Tokyo. That was the plan anyway, so I thought, but something got lost in translation.

I realised we weren't going to #67 as we were driving down the Yoshinogawa Valley in the Tokushima Prefecture, the very same valley I'd set out from on my way to Unpenji. But by that time it was too late to say anything, so I decided just to let go and see what the day would bring.

We turned off the Tokushima Expressway onto Route 438, and up a narrow valley with smoothly ground grey-green huge rocks at the bottom of the riverbed. After twenty kilometres of narrow, twisting mountain roads we came to the bottom of the Tsuguri San (1,955 m), and a chairlift that would take us close to the top of the mountain.

Tsuguri San is located in the central part of eastern Shikoku, and its spiritual importance is only second to Ishizuchi San. Its height and geographical location puts it just above the tree line, thus giving an unobstructed view in all directions.

It took us half an hour to walk to the Daiken Jinja (Shrine) located close to the top. The shrine itself isn't very big or ostentatious, but it stands against a rock that has the shape of burning flames, which is said to be the seat of the Gods. Further on, and closer to the top, is the Tsugurisan Hongoo, an equally modest shrine built against a large and very impressive rock.

I stood there for a while touching the rock, feeling the energy of the Gods pulsating through my body. Not too strong, just a flow of gentle, beautiful energy.

We descended the mountain and said goodbye at Temple #67. From there I walked the eight kilometres to Kan-onji (and the Kan-onji Sunny Inn) to complete the day. The Daikoji is a very attractive, small temple with a camphor tree at its gate that is said to have been planted by the monk Kuukai.

Once again, the generosity of my friends left me astounded and a little embarrassed, though I'm slowly getting used to Japanese generosity and hospitality. Not only would they not allow me to pay for anything (except the hotel and dinner), but they showered me with many thoughtful gifts that I couldn't reciprocate. Indeed, they said it was *they* who were the beneficiaries of me having spent the two days with them and that my presence had enabled them to climb the two mountains.

The only thing I could do was to accept their gifts, and promise to offer them my hospitality when they return to Tasmania.

## Day 34 - 15 September - Zentsuuj City

Distance (km)	26	Vertical (m)	300	Time Taken (hrs)	10.5
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Temples	●	Jinnein - 68 (God's Grace)
	●	Kan-onji - 69 (Kannon)
	●	Motoyamaji - 70 (Headquarters)
	●	Iyadanaji - 71 (Eight Valley)
	●	Mandaraji - 72 (Mandala)
	●	Shusshakaji - 73 (Shaka Nyorai's Appearance)

- Kooyamaji – 74 (Armor Mountain)
- Zentsuuji – 75 (Right Path)

Today was one of (relatively) short distance, and a big number of temples. I also went past the 1,000 kilometer mark of my pilgrimage somewhere between #70 and 71. Not a bad achievement, I think.

I had breakfast at the Kan-onji Eki's Bakery and Café, then headed for the nearby Temples #68 and 69. Both are on the same grounds, so it was a bonus bagging two in one hit. On the way I had a conversation with a local on his early morning walk. He seemed to enjoy my company and promised to show me a 'quicker way' to the temples. So we ended up on top of the Kotohiki Park's main hill from where he tried to persuade me to go with him to the Kan-ei-tsuho, a replica of a 17<sup>th</sup> Century coin with a circumference of 345 metres, and made entirely of sand. I got a look at it from the mountain, though. Only on my insistence he'd take me down to the temples did we finally make our way down the hill.

There were already four walking henro at the temples, including Jun. Jun was surprised to hear about my reasons for doing the pilgrimage (don't *know* the specific reason, just needed to do it). He said this was his reason too, and expressed surprise that a gaijin could have similar thoughts.

The rest of the day was just walking and praying. Temple #70 has a lovely pagoda, #71 is 'inside' so one needs to take the shoes off after climbing more than 300 steps, #72 is the Dainichi Nyorai's temple where I said a special prayer to seek the God's blessings for Nahoko and me, and #74 is located in a highly industrial area and is almost certainly left off the bus henros' itineraries.

Temple #75, the birthplace of Kooboo Daishi is, together with Koya San and the Toji Temple in Kyoto, one of the three most important sites associated with him. It is huge, covering an area of 45,000 square metres, and is overrun by tourists and bus henros. I had an air of commercialism about it, and I longed for the pristine mountain air of the Yokomineji, the swirling clouds of Unpenji, or the sweeping views at Cape Ashizuri. I said my prayers, had my book signed, then walked in the total darkness of the Kaidan-Meguri, the tunnel below the Hondo where Kuukai was born, chanting Namu Daishi Henjoo Kongoo, the Kooboo Daishi's name.

The 'Grand Hotel Zentsuuji' might have been grand in a previous life, but now it is run down and not very clean – I certainly wouldn't take Nahoko there for a relaxing weekend. It was cheap, though. Never mind, my walking journey will soon come to an end.

I'm a little embarrassed to say that I am fast running out of temples for the time I'd allocated for the journey. Maybe I'm just walking too fast. There are countless henros that I overtook, but only very few who walked faster than I did. I'm waiting for Nahoko to call me tonight so we can talk about an early 'repatriation'. In late October, when she is running a series of workshops, she won't want me in Tokyo for several days so I have to keep a few temples and kilometres up my sleeve to fill these days.

## Day 35 - 16 September - Takamatsu

Distance (km)	27	Vertical (m)	100	Time Taken (hrs)	10
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Temples ● Konzooji – 76 (Golden Storehouse)

- Dooryuuji – 77 (Arising Way)
- Gooshooji – 78 (Illuminating Local Site)
- Tennoji (Koshoin) – 79
- Kokubunji – 80 (Official State)

Today is the last day of the second of my three étapes, and I'm going 'home'. 'Home and Nahoko' has a distinctly nice ring about it. There are still eight temples and about 120 kilometres to go, which I'll do them in late October.

Today was, apart from the last day, one of long, straight and flat roads (except for the very last bit), with temples equally spaced.

I finished prayers at #76 well before the stamp office opened. The monk was busy wiping down shelves and I was quite happy to sit there and contemplate the world until 0700 hrs came around. He wished me 'o kyoo tsugette' – good luck, which I took as a good omen.

One hour later, at the stamp office, the nice lady gave me a bottle of apple pulp as an osettai. I already had all my temple stuff stowed in my back pack, but proper etiquette was for me to give her an osame-fuda in recognition of the 'service' she provided. So I dug out the little white slip with the Kooboo Daishi's blessings printed on it, and my written name (in roman and katakana) and gave it to her.

Somewhere between #77 and 78 a woman watering the plants rushed inside to give me a can of sparkling apple cider, so I again had to dig out an osame-fuda. I suspect the drink was alcoholic, because my step became a little unsteady for a while, but I was OK when I arrived at the next temple.

There were many prep and primary school kids on their way to school. They walked in small and large groups along roads and footpaths, highly disciplined and without any rowdiness, pushing or playing silly games. Crossing guards were at all major intersections, and mothers saw their children off at their front doors as they joined the groups. It was exactly like the 'walking school buses' they are trying to introduce in Tasmania, but a superior arrangement because it didn't require the involvement of parents to be the 'driver' and 'conductor' – the kids took care of that all themselves. At the school the groups were met by what I thought to be prefects adorned with sashes who shouted, on top of their voices, 'ohayoo gosaimasu' – good morning! Try this in Australia!

At Temple #79 the monk gave me an apple cake as osettai. I'm sure the Kooboo Daishi has become aware of my culinary preferences since we've been on the road together.

Temple #80 was the last, and most impressive of today's walk. The monk also gave me an osettai, though it did *not* contain apple – a bottle of cold tea.

Then I took the local train back to Takamatsu, from where I'll catch the plane to Haneda tomorrow.

So, that's the end of the walking – at least for the time being. It has been a journey of discovery, reflection and changes for me, and I am sure the changes will be ongoing. Physically, I am in superb shape, no pains, no swollen feet, just one small blister, and I am walking *very* fast. In the

last couple of weeks I've overtaken a few henros, but was never overtaken (to the best of my knowledge). I am returning to Tokyo five days earlier than I had planned, having done all the walking. That means more time with Nahoko. I can't wait to see her again. . .

## 12 October

Yesterday we met with Sadako, Kiyoko, Yoshiko and Reiko (the seeress) at a high rise hotel in Shinjuku, our lovely friends who had earlier presented me with the pair of seta then visited me at Matsuyama during the O Henro San.

It was lovely to see them again, and we all spent a very pleasant afternoon. Yoshiko and Kiyoko laughed about the trip to Shikoku, the original purpose of which was for them to support me during my pilgrimage. As it turned out, so they said, it was *me* who supported them on the climb up Ishizuchi San.

The Hawk-Eye bracelet they had given me as a blessing for the O Henro San had broken just as I'd left the last temple of the journey dedicated to the Deity Dainichi Nyorai, and Nahoko had returned it to them to be repaired. I had hoped it would be possible for them to have it fixed before I returned to Shikoku, because it had become an integral part of me and my journey.

So it was with some surprise that the bracelet that Kiyoko pulled out of the bag was different to the one I had worn: it was heavier, the stones were larger, their colour darker, and there were 19 rather than the 23 stones. They also returned the old bracelet, the stones still precariously hanging from one single thread.

'The earlier bracelet is no longer appropriate for you, Reiko explained. The Buddhas at the temples have noted the serious way in which you undertook the pilgrimage, they are aware of the changes that have occurred in you, and they want you to continue to search for the Buddha inside you when you return to Tasmania. The new bracelet has much stronger power, and will support you in your efforts'.

Reiko's words brought tears into my eyes, and I accepted their generous gift gratefully, which I will continue to wear on the O Henro San and beyond. As to the old bracelet, I think I will present it to the Buddhas of my 'support crew' on the last day of my pilgrimage.

## Day 36 - 23 October - Takamatsu

Distance (km)	35	Vertical (m)	600	Time Taken (hrs)	9.5
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Temples	●	Shiromineji – 81 (White Peak)
	●	Negoroji – 82 (Fragrant Root)
	●	Ichinomyaji – 83 (First Shrine)

It's good to be back on the road again. I might have gone a little soft in the last few weeks filled with love, excitement, travel to Europe and Hawaii, food and wine (I put two kilos back on again while we were in Europe!), but the 35 kilometres today helped to sort myself out. I must admit, though, I was *very* pleased to reach the Yashima Royal Hotel in the north-eastern part of the City of Takamatsu, not too far from Temple #84.

As much as I loved being with Nahoko (and I had said that to her), I was missing life on the road. Indeed, I know there will be something missing from my life when I complete the pilgrimage in three days' time.



As to the planning, I had thought the last four-day would be an easy ‘coffee and cake run’. Well, not quite as it turned out to be! Especially after I discovered that there are 47 kilometres to go from Temple #88 to #1, not 18.9 as is stated in the usually reliable guide book. This meant I had to re-schedule the walks and overnight stops into two reasonably challenging days (1 & 3), and two softer ones (2 & 4), before returning to Tokushima and Tokyo.

I flew into Takamatsu yesterday afternoon, then took a taxi to Temple #80, the place where I had left off a month ago. There were five other henro at the Ebisu-ya besides me, one walking (on this third O Henro San), one cycling and three driving.

Just before the temple closed I purchased a pair of white henro pants. This makes my entire outfit authentic and complete. I feel very comfortable in it; unlike the way I felt when I set out from Temple #1 so long ago. . .

Temples #81 and 82 are located on a 400-meter high plateau west of the City of Takamatsu. It only took me 1 ½ hours to reach the first temple. The henro road to #82 was really lovely, a wide, smooth, slightly undulating forest trail and, for once, *no* spider webs!

The path to Temple #83 went downhill and into the southern part of Takamatsu, halfway between the city and the airport. Once on the flat ground, the henro road followed a lace-work of small county lanes and urban streets, wonderfully marked with hundreds of red henro stickers and little fat red arrows. Indeed, there were so many that I came to the conclusion that the marker must have been an obsessive-compulsive navigator. However, without these stickers I would have had some difficulties locating the temple.

I left Temple #83 a little after 1300 hrs to take on the last 10 kilometres. My pace soon slowed, because I wasn’t used to walking any longer. Though it wasn’t too slow, for I was always within eyesight of the other much younger and fitter looking henro, whom I’d met at the ryokan last night.

What I really was aware of was the much cooler temperature. That made walking a real joy. It had been on the chilly side in the morning though I raised a sweat on the way up to Temple #81, after which I cooled down, and there was a chill in the sea breeze as I trudged towards the hotel. What a nice change from the murderous heat of bygone days!

## Day 37 - 24 October - Sanuki City

Distance (km)	27	Vertical (m)	700	Time Taken (hrs)	7.5
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Temples	●	Yashimaji – 84 (Roof Island)
	●	Yakuriji – 85 (Eight Chestnuts)
	●	Shidoji – 86 (Fulfilling One’s Wish)
	●	Nagaoji – 87 (Long Tail)

A very pleasant and easy day ahead of a more challenging one. I could easily get used to this kind of walking.

I had a ‘late’ breakfast at the hotel (0700 hrs) and was on the road twenty minutes later. Temple #84 was only two kilometres away, located on the Yashima Plateau, a headland jutting into the Inland Seto Sea.

The first kilometre was reasonably flat, but then the path went steeply uphill to the 300 metre high plateau. It only took me 40 minutes to reach the temple.

There is a circular pond at the temple, said to have been dug by the Dainichi Nyorai during his training. In its centre is a small island where it is said he'd buried an emerald ball. The waters of the pond ran red at the end of the Genpei war in 1185 when the victorious soldiers washed the blood off their sabers.

From there the path went all the way down hill to sea level, then up again to Mt Goken-zan and Temple #85. I seriously thought of taking the ropeway up the 300 metre high mountain, but the 'pure' O Henro in me decided against it. There was a very large group of bus henros at the temple and I was surprised at my patience as I waited in the queue to have my book signed.

Then it went again downhill and along the shoreline to Sanuki City, which I reached just before 1300 hrs. By that time I had developed a serious craving for a cup of coffee or two.

Temple #86 must rank among the loveliest of the 88. It has a five tiered pagoda and extensive grounds. An older and a younger woman, and a small boy were handing out small osettai to pilgrims – two lollies artfully wrapped in colorful paper. A very old woman, her back bent deeper than horizontal, struggled to get up the steps to the Hondo, supported by an elderly woman. I helped them both to walk down the steps.

My coffee cravings were satisfied when I came to the 'Members' Café', decorated in an art-deco style. I didn't know any better so I ordered a coffee, and asked whether they had any cake (it only dawned on me then that it really must have been an exclusive members' club, not just a café by name). The response to the questions was 'yes' to the first, and 'sorry' to the other. The coffee was delivered on a tray beautifully laid out with a small vase of fresh flowers, then I heard the waitress on the phone talking to someone about cakes.

In the meantime, a very old woman sat herself down at my table and began to talk to me incessantly, even though I told her 'sumimasen, nihongo ga wakarimasen'. An equally old man, maybe her husband, sat nearby and watched a cycle race in Switzerland on a wide screen. Then the young waitress came back with an apology, and presented me with two delicious sweet bean paste sweets, one of which the old woman skillfully opened with her arthritic fingers.

Coffee and sweets downed I got ready to leave and got out my wallet to pay. But the old man waved the money away, saying it was an osettai. Such lovely people!

The last few kilometres to Temple #87 made for pleasant walking. The guidebook got it wrong again, and instead the 12 kilometres which it claimed to be to the next temple, it was barely seven. That was a nice change. The weather was overcast, warm but not too hot, and the road was flat with little traffic. On the way I met the 'cycle henro' from two days ago who greeted me like a long lost friend.

The Azumaya Ryokan is directly opposite Temple #87. I was watching TV just before dinner when Nahoko rang and warned me about the 'eccentric old woman' who runs the ryokan. I already had experienced her eccentricity. She'd even called Nahoko (who had made the booking) to inform her of my safe arrival. At any rate, she had the guests laughing long and hard at dinnertime with her stories. I gave Nahoko the phone number for the intended hotel tomorrow, and she soon rang me back to confirm the booking. However, she was told by the receptionist it was actually a 'love hotel'. An old henro at a love hotel???? That's a new one!!!

P.S. The eccentric lady just came to my room to give me the obentoo for tomorrow's breakfast, and returned the 500 yen I'd paid for the beer – the beer was an osettai, she said.

## Day 38 - 25 October - Higashi-kagawa City

Distance (km) 42 Vertical (m) 800 Time Taken (hrs) 9.5

Temples ● Ookuboji – 88 (Large Hollow)

The last of the hard stages, and the second last day of my journey!

I had an other marathon distance ahead of me that included a sizeable mountain to climb (Mt Nyotai-san – 774 metres). So I had decided on an early start.

The eccentric lady had the place alarmed, and a bell went off as I tried to sneak out at 0530 hrs. She woke and quickly got dressed to see me out onto the street, where I said my prayers before setting out for the day.

The first hour went gently uphill on an auto route, and I covered quite a few kilometres. I wore again the ‘road warrior’s outfit’, sleeveless vest and khaki cargo pants. A couple of people asked me whether I wasn’t too cold in the chill of the morning, but I felt very comfortable (tomorrow I shall again wear the more genteel O Henro whites). The second hour took me into the mountains, still on a good road.

During the third hour I experienced the first and only place on my 1,200 kilometre pilgrimage that deserved to be called ‘henro korogashi’ – a ‘place where henro fall down’. The path up the upper slopes of Mt Nyotai-san was steep and frequently covered with loose rocks and soil, requiring a lot of care. Strangely, none of the guidebooks mention this scramble, making me wondering whether the authors may have been using the longer, more gentle ‘old pilgrim’ route.

After studying the map the day before I had come to the conclusion that Temple #88 would be at or near the mountaintop, given its close lateral proximity to My Nyotai-san. But I was wrong with my assumption. The two places are indeed close together on the map, but from Nyotai-san a steep path leads down to the temple, about 300 metres below the summit. Near the temple I encountered a beautiful slim snake, in Japan considered to be a messenger of the Gods, which I took as a good omen.

It felt strange to be at the last temple of my journey. I felt no elation at having achieved this goal, just a quiet gratitude to higher powers for having guided me to this place, and for having me bestowed with their blessings. I bowed deeply at the gate and thanked the Kooboo Daishi for having guided me to this temple, and asked him to allow me to worship at this sacred place.

I said my Heart Sutra, then offered a special prayer to the Kooboo Daishi and all the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and Jizoo Bosatsu for their guidance, protection, blessings, teachings and support during the journey. A tear or two came to my eyes as I watched the temple book being signed at the very last page, then I smiled.

I left the first hawk-eye bracelet that Sadako and her friends had given me at the feet of the granite statue of Kooboo Daishi, and offered my prayers of thanks.

The weather had been overcast all day long, and would remain so for the rest of the day. But as I was at the temple, the sun briefly broke through the clouds, adding luster to the gold of the gingko trees and red of the cherry trees. Thank you for this special gift, Kooboo Daishi and the Buddhas!

I would have loved to stay longer at the temple (I'd already been there for 45 minutes), but I still had 27 kilometres to go, mainly downhill and on flat terrain, so I had to move on.

For the rest of the day I kept a strict walking regime – 50 minutes walking, 10 minutes rest, with food and water intake every hour. I made good headway this way.

Less than half an hour before reaching the Hotel Ocean came across the one and only café of the day (it was Sunday after all) and I enjoyed a hot coffee and a marron cake. The waitress asked me how far I'd be going, and when I was unable to answer immediately she suggested it would be Temple #1. I let it pass, so I didn't have to lie. I really couldn't have told her I'd be spending the night at the nearby Love Hotel.

Nahoko had been right, Love Hotels are usually very comfortable and the bathrooms 'gorgeous'. This one certainly lived up to expectations, a huge room, separate bathroom and toilet, it even had a sauna – all that for 4,000 yen. (Sorry, no dinner and breakfast is being served at such establishments).

For dinner I went to the nearby eatery where I had an amazing seafood/sashimi meal. Just outside the kitchen are large tanks with many different species of fish destined for the table. You can't get much fresher than that!

Right now I am relaxing, with the second large glass of French Pinot Gris. Maybe I will have a third. Feet, body etc. are in great shape. That's what I call happy walking.

## Day 39 - 26 October - Tokushima

Distance (km)	17	Vertical (m)	350	Time Taken (hrs)	3.5
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Temples	●	Ryoozenji – 1 (Vultures Peak)
	●	Gokurakuji – 2 (Pure Land)

I think the Kooboo Daishi played his last joke on me. I had imagined ending my journey on a beautiful sunny autumn day, given the excess of heat and sun I was subjected to through my journey.

But today it rained. The fourth rainy day of my O Henro San to be exact. It didn't rain heavily, though just enough to be a nuisance and to make me wear the rain poncho.

I'd slept very well last night. It was quiet and the bed was very comfortable. Though I discovered a couple of cockroaches this morning – nothing can be perfect, I guess.

It was pitch black when I left the hotel at 0530 hrs, and it was somewhat difficult to make out the O Henro signs along the route. Though once I reached the forest, the trail was well defined, and the first grey of the morning announced a new day.

It took me a little over an hour to reach the 350 meter high Osaka-toge (pass), and from here it would go downhill all the way.

A feeling of elation came over me as I contemplated my journey, and the becoming of a 'holy man', as Nahoko had called me. With a loud voice I shouted 'Kooboo Daishi – arigatoo gosaimasu' across the broad valley.

It didn't take me long to go past Temple #3 (Konsenji), then I turned left for the four kilometre long 'homestretch'. My feeling of elation giving way to more thoughtful contemplation.

The one wish I had brought with me to this journey was for the Kooboo Daishi to teach me what I needed to know. I guess I learned much during the journey, patience, forgiveness, and I am feeling now free and easy towards my family, especially Christophe. These are very important changes. But the key message I received in a subtle yet strong way is that I need to discover the Buddha in me. This, I believe, is the main message from the Kooboo Daishi to me. I don't know how to achieve it at this stage, but I know it will come to me when I am ready for it, and when I am receptive.

My outward behavior may have changed too and may continue to do so in the future. Because I will continue to be on my pilgrimage, even after my return to Australia, for I have commenced the second O Henro San this morning, and therefore will continue to be on the journey. That means the Ten Commandments of the pilgrimage will continue to apply for me when I return to my 'normal' life – whatever 'normal' may mean.

I was less than one kilometre from the Ryoozenji Temple when I stopped for coffee and cake. I felt a little like a solo sailor who had been to sea for a long time and was longing for land, yet hesitating to make landfall – I didn't wish for my journey to end, now that I was so close.

Tears came into my eyes when I bowed at the temple gates and said my prayers. It was just on 0900 hrs on a grey morning.

I didn't feel the same emotions of elation I had felt at Temple #88, this time it felt like a quiet homecoming. A nun signed my temple book, and gave me information about the trip to Koya San, where the Kooboo Daishi is in eternal meditation, to complete my journey. Noticing my wet hat, the nun gave me the last osettai of this O Henro San – a plastic cover. I did have one, packed away, but I couldn't refuse this gift to the Kooboo Daishi.

Then I packed my backpack and embarked on the second O Henro San. Once completed one circle of the 88 temples, the journey is ongoing. It is impossible to come to Temple #1 and shed the new person one had become like an old skin.

So my O Henro San will be continuing. It will be a journey for the rest of my life, and I may even complete a second circle in the future – or maybe more.

I walked the 1.2 kilometres through the rain to the Gorakuji, Temple #2. It is a lovely little temple with beautiful gardens, though I couldn't recall any details from my previous visit. I guess I was just too overwhelmed/frightened by the occasion to take anything in. I left my trusted kongozue, the walking staff outside the Honzo, to be burnt in a sacred fire. It felt strange being without the staff. Then I received the second set of stamps on the Temple Book's page for Temple #2.

Outside the stamp office I met a couple of middle-aged people who'd just embarked on their first O Henro San (by car). As a 'veteran' I wished them 'gambatte kudasai' and 'o kyoo tsugette'.

I sent Nahoko a message to let her know I had reached my goal. Some of it had been tough and made me tough, but I had never thought of quitting. This was her response:

'Armin! Congratulations! I really admire you. And proud of you. I am lucky to be your partner  
♥ I love you and wait for you back here. Nahoko'.

## Epilogue

Most henro will visit Koya San as part of their journey, because without visiting the place founded by the Kuukai, and where he entered eternal meditation, the journey won't be complete.

Some go before the pilgrimage to seek the Kooboo Daishi's support and blessings for the journey ahead, some do it after the journey to thank him and to 'report' on the completion of the journey, some even go there a few times.

So Nahoko and I journeyed to Koya San, four days before my return to Australia. Koya San is located in a beautiful mountainous area about 1 ½ hours' drive south east of Osaka. It consists of a huge area, maybe three by five kilometres, and there are more than one hundred temples, which, apart from providing the spiritual stuff, are also providing accommodation to henros and tourists.

I felt very privileged to have Nahoko accompany me on this last part of the journey. She, on the other hand, said she was grateful that I wanted her with me.

Nahoko had booked us into the Fugenin Temple. The accommodation, service and vegetarian meals, cooked based on age-old recipes, was simply amazing.

We'd flown to Osaka where we hired a car and made our way into the mountains. It was late afternoon when we arrived at the little town, just in time for a meal then a most enjoyable hot bath. Nahoko had told the monks we were married (what's the difference anyway?) to ensure we could use the ofuro reserved for couples and families.

We got up early the following morning to attend the 0630 hrs service, at the end of which we were granted the privilege of being shown a tiny fragment of the Buddha's bone. The piece, the only one of its kind in Japan, had been given as a gift by a temple in western Nepal and had travelled by land and sea along the Silk Road and the Sea of Japan.

After breakfast we walked to the Okunoin, the Kooboo Daishi's mausoleum, and the place where he entered eternal meditation. We walked along the flag stone paved walkway through a forest of '500,000' graves, a forest where the ashes of at least 100,000 people had been scattered.

I had been unsure about wearing the O Henro San clothing, but Nahoko encouraged me to do so. There were a few other henro making their way to the Okunoin, though I didn't think there were any walking henro among them, apart from me.

We meditated and said our prayers at the Okunoin. Then I read the Heart Sutra for the very last time, and canted three times 'Namu Daishi Henjoo Kongo' – I dedicate my life to the Kooboo Daishi. Then I thanked him for His guidance, protection and learning experiences he had bestowed upon me, and asked for His ongoing blessings – to Nahoko and me, my children and grand-children, family, friends, colleagues, and the people of Japan, Australia, and the entire world. Contrary to what I had anticipated, there wasn't a very strong energy at the mausoleum, or maybe the distractions of the past four weeks might have blunted my perception.

Though when I had the last of the pages of my temple book signed and the monk congratulated me on my achievement, a couple of tears rolled down my cheeks.

It was very cold on the mountain, the exact opposite to what I had endured during the first weeks of the O Henro San. We walked back to our temple where I changed into something warmer, then we enjoyed what the town of Koya San had to offer: the main temple, the Kongobuji, the tiny Myo Shrine, place of worship of the Niutsuhime-no-Mikoto, the younger

sister of Amaterasu, who is one of the three deities protecting the Koya San area, and the Reohokan Museum.

We left early the next morning to make our way to the Ise Shrine, Japan's most important shrine where the Goddess Amaterasu, her parents, and lesser deities are worshipped. Then we took the shinkansen from Nagoya for our return to Tokyo.

## A Brief Biography of Kooboo Daishi (The Monk Kuukai) (b. 774)

- 774 Born into the Saeki Clan, a declining aristocratic family, at Temple #75 (Zentsuujii) in Kagawa Prefecture.
- 788 Began study of Chinese classics under the direction of his uncle.
- 791 Entered college in Nara. About two years later left school, became a monk, and spent time as a wandering ascetic.
- 797 Committed himself to Buddhism and wrote Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings (Sangoo Shiiki) in which he compared Buddhism with Confucianism and Taoism. Argues for the superiority of Buddhism.
- 797-804 It is assumed he lived as a travelling ascetic. During this time he might have visited Mt. Koya-san for the first time as well as have spent time training at Temple #21, Tairuujii, and a cave (Mikura-doo) at Cape Muroto Misaki in Shikoku.
- 804 Left for China with the plan to stay for 20 years to study Esoteric Buddhism.
- 806 Returned to Japan after becoming the 8<sup>th</sup> Patriarch of Esoteric Buddhism. During his time in China, he studied under the previous Patriarch, Keika (Hui-kuo) at a temple called Shooryuujii.
- 809 Was allowed to leave Kyushu and go to Kyoto to reside at Takaosanji (later known as Jingoji). He stayed there until 823.
- 810 Was appointed as an administrative head of Toodaiji in Nara and acted as such until 813.
- 816 Received the Emperor's permission to use Koya-san.
- 819 The formal consecration of Mt. Koya-san.
- 821 Directed the reconstruction of the Manno-ike reservoir.
- 823 Moved his Headquarters to Toji Temple.



- 824 Was officially appointed administrative head in charge of the construction of the Toji Temple.
- 828 Opened the School of Arts and Sciences (Shugei shuchi-in) in Kyoto open to all students, regardless of their social status and economic means.
- 835 Entered eternal meditation at Mt. Koya-san.
- 921 Received the honorary name of Kooboo Daishi from Emperor Daigo (885-930).

## Daily Walking Summary

Day	No Temples	Distance (km)	Vertical (m)	Other Distance (km)	Other Vertical (m)	Total Distance (km)	Total Vertical (m)	Time (hrs)
1	6	16	100			16	100	6
2	5	21	300			21	300	10
3	2	34	1,500			34	1,500	11.5
4	6	30	400			30	400	9.5
5	2	24	1,000			24	1,000	9.5
6	2	43	1,100			43	1,100	12
7	0	47	400			47	400	11
8	1	14	300	12	200	26	500	7
9	1	10	200			10	200	2
10	2	43	1,000			43	1,000	12.5
11	1	38	100			38	100	10
12	4	33	600			33	600	11.5
13	3	20	200			20	200	6.5
14	1	40	600			40	600	9
15	1	40	600			40	600	10
16	0	46	300			46	300	11.5
17	1	14	200			14	200	3
18	0	42	700			42	700	11
19	2	45	600			45	600	12
20	0	40	600			40	600	10
21	3	25	600			25	600	7.5
22	0	29	500			29	500	7.5
23	1	23	700			23	700	7
24	3	42	1,100			42	1,100	11
25	4	18	100			18	100	6.5
26	2	24	100			24	100	8.5
27	5	35	400			35	400	11
28	1	19	100			19	100	6
29	5	27	800			27	800	9
30	1	20	800			20	800	6.5

Day	No Temples	Distance (km)	Vertical (m)	Other Distance (km)	Other Vertical (m)	Total Distance (km)	Total Vertical (m)	Time (hrs)
31	1	11	800			11	800	4.5
32	0	8	0	15	900	23	900	10
33	1	9	0			9	0	2
34	8	26	300			26	300	10.5
35	5	27	100			27	100	10
36	3	35	600			35	600	9.5
37	4	27	700			27	700	7.5
38	1	42	800			42	800	9.5
39	2	17	350			17	350	3.5
					<b>Total</b>	<b>1,131</b>	<b>20,750</b>	<b>333</b>