

My Shikoku O Henro San Pilgrimage #2 – 2011-2014

By Armin Howald

Day 1 – 12 October 2011 – Kamiita Town

| Distance (km) | 19.6 | Vertical (m) | 200 | Time Taken (hrs) | 6.5 |
|---------------|--|--------------|-----|------------------|-----|
| Temples | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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) | | | | |
| Accommodation | Minshuku Kotobuki-Shokudoo | | | 2 * | |

The first day of my second O Henro San began very early – 0420 hrs to be exact. I left my beautiful Nahoko's side, showered and had a cup of tea. Then I walked through the deserted streets of Kitami to the railway station.

There were few people at the station, and it was eerily quiet. I heard the man across the tracks clear his throat, and the rustling of a breakfast paper bag.

I arrived early enough at the Haneda Airport to have breakfast. The flight to Tokushima was on time, as flights usually are in Japan.

The question that I am asking myself if *why* I am doing the O Henro San for the second time. The answer is the same that I came up with two years ago: 'I don't know why I am undertaking this journey, but I trust its purpose will be shown to me along the way'.

The response to the identical question on my first O Henro San was that I needed to discover the Buddha in me. I don't believe I have done as much in this direction as I ought to have done. Though there have been significant changes in me. I feel it deep inside, and Nahoko and some others have noticed it too. I think I have become a little kinder to myself and others, maybe a little more patient, and I can accept myself a little better than I was able to do before.

There were a few elderly (bus) henros at the Haneda airport, looking pristinely clean in their starched and ironed whites. I'm sure that mine, the ones I wore on my first O Henro San time, would never look as white as theirs again. My white bag for the temple paraphernalia (zudabukuro) has seen better times, and the sugegasa, the conical straw hat is broken in a few places. I don't think it will last the second journey around the island.

In some ways it is unfortunate that I have to do the second O Henro San in stages since I feel that a pilgrim gets the best possible results though doing it in one part. For this, my second journey, I intend to do it in four stages with a completion in 2014 in mind. After that, when I am retired, I can do it again in one stretch at the time.

At the end of the day. . .

The first day on the road wasn't too taxing, just a decent leg-stretch - close to twenty kilometres with a few benign hills thrown in for good measure. No blisters on my feet, not that I expected any as I am wearing the same shoes I wore on the previous journey.

The first temple, Ryoozenji, always reminds me a little at Shinjuku Station. Middle aged and elderly (mainly female) bus henros jostling for position to get their gear, as if they fear to be left behind by their respective tour buses. And there is, of course, a photographer on site to snap pictures of the happy groups, and there is a feeling of great anticipation. There were also a few walking henros preparing themselves for the journey among the crowd.

The kind woman at the stamp office gave me a kongoo-zue, a walking stick with a little bell as an *osettai*, a gift to a henro. I was really touched by this gesture. She seemed surprised that I, a *gaijin*, was doing my second journey.

I didn't stop to pray at the second temple, having been there and received the stamp in my temple book, two years ago.

Temples #3, 4 and 5 were 'routine' though I was struggling with the wording of the Heart Sutra that needs to be recited both at the temple of the main Deity (Hondo), and Kooboo Daishi's temple (in that order). At Temple #3 I caught up with a group of bus henros I'd met at Temples 1 and 2. They insisted on a group photo with me at the centre, especially once they realised that I was on my second O Henro San. I took it they were on their first journey around the island.

Temple #3 is very important to both Nahoko and me, since its main Deity, Dainichi Nyorai, is our special protector.

Compared with 2009, where I got lost on my way to Temples 4 and 5, I didn't encounter any trouble and was well ahead of time towards the end of the afternoon. So I decided to go past the Minshuku Kotobuki-Shokudoo where Nahoko had booked me in for the night to Temple #6, then walk back to the accommodation at a leisurely pace.

At Temple #6 I met a female henro about my age that is doing the pilgrimage for the first time. She spoke good English. She is doing it independently by bus and taxi, as well as a little walking. She gave me some food as an *osettai*. I now have so much food, I don't think I'll need to buy tomorrow's lunch.

The woman apologized for her direct and inquisitive questioning that was about to come, then asked: 'what are you bringing to Shikoku and the O Henro San?' Her question startled me for a moment.

'I'm not bringing much of myself to Shikoku, I began. I am here to find myself and learn what I am destined to learn'.

'However, I believe I am enriching the lives of my friends in Japan through just being their friend, and through helping them to create opportunities to change their lives and themselves for the better. I also provide opportunities to my Japanese friends to experience the wilderness of Tasmania as part of their personal growth'.

'Are you Christian?' she asked.

'No'.

'Buddhist'?

'I don't think so. Maybe I am just a free thinker, a free spirit, with a strong leaning towards Buddhism'.

This response seemed to satisfy her, and she admitted that she held similar views about her own spirituality.

The Minshuku Kotobuki-Shokudoo is built for at least 40 people, but I am the only guest tonight. This is probably not surprising, for the Minshuku has definitely seen better days. It isn't quite at the 'I'd never take Nahoko there' standard, just a little bit above. The large kitchen (not used today) wouldn't pass an inspection by an Australian Local Council, toilets are so-so, but the overnight stay is reasonably cheap.

Nahoko rang just as I was sitting down to a very filling and delicious hot-pot (*nabe*) and a bottle of Asahi Dry. She was in a rush to get back to work, but I loved the feeling of being connected with this beautiful woman.

I am reasonably clean and hope to smell that way too, and the white clothes are freshly laundered and dried. I think I am ready for tomorrow. . .

Day 2 – 13 October 2011 – Yoshinogawa City

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|---------------|---|--------------|-----|------------------|-----|
| Distance (km) | 27.5 | Vertical (m) | 400 | Time Taken (hrs) | 9.0 |
| Temples | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Juurakuji – 7 (Ten Joys) • Kumadainichi – 8 (Bear Valley) • Hoorinji – 9 (Dharma Wheel) • Kirihataji – 10 (Cut Cloth) • Fujiidera – 11 (Wisteria) | | | | |
| Accommodation | Yoshino Ryokan | | | | 3 * |

Breakfast was at 0620 hrs, and I was on the road twenty minutes later. The breakfast was really enjoyable, it consisted of no less than eight dishes of rice, vegetables and soup. No fish, though. Maybe the hosts had thought, after me not eating meat last night (though I ate the fish) that I was a pure vegetarian.

The road went in a westerly direction, and I managed to lose my way to both Temples 6 and 8 through not paying attention to the multitude of road markers indicating the Henro Trail. So much for my concentration when I don't need to concentrate. When I do concentrate I usually don't lose my way. . .

At Temple #8 I caught up with three male and one female henros. The woman (I had given her directions to Temple 6 the previous day) gave me as an *osettai* a can of delicious iced coffee.

Temple #9 is a small and pretty temple with a colorful small ginkgo tree in its centre. I gave Nahoko a quick call, I just wanted to hear her voice and say that I loved her. She was busy cleaning her perennially clean house, then she'll have to prepare for tonight's lecture.

Two years ago I found Temple #10 a huge challenge, because I climbed the 300 odd steps in the midst of a burning hot day. Today, under a cloudy sky and temperatures in the high tens it was a breeze. The temple certainly warrants a closer look, for it is quite beautiful and the ancient wooden tower at its highest point was transported to this site from Osaka in 1873.

It began to drizzle as I made my way down the steps from Temple #10 and, when I had lunch at the Udon-tei halfway to the Yoshinogawa River, it poured. I ordered udon with octopus at the eatery; the udon was very nice, but the fish quite inedible although the *taste* of it was OK. Shoe leather or maybe the flesh of a Tasmanian Native Hen might have been tenderer than the tentacles of this fish.

I crossed the left arm of the Yoshinogawa River and entered the low-lying, fertile fields of the river flats. A tractor was tilling a nearby field and my nostrils were filled with the beautiful perfume of freshly tilled earth, an scent which I had not smelled since I was a little boy picking up potatoes on a neighboring farm in Ostermundigen, Switzerland, almost 60 years ago.

The fields were tilled and cared for with great precision and big efforts. Yet, in the not too distant past a huge flood must have washed the crops and fields away, as was evidenced by river-borne debris three metres up in the trees. I was filled with admiration for these tough people who would not succumb to the ravages of nature.

Two kilometres from the last temple of the day I encountered the first café on the journey so far. A temptation too great to resist. I asked about the availability of cake but was told by the owner none was to be had. So I settled just for coffee. Yet, five minutes later, his wife walked in with one of my favorite cakes: sponge with a chestnut filling which he presented me as an *osettai*. Then he offered me a cup of very special roasted tea from somewhere in Shikoku, and a can of cold tea for the road. He would only accept 400 yen for the coffee. . . such a generous man. I said a little prayer of thanks to the Kooboo Daishi, asking to give him His blessings.

Temple 11 is an other real jewel, situated at the foot of the formidable mountain range that awaits me for tomorrow. At the back of the temple is a little path that leads to a beautiful shrine located in a little gully with small waterfalls and hanging rocks.

The Yoshino Ryokan near the temple, where I had stayed two years ago is really nice and comfortable. I was given a corner room with a view over the setting sun, a hot bath, and my clothes are in the *sentakki* – life is good.

There were eight walking henros staying overnight, and we met at the dinner table. Conversation was a little subdued, even among the Japanese, and everybody went to bed early.

As to my spiritual journey, nothing much seems to be happening so far. It's not like it was in 2009. Maybe I arrived at the beginning of this pilgrimage with too great an expectation for changes, which so far haven't materialized. Maybe I need to concentrate on the more subtle changes that will come to me as the journey progresses.

Day 3 – 14 October 2011 – Kamiyama Town

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|---------------|-------------------------------------|--------------|-------|------------------|-----|
| Distance (km) | 25.4 | Vertical (m) | 1,200 | Time Taken (hrs) | 8.5 |
| Temples | • Shoosanji – 12 (Burning Mountain) | | | | |
| Accommodation | Minshuku Tsuji-soo | | | 2 * | |

The weather forecasters got it right for today – *ame* (rain).

I am at the Minshuku Tsuji-soo in Kamiyama Town west of Tokushima and drying out, a can of Asahi Dry in front of me; clothes are in the washing machine, and I have survived what I consider to be the most challenging temple of the O Henro San. It took me just 4 ½ hours to reach this mountain top temple, a total climb of 1,200 metres and a distance of 13.4 kilometres.

I am happy.

I headed up the mountain straight after breakfast, at 0630 hrs. The trail was well maintained and no steeper than the steepest part of the Truganinni Track in Hobart, and I gained height quickly. An hour later, at the Choodo-an Temple it began to drizzle but I decided against taking the rain poncho out, which makes me sweat too much. From here on there were thirty minutes of beautiful ridge walking, flat and a little up and down (though more up than down) and I moved at a fast pace. Then the track suddenly plunged steeply down to the Ryuusui-an Temple. Here I donned the rain gear, because it had begun to rain hard.

From the temple the track went steadily upwards for 250 metres to the Jooren-an with the beautiful statue of the Kooboo Daishi. The rain was now mercilessly pelting down.

I had promised my friend from Hobart, Phil Lowe, the eccentric clarinet player from the Salamanca Place to sing the *You'll Never Walk Alone* for him on my journey. I'd seen Phil at the Markets as he made his preparations to go back to the UK, where he asked me what song he should play as his farewell present to me. I chose that song and listened to it as I lost myself in the crowd. I sang the song into the rain but, somehow, it didn't feel right on this occasion.

One of the 'three musketeers', the henros from Temple #8 caught up with me near Jooren-an and we played 'tag' during the last hour to the temple. He was quicker uphill, I on the flat and downhill. Ultimately we reached the Temple together. Little black frogs jumped across the track, and small crabs with blue bodies and white legs lifted their tiny pincers in a menacing manner as I rushed past.

From Jooren-an it went 300 metres down to Route 43, then 300 up to the Shoosanji Temple. The track resembled a little rivulet, rain pelting down incessantly.

The last 500 metres to Temple #12 is a well kept flat gravel path guarded by statues of warriors, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. I enjoyed the peace of this cloud shrouded mountain temple, listening to the falling rain on my hat, the crunching of gravel under my feet and my breathing.

Mountain temples are very special to me, and Shoosanji is no exception. Shrouded in clouds, and surrounded by huge, ageless mountain cedars.

I had planned to climb up to the Okunoin Temple on top of the 'Bear Mountain', but this caused alarm with the monk at the stamp office. He strongly counseled against it, saying it was too slippery and dangerous to attempt in such atrocious weather conditions. I was still in two minds about going because the rain had temporarily ceased but, two minutes later, with rain pelting down again, I decided to let prudence reign. I'm sure the monk breathed a sigh of relief. Maybe I'll try the Okunoin again in 2015, during my third O Henro San.

With time on hand I strolled around the temple. It is truly beautiful! Then, feeling the cold through my thin wet cotton clothing, I decided to head down the valley.

The minshuku took some finding, and I was assisted by a kind young woman from a nearby shop who braved the rain to show me the way. I felt a little awful, because she got wet.

Communication with the woman at the minshuku is slightly comical. She speaks in a strong local dialect and when I told her I didn't speak any Japanese (*sumimasen, nihongo ga wakarimasen*) she simply spoke louder (I'm not deaf, just ignorant of Nihongo!!). So

what! I got my bath, clothes are being washed in the machine, and I am now into my second can of (Kirin) beer.

Day 4 - 15 October 2011 – Tokushima City

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|---------------|---|--------------|-----------------|------------------|-----|
| Distance (km) | 29.8 | Vertical (m) | 300 | Time Taken (hrs) | 9.0 |
| Temples | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dainichiji – 13 (Temple of the Great Sun) • Joorakuji – 14 (Everlasting Peace) • Kokubunji – 15 (Official State) • Kan-onji – 16 (Avalokitesvara) • Idoji – 17 (Well) | | | | |
| Accommodation | Toyoko-Inn (Tokushima) | | 5,900 Yen (B&B) | | 3 * |

Just returned from dinner in Tokushima City – a seafood curry and salad at the COCOcurry restaurant near the station, followed by coffee and cake at the Tully’s Coffee House. The ‘Mont-Blanc’ Cake (sponge cake with cream and chestnut puree) wasn’t the greatest I’d ever had, but it had to do.

Nahoko had booked me into the Toyoko-Inn close to the Tokushima Station. She chose well, as she always does: 5,900 yen (about \$72) for a spotlessly clean (tiny) room, breakfast included. I don’t think I could get anything similar in Australia for that price.

Today I was on the road by 0650 hrs. First there was a steady ascent to the top of a tributary valley to the Akai Gawa (River) Valley, then along this wide Akai Gawa to Temple #13. The 14 kilometre walk took me three hours. It wasn’t a walk for people suffering from arachnophobia, for huge yellow/red/green/black spiders hung in large nets everywhere, ready to pounce on unsuspecting victims (they don’t eat henros, though, I believe).

At Temple #13 a small, stout western woman asked me whether I was Swiss. I confessed I was. ‘So you are the Swiss man who is doing the O Henro San for the second time that I’d heard of’, she exclaimed.

I tried to convince her that it couldn’t have been me for, to the best of my knowledge I hadn’t told anybody about my land of origin. But my memory might be slipping, or indeed I may have a ‘Doppelgänger’. It turned out that she was Swiss too, from the town of Schaffhausen, who is doing part of the O Henro San with an other Swiss friend, before going to work as an English teacher in the tsunami devastated Tohoku Region.

Liselotte, the Swiss woman had stayed at the Shoosanji the night before and confirmed that the path to the Okunoin temple was indeed treacherous. She had attempted to climb the mountain in *dry* weather but was beaten by the slippery conditions halfway up to the temple.

Together we walked to Temple #14, before saying goodbye.

Temples #14 to #17, on the rural western fringes of Tokushima, are all small and surrounded by urban sprawl. There was a downpour on the way to Temple #17 that gave me time for a lunchtime snack, two rice balls bought at the local Lawson Station.

At Temple #17 I encountered the old henro who I’d met at the Shoosanji Temple yesterday. He has brocade *osame-fuda* (name slips) that indicates he has done the O Henro San more than 100 times. His clothes were pristine white including his walking shoes – I don’t know how he does it, dirt seems to follow me and stick to me wherever I go.

There was a little matsuri (festival) at the shrine adjacent to Temple #14 and I took a little time out to enjoy the festivities. Then I headed for Central Tokushima.

I don't think I've done my feet any favour walking in wet shoes and socks for two days. It definitely feels like blisters. I'm trying to dry the shoes with a hair-dryer; the smell prevailing in the room is, well. . . Though I'm trying to dull my senses with two large cans of Kirin beer.

I reached the hotel around 1600 hrs and talked briefly to Nahoko. Yesterday's rains seem to have shifted to Tokyo. Tomorrow I shall again be with my beautiful wife. . .

Day 5 - 16 October 2011 – Tokushima Airport

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|---------------|--|--------------|-----|------------------|-----|
| Distance (km) | 22.7 | Vertical (m) | 200 | Time Taken (hrs) | 6.0 |
| Temples | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Onzanji – 18 (Gratitude Mountain) • Tatsueji – 19 (Arising a Bay) | | | | |

I'm feeling a little melancholic because this year's stage of the O Henro San has come to an end. Though I am already planning for it to continue in October of next year, from Temple #19 to Kochi.

Tatsue-ji is effectively the end of Tokushima's 'urban' temples. To me it feels to that the 'real' O Henro San begins here: the beautiful mountain temples #20 and #21, followed by endless roads, with very few temples along the way, until Temple #54 at Imabari.

Breakfast wasn't until 0700 hrs, so I enjoyed the luxury of an additional hour in bed. Shoes and socks were dry by now. Half an hour later I said my prayers outside the hotel, as I usually do at the beginning of every walking day. I faced where I'd come from the previous day and thanked the Kooboo Daishi for the protection and teachings He'd afforded me on the previous day. Then I turned to where my journey would take me on the day and asked for His blessings - for me, for Nahoko, my children and grand-children, my friends in Japan, Australia and around the world, family members (deceased and alive), colleagues, and the people of Japan, Australia and the world and, especially, the victims of the 3/11 (earthquake and tsunami disaster in the Tohoku Region). Then I recommenced my journey.

It was Sunday morning and the streets were quiet, businesses shut. I soon reached Route 55 that would take me almost to Temple #18.

Route 55 must be Tokushima's 'car city' because, along its entire length to Route 33 (where the turnoff to Temple #18 is located), is lined with car dealerships.

One hour into today's walk, a kind man with dreadful teeth stopped his bicycle to shake my hand and wish me '*o kyoo tsugette*' – take care. Then he presented me with a small loaf of bread that is destined to become my lunch.

The dreadful weather of the last few days had given way to a clear, sunny morning, and I moved at a brisk pace. A cooling breeze from behind and to the right added to the progress.

Last time it took me more than an hour to find Temple #18, no such chance this time 'round. I said my prayers, took a few photos, then headed down the hill, turned right at the covered cattle pens, then entered one of the most beautiful bamboo forests I had ever seen in Japan.

In Tatsue Town near Temple #19, before crossing the Tatsue River on the red bridge, I prayed to the Kooboo Daishi to give me a pure heart and make me worthy of crossing the bridge. An old henro legend has it that those unworthy of crossing the bridge will be prevented by the Master to do so.

Close to Temple #19 I again encountered the old henro from the last two days, still resplendent in his whites and his very special walking staff. He said he'd take a taxi to the mountain temple #20, then we bowed politely and wished each other *o kyoo tsugette*.

I had planned for an early return to Tokushima and, if possible, an earlier flight back to Tokyo. However, I soon discovered that trains and buses ran *very* infrequently given it was Sunday, and there weren't any taxis to be seen. So I adopted the 'old henro's solution': '*aruite de*' - walking!

I walked north on Route 55 until, 1 ½ hours later and eight kilometers closer to Tokushima, I was able to flag down the first taxi that came in sight.

In the two hours at the airport I had the first sashimi meal since coming to Japan. The fish was a little chewy and the Yamamomo (fruit) wine of questionable quality, but I really enjoyed the meal.

So, to my final thoughts for this part of the journey. There's no question that I loved to be on the road again – I seem to find inner peace as I walk the Henro Trail. Just emptying my mind, being at peace with the world and myself.

I will be resuming my journey this time next year, and I will be ready for any changes that the journey may bring to me. The five days on the road haven't created the same emotional release that I experienced at this stage two years ago, but I am certain there have been changes in me that I will recognize over time.

It's time to board the flight to Tokyo. Japanese flights always seem to run on time.

Day 6 – 2012 – 25 September 2012 – Near Tairyuuji

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|---------------|---|--------------|--------------------|------------------|-----|
| Distance (km) | 18.2 | Vertical (m) | 1,100 | Time Taken (hrs) | 6.5 |
| Temples | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kakurinji – 20 (Crane Forest) • Tairyuji – 21 (Great Dragon) | | | | |
| Accommodation | Sakaguchi-ya | | 5,400 Yen (D, B&B) | | 3 * |

I'm on the road again, for the second stage of my second O Henro San.

I had to get up early, 0340 hrs to be exact, to catch the 0453 hrs 'Local' at the Seijogakuen-mae Station. I didn't sleep all that well last night, probably because of my anticipation of the journey ahead. The night was hot, there was a thunderstorm, and Nahoko was restless too.

I dreamt I was in some kind of footrace with many participating, but when I got to starting line all runners had already left. So I walked on my own, trying to catch up with the others. Somewhere along the way a blonde woman appeared out of nowhere and began to kiss me passionately, wanting to make love with me. I told her to stop and walked away. Then I came to a dangerous river, with only a very narrow spillway leading across. I went in anyway, and the waters receded and it was easy for me to cross. Then, just as I had caught up to the back markers of the race, I was given a heavy wheelbarrow to push. That slowed me down again, but I kept pushing on. . .

Nahoko always says that my dreams are reflections of my inner fears.

I had a quick breakfast, then crawled into bed for our last hug. Nahoko said she loved me, and wished me a good and safe journey. How I love this beautiful woman!

I said a prayer to the Kooboo Daishi at the front door, asking Him to bless Nahoko, this house, and to guide me on the journey.

I walked through the darkened streets to the station. I felt transformed, wearing my Henro whites again. The station was just opening as I arrived. The journey had begun.

At the airport I read that the Kooboo Daishi too was tempted by a 'fair woman' during his ascetic training. He had resisted the temptation.

On arrival I took the Limousine Bus to Tokushima Station, then a taxi to the junction of Roads 22 and 16, about an hour's walk west of Tatsueji.

I said my prayers in front of Lawson Station, expressing my gratitude to the Kooboo Daishi for His guidance in past journeys, and asking for His blessings for Nahoko and me, my family and friends.

The first hour's walk was along the flat valley floor along the Katsuura Gawa (River). Then the road turned left and up a very steep concreted path, that later became steps.

The Kakurinji (Crane Forest Temple) is supposed to be a 'nansho' (difficult/dangerous to go to temple) but I found the ascent rather easy. I climbed the 500 metres height in just over an hour. I'm convinced that the Kooboo Daishi carried my pack, weighing less than ten kilos including liquids. My rigorous training in the weeks leading up to the journey would also have helped.

I had been concerned about the lack of shops in the Katsuura Valley, given the fact that I intend to begin walking at 0500 hrs tomorrow, well before breakfast. I was lucky to stumble across a shop that sold delicious rice cakes (covered with a miso-paste) and, a few hundred metres later one that sold bread and apples, along a myriad of other things.

I really enjoyed Kakurinji (550 m ASL) near the top of a mountain. Famous for its two cranes, said to have been encountered by the Kooboo Daishi. I spent some time at this lofty place, enjoying the peaceful atmosphere. I recited the Heart Sutra twice, and said a very special prayer for Nahoko and me, family and friends all around the world, and especially Melinda who is currently undergoing chemo treatment for breast cancer. Then I walked down the very steep track, crossed the Naka Gawa, and climbed up on the other side to the 600 metre high Tairyuuji.

Tairyuuji was as beautiful as I had had it in mind. This time it was bathed in beautiful sunlight, unlike in 2009, when it was clad in swirling clouds. Tairyuuji is also the only temple where there is written proof that it was actually established by the Kooboo Daishi, and where he had been the head monk for some time. Unfortunately, the main temple was being restored and couldn't be accessed, so I just said my prayers at the Kooboo Daishi shrine before descending into the valley.

I'm staying at the Sakaguchi-ya for the night. There was a mixed group of bus henros in the dining room, as well as eight or nine walking henro, all men and mostly past retirement age. The man at the next table spoke very good English, and acted as my translator. They were curious about my reasons for doing the O Henro San, so I told them about my earlier

trip to Kochi with Nahoko, my awakening interest in the journey, and what had happened to me on my initial journey. Most had similar stories about changes in their lives resulting from undertaking the journey. The bus henros left straight after their meal, and the remaining men engaged in, what is commonly referred to in French 'bon-hommerie', just having a good time together. Then as quickly as the good time had started, everyone got up, got into a more formal mood and retired at 1930 hrs.

Nahoko had called me just before dinner, and was pleased to know I'd made a good start to my O Henro San. I really love this beautiful woman!

As to the Sakaguchi-ya, it caters for large groups and single travellers. The dinner was huge, enough to feed two hungry henro, and delicious. The service couldn't be faulted either. Even the use of the washing machine and dryer was free of charge. Bed, dinner, one bottle and one can of beer came to 5,900 yen. Really good value!

Day 7 – 26 September 2012 – Central Mugi

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|---------------|--|--------------|-----|------------------|------|
| Distance (km) | 42.6 | Vertical (m) | 600 | Time Taken (hrs) | 12.0 |
| Temples | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Byoodooji – 22 (Temple of Equality) • Yakuooji – 23 (Medicine King) | | | | |
| Accommodation | Minshuku Azuma | | | 3* | |

Today was tough, maybe even a little harder than the same stage in 2009. Maybe I'm just not as fit as I was three years ago.

There were two temples today, Byoodooji and Yakuooji. The Honzo, the main Deity for both temples is Yakushi Nyorai, the Buddha of Healing. At both temples I especially prayed for Melinda's total recovery, and for the Gods to give her and her family the strength endure the cancer treatment.

To the day's journey itself: I left at 0500 hrs after a meager breakfast of a sweet bread roll and an apple. That didn't faze me too much, because the map said there was an eatery along Route 55, about 3 ½ hours' walk from my starting point.

I made it to the first temple just after 0700 hrs, despite having lost 15 minutes through taking a wrong turn in the pitch black of the night. I didn't think 15 minutes would matter, given the scale of today's walking.

I lit the first candles incense of the day and, thinking I had plenty of time, whiled for an other quarter of an hour at the temple after my service.

From here it went up 350 metres and across a beautiful pine and bamboo studded ridge, then down the gentle sloping Route 284 to the junction with Route 55.

Route 55 to Minami Town used to be the main arterial road until the express way was completed a couple of years ago. Now it is barely used, and all the eating places and cafés along the road have been abandoned. I didn't encounter many people on the way, apart from a few local vehicles. There went my hopes for a decent breakfast until lunchtime, when I was able to buy some food and water at Lawsons in Minami Town.

I had lunch at Temple 23, then went through my temple routine.

Yakuooji is one of the most visited temples, because of its healing powers for sickness, including conditions of old age. About 500,000 people are said to visit the site every year.

Whilst I recited the Heart Sutras I was jostled by mobs of bus henros, trying to get the best vantage points.

I whiled at the temple for longer than I should have had because I considered I could easily do the last 14 kilometres in three hours.

The first hour of the afternoon's journey went well, even though the road went slightly uphill all the way to the Hiwasa Tunnel. There I ran out of steam. I was well fed and hydrated, but the temperature at 32 degrees and a stinging afternoon sun from directly in front, and the wind blast from heavy vehicles made things tough. I finally struggled into Central Mugi and the Minshuku Azuma just after 0500 hrs.

The landlady hadn't changed in the past three years. The first thing she did was to confiscate my kongozue (walking stick) to put a hand knitted woolen grip on it. Sorry, it will have to come off tomorrow, because it actually feels very hot and uncomfortable.

As she had done three years ago, she had driven along the last section of Route 55 in order to find me and transport my backpack to the minshuku. She didn't see me, and ended up calling Nahoko trying to find out where I might have been.

As to the dinner, it was huge both in quality and quantity, but the lady chose to sit across the table from me for a never-ending comment on what I was eating (in Nihongo, of course).

On osettai: just outside Minami Town a middle aged man gave me a small envelope that seemed to be rather thick for an osettai. In return I offered him an osame-fuda (blessings from the Kooboo Daishi with my name and age written on it). Then I stood in prayer asking for the Kuukai to bless the man as he drove away. Inside the envelope were three neatly folded 1,000 yen notes. The biggest osettai I ever had received. Nahoko, when I told her, said I must have looked miserable or 'gorgeous' for the man to be so generous. I don't think it would have been the latter.

Body-wise, there are no issues. I've got a heat rash on both thighs and sunburnt upper arms, especially the left one. Feet are fine, there are no blisters.

Tomorrow will be 47 kilometres on the road with not too many hills – just a very long way to go. I intend to leave at 0430 hrs.

Day 8 – 27 September 2012 – Sakihama Port

| | | | | | |
|---------------|-------------------|--------------|-----|------------------|------|
| Distance (km) | 47 | Vertical (m) | 500 | Time Taken (hrs) | 11.5 |
| Temples | • Nil | | | | |
| Accommodation | Minshuku Tokumasu | | | 3 * | |

I'm sitting on the verandah of the Minshuku Tokumasu, clean straight out of the 'ofuro', clothes are being washed, a bottle of Asahi Dry next to me. Just across the road is a huge surf breaking, three to five metre waves created by a typhoon near Taiwan and fanned by an off-shore breeze. Perfect conditions for the avid surfer. Otherwise the sea is perfectly calm, there are no white caps out in the deeper water. The cloudless sky is bathed in the soft light of late afternoon.

I'm not too tired, and certainly in much better shape than I was at the end of the same stage in 2009. The heat rash on my thighs is still there, both arms are now sunburnt, there

are what look like small blisters on my small toes, nothing that can't be taped up. Happy is the henro. . .

It is still 1 ½ hour to dinner, time to catch up with my impressions for the day. Nahoko just called me, and that adds to the pleasures of the day.

Forty-seven kilometres and a height difference of about 500 meters lay ahead of me today. I woke up at 0310 hrs, well before my alarm clock, and was on the road 30 minutes later.

I said the first prayers to the Kooboo Daishi for the day in front of the minshuku just as I set out for the day's journey. I admitted that I'd been feeling somewhat disconnected from Him, but hoped I could establish again a stronger connection during this journey. I also said a special prayer for Melinda, whose 42nd birthday it was today.

I was very dark with thousands of stars shining above. Orion was to the East, 'upside down'. Outside town it was difficult not to trip over kerbs, so I just followed the white lines painted on the side of the road, facing whatever little traffic there was. It was incredibly quiet. The only sound I heard was my footsteps, my breathing, and the occasional tinkling of the bell on my kongozue.

I became light after 1 ½ hours' walking, and the sun rose as I walked through Central Kaiyo. I bowed to the sun and said my prayers. An hour later I crossed from the Dojo of Spiritual Awakening (Tokushima Prefecture) into the Dojo of Ascetic Training (Kochi Prefecture). I prayed at the border, thanking the Kooboo Daishi for His guidance through the previous prefecture, and asking for learnings He considered necessary on my ongoing journey. An hour later I was overtaken by two henros at great speed. I doubted they had had as many kilometres in their legs as I did on the day. . .

Seven hours into my walk I stopped at the supermarket in None where I stocked up on supplies and had a hearty meal – ice cream and two big bananas. My drink supply was almost exhausted, so I bought an other two litres of water.

From here on I travelled along 'the empty coast'. To my left was the deep blue ocean, to my right concrete fortification walls and beyond steep, forested hills.

As to the seaside, the view would have been absolutely stunning had it not been for the endless concrete barriers protecting the land against typhoons and tsunamis.

It was really hot, and there was barely a cooling breeze. My strength waxed and waned, and when I felt weak I recited my special mantra 'namu daishi henjo kongoo' for long stretches of the road. Roughly translated, it means 'I am dedicating myself to the Kooboo Daishi and I believe that he is walking with me'. Repeating the mantra gave me an enormous lift. Somewhere along the way I passed the two henro who had earlier overtaken me, they appeared to have settled for an extended rest in the shade.

After 10 ½ hours' walking I entered Sakihama Port and realized I was way ahead of my scheduled time. I allowed myself the luxury of hanging around the fishing port, and managed to drop my camera into a storm water drain. Two friendly locals helped me to fish it out. Then I made my way to the accommodation.

Day 9 – 28 September 2012 – Kiragawa Town

| | | | | | |
|---------------|---|--------------|-----|------------------|------|
| Distance (km) | 30.2 | Vertical (m) | 500 | Time Taken (hrs) | 10.0 |
| Temples | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hotsumisakiji – 24 (Cape Temple) • Shinshooji – 25 (Illuminating Seaport) • Kongoochoji – 26 (Vajra Peak) | | | | |
| Accommodation | Ryokan Kura | | | | 5 * |

It's been an excellent day. There wasn't as much walking to do as I did in the past two days, there were three temples, and I am staying at the most amazing Ryokan over night.

I did without breakfast and was on the road at 0530 hrs, hoping to catch the rising sun at Meotoiwa (Married Couple Rocks). I just made it in time and was rewarded with the most amazing sight of the rising sun!

Then I made reasonably good time to the Muroto Misaki (Cape), arriving at the Mikuradoo Cave at 0830 hrs. This is where the Kooboo Daishi had found enlightenment at the age of 22, and changed his name to Kuukai (meaning 'sea and sky') (the honorary name of Kooboo Daishi was bestowed upon Him about 80 years after he entered eternal meditation).

I earnestly prayed inside the cave but, to my slight disappointment, I didn't really feel I was connecting with the Kooboo Daishi. Maybe my perseverance is being tested. . .

From the cave it was a short, steep and sweaty ascent to the Cape Temple. Hotsumisakiji is definitely one of my favorites, and there weren't too many bus henros around. I recited the Heart Sutra and prayed for the health of Melinda and Stephen's families, Nahoko and me, my family and friends in Japan and Tasmania, Christophe, Daisy, my parents, Hans-Peter, Irène, and all the people of this world. Then I headed down the road bends to Muroto City.

Alas, it *was* very hot! There was a following breeze at walking pace, so there was no effective cooling at all. An hour after leaving the Cape I sat in front of a Y-Shop and treated myself to an onigiri (rice ball), followed by an ice cream and mandarins.

Then I said my prayers at the Shinshooji (#25), dodging a bus load of henros. I didn't mind the slight time delay, because I had plenty of time on my side.

Kongoochooji (#26) was a short 3.8 kilometres away, but the last 600 metres were steep and rocky. I overtook two elderly henro (whom I would later meet again at my ryokan), and an other who is doing the O Henro San in the reverse way.

The Main Deity at #26 is Yakushi Nyorai, and I again prayed for Melinda's total recovery and strength during her treatment. It is a very fine looking temple with a beautiful bell that I took great pleasure in ringing to announce my arrival.

There were at least three loads of bus henro, including the group that I had encountered at Tokushima Airport. The guide looked as harassed as he was at the beginning of their journey four days ago. During these days the group had 'done' 26 temples to my 6. Not a bad score, 26:6.

Then the Henro Road took me down an equally steep and rocky slope. I walked very gingerly for I didn't want to injure an ankle. After that is was only a few more kilometres to Kiragawa, famous for its antique street, and the Ryokan Kura.

Nahoko had discovered this ryokan, which is just amazing!! Not sure whether it is a museum, ryokan, artisan's workshop or model garden. My rooms are amazing and airy, measuring about eight by ten metres with a separate space for sleeping and day use. They are facing a beautifully maintained courtyard, and the ofuro is a wooden tub set among rocks. My smelly clothes were being washed as I was enjoying the hot bath.

A little while later I walked across a couple of streets to watch a most amazing sunset, created by the oncoming typhoon. Sunrise *and* sunset over the sea in the one day? Not a bad effort!

Dinner was equally amazing with four different kinds of sashimi, fried fish, small pickled fish and a colorful array of vegetables, pickled and fresh. Rice, miso soup and a bottle of Asahi Dry completed the meal.

When I excused myself from the dinner table, the hosts, both maybe in their mid to late 40's, hurried ahead of me to set up the futon and a mosquito net. I should have a good night, and have decided not to leave until after breakfast.

Body-wise, I've got a big blister on the right heel, whilst the little toes seem to be OK. The heat rash is gone, and sunburn in under control following a liberal treatment with sunscreen.

Day 10 – 29 September 2012 – Aki City

| | | | | | |
|---------------|--------------------------------|--------------|-----|------------------|------|
| Distance (km) | 34.7 | Vertical (m) | 650 | Time Taken (hrs) | 10.0 |
| Temples | • Konomineji – 27 (God Summit) | | | | |
| Accommodation | Business Hotel Tamai | | | 3 ½ * | |

Today was a day of great learning, courtesy of my great teacher and guide, the Kooboo Daishi.

So far I had been slightly disappointed with the experiences I'd encountered on this O Henro San. Unlike three years ago when I immediately seemed to connect with the Great Master and was able to dissolve many of my old patterns, letting go of 'old stuff', nothing much seemed to be happening on this journey.

My right foot was hurting badly (I had to pierce a big, deep blister yesterday) and I was walking slowly and with a limp. So I began to recite my special mantra – 'namu-daishi-henjo-kongoo'.

Almost immediately I forgot about my pain, the limp disappeared, and my walking pace picked up considerably.

Konomineji is a 'Barrier Temple', where it is said that only those with a pure heart may enter. Others could easily come to grief. I said a special prayer before entering the gate, and was allowed inside.

I recited the Heart Sutra at the Temple of the Honzo (Juuichimen Kannon Bosatsu). This Deity will guide people being saved. Strangely, for the first time ever I recited the sutra flawlessly and in the correct rhythm. I was surprised at the ease with which it went. Then I walked to Kooboo Daishi's Temple where I repeated the sutra, again flawlessly.

I bowed at the gate for my journey onwards, heading down the road.

Then it hit me like a bolt out of the blue (or maybe grey mist). Here are the thoughts that came to my mind:

- On this O Henro San I was looking for something that existed no longer. I may have atoned for many of my bad deeds and for many things that happened in my past, on the last journey.
- There was nothing to atone for now. No bad feelings, the past just didn't matter, good and bad deeds were meaningless.
- There was nothing from the past I needed to hang on to. I was freed from everything, good and bad!
- It was time to empty my mind. I had done so in the last three hours, reciting the Mantra, not thinking about anything. It had worked!
- So far I had recited the Heart Sutra 224 times, but I'd never really understood its meanings:
 - ... form is emptiness and emptiness is form. The same is true for feelings, perceptions, formation and consciousness. They neither arise nor cease, are neither defiled nor pure, neither increase nor decrease. . .
 - ... therefore, in emptiness there is no form, no feelings, perceptions or consciousness. . .
 - ... there is no wisdom, nor is there attainment, for there is nothing to be attained. . .
 - ... nothing obstructs their (Bodhisattva's) minds. Because obstructions exist not. . .
- Maybe I had been trying too hard, throughout my life, to undo the damage I may have caused (or thought to have caused). My thoughts of what I may have done, feelings, perceptions, are just emptiness. And in emptiness there is nothing to be attained.
- I am free! I experienced emptiness today without trying! It just so happened!!
- The 'Empty Mind' – how easy to understand, yet difficult to achieve. Just four words – 'namu daishi henjo kongoo' helped me achieve it. . .

I experienced a great feeling of freedom as I walked down on the wet road. I felt freed from the past, life had changed!! With a big voice I called out several times 'Kooboo Daishi Arigatoo'. Then my voice seemed to echo back. For the first time on this O Henro San I was again able to sing. I sang 'my' beautiful Henro song 'You'll Never Walk Alone' as I walked down the mountain. . .

As to the day itself. . .

I slept marvelously well, with the help of a sleeping tablet, tho'. At this stage my body just wants to keep on going and I forcefully need to stop it. At 2100 and 0500 hrs local authorities tested the tsunami warning siren.

After last night's sumptuous dinner, breakfast was a relatively modest affair: a toasted vegetable sandwich, coffee, fruit and a banana.

Then I bade goodbye to the wonderful hosts and the two henros with whom I'd shared dinner and breakfast. One of them is 78 years old, the other 64. Both of them have walked the O Henro San before.

There is a typhoon brewing to the south that is rapidly moving towards Shikoku. It drizzled lightly all day long, not heavily enough to don the poncho, just enough to keep the

clothes slightly damp. Tho' I wondered whether my clothes were drying through sheer body heat. Maybe I was leaving a vapor trail behind me like an airplane.

I made it in good time to Yasuda at the foot of the mountain on which Temple #27 located. From where it went upwards, gently at first then very steeply. I chose the rocky henro road that, in its upper reaches, goes almost directly up a 45-degree slope. In places the trail resembled a washed out creek bed. #27 is also considered a 'nansho', 'difficult to get to' temple.

I climbed the 3.4 kilometres and 635 metres in about 75 minutes, no mean feat when my father always thought that a 'good' ascent was 300 metres in one hour. By the time I reached the car park my clothes were soaked, I'm not sure whether from rain or sweat. Maybe both, but I felt comfortably warm.

There was a fleet of 12-seater vans and taxis disgorging bus henro like an ongoing stream. The road is too narrow and steep for big buses.

I enjoyed a nice cup of brewed coffee (the first on this O Henro San), then headed down from the temple. This time I stuck to the road, because the trail would have been too slippery and dangerous. On my way down I met the two henro from the Ryokan Kura, and later I overtook the 'camping henro' I'd met at Sakihama Port. I wondered whether he would camp out tonight too, in the face of the oncoming storm.

From the bottom of #27 is was a long 8.6 kilometres to Aki City, much of it along the top of the tsunami fortification walls. I doubt tho' whether they would have been able to provide protection against the tsunami created by the Great East Japan Earthquake last year.

I was fairly tired when I reached the Business Hotel Tamai at around 1700 hrs. The receptionist couldn't find my booking but gave me a room anyway. (I realized during dinner that I had actually asked Nahoko to book me into the Business Hotel Bencho – all my fault!).

So, tomorrow will be my last day on this O Henro San. Just a walk of 24.7 kilometres to Temple #28, I might even throw in #29 if I have the time. Hopefully the flight back to Tokyo won't be cancelled because of the oncoming typhoon. . .

Day 11 – 30 September 2012 – Kochi Airport

| | | | | | |
|---------------|-------------------------------|--------------|-----|------------------|-----|
| Distance (km) | 24.7 | Vertical (m) | 200 | Time Taken (hrs) | 5.5 |
| Temples | • Dainichiji – 28 (Great Sun) | | | | |
| Accommodation | Kuroshio Hotel Kochi | | | 3 * | |

The Tamai BH was very comfortable, and I enjoyed a good sleep. It rained heavily during the night, and hadn't eased when I said my morning prayers and began walking at 0600 hrs.

The 25 kilometres to the Dainichiji (Temple) were mostly along Route 55, even though there were a few cycle/pedestrian ways to keep away from the traffic.

It poured heavily, I had never seen so much rain fall from the sky! Tho' it was cool and my poncho kept me reasonably dry.

I made good time, chanting my mantra, walking 60 minutes, resting for ten.

The wind began at 0830 hrs, just a light zephyr, and I hoped this would be it. It wasn't to be!

Just after Nishibun Station I came to the 'Big Udon', the place at which I had almost collapsed due to heat exhaustion last time. This time I sat on the same seat, grateful for a warming cup of coffee.

In the meantime the wind had increased. It came from my right. The road was awash and I was being mercilessly sprayed by passing vehicles. I just kept on walking, head down, focusing on every step I took. I didn't even notice that the road had turned right near Akaoka Station, even though the wind was now coming from straight ahead. Then out of the rain, appeared the Kochi Kuroshio Hotel where I'd stayed in 2009. I then realized I had walked at an amazing pace. From here it would be a mere two kilometres to Temple #28.

But by now the storm was venting its full fury, and the rain came in horizontally, stinging like bullets. Many a time I was blown backwards in my steps, and sheet metal billboards travelled along the road at amazing, dangerous speed. Fast enough to cause some very serious injury. I was the only pedestrian on the road, and there were hardly any cars. But I valiantly fought on. The small road leading up to the temple was strewn with broken tree branches, some as thick as my arm.

I hadn't seen any other henros all day long, and the temple was deserted.

I forcefully rang the bell at the temple to announce my arrival, then managed to light the candle and incense at the main temple, but failed to do so at the Kooboo Daishi's temple which was in a slightly more exposed position. Then I recited the Heart Sutras for the very last time on this journey, and thanked the Kooboo Daishi for His teachings and protection during the journey. Then I asked the Dainichi Nyorai, Honzo of the temple, the most powerful of the Deities (whose Hawkeye bracelet I was wearing on this special day) for Melinda's complete recovery from cancer.

I'm sure I would have been one of the very few (if any) henros to have their nokyocho signed on this day. The lady at the office certainly didn't expect any customers, because I had to knock on the closed shutters. She wished me 'o kyoo tsugette' for my ongoing journey. I took this as a good omen.

I would have had enough fuel in my tank to proceed on to temple 29 or even 30, but the weather was just too horrible. So I decided to head for the airport to see whether I could get on an earlier flight than the one scheduled for 1905 hrs. Just as well, because Nahoko rang me shortly afterwards to advise me that my flight had been cancelled, and there was only one out of Kochi in the afternoon, at 1615 hrs. I should try to get to the airport as quickly as possible.

A man stacking bottles at a nearby supermarket called a taxi for me, then waited with me for its arrival. It only took a few minutes. Such kindness!

It looks like most flights out of Kochi to other airports have been cancelled. Now that I'm writing I've noticed that the rain has stopped, there is blue sky above, but it is still very windy. Maybe I will be able to sleep with Nahoko tonight after all. . .

Later, at a hotel

It looks like this typhoon is a 'biggie'. It commenced about a week ago to the East of the Philippines, moved past Taiwan, then came close to Ashizuri Misaki in the South West of Shikoku. Now it is heading North East, unfortunately the direction of Tokyo. There is nothing I can do except watch TV and drink beer. I'm booked to travel on the 0730 hrs flight out tomorrow, but I don't like my chances. . .

1 October 2012

After yesterday's cancellations, I would have expected chaotic scenes at the Kochi Airport especially being Monday, but everything seemed to be *very* normal. There were even a few spare seats on the B737-800 – I always seem to get two seats when I travel on my own on JAL within Japan. Such service and kindness!

Earlier I was driven by a very friendly taxi driver to the airport, and I regretted not being able to speak Nihongo. I must learn to speak a few sentences before coming to Nihon next.

The flight left on time. Though a light cloud cover I caught glimpses of 'my' coast below, right down to Muroto Misaki and towards Tokushima. Following yesterday's typhoon all rivers are running dirty brown, and there are huge fan-shaped expanses of brown where rivers meet the sea.

It only took a few minutes to cover a distance that had taken me days of elation, pain, sweat, dampness, determination, spiritual growth and hard work. I'm already missing being on the O Henro Road. . .

Day 12 – 26 September 2013 – Kochi

| | | | | | |
|---------------|---|-----------------------|-----|------------------|-----|
| Distance (km) | 24.0 | Vertical (m) | 250 | Time Taken (hrs) | 8.0 |
| Temples | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kokubunji – 29 (Official State) • Zenrakuji – 30 (True Joy) • Chikurinji – 31 (Bamboo Forest) | | | | |
| Accommodation | Hotel Tosaji-Takasu – 088 882 770 | 4,300 Yen (room only) | | | 3 * |

I'm on the road again, the third year running – well, almost anyway. I'm sitting at Haneda International Airport, waiting for the flight to take me to Kochi.

I'm not feeling the best today, even tho' I've been training hard in recent months for the continuation of my second O Henro San. The gout that had made an appearance a few days ago has mercifully subsided, and the lingering cough I'd picked up in Tokyo is almost gone. My lower back has almost healed after a visit to a Chinese massage therapist a week ago - she must have damaged some ligaments (I had heard a distinct 'crack' when she put her entire weight on her elbow and pushed near the spine just above the hip bone).

The lack of sleep in the last three nights is a minor problem, even tho' I took a sleeping tablet last night. Nahoko and I had been very busy travelling to Osaka where she gave a lecture at the Kansai University, after which we took an early train to Tenri to meet up with our friends Ai and Takamasa. From there we walked the twelve kilometer Yamanobenomichi Trail visiting a number of shrines on the way, after which we ascended the holy Miwa Mountain (490 metres). After all that we drove 3 ½ hours in Takabo's Mini Countryman - huge when compared to my Mini Cooper D ('Koguma') to Hamamatsu where we stayed over night in a comfortable hotel. Yesterday we drove the remaining 240 kilometres on the expressway back to Tokyo where we arrived at 1400 hrs, had a quick snooze, then met our generous friends from a Tasmanian Tour in Kichijoji at 1830 hrs, prayed at Takakazu's Shrine (part of his ashes were strewn into the Tasman Sea on Bruny

Island), then Michiyo served us the most delicious okonomiyaki washed down with European wines. . .

But, when we finally collapsed into bed at 2330 hrs, sleep wouldn't come. I listened to the sounds of the night, the distant rumble of the last trains, footsteps outside the window, Nahoko's quiet breathing, feeling her tiny movements. At 0030 hrs with sleep being as far away as ever, I took a sleeping tablet against my better judgment, given the fact I had to get up at 0415 hrs. I promptly slept through my alarm but was saved by Nahoko's.

It is never easy to say 'goodbye'. Nahoko is so beautiful, especially early in the morning and still half asleep. Her warmth and beautiful perfume. Half asleep she wished me, a 'holy man', a good journey and gave me her love.

Yesterday a typhoon came past Tokyo, but too far out to sea to disrupt flights. Maybe it will help to keep the temperatures down a little. Shimanto City, my final destination, recently established a record for Japan's highest ever recorded temperature (41 degrees). That and a 75% humidity!

A little later

Now that I am on the plane there isn't anything to do except to fly to Kochi, changing into my pilgrim's clothes, then commencing the journey with the blessings of the Kooboo Daishi. . .

Later in the day

It was a good day's walk in excellent conditions. Sunny, tho' a hot northerly wind made walking into it in the first half of the walk rather tiresome.

I took a taxi from the Kochi-Ryoma Airport to the Dainichiji Temple, that I'd visited during a typhoon last year. There I thanked the Kooboo Daishi for His guidance and teachings in the past and asked for ongoing protection and blessings for Nahoko and me, my children, family, friends, work colleagues and the people of Japan, Australia, Switzerland and the world. Then I hit the road.

The distances in my guidebook are usually fairly reliable, but I'm not sure they were correct between Temples 28 and 29. Or maybe it was just the strong headwind that slowed me down. Anyway, I made the stated 7.5 kilometres in 1 ½ hours.

The Henro Road between 29 and 30 skirts the northern perimeter of Kochi, with an abundance of rice fields, market gardens and forests. I really enjoyed being on the road again. On this day I passed five or six walking henros, including three women. It's not that I am focusing on 'swallowing' up other henro, I simply walk at my pace which seems to be quicker than that of most other walkers.

Chikurinji, located next to the Makino Botanical Gardens, is one of the most beautiful temples with its old, ornate gate, steep stairs, various temple buildings, ponds and an impressive five storey pagoda. Then I traced my steps back down the hill in search of my 'hoteru'.

This took a bit of finding, and I looked in vain for a sign or a phone number outside a building that could resemble a hotel. Finally, a kind local woman offered her help and said the hotel was just to the left (hidari) of the traffic lights (shingoo). Well, this didn't help either so I kept walking.

Then the lady came running from behind and said, breathlessly, something that I took as me having overshot the target. She took me into the hotel which, to my reckoning, did not look like a business hotel at all. When I gave her a name-slip with the Kooboo Daishi's blessings, she reached into her shopping bag and gave me a small tray of tomatoes. Such kindness!

Spiritually, the day was not one of many 'highs'. Day one never is. It is just one of getting back into the routine, and opening myself up for receiving the Kooboo Daishi's blessings and teachings. Physically, I feel A1. I got what could be the beginning of a blister on my right heel and a heat rash on my thighs. Must wear lighter trousers tomorrow. The right arm is slightly sunburnt; I must do something about this tomorrow.

I'm into my second can of Kirin Beer, sitting in the large lounge overlooking a busy intersection. One floor below my washing is in the 'sentakki'.

Nahoko rang me less than twenty minutes after check-in. It was lovely to reconnect with her. She said she was already missing me. This morning, she said she had wanted to stop me from leaving our bed but she recognized the importance for me to undertake this 'holy journey'. What amazing understanding! And what a woman!

Tomorrow it's going to be a early start - 0500 hrs. I'm sure I'll sleep well tonight!

Day 13 – 27 September 2013 – Tosa

| Distance (km) | 33.7 | Vertical (m) | 300 | Time Taken (hrs) | 10.0 |
|---------------|--|--------------|-----------------------|------------------|------|
| Temples | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zenjibuji #32 (Ch'an Master's Peak) • Sekkeiji #33 (Snowy Cliff) • Tanemaji #34 (Sowing Seeds) • Kiyotakiji #35 (Clean Waterfall) | | | | |
| Accommodation | Business Inn Tosa - 088 852 5322 | | 5,400 Yen (room only) | | 3 * |

It's been a good day of brisk walking. I hit the road at 0515 hrs to reach Temple 32 just after seven. It was the first of the temples on this section of the journey that allowed henros to ring the bell on arrival, and I did so with great relish.

From here on I travelled west to catch the ferry across the narrows of the Urado-wan (Bay). I misread the map and may have added a kilometer or so to the walking. Not that it mattered, because the ferry to Nagahama only runs once an hour on the hour (0900 hrs in my case).

I met a slightly scruffy looking 'cycling henro' on the ferry, who is on his third O Henro San. I understood he was camping close by and was doing nearby temples on the bicycle. A short time later I spotted him standing motionless at a shopping centre a begging bowl in his hand. I don't think he will get very far this way. . .

Sekkeiji is one of the three Zen Buddhist Temples on the O Henro San. The lady at the stamp office gave me a little osettai, a colorful tissue case.

Temple #34, Tanemaji, was 6.3 kilometres away and I travelled there at quite an amazing speed. I'm sure the Kooboo Daishi gave me wings. The young monk at the office gave me a small osettai, as did an other henro who lives in Tokyo.

By the time I left Tanemaji it had become hot and I filled the walking time with reciting the 'Namu Daishi Henjo Kongoo' Mantra (meaning I will follow the Kooboo Daishi's teachings)

and singing/humming various tunes from the Swiss 'Tägertschi Marsch' to Beethoven's 9th to *Die Himmel Rühmen des Ewigen Ehre* and many more.

Temple #35 is about 120 metres up from the surrounding plain. The walk uphill was through a mixed leafed and bamboo forest. It was cool, a nice change from the earlier part of the day.

A bored tax driver at the temple tried to make conversation with me but soon gave up when I told him *sumimasen – Nihongo ga wakarimasen* – I'm sorry, I don't understand Japanese. A fleet of mini buses disgorged hordes of bus henro, keeping both staff at the stamp office busy signing the nokyocho.

Business over, I enjoyed the stroll downhill to the hotel in the cooling breeze of the afternoon.

Health-wise, I am doing quite well. My face is on the reddish side even tho' I'd worn the hat all day and the left arm is badly burnt from the shoulder down even tho' I applied sunscreen today (maybe too late, the damage was done yesterday).

Spiritually/emotionally, not much has happened – unfortunately. Tho' I am sure something is bound to happen on this journey.

I remembered my daughter Melinda's birthday today. One year ago she was undergoing extensive and aggressive treatment for breast cancer. I asked the Kooboo Daishi to give her His special blessings.

Right now I'm sitting in the 'Goo-gou Kitchen Restaurant' near the hotel. I'm the only customer, and the staff of five stare bored into space. Drinking plenty of water on top of the liter of Asahi Dry I had consumed earlier to rehydrate. I hope the maître d' (who speaks some English) understood my order (rice, miso soup, fish, and absolutely no meat).

A little later

As to the dinner, it was *amazing!!* Rice, miso soup, fried fish, vegetable and pasta salad, lotus root, a very strong garlic dish (thankfully I won't be getting close to anyone in the foreseeable future) and five thick slices of bonito sashimi – it all came to an amazing 790 Yen (about A\$ 9.00).

Whilst enjoying the meal my beautiful wife rang. We didn't talk much but Nahoko said it had suddenly become cold in Tokyo at night. What a lovely way to finish the day. We both miss each other.

Day 14 – 28 September 2013 – Susaki City

| | | | | | |
|---------------|---------------------------------------|--------------|-----|------------------|-----|
| Distance (km) | 36.7 | Vertical (m) | 300 | Time Taken (hrs) | 8.5 |
| Temples | • Shooryuujii #36 (Blue/green Dragon) | | | | |
| Accommodation | Yanagiya Ryokan – 0889-42-0175 | 6,550 Yen | 4 * | | |

Today I walked, without an exaggeration, at a quite amazing speed. I'm too early for the check-in at the ryokan so I'm whiling the time away to the local shopping centre where a cup of nice cup of coffee costs a tiny 100 Yen (A\$1.10).

I hit the road at 0600 hrs under leaden skies. Not quite enough to wear the rain poncho so I was pretty wet by the time I came to the Tsukajizaka Tunnel near Usa City. But I saw the

sun for just a few seconds after sunrise (the only time during the day), just long enough to give my gratitude and prayers.

Today's navigation would be easy: Follow Route 39 to Usa, then over the Usa Bashi (bridge) to the temple, back across the bridge and then follow Route 23 for the rest of the journey. On my first O Henro San I had walked the skyline over the Yokonami Peninsula. This time I chose the longer, flatter road that winds itself along the northern side of the Uranouchi-wan (Bay).

I reached the day's only temple in slightly less than two hours. Temple #36 is the one at which I'm said to have spent past live(s) at. It is quite beautiful built on the mountainside, which I reached by climbing about 100 steep and uneven steps.

I always tend to relax after visiting a day's final temple, but today's 'last temple' was just the beginning of the journey. The rain had eased and my clothes were almost dry when I left the temple.

From here on, and for the next 2 ½ hours, the road wound itself along the northern shore of the Unarouchi-wan, only leaving it once for the tunnel through the Yokonami Natural Park. I walked at a brisk pace, 50 minutes walking followed by a 10-minute rest. I met seven other henro along the way, including three women and two doing the journey in reverse.

It felt like I had settled back into the 'henro-routine', and I felt good about it. Leaving the bay I began to chant 'Namu Daishi Henjo Kongoo'. I found this mantra to be quite powerful because at one stage, and I don't know how I had been chanting/walking for, I found myself in 'space', not sure whether I was walking the Henro Trail or being suspended in nothing.

East of Susaki City near the Oshioka-gawa (river) is a little henro hut where I stopped for a brief rest. There was an elderly Japanese couple from Oita (Kyushu) also having a rest. The man looked a little worse for wear. We exchanged names, took photos of one another, and the lady gave me nice sweets and home made sour plums (oishii - delicious!).

Later

The Yanagiya Ryokan where I am staying is an amazing find! There are four other henros besides me including Mr. Hirohumi Etou and his wife whom I'd met earlier on the road. He turned out to be 72 years old and is doing his third O Henro San, she is 65 and doing her second. Today they had walked twenty kilometers and are quite exhausted. This doesn't bode well for tomorrow's 32 kilometer walk including the 500 metre high Nanako-toge which they intend to do. I've got my own wing with a private garden (including a 100 years old cactus) and a huge double room measuring 4 x 9 metres. My washing is currently drying, and the ofuro (bath) was wonderful. It's amazing what hot water and an underwater self-massage can do to weary muscles. The futon was laid out as we were enjoying dinner.

As for the dinner, it was an amazing feast! Rice, miso soup, tempura (prawns and several vegetables), sashimi, salad, pickled vegetables and dessert. After dinner and a bottle of beer each (Mrs. Etou didn't drink) everybody relaxed. I was really sorry not to be able to speak Nihongo.

I really feel I am again aligned with the ‘Spirit of the O Henro San’. It usually takes a couple of days to get into the right frame of mind. I shared these thoughts with Nahoko when we talked tonight. She said I was mentally and physically very tough, and spiritually a ‘high’ man.

Health-wise, I’m still coughing and now I also have a sore throat. This doesn’t bode very well for the next few days. I pierced a blister on the right heel, it was very deep and I feared the needle would break as I pushed it in, the skin is so tough.

It’s raining again, but the forecast for tomorrow is sunny with a few showers.

Day 15 – 29 September 2013 – Shimanto Town

| | | | | | |
|---------------|----------------------------------|--------------|-----------|------------------|-----|
| Distance (km) | 31.6 | Vertical (m) | 600 | Time Taken (hrs) | 8.0 |
| Temples | • Iwamotoji #37 (Rocky Root) | | | | |
| Accommodation | Ryokan Mura-no-ie - 0880 220 648 | | 5,000 Yen | | 2 * |

Today’s walk took longer than anticipated. I didn’t sleep all that well with that bad coughing and I woke up at 0400 hrs, wishing it was six. Breakfast again was amazing (about eight separate dishes)!!! I hit the road at 0700 hrs.

I walked at a brisk pace. There were few cars on the road since the expressway to Shimanto City had been completed.

I walked without a break to Tosa-Kure where I stopped at the little roadside café I’d had breakfast four years ago (I was soaking wet at that time). The coffee was OK but I can’t say the same about the Mont Blanc Cake. It tasted like it had been in the freezer for a bit too long – nothing is perfect, I guess.

At Tosa-Kure I turned off Route 56 and onto Road 14, which led me to the trailhead to the Nanako-toge (Pass). The trail took me through a beautiful valley along the Nagasaga-gawa, then the path branched off and went steeply upwards to about 400 metres where it flattened out before ascending again. It is a very ancient path, deeply worn by countless henros’ feet. I wondered whether the Kooboo Daishi might have walked this very path during his time. If not, I was sure he was walking with me there and then. Halfway up the pass I sat down for a little rest. After a while I heard a man and woman’s voices so I got going and soon left the voices behind.

The last kilometer to the pass was flat and along rice fields waiting to be harvested. On top of the pass I met an other western henro, Gerry from Sydney. He had done the Compostella Pilgrimage and was now interested in the O Henro San. He asked me whether I was Buddhist, to which my honest answer was ‘I’m not sure, maybe just a free thinker with a strong interest in Buddhism’. I tried to have lunch but felt sick in the stomach, the Mont Blanc Cake from earlier on repeating.

The walk from the Nanako-toge to Shimanto Town is quite nice and I remembered the high I’d been on four years ago – despite the atrocious weather conditions that prevailed at that time. This time, though, I was struggling a bit. Was it the Mont Blanc Cake or the exertion of the previous days? The early drizzle had given way to bright sunshine and I was concerned about dehydration, even tho’ my stomach didn’t want any more liquids. I finally took the second of four sachets of power gel I had taken along that helped a bit.

Iwamotoji is a beautiful temple, especially the paneled and painted ceiling of the main temple. I recited the Heart Sutra twice, then added prayers of thanks to the Kooboo Daishi

for guiding me so far and asked for His blessings for Nahoko and me, my brother Christophe and his partner Daisy, Melinda and Stephen's families, my friends and colleagues, and the people of Japan, Switzerland, Australia and the world.

At the temple I again caught up with Gerry, as well as a female henro from Kobe I'd briefly met in the rain near the Shooryuji two days earlier. She and an other henro must have been the ones that had followed me up the Nanako-toge.

I'd been wondering about the dearth of osettai on this part of the journey. Then, outside the temple an elderly and very distinguished looking henro, his hakui (the white vest) embroidered in gold, presented me with a beautiful nashi pear. We exchanged bows and handshakes and osame-fudas (name slips). Mine was plain white, the color for the first four O Henro San. His was brocade and the reverse side indicated that he was on his 153rd journey (not all walking, though).

The ryokan I'm staying at it run by a very old woman (her back bent 90 degrees) and her middle-aged daughter. The old lady did my washing for free, which I very much appreciated. She must have thought I was a habitual drunkard for asking for a bottle of beer one hour *before* dinner. The meal was quite nice, with eight dishes presented.

Just as I was about to retire when Hirohumi Etou and his wife stepped into the dining room. They had taken about three hours longer than I did and were really pleased to have made it.

I set the alarm clock for 0330 hrs tomorrow. It's going to be a long day. . .

Day 16 – 30 September 2013 – Shimanto City

| | | | | | |
|---------------|-------------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------|------------------|-------|
| Distance (km) | 44 | Vertical (m) | 400 | Time Taken (hrs) | 10.75 |
| Temples | • Nil | | | | |
| Accommodation | Daiichi Hotel (at Nakamura Station) | | 5,100 Yen (room only) | 3 * | |

At Uchibuchi, lunch time

Today I had the most amazing encounter with the Kooboo Daishi. Some might think what I experienced was all in my mind and imagination, maybe brought about by tiredness or simply *wanting* to have an experience with the Great Master - I'm pretty hard-nosed, though and I am not the type that sees the Kooboo Daishi peering at me from behind every tree with his friendly eyes. But to me, the experience was *very* real.

By way of background, Nahoko and I took a group of friends to the Ashizuri Misaki in 2012. Prior to the tour, indeed prior to coming to Japan on that occasion, I had a vision that I should offer a prayer to the Kooboo Daishi on the upper part of the 'Big Slope', about six kilometers south of Shimanto Town, which I did when we drove to the Cape. . .

But back to today's events. . .

The futon at the ryokan was very comfortable and I crashed at 1900 hrs, though as I was about to drift off the old lady opened the screen door and said something that I did not understand.

I woke up at midnight with a coughing fit that lasted for about an hour (I hope I didn't disturb the man next door, since the walls are merely made of rice paper). I thought it

might be bronchitis, even though Nahoko insists that all is part of my body's cleansing routine. Between coughs I listened to two cats performing their night's concert.

At that time there was little likelihood of getting any sleep, so I seriously thought about getting up and hitting the road. But I reasoned there was little point in getting to Shimanto City before midday.

Somehow I must have drifted off to sleep again, because I woke to the sound of my alarm clock. I had forsaken breakfast due to my early departure, and the old lady had not been willing to pack me an obento. So I'd decided to walk on an empty stomach. Luckily, there was a 24-hour Lawson Station just south of Shimanto Town where I got my breakfast – an onigiri (rice ball), apple cake and a lukewarm can of milk coffee. Praise there be for Lawson Station!!

I rested after an hour's walk then continued my journey in the pitch dark of the night. It was easy to follow the white line painted on the side of the road, and the waning sickle of the moon occasionally peaked through the clouds, providing a meager light.

I didn't at any time pay heed to where I was on the road, because there was no need to. Today's task was simply to follow Route 56 to Shimanto City.

I enjoyed walking in the coolness of the early morning. After a while I began chanting 'Namu Daishi Henjo Kongoo', over and over again.

Then, walking downhill somewhere in the darkness I had the feeling that someone was following me. I didn't turn around for I knew I was the only one there on the road. But the energy continued to be there and finally I turned around. I didn't see anybody, but I knew that instant that the *energy* had been the Kooboo Daishi walking with me. Shocked as I was, the only words I was able to utter were 'hello, Kooboo Daishi'. Then the energy dissolved into the darkness in a flash.

I gathered myself, and continued with my walk then, a few hundred metres down the road, I realized that I had met the Kooboo Daishi *exactly* at the very spot where I had said my prayer to Him about a year ago.

With tears in my eyes I thanked the Kooboo Daishi for this miracle, then walked down the hairpin bend on the Big Slope singing with a full voice 'You'll Never Walk Alone', tears still running down my cheeks.

The following day, at Shimanto City

It had been a good day's walk, but it was hard. I called Nahoko yesterday at 1000 hrs, six hours into the walk, sitting on the side of the road along the Shirahama Coast. It already was getting hot. Then, a short time later near Nada Port I hit the wall but had no choice but to press on. On the other side of the Inomisaki Tunnel I stopped for an ice-cream that tasted as if it had been thawed and re-frozen many times, but at least it was cold.

In the meantime the temperature had risen to 36.5 degrees. Shimanto City, a few weeks earlier, had established an all time temperature record for Japanese cities with 41 degrees and the area certainly didn't disappoint. A short time later I stopped at a Whale Information Centre where I sat for an hour in order to bring my body temperature down and rehydrate. By the end of the day I would have drunk 5 ½ litres of water, but my urine was still dark yellow in colour.

The last few kilometers were a struggle, especially the last two to the Nakamura Station. The Daiichi Hotel where I'm staying at didn't have any beer (!!!!!), so I had to walk an other 1 ½ kilometers to get the refreshing drink. I didn't feel like eating, despite hardly having eaten anything since the early breakfast. At 1900 hrs and only after 1 ½ cans of beer I crashed and slept solidly for 11 hours.

This marks the end of this year's journey. I am frustratingly close to Ashizuri Misaki (only 52 kilometres to go) but this just has to wait until 2014, when I intend to complete my second O Henro San and commence the third. The only thing that now remains is to catch the train to Kochi then the afternoon flight to Tokyo. It seems to be ironical – to travel in the train for 1 ½ hours that took me five hard days on the road (or 40 minutes for what took me 10 ¾ hours yesterday).

It's been again a remarkable journey for me: I'm sure that 'walking in space' and meeting the Kooboo Daishi will go down as the most memorable experiences of this journey. I feel truly blessed. Nahoko, my beautiful wife and my strongest supporter thinks that the Kooboo Daishi really loves me and feels she has received His blessings that I had asked for in my prayers.

I again feel like a *true* henro, deeply connected with the Spirit of the Kooboo Daishi and what the O Henro san stands for. May the Kooboo Daishi extend His blessings to Nahoko and me, Christophe and Daisy, my children Melinda and Stephen and their children James, Abigail, Madeleine, Ebony and Charlie, my family (alive and passed on), relatives, friends, work colleagues, and the people of Japan, Australia, Switzerland and the world.

Arigatoo gosaimasu!

With much love. . .

P.S. I wrote this last entry at the Rino Café near the Nakamura Station waiting for the train. After paying, the proprietress returned the 350 Yen for the drink to me as an osettai – same as she did four years ago. My blessings go to her.

Day 17 – 20 October 2014 – Oki no Hama Beach

| | | | | | |
|---------------|---------------------|--------------|-----|------------------|------|
| Distance (km) | 18.1 | Vertical (m) | 200 | Time Taken (hrs) | 3.25 |
| Temples | • Nil | | | | |
| Accommodation | Minshuku Oki Marine | | | 4 * | |

Prologue

This is the fourth year of walking my second O Henro San, which I intend to complete in about three weeks, having walked from Nakamura Station to Temple #1 – a journey of about 700 kilometres.

So much has changed since I began my first O Henro San in 2009, with the biggest changes occurring this year. Tomorrow I will be celebrating my 70th birthday at Ashizuri-Misaki. Three weeks ago I retired from my work as Senior Consultant of Risk Management at the Department of Education in Tasmania, and following this I had hoped to spend more time with my beautiful wife Nahoko in Tokyo. We had even married after my first O Henro San, a little more than four years ago.

Alas, the wisdom of the Universe has its own unfathomable secrets, and dashed my plans in a way no one could have foreseen.

Nahoko, my soul-partner, died one week ago, on 13 October 2014, after a six-month battle with cancer. She was a beautiful woman who led a beautiful life, and even her dying and death were beautiful.

At the cremation ceremony two days later, I stood by my Darling's coffin, she being dressed in my hakui (the long sleeved white vest) that I had worn since commencing my first O Henro san and holding my juzu in her hands. I donned my purple wagesa and called in a clear voice the most powerful mantra that I know 'namu daishi henjo kongoo, namu daishi henjo kongoo, namu daishi henjo kongoo'.

Then the coffin lid was closed.

I know that Nahoko went to the sacred fire with the Kooboo Daishi's blessings.

The remainder of this journey, and my third O Henro San, will be dedicated to Nahoko's journey to the world of the Gods and Spirits and the healing of my soul.

* * *

Morning

I'm into the air and on my way to Kochi, Fuji-san is just passing below and to my right.

I had slept quite well, aided by two sleeping tablets. Physically I might be just 'OK' for the coming journey. My weight is still less than my normal 70 kilos; the stress of the last few weeks has clearly taken its toll; and my level of fitness is not what I would like it to be.

I said a silent prayer at Nahoko's shrine at her house in Kitami, I extinguished the candle and was on my way to catch the first train from Seijogakuen-mae.

I know this part of the pilgrimage will be very different to any others encountered before. In the past I might have been a little self-indulgent at times, enjoying the sightseeing and physical exercise, but on this journey I will solely be focusing on helping Nahoko in her journey to the world of the Gods and Spirits, and on the healing of my soul. I will also be praying for my friends and people close to me for them to achieve enlightenment.

I am also carrying a small bottle containing part of Nahoko's ashes, which I intend to scatter on Unpenji, the highest and my most favorite of the temples.

This morning there was a red sunrise, similar to the last sunset that Nahoko and I saw together from her hospital bed. The waning moon was low against the backdrop of the pastel pinks and blues of the sky as the Limousine Bus took me to Haneda.

I prayed as the aircraft left the runway: *Dearest Nahoko, I love you and will love you for ever. I invite you to join the Kooboo Daishi and me on this journey. You don't always have to walk with me. You can run ahead, behind, beside me, run away. Dance, enjoy, have fun, being the free spirit again. But most of all I wish you an easy and joyful journey into the realms of the Spirits and Gods. I know they have given you their blessings. My love for you will be there with you, for all times. I love you, my beautiful woman!*

* * *

Later, at Oki no Hama Beach

I took a taxi to the Kochi Station, and just as well. An express train was about to leave for Nakamura Station, for the one hour and forty minute trip. Express trains seem to be far and few in between down here. Then I had a leisurely udon lunch near Nakamura Station, believing I had plenty of time. . .

Somehow the Planning Department (meaning me!!) hadn't done their homework. It was in my mind that the first day's walk was about 15 kilometres, whereas it actually was ten more. Hence the lack of urgency when I hit the road at 1315 hrs.

At exactly 1500 hrs, the minute Nahoko died one week ago, I said a little prayer at the Imadaishiji Temple, just north of the 1,600 metre Shin-Izuta Tunnel. Walking through the long, black hole I sang to the droning of the traffic Nahoko's favorite song, *The Rose*. It was the last song she'd heard in her short life.

At 1545 hrs I panicked mildly when I saw a sign indicating that I still had an other ten kilometres to go to. So I put the hammer down, realising I would barely make it to the minshuku by dinner time, let alone the bath. Luckily for me, I saw an exhausted henro sitting at a bus stop, and the bus that took me to Oki no Hama was just two minutes away.

The minshuku overlooks a beautiful surfing beach. Bathed in the gold of the afternoon sun, there are quite a few surfers riding the waves.

Dinner was excellent! Three kinds of sashimi, locally grown vegetables and home-made condiments. There was an other henro at the table (older than me!) but we didn't talk all that much.

I don't think there can be any planning foul-ups for tomorrow. It's going to be just a long, hard day on the road to the Cape and back. . .

Day 18 – 21 October 2014 – Shimonoake

| | | | | | |
|---------------|---|--------------|-------|------------------|-----------|
| Distance (km) | 42.0 | Vertical (m) | 300 | Time Taken (hrs) | 9.5 |
| Temples | • Kongoofukuji – 38 (Everlasting Happiness) | | | | |
| Accommodation | M Ansyuki | | 2 ½ * | | 6,000 yen |

I turned 70 today! One of my Facebook friends said that 70 used to be 'old', but no longer. As for me, I certainly don't feel (and some have kindly suggested I don't look) my age; 70 is just a number.

It was a long(ish) day today – 42 kilometres in 9 ½ hours, and about 300 metres up and down.

Breakfast at the Oki no Hama was outstanding: rice, fried fish, a raw egg, pickles and home-made miso soup. In addition, the kind host gave me two onigiri (rice balls) for the road.

There were quite a few henros on the road, though not quite as many as yesterday. Mainly my age or older, as well as a few women and younger men.

I headed out at 0630 hrs. Because of the need to back-track the route in order to reach Temple #39, I was able to leave half of the load at the minshuku, which made for faster walking.

East of Iburi Port I joined the old henro route, which was covered by masses of spider webs. I'm not suffering from arachnophobia, but heavy and sticky spider webs plastered on my face is something else! Somewhere on a steep descent I slipped and fell, and I heard Nahoko's admonishing voice 'you always fall down'.

The sea and sky were deep blue and beautiful as I neared Kobutsu Port. Waves crashing against the black volcanic rocks below, buzzards with their shrill 'pee-eeee' circling overhead.

I distinctly felt Nahoko's presence as I enjoyed the morning. She was soaring in the sky, running ahead, hiding, and laughing with me and at me. I smiled and sent kisses into the ether.

Nahoko had two distinct sides, none of which I ever completely understood, even though we had been together for 14 years, and married for four. There was the severe, critical side, that of her being a therapist, counsellor, Bach Flower Remedy practitioner and teacher, and author and translator of books. The other was the playful little girl. One that liked to run away from me in the Tasmanian wilderness, liked to walk on her own in the mountains, swim in the nude on deserted beaches, and once she even threw herself into the River Aare in Switzerland, 'because she felt like doing it', and forgot she had to do the swimming strokes to stay afloat. It could have ended tragically. . .

I had a coffee at Kobutsu Port and, buoyed by the 'Ashizuri Misaki - 10 Kilometre' sign I increased my pace. I reached the lighthouse and temple 90 minutes later.

Temple #38 is large, complex and very beautiful - ponds surrounded by red granite and black volcanic rocks blending in with the beautiful buildings. At the Hondo I lit six incense sticks rather than the usual three, three for Nahoko and three for me.

I spent more time at the temple than I normally do, but I was aware of the passing time. I had a bowl of udon noodles then commenced the return journey at 1100 hrs.

Ninety minutes later, at the same café, I rang Maki, a friend of Nahoko's and I, who had kindly offered to act as my 'O Henro San Manager' (everyone needs a manager, don't they?). As my 'manager', she would arrange the accommodation for me on a daily basis. She said she was doing it for Nahoko, and I was eternally grateful to her for doing it. She rang a business hotel in Sukumo to arrange tomorrow's accommodation. That is one (the biggest) stressor out of the henro's life.

The Ansyuki Minshuku at Shimonoake is OK, not as clean as yesterday's but, hey, nothing is perfect. Dinner was absolutely HUGE! Fried tuna, sashimi, vegetables, rice, miso soup, fruit - enough to feed two hungry henro. I ate almost all, having been informed by my hosts I had actually walked 48 kilometres today. I prefer to settle to 42.

Over dinner I had a very interesting conversation with Maria from Mexico City, who is doing her first O Henro San to 'find herself', after having done the Camino de Santiago Compostella a few times.

Rain is forecast for tomorrow. . .

Day 19 – 22 October 2014 – Sukumo

| | | | | | |
|---------------|--------------------------------|--------------|-----|----------------------|-----|
| Distance (km) | 38.9 | Vertical (m) | 350 | Time Taken (hrs) | 8.5 |
| Temples | • Enkoji – 39 (Emitting Light) | | | | |
| Accommodation | Akisawa Business Hotel | | 3 * | 4,800 Yen (no meals) | |

It was a good day's walking. Not quite as far as yesterday, the weather was on the drizzly side, but that was just fine for me.

Breakfast at the Ansyuki was HUGE again. Last night I was worried that there wouldn't be any food available on today's route, a hunch that proved to be correct. However, the owner gave me an onigiri and there was a small convenience store next to the minshuku that I hadn't noticed yesterday. So I stocked up on food.

I've come to the conclusion that a ten-minute stop every two hours and a short drink stop in between suits me best. After walking along Route 21 for two hours and looking for a sheltered spot to sit down I came across the Yoshii Henro Hut, surely among the very best on Shikoku. There was laid out fruit, quick cooking meals, snacks, chocolate, tea and coffee and hot water, even a fridge with cold drinks. The owner, a kind looking man of about my age poured me tea as I helped myself to a banana and a mandarin. We attempted to converse, but his English was about as good as my Nihongo.

When I reached into my pocket he said 'no money, osettai'. What a kind man! I said a little prayer to the Kooboo Daishi as I moved on, asking Him to bless that man.

When I commenced the day's walk, the road had followed a beautiful wide meandering river which, as I gained height, significantly narrowed down to the size of a creek. Finally, near the village of Mihara it lost itself in the myriad of rice fields.

Mihara Village is a pretty little settlement set between rolling hills that were covered by a fine mist that morning. From here on it went steadily downhill towards Hirata and the Enkoji temple.

This is the temple of Yakushi Nyorai, the God of Healing. I had intended to particularly pray at these temples for Nahoko's recovery. Now, sadly, all I could do was to ask the God to assist Nahoko with an easy move into the world of the Gods and Spirits, and for the healing of my soul.

Near the temple and, later on, I met a 63-year old henro who is doing the pilgrimage anti-clock wise. He said it was a difficult undertaking, because he gets lost frequently and relies on the locals for directions. I guess that puts paid to my plans to do my 4th O Henro San in reverse order. He also said he was doing the pilgrimage 'on the cheap' (my words) as was doing an other Australian, Wayne from Albury whom I overtook today. Sorry, camping on the O Henro San is just not my style. I do like to slip into clean clothes every morning, and have a bath, meal and a clean bed or futon on which to rest at the end of the day. The hotel here isn't bad, the room is about twice the size usually encountered in a business hotel, and clean.

Happy is the henro. . .

Day 20 – 23 October 2014 – Urachi Village

| | | | | | |
|---------------|----------------------------|--------------|------|------------------|-----------|
| Distance (km) | 37.0 | Vertical (m) | 900 | Time Taken (hrs) | 8.5 |
| Temples | • Kanjizaiji – 40 (Kannon) | | | | |
| Accommodation | Nishi-yuugyo Centre | | 4½ * | | 7,800 yen |

I had a dream of Nahoko last night, the first since she travelled to the world of the spirits. I dreamt that she was still alive. In some ways I still cannot believe she has died. To me she is still here. I imagine coming back to Kitami from the O Henro San, opening the front door and calling out 'hi darling' and she answering from her upstairs office with her familiar 'hellooo'.

As to today, it would have been one of the best walking days *ever*. I'm sitting outside the Nishi-yuugyo Centre just north of Ainan Town. Sitting facing the setting sun, overlooking a small bay dotted with thousands of black buoys of the pearl fishing industry. Just a few metres away, on a small pontoon, an egret and a heron are disputing their patch. I bet the larger, grey egret is going to win.

I slept well last night without sleeping tablets, though I woke up several times and found it difficult to get back to sleep. Must try to reconfigure my sleeping pattern if I can. . .

I started walking just after 0600 hrs, having decided to cross the 300 metre high Matsuo Tooge (pass), which also forms the border between the Kochi and Ehime Prefectures, the Dojos of 'Ascetic Training' and 'Enlightenment' respectively. It was a beautiful walk in the cool of the morning, the fragrance of pines hanging in the air. The last 1.7 kilometres was a steep uphill climb to the pass.

At the top I thanked the Kooboo Daishi for His guidance, teachings and support whilst crossing the Kochi Prefecture and asked for His continuing presence. Then I sang 'You'll Never Walk Alone' into the cool ether, followed by 'The Rose' for Nahoko. My singing wasn't quite up to scratch, but there were plenty of emotions.

The way down the pass was much easier, I walked on a little road almost wide enough for me to drive my MINI Cooper down. A short time later I joined Route 56, 'the hard road of Ehime' as I remembered it from 2009.

Somewhere I saw a sign that said 'Matsuyama 145 kilometres', which made me smile. This information was as significant to me as knowing that the average distance between the Earth and Moon is 384,000 kilometres. On the O Henro San it is only the next step that counts. . .

I made the Kanjizaiji Temple in good time where I recited the Heart Sutra at the Hondo and the Kooboo Daishi's Temple. I also sent a special prayer to the Yakushi Nyorai, asking Him to assist Nahoko with an easy and joyful journey into the worlds of the Gods and Spirits. The man at the stamp office seemed to be surprised to see a gaijin henro doing his second pilgrimage.

Kanjizaiji is the temple furthest away from Temple #1. From now on it will be going downhill all the way – erm. . . only figuratively, because the Yokomineji, Unpenji and Temple #88 are still looming in the distance.

From here on it was all the way along the '56', up and down, hardly ever flat, but never too steep to make it uncomfortable. It was sunny, warm, with an occasional cooling breeze blowing.

Maki rang me to say there was no accommodation available around temples #41 and 42. That caused me some concern, because it means a further ten kilometres tomorrow. I had hoped for an 'easy' day. I might have to leave at 0500 hrs to walk the 45 kilometres. It was so nice to hear a friendly voice on the phone, and knowing that Maki was doing such a great job looking after my accommodation needs.

Accommodation can be difficult to find in western Ehime, because there is a dearth of walking henros (even the Kooboo Daishi had made a similar observation some 1,200 years ago). Today I didn't meet an other henro. It seems that all but the hardest 'walking' henro travel by bus or train around here.

The place I'm staying at is quite amazing! It is located right on the water, with views over the bay from the living area and the private bathroom and toilet. A henro can't ask for much more! Though I reflected it was probably not a good place in the case of a tsunami, though the terrain behind the centre goes steeply upwards to where one could flee to if a disaster occurred.

Later

I stood by the water watching the sun go down. Praying to Nahoko, assuring her of my love, reminding her that we had been together in previous lives as we had been in this, and would again be together some time. There was great sadness in me, but tears would not come.

Day 21 – 24 October 2014 – Unomachi

| | | | | | |
|---------------|---|--------------|-----|------------------|------|
| Distance (km) | 47.0 | Vertical (m) | 450 | Time Taken (hrs) | 12.0 |
| Temples | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ryuukooji – 41 (Dragon's Ray) • Butsumokuji – 42 (Buddha's Tree) • Meisekiji – 43 (Brilliant Stone) | | | | |
| Accommodation | Fujino-ya Ryokan | | | 3 * | |

Last night's dinner was out of this world! Rice, fried fish, sashimi, pickled fish, tempura, udon and fruit. I struggled to make a dent into it. The hosts even provided me with an obento because of my early starting time.

Today was a very tough day: forty-seven kilometres, 450 metres up, and twelve hours on the road. I hit the road at 0500 hrs, endlessly chanting the most powerful mantra *Namu Daishi Henjoo Kongoo*.

I had hoped to make it into Uwajima City in five hours but was pleasantly surprised when its castle came into view at 0900 hrs. From here it was a long, tortuous drag up to Muden Station. The road wasn't sufficiently steep to go into slow gear, and too steep to stay in top. And, later in the afternoon, there was the beautiful path across the Hanaga-Tooge in the light of the afternoon sun.

Just a couple of vignettes to today's walking: at the Toyota dealership at Uwajima the entire staff was outside, before opening hours, busily cleaning the shop windows inside and out, sweeping the driveway and even trimming the hedges. A gentleman in black trousers, light coloured jacket and tie was sweeping the customers' car park with a broom – try this in Australia. . .

I also came across some examples of Japanese over-engineering. There were a couple of tunnels, each about 1,000 metres in length, that were actually parallel tunnels – one for the

vehicles, the other for pedestrians and bicycles. The latter were immaculately clean and tiled white with mosaic pictures inlaid into the walls.

I visited three temples today. At Temple #41 (which, for some reason I'd liked ever since I visited it in 2009), when I said my prayers for Nahoko tears began to flow.

A little later, I was presented by a local farmer with a bag of beautiful persimmons.

Apart from chanting my special mantra, I also pondered on what I have learnt on this and the previous O Henro San pilgrimages. There was so much – learning how to let go, learning how to forgive, re-establishing my connection with my older brother Christophe, learning about the 'empty mind' and above it all, meeting the Kooboo Daishi last year. But the journey has also taught me about the power that I have within myself, about my ability to access the immense power of the Universe, helping others to heal themselves, and helping to change others' lives for the better.

Accessing the power of the Universe is important to me in order to heal myself and to use it for the benefit of others.

Nahoko died last week. We both had been aware for quite some time that it was only a matter of time until she joined the Universe, the world of the spirits. The question was simply *when*.

On the day of Nahoko's passing, I was with her as I had been every day for weeks. Her labored breath told me she did not have much more time.

It was at around 1445 hours that I realised Nahoko was ready to go. I held her bony hand, kissed her lips and forehead for one last time and said: 'Darling, you are allowed to go. You are surrounded by those who love you, we love you all. It is safe for you to let go, because the Gods and good spirits will welcome you, look after you, take you into their care. Just go, my beautiful wife, my greatest love'.

Then I created a visualization, wrapping Nahoko in a safe, warm, shimmering white light that I connected to the Universe with a beautiful white path. The Universe, Nahoko and the Path becoming one seamless beautiful white light. Then I said the four simple words 'please go now, Darling'.

At that instance, Nahoko stopped breathing. . .

Days 22 & 23 – 25 & 26 October 2014 – Kuma-koogen

| | | | | | |
|---------------|---|--------------|-----|------------------|---------------------|
| Distance (km) | 90.8 | Vertical (m) | 960 | Time Taken (hrs) | 24 (2 days/1 night) |
| Temples | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Daihooji - 44 (Great Treasure)• Iwayaji - 45 (Rock Cave) | | | | |
| Accommodation | Omogo Ryokan | | | 2 * | 7,500 yen |

25 October – Oozu City

It's been an easy day so far. A 'cake and coffee run', so to speak. To wit: I'm sitting on plush red velvet seats in a café just north of the Hiji Kawa Bridge, enjoying a coffee and chocolate cake, one that I'd promised myself a few days ago. Luckily I am not too smelly/sweaty just yet.

I had a good (medication assisted) sleep. The ryokan where I'd stayed at was a bit tired looking, but the service could not be faulted.

I had a leisurely breakfast and was on the road at 0730 hrs (such luxury!!). My body felt good, there was no soreness to speak of in my legs and feet.

The '56' followed a flat valley floor until it came to the 1,117 meter long Tosaka Tunnel – the worst on this journey so far. It was dirty, grimy, grit getting into my eyes and big ten-wheelers were thundering by less than a metre away. Still, the alternative would have been a 150-metre climb over the hill that I was happy to avoid. From the tunnel it went downhill for about seven kilometres at a comfortable gradient – one that I would have hated to do in the opposite direction.

I reached Oozu after a walk of about 4 ½ hours, a pretty good time!

Oozu is famous for its Ohanahan Street, but I didn't even notice it because most shops were shut, and there were no people about. Maybe because it was Saturday?

Today I felt a bit lonely. I had briefly talked to my friend Jude in Hobart yesterday and this morning. The thought of going as far as Matsuyama then head back to my friends in Tokyo occurred to me, but I knew I could not face myself if I did. And, once back in Tokyo, I was sure I'd head straight back to Shikoku. Quitting the O Henro San was simply not an option!

The man at the next table is smoking. This would usually cause me to complain and get up and leave. Instead I'd just ordered an other coffee. Am I in the process of learning patience and acceptance?

Maki hasn't called me as yet about tonight's accommodation. Could it be I might be sleeping in the rough tonight?

Uchiko, later in the day

I made it into Uchiko Station just after 1500 hrs. Now it is waiting, waiting. Wondering whether Maki has arranged for me to stay here in Uchiko, or whether there might have been a misunderstanding.

26 October

My favorite saying is 'unless you go too far, you will never know how far you can go'. Now I know: for me it is 90.8 kilometres and a climb of about 980 metres. . .

As it turned out there *was* a misunderstanding, and Maki had booked a room for me in Kuma-koogen, some forty kilometres from Uchiko where I had intended to stay overnight today.

Well, the weather looked fine and I felt good about my physical condition: no blisters, tightness or sore spots in my muscles and I had only walked 32 kilometres yesterday. So I decided to do a night walk to Kuma-koogen.

I bought myself a torch at the Lawson Station (they seem to have everything a henro needs, though at times of questionable quality) and set out at 1700 hrs. The navigation would be quite easy, even in the dark of the night: follow Route 379, then 380, and then 33. No mountain trails or other difficult spots to get into trouble.

I walked up the flat, meandering valley at a good pace and was pleasantly surprised when, after three hours and no significant break, I came to the junction of the 379/380. From here on the road became steeper and steeper and winding. My pace slowed, and I recited

endlessly my *Namu Daishi Henjo Kongoo* to help me keep the walking rhythm and give me encouragement.

For previous early morning walking it had always been easy to keep to the road, because of the white line painted on each side of the tarmac. But here the lines had been scrubbed out by wearing traffic, and it was very dark, so I needed the torch at most times. A myriad of stars were shining overhead, but there was no moon to provide any light.

2100 hrs – ‘*Namu Daishi Henjo Kongoo, Namu Daishi Henjo Kongoo. . .*’.

2200 hrs – ‘*Namu Daishi Henjo Kongoo, Namu Daishi Henjo Kongoo. . .*’ (a little more out of breath).

2300 hrs – ‘*Namu Daishi Henjo Kongoo, Namu Daishi Henjo Kongoo. . .* where the hell is that Mayumi Pass?’

The Mayumi Tunnel, at the very top of the pass, is about 450 metres ASL. I crossed it some time between 2300 hrs and midnight. The map book told me there was a henro rest-hut about five kilometres down the road so I decided to go there and I moved at amazing speed. Knowing that the Kooboo Daishi was carrying my pack, and Nahoko cheering me on. I reached the hut at exactly midnight.

I had not taken sufficient warm clothing with me for a camp-out in the mountains, and it was cold and foggy. The henro hut consisted of a roof, waist-high walls on three sides, three hard benches and a table.

I took off the wet rags and put on every stitch of clothing that I still had (I did have some clean spares, the old ones stank) and wrapped myself in the aluminum emergency blanket that I carried. Somehow I must have drifted to sleep because, when I looked at my watch it was 0200 hrs. I was very cold and shivering, and my body hurt because I don't carry any fat to provide much needed padding and warmth.

At 0400 hrs I set out again, because the shivering had become uncontrollable. I walked through thick fog, the occasional car lights piercing the pea soup fog. I wondered what drivers would have thought, seeing this strange apparition suddenly emerging from the darkness.

Turning into Route 33 I counted down the kilometres until I saw the illuminated K-Circle sign, the 24/7 convenience store at the edge of Kuma-koogen. I treated myself to a hot coffee, egg sandwiches and some Pocari Sweat to boost my electrolyte levels.

Temple #44 was within two kilometres from where I was, but it would not open for another hour at seven, so I decided to walk to the more distant Iwayai Temple, about 13 kilometres away.

I followed the old henro road to the Filtration Plant (a landmark on the map), then took on the steep Hacchoozaka Slope. It looks like a very ancient henro trail, given the presence of the many very worn chisoo bosatsu statues lining the trail. My legs were seriously screaming for mercy. Then I followed the beautiful skyline path that would ultimately lead me down to Temple #45.

I was the first henro on the trail today, judging by the multitude of spider webs that hung across the trail. To my left and below, there was a beautiful sea of white clouds above the

valley, the higher hills bathed in the brilliant light of the morning. Patches of red and yellow in the green of the forest.

Iwayaji must be one of the most beautiful temples on the pilgrim route, carved into the side of a steep rock face. Even the Kooboo Daishi had commented on the beauty of its surroundings, writing a poem about the mist floating among the pine trees.

Despite time becoming an issue, I spent more time there than I usually do at a temple. So beautiful!!!

An other henro mistook my walking staff for his as I'd left it on my pack on a bench, as I always do at temples. Or maybe he/she flouted the second commandment of the O Henro San 'I will not steal'. Never mind, I had planned to replace it at Temple #46 anyway, because it was seriously worn down and wasn't much use on the steep downhill mountain trails.

Walking back to Temple #44 was painfully slow. 'Why do they always place temples on the top of hills?', my aching legs asked while I was taking the last few painful steps.

The ryokan I'm staying at is 'just OK', even though it is listed as 'recommended' in the guide book. It's very much on the tired side but I'm sure to get a good sleep. Tomorrow is going to be an easy day.

P.S. the old woman that runs the ryokan has the place wired, has x-ray vision or is simply a snoop. She admonished me (in Japanese) for (accidentally) leaving a biscuit and two lollies in the pockets of my pants when I did the wash. And she seems to be aware of every of my moves.

Day 24 – 27 October 2014 – Matsuyama

| | | | | | |
|---------------|--|----------------------------|-----|------------------|-----|
| Distance (km) | 18.8 | Vertical (m) | 190 | Time Taken (hrs) | 8.0 |
| Temples | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Jooruriji – 46 (Pure Emerald)• Yasakaji – 47 (Eight Slopes)• Sairinji – 48 (West Forest) | | | | |
| Accommodation | Chochin-ya | 4 ½ * (in the new section) | | 7,762 yen | |

Today was as good as it can get for a henro. I'm sitting in my room at the ryokan across the street from Temple #46. I stayed here in 2009, but since then a new wing has been added. My room overlooks some market gardens and, a few hundred metres away, low hills. It has tatami flooring and its own bath/toilet (who needs his own bath, though, when there is a perfect onsen on the lower ground floor?). I had fun swapping from the hot to the cold basins and back again. There is also a big bank of washing machines and dryers in the basement. This place is set up to cater for big crowds.

There is also a shop that enabled me to stock up on supplies. I bought myself a new hakui (stole), and a white vest with sleeves. In the past this garment had been considered to be a henro's death shroud if he died on the pilgrimage. Nahoko was wrapped in my old and faded one when she commenced her final journey.

The Omogo Ryokan where I'd stayed last night, so I was told, was established as a teahouse 120 years ago and later converted into a ryokan. Breakfast, as had been last night's dinner, was plentiful but the quality was definitely lacking.

There were four henros at the dinner and breakfast table, all about my age and the one next to me spoke excellent English. We discussed Buddhism, spirituality and what the

journey was doing for us personally, and the road ahead. Most of them were destined to go to #45 on that day, considered to be a 'hard to get to' temple. I was glad this was behind me.

I left at the unusually late hour of 0730 for the 20-kilometre walk (I definitely must be getting soft!!). Halfway up the 702 metre Misaka-Tooge I caught up with Anna, a woman in her late 20ies from New Zealand who is doing her first O Henro San. She is usually camping (her stops are dictated by coin laundries) and carries a pack with a few attached bags weighing a massive 17 kilos. She was walking almost as fast as I do. So together we headed up the pass then down to Temple #46.

I usually prefer to walk alone, but Anna proved to be really good company and I enjoyed walking with her.

I had been feeling slightly uneasy about the descent from the pass, but the track leading down to Matsuyama is actually easy and in very good condition. The memories of my previous descent were coined after having done Temples #44 and 45 from Kuma-koogen in the one day, and I had been struggling on that day for some unknown reason.

I finished my day's walking around midday and, not having anything else to do, decided to walk to Temples #47 and 48 as well. Not that it will impact of tomorrow's distance because the road to #49 goes past #48, but I can reduce the 'temple time' by about an hour.

There is a tinge of sadness in me. Nahoko and I had been to Matsuyama twice, once when she visited me on the previous O Henro San, and two years ago when we climbed the Ishizuchi-san together. She was a little frightened to go all the way to the 1,852 meter Tengu Dake, but went up there anyway, and we enjoyed the most amazing sunset and sunrise from the top. How I wish to do this again with her. . .

Nahoko and I were meant to meet in a few days' time in Matsuyama to go up Ishizuchi-san again before they close the ryokan on top for the winter. Right now, the only thing of hers that I carry with me are her ashes and her wedding ring on a chain around my neck. She'd bought our rings in Oban, Scotland, and hers is now blackened with my sweat. At every temple I pray to the God for her smooth, easy and joyful passage. The other day I felt Nahoko's presence close by, but we appeared to be separated, like by a pane of glass between the two of us, and we could not communicate or connect.

Day 25 – 28 October 2014 – Matsuyama City

| Distance (km) | 30.8 | Vertical (m) | 100 | Time Taken (hrs) | 10.0 |
|---------------|--|--------------|-----|------------------|------|
| Temples | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joodoji – 49 (Pure Land) • Hantaji – 50 (Great Prosperity) • Ishiteji – 51 (Stone Hand) • Taisanji – 52 (Big Mountain) • Enmyooji – 53 (Circular Illumination) | | | | |

A longish day, mainly because of the number of temples visited. The 'Kilometres to go to Matsuyama' signs have now given way to the 'Kilometres to go to Imabari' – 40 kilometres from here.

There was a clear sky, not a cloud above the Misaka-Tooge when I set out at 0630 hrs. The coffee at the K-Circle store wasn't too bad, and I was at Temple 49 at 0800 hrs. From here

it was easy to find the way to Temple #51 and the Dogo Onsen, Japan's oldest bathhouse. Nahoko and I had visited it two years ago.

From the onsen onwards, navigation became a bit of a challenge. The trail of little red arrows that I followed disappeared at times (*no*, I did not accidentally miss them!!), there were 'multiple choice arrows' and Route 196 disappeared at an intersection only to reappear somewhere else. I finally gave up following the arrows and navigated independently using map and compass. That did the trick.

The locals on the way were quite friendly. An old woman, doubled over and walking on a frame gave me encouraging words and a 'ganbatte kudasai' and 'o kyoo tsugette', a farmer in a field gave me a can of soft drink and a sweet biscuit and a young woman in a small red car rescued me from taking the wrong road to Temple #53.

Physically, when I put pressure on my right knee it brings up a burning/stinging sensation. I felt that even before commencing the O Henro San, but it doesn't seem to affect my walking. And the ball of my left foot is a bit tender, I don't know whether it is an inflammation or stress fracture.

Day 26 – 29 October 2014 – Imabari

| | | | | | |
|---------------|--|--------------|-----|--------------------------|-----|
| Distance (km) | 35.0 | Vertical (m) | 150 | Time Taken (hrs) | 9.5 |
| Temples | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enmeiji – 54 (Long Life) • Nankooboo – 55 (Southern Lights) | | | | |
| Accommodation | Imabari Urban Hotel | | 3 * | 7,660 yen (incl. B'fast) | |

Today was tough going, even though the distance wasn't all that big. It had to do with my physical condition.

My left foot was quite painful and significantly slowed my progress. I had no painkillers with me, only tablets against gout that I occasionally get if I don't drink enough water, but I reasoned they must have painkilling and anti-inflammatory substances in them. The medication seemed to do the trick, and also seemed to fix the burning sensation in my knee.

Earlier on, I communicated with Nahoko, assuring her of my ever lasting love and blowing a kiss into the air. Immediately, a black crow circled my head, and then settled on a nearby lamp pole on my right. Now what do I make of this???

1130 hrs found me quite miserable at a little food stall on the side of the road that was selling octopus dumplings covered with mayonnaise and bonito flakes (a very popular snack in Japan). I ordered two portions and while I was waiting I called my friend Jude in Hobart, because I needed to hear a friendly voice. As usual, she was very kind and supporting.

After lunch, with the medication having kicked in, I was feeling better and increased my pace. Somewhere along the way I overtook Anna, who too was struggling with her big pack against the strong headwind.

I felt relieved when I arrived at Temple #54, with #55 nearby.

The hotel is quite nice. I enjoyed a long bath and shave, whilst my washing was being done just next to my room.

Right now I'm sitting in a small restaurant near the Imabari Station (every table has its own booth with the door closed). The second beer has just arrived. If it were any colder, it would have an ice crust on top. I've just devoured a delicious fried fish that looked like mackerel and am now eating a 'nabe' (stew pot) of vegetables and oysters. I'm not so sure about the oysters, but the veggies are very nice.

I've booked myself a massage in my room for 2000 hrs. Tomorrow I will go easy on myself, maybe even travel a short distance by taxi, bus or train. Yokomineji looms for the day after tomorrow, but I am sure my legs should be OK.

Day 27 – 30 October 2014 – Saijoo City

| | | | | | |
|---------------|---|--------------|-----|------------------|-----------|
| Distance (km) | 32.6 | Vertical (m) | 430 | Time Taken (hrs) | 9.25 |
| Temples | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taisanji – 56 (Peace Mountain) • Eifukuji – 57 (Good Luck) • Senyuuji – 58 (Hermit in Seclusion) • Kokubunji – 59 (Official State) | | | | |
| Accommodation | Yunosato Komachi Spa | | 2 * | | 8,250 yen |

A much better day today! Even though the *Diclofenac* was supposed to be good against gout, it worked on my inflamed foot and I walked at my normal, fast pace. I overtook a few henros, who seem to be very scarce in this area!

Waking up and trying to move my body, I encountered a few sore spots I hadn't had the day before – surely the aftereffect of the massage this 'iron-thumbed' therapist gave me. He was very good, though.

In 2009, at Temple #56, there were two little white 'fluff-ball' dogs that dominated the stamp office. This time only one greeted me.

I also clearly remembered struggling up to Temple #58 five years ago, because I visited it at the end of a long day. This time, being early in the day, it was relatively easy. Two buses disgorged a bunch of 'tourist henros' while I was there and there was much jostling and (polite) pushing and shoving amongst the worshippers to get to the best spot. It didn't affect me because I was ahead of them in my temple routine, but their action reminded me of the crowd trying to board the Odakyu Line train at Shinjuku Station at seven on a Friday evening. When I got to Temple #59, 6.1 kilometres up the road, they were there again, just having finished their temple routine and shaking hands with the stony figure of the Kooboo Daishi.

After #59 it was an other twenty kilometres of 'Namu Daishi Henjoo Kongoo' to my accommodation. The light turned soft and golden, and the distinct crag of Ishizuchi-san came to dominate the skyline more and more. This holy mountain, one of Japan's seven holiest, being so close almost made me regret my decision not to go up there this time. At any rate, I didn't have our 'marriage stones' with me that I intend to place at the summit, the Tengu Dake, at my next visit.

I've been calling a few friends over the last few days – Jude, Tomoyo, Takamasa, and of course Maki. Life on the road can get a bit lonely at times, especially when one doesn't speak the country's language. I feel really humbled by the love, care, friendship and support these wonderful people are providing me with. I feel very privileged to be included in their lives.

On the road today I received two osettai, cold tea, and crackers and boiled sweet potato. The latter will come in very handy on the way up the Yokomineji, whose God is the Dainichi Nyorai, our favorite God.

As to the place I'm staying at today, given the price I really cannot give it more than two stars. But, hey, I've just have had a very filling meal and the hot bath in the onsen (which admittedly had seen better days) was wonderful.

Day 28 – 31 October 2014 – Saijoo City

| | | | | | |
|---------------|---|--------------|-----|-----------------------|------|
| Distance (km) | 32.1 | Vertical (m) | 720 | Time Taken (hrs) | 10.0 |
| Temples | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yokomineji – 60 (Side Summit Peak) • Kouonchi – 61 (Incense Garden) • Hoojuji – 62 (Temple of Wealth and Happiness) • Kichijooji – 63 (Mahasri Laksmi) • Maegamiji – 64 (Front God) | | | | |
| Accommodation | Business Hotel Tamano-ya | | 3 * | 6,500 yen (two meals) | |

It's been a fairly big day: up the Yokomineji, then four temples along Route 11 the last of which, #64, is particularly complex and beautiful.

There was a big crush at Temple #61, the 'modern' temple when I got there around noon. The leader of one of the big groups gave me an osettai, two little figures, in purple and red, about three centimetres high.

I had expected similar crowds at the following temples, but they did not materialise. Some temples don't have parking facilities for big buses, which made me wonder whether the 'tourists' simply bypass them and get one of their assistants to have their 'nookyoo-cho' stamped.

I slept quite well and was on the road at 0645. Making good time until I got to the trailhead to the Yokomineji, which I reached in just ninety minutes. The following 2.2 kilometres, however, were quite a struggle and I needed an other fifty minutes to reach the temple.

There were very few people at the temple. I gave a big red apple to an ageing walking henro who told me he was 83 years old and was doing his 18th O Henro San, walking and bussing. Wow! I don't think I'll ever come even near this number.

A few raindrops were falling as I was at the temple, but the rain held off for the day. It was a gloomy, cool day but ideal walking weather.

Somewhere after Temple #62 I stopped for coffee and cake. Delicious, it certainly beat the chemical cakes and coffee I've been treating my body to at the various convenience stores.

I spent the day between reciting 'Namu Daishi Henjoo Kongoo' and thinking about Nahoko. I fervently pray at every temple for the Gods and good spirits to help her to completely cut the bonds that may be keeping her anchored to this Earth.

I have had the feeling that, over the last few days, our connection has been fading. Is it Nahoko or I? I know that in every life there is but one chance to find true love. If one doesn't grasp that chance for whatever reason, it may still be possible to love again, but never to the fullest. I know that Nahoko and I were meant for each other, and we were privileged to experience what some would call a 'fairytale love'. I have no regrets about anything that happened in our life together for these fourteen years. If feel there was

nothing left unsaid or undone, and nothing said or done we should not have been said or done. How much more privileged can two people be?

I 'hit the wall' at the Kamo River, a short distance from my hotel and ducked into the Family Mart for an onigiri and a piece of pastry. The latter was stale and tasted of chemicals, but it was what my body seemed to crave.

Day 29 – 1 November 2014 – Shikoku-Chuuo City

| | | | | | |
|---------------|-----------------|--------------|-------|-----------------------|-----|
| Distance (km) | 34.5 | Vertical (m) | 250 | Time Taken (hrs) | 7.5 |
| Temples | • None | | | | |
| Accommodation | Ryokan Tsuru-ya | | 3 ½ * | 7,500 yen (two meals) | |

Very early

I cannot sleep. 'The Rose' is playing in my mind. . .

Evening

It was a relatively easy/breezy day. No temples, just the thirty-odd kilometres on or alongside Route 11. There weren't any henros on the road, not until I got close to Shikoku-Chuuo anyway, which made me wonder whether they might have taken the day off, given it was the weekend.

But then there is little reward for some to walk this stretch of road. It's just along a boring highway, with a small hill about half-way, and 44 kilometres between Temples #64 and 65.

After an hour's walking I became desperate for a caffeine infusion. Lawson Station didn't have any (!!), Family Mart's tasted bitter and horrible (they probably don't know how to clean a coffee machine) and K-Circle's, about an hour later, wasn't much better.

I walked fast and without any significant breaks. At noon I stopped at SUNKUS and picked up some of the worst tasting obento known to man. I certainly didn't seem to have much luck with the 24/7 stores this morning. . .

Close to Shikoku-Chuuo I overtook two female henros struggling with their big packs, and later two males. They all seem to be staying at this ryokan too tonight.

I don't know whether it was my fast walking or the instant chanting 'Namu Daishi Henjoo Kongoo' that made me lightheaded, but at times I almost felt I was floating.

I looked at myself in the mirror this morning. Whatever fat I may have carried around my waist is definitely gone. Just looking like a lean, mean walking machine (Jenny Craig, eat your heart out. . .).

I didn't take any medication this morning and didn't have any pains, meaning the inflammation in my left foot has receded and it wasn't a stress fracture. I'm relieved! I'm still on sleeping tablets, though, and it might take a little time for me to get over this little addiction.

A little later

I spent the afternoon washing my clothes, watching horse and car racing, and drinking beer. What would the Kooboo Daishi have thought of this??

Dinner was quite a lively affair with the four henros I overtook earlier. Quite a bit of beer and sake was consumed and a 71 year-old henro (Mizouchi Michiaki) got a bit noisy. He and I will be staying at the same minshuku tomorrow.

As for tomorrow, rain is forecast.

As for the ryokan, I received a very friendly reception, the ofuro was ready in no time, and I have my own bathroom and toilet. Happy henro! One can't ask for much more.

Day 30 – 2 November 2014 – Miyoshi City

| | | | | | |
|---------------|-------------------------------|--------------|-------|------------------|-----------|
| Distance (km) | 22.4 | Vertical (m) | 500 | Time Taken (hrs) | 6.0 |
| Temples | • Sankakuji – 65 (Triangular) | | | | |
| Accommodation | Hakuchi-soo Minshuku | | 4 ½ * | | 6,800 yen |

Now I am definitely getting soft! Yesterday I walked for less than eight hours, today I did so for six but could easily have done it in five.

The minshuku I'm staying at is without a doubt one of the very best I've ever stayed in: it is located high about the Yoshino-Gawa (River), my room has a balcony with a splendid view over the valley below and surrounding hills, and I have my own bathroom and toilet – plus an ofuro downstairs from which I just have emerged, even though it is only 1430 hrs.

I had actually intended to stay at the Minshuku Okada close to the trailhead to the Unpenji where I stayed in 2009, but it was full. The kind owner however directed Maki to the Minshuku Hakuchi-soo not far from the Awa-Ikeda Station, the owners of which would collect Mizouchi-san and me at the Okada, and deliver us there the following morning – a round-trip of about 18 kilometres!

Today's breakfast was scheduled for 0600 hrs, but I was called downstairs at 0540. That was OK with me because I was almost packed (not that there was much packing to do) and it meant an earlier start for me. It had been raining over night, heavy at times, and the sky was still overcast.

I overtook Mizouchi-san on the way up the big hill on which Temple #65 is located. There were quite a few henros there already, including the passengers of a big bus, despite the early hour.

The first sakura blossoms were out, I was told they are called 'crazy sakura' for obvious reasons. From this temple it was a gentle walk downhill for about six kilometres. Not too far away were the smoking chimney stacks of Shikoku-Chuuo, home to big paper manufacturers and creators of bad smells. Then the road went gently uphill on Route 192 for about five kilometres. Many beautiful and loving thoughts for Nahoko came to my mind, some of which I intend share with her when I deposit her ashes at the Unpenji tomorrow.

At the western entrance of the 855 metre Sakaime Tunnel I thanked the Kooboo Daishi for His protection, teachings and support whilst crossing the Ehime Prefecture. Funny it only seems a few days since I left the Kochi Prefecture. I think this will be one of the last long tunnels on this O Henro San.

I stopped for a huge meal for 1080 yen at the other end of the tunnel, where I had a brief chat with a local teacher of English at the nearby high school (with twelve students) and a female henro from Paris.

Mizouchi-san overtook me while I had my lunch but I soon caught up with him and together we walked to the Okada to wait for the transport. Whilst waiting, Yoko sent me a message suggesting we'd spend a couple of days at a friend's place at Hayama later this month. That would be a really nice break.

I spent the afternoon watching TV again (this time baseball and football) and drinking tea. On an other channel the movie the 'The Bridge on the River Kwai' (Alec Guinness *et al*) was shown. Clean, shaved, gleaming, well fed and muscular bodies with a little bright red paint here and there suggesting blood. So far from reality, but then the film was made in the late 1950's.

Whilst writing, the sky has been clearing and there are a few patches of blue. Sun on the Unpenji tomorrow?

Later

There were 13 henros at dinner of the walking, car and weekender genre, aged between about 30 and more than 70. Quite a lively group amongst some of which, especially Yukiko, an English teacher, spoke excellent English.

Tomorrow it's the 'big uphill' and a 0500 hrs breakfast.

Day 31 – 3 November 2014 – Kanon Ji City

| | | | | | |
|---------------|---|--------------|-----|------------------|------------------|
| Distance (km) | 30.2 | Vertical (m) | 750 | Time Taken (hrs) | 9.5 |
| Temples | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unpenji – 66 (Hovering Clouds) • Daikoji – 67 (Great Growth) • Jinnein – 68 (God's Grace) • Kan-onji – 69 (Kannon) • Motoyamaji – 70 (Headquarters) | | | | |
| Accommodation | Sunny-Inn Hotel | | 3 * | | 5,900 (no meals) |

The Hakuchi-soo is certainly one of the very best I've come across my two O Henro San. The fact that I didn't sleep well had nothing to do with the room, just my emotions.

Breakfast was at 0500 hrs, and the transport to Okada left one hour later. There were six henros on board the little bus. There are no overnight convenience stores in this area, so the driver woke up the owner of one of the few stores in the valley to enable us get our supplies.

Our small group hit the trail at 0630 hrs. We walked together along the flat valley road but, once the trail began to go steeply uphill, everyone found his own pace.

The first 1.8 kilometres is up a very steep and narrow concrete road, followed by a dirt track. Thankfully it hadn't rained over night. Halfway up (or down) I saw a street bicycle leaning against a tree, complete with shopping basket. I wondered why or how someone would have bothered to put it there. Then the trail flattened out and eventually joined the sealed access road to the Unpenji.

Much has been made of the difficulties in accessing the temple, but I found it rather easy. Certainly much easier than Temples #12, 60 and 88.

I arrived at Unpenji at exactly 0800 hrs, the remainder of our group ten minutes later.

The most important task for me on this O Henro San was the scattering of part of Nahoko's ashes.

The selection of the place to leave her remains had not been a difficult one. It was the spot where I had found *freedom* during my previous O Henro San. The place, near the big bell and the Kooboo Daishi's Temple, is where I made peace with myself, where I let go of much of the anger I had held for so long, where had I asked for forgiveness from those who I had wronged and forgave those who might have wronged me in the past. I did not know it at that time, but the transformation I experienced at ultimately enabled me, with Nahoko's help, to reconnect with my brother in Switzerland after virtually not speaking to each other for fifty years.

There was brilliant sunshine when I placed a few important items including my wagesa, the purple stole at the foot of a tree, then I scattered the ashes of my beloved woman.

Yesterday words had come to me that I wanted to share with Nahoko. I had intended to say them with a firm, loving voice, but tears began to flow and my voice broke up as I said:

My dearest Nahoko,

With the scattering of your ashes I am setting you free from these earthly bounds. You were like a rare and beautiful flower that only blooms once, and then for only a short time.

You came into this world endowed with the wisdom you had acquired over countless lives before. And during your short years on this Earth, you gained knowledge and understanding that went beyond the understanding of most.

During this life you freely conversed with the greater Universe, you trusted the guidance of the spirits and your own instincts, and you did not fear to walk roads that others would not dare. Your wisdom and understanding went beyond the comprehension of most, yet you continued to teach us and help us learn as much as we were able to.

You were a beautiful person who led a beautiful life. You were even beautiful in your dying and death.

You gave your all to others, yet asked for very little.

You have made the world a better place.

You were my friend, my lover, my wife, my teacher, my harshest critique but, above all, you were my soul-partner, a partnership forged over countless lives.

You changed my life, as I have changed yours. You gave me love, helped me to see, taught me compassion and generosity, you gave me precious gifts of life and yourself that cannot be expressed in words. But most importantly, you believed in me.

There is nothing I can give you now, my beautiful wife. Not that you'd want anything, so much I know. The only thing I can give to you is my ongoing prayers, my love as I have always loved you, and the promise that some day we will be together again in the vastness of the Universe.

Farewell, beautiful Seinaru Hikari, 'Pure Light'. May your Spirit soar, may you dance with the Gods, and may you find eternal peace and enlightenment.

Sayonara.

Reluctantly I took off my wedding band and put it on my neck chain, to join Nahoko's. Then I tried to sing *The Rose* for one last time. . . but my voice broke up.

Then I headed down the mountain, fast. By the time I reached Temple #67 I had caught up with the other henros of my group. Somewhere along the way a woman stopped her little van and gave me three mandarins that I very much appreciated.

I was much too early for the check-in so I left the pack at the hotel and took a taxi to Temple #70, then walked at a leisurely pace to Temples #68 and 69 which occupy the same site.

Maki told me that today was a public holiday, which might explain the many closed shops in town. I'm sitting at what appears to be the only restaurant that is open, 'Baby Face Planets – since 1979'. I devoured a reasonably sized pizza that wasn't enough, so I followed up with a big plate of spaghetti with shellfish. As much as I like the meals that are generally dished up at the accommodation places, it gets all a bit monotonous at times.

Tomorrow it's a relatively short walk to the Kooboo Daishi's place of birth, Zentsuuji.

Day 32 – 4 November 2014 – Zentsuuji

| | | | | | |
|---------------|---|--------------|-----|------------------|-----------|
| Distance (km) | 28.8 | Vertical (m) | 250 | Time Taken (hrs) | 8.5 |
| Temples | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Iyadanaji – 71 (Eight Valley)• Mandaraji – 72 (Mandala)• Shusshakaji – 73 (Shaka Nyorai's Appearance)• Kooyamaji – 74 (Armor Mountain)• Zentsuuji – 75 (Right Path)• Konzooji – 76 (Golden Storehouse) | | | | |
| Accommodation | Zentsuuji Station Hotel | | 2 * | | 3,500 yen |

It's been a good day's walking, but the guys in the Planning Department (meaning me) have stuffed up big time!! I could easily have walked to #77, but instead I'm stuck near #75.

To atone for my sins I went to Temple #76 this afternoon and intend to hit the road at 0500 hrs tomorrow to be at #77 when it opens for business at 0700 hrs.

This morning I decided to have breakfast at the Sunny Inn. The coffee wasn't bad, so I had a second one.

The first three hours to Temple #71 were on or along Route 11. There wasn't a cloud in the sky and the weather would remain so for the rest of the day. As I kept walking Unpenji receded in the distance and new hills appeared and were left behind, including a badly cut-away hill on my left. It was a little like coastal sailing – headlands appearing on the horizon, and then disappearing into the sea.

Temple #71 isn't quite a mountain temple but there are between four and five hundred steps to get up to the Hondo. The temple itself is very complex and set against a vertical rock face. The Kooboo Daishi's Temple is indoors.

There was a MINI Cooper S parked in the parking lot and I saw it a few more times during the day. Doing the O Henro San in a MINI?? Dream on!

At the foot of the steps, at a small shop, two elderly men treated me to tea and a sweet rice cake. They also passed sunflower seeds to passers-by to hand-feed little birds, the size of finches.

From #71 it went downhill through a beautiful bamboo forest and past a pond reflecting the colors of autumn.

I had expected Zentsuuji to be overrun by tourists, unlike its 'poor neighbor', #74 that seems to be visited by only a few in comparison. I wasn't disappointed, and made as quick a getaway as possible, hailing a taxi to #76 before walking back to the hotel.

At #76 I had a really strange experience, the significance of which I haven't quite worked out. As I climbed the few steps up to the Hondo, I noticed a man saying his prayers. There was nothing noteworthy about him, he just looked like an ordinary kind middle-aged man one can see in any government office. He did not wear a henro's tunic, but held a rosary. He recited many prayers off by heart, and used words and expressions I had not heard before at other temples.

After reciting my Heart Sutra I felt a tap on my shoulder and turned around. The man reached for both of my hands.

Now had this happened in Kenya, South America or even Australia, I would have become very suspicious and probably moved away. But not so on the O Henro San, where I value every experience, never knowing where it could lead.

The man began to pray earnestly, the meaning of which I did not understand. But strangely, tears welled into my eyes and he simply held my hands firmer and continued with his prayers.

When he finished he put his right hand on the middle of my chest and, though I barely understood, said mine had been 'Buddha's Tears'. And he said, over and over again, that I had a 'good heart'.

I felt very light walking back to Zentsuuji. . .

The Station Hotel looked like good value on paper – 3,500 yen. There was even a sign outside indicating it had an 'occasional restaurant' – whatever that means. My room is on the 6th floor and has a balcony with a view south, and that's where the good news ends. The young man at the front desk told me there was in fact no restaurant and pointed to the 24-hour convenience store across the street when I asked about food. When I asked about the *sentakki* he pointed in the same direction and said 'coin laundry'.

So what! I've travelled rough in South America and Eastern Africa and, compared to some of the hotels there, this one is 'five stars'! The water in the bathroom (my room actually had private facilities) was hot, my clothes aren't too smelly, and I washed my T-shirt and undies in the bathtub.

Later on I found a reasonably nice restaurant, and had a massage on my way back.

I think tomorrow I'll be going across the road for my 'breakfast', whatever that means.

Day 33 – 5 November 2014 – Takamatsu

| Distance (km) | 42.3 | Vertical (m) | 700 | Time Taken (hrs) | 12.5 |
|---------------|---|--------------|-----|------------------|-----------|
| Temples | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dooryuuji – 77 (Arising Way) • Gooshooji – 78 (Illuminating Local Site) • Tennoji (Koshoin) – 79 • Kokubunji – 80 (Official State) • Shiromineji – 81 (White Peak) • Negoroji – 82 (Fragrant Root) | | | | |
| Accommodation | Momo-ya Ryokan | | 2 * | | 6,800 yen |

An other 'BIG' one, and I am just glad I won't have to repeat it in a hurry. As to my previously bad planning, I remember what my mother used to say: 'if you don't have a head, you have feet'. Well, my legs did most of the work today.

I began the walk at 0500 hrs with the intention of being at Temple #77 by 0700 hrs when the stamp office opens. Being autumn, this meant I would be walking through pitch-blackness for a while. Orion and the Big Dipper were clearly visible in the sky, until the grey of the morning faded them. Somewhere a dog stood in the middle of the road, snarling and barking ferociously at me, and I was glad to have the kongozue at hand, just in case. However, the beast thought the better of it and slunk away into some bushes.

I arrived at #77 at 0615 hrs when people were readying the temple for the day's business and said my prayers. Half an hour later, the lady from the stamp office brought me a sweet bun and a large steaming cup of chai. I really appreciated this gift, because it was quite cold at this time of morning.

Last night, when I looked at myself in the mirror, I noticed the bones of my sternum and ribs showing quite clearly. Today I felt famished and weak. I desperately needed food but, at 0930 hrs, there were no restaurants open for business. I finally settled for a hot 'meal' at a Lawson Station (eggs that had been boiled for too long in some kind of brownish broth, something that was supposed to be 'manufactured fish' and boiled daikon). They all looked as bad as they tasted, but at least I ingested some calories.

That food did not satisfy my state of famine, it simply reminded my stomach that something like food existed. At the eastern end of the Sakaide Shopping Street I had a large bowl of udon for 210 yen, about A\$2.40(!). The elderly owner was asleep at one of the tables when I arrived and I was sorry for having to wake her up. The udon filled some empty space, and the kind owner gave me two mandarins as osettai.

At Temple #80 around lunchtime I was still hungry so I had a huge vegetarian meal for 500 yen that I thought would last me for the rest of the day. Wrong!

I'd vaguely remembered the Goshikidai Plateau, on which Temples #81 and 82 are located, but I'd forgotten that it wasn't a flat plateau, and that there was some very serious going up and down. I began to run out of puff quickly! I had the last of my lollies and sucked the last of my energy gels that I carried, hoping I'd make it to #82 and down into Takamatsu.

At #81 I again met the couple from the Unpenji. They seemed to be travelling well, and told me that yesterday they had put in an 11-hour day. I guessed they were doing the temples in the order of 79:81:82:80:83 which appears to be much easier.

At Temple #82 (a very beautiful temple and surrounds) I was seriously running out of time so I just said a few brief prayers instead of going through the full temple routine then

had the book stamped before heading down towards Takamatsu. At a henro hut near that temple I was given cold tea and a sweet as an osettai but, more importantly, information about a shortcut (going through private land) that wasn't shown in the 88 Route Guide. That cut my descent by at least fifteen minutes, a lot of time when U are running out of it and it is getting dark.

By the time I found the ryokan it was completely dark. It was difficult to find, but finally a local woman pointed me into the right direction.

At dinner there were two Japanese men of about my age, a Mexican woman in her fifties (not the one I'd met earlier) and me. One of the men was travelling with the woman, though I was unable to establish what their relationship was. She spoke no Japanese, and her partner very little English. She had, apparently, made the booking at the ryokan herself the day before and was now arguing with the owner about the price. I wished she would have refrained from doing so.

So, tomorrow is going to be a much easier day now that my feet have atoned for the earlier mistakes by the Planning Department. The brain is relieved. And it looks like Koya San this Sunday, Monday back in Tokyo. . .

Day 34 – 6 November 2014 – Sanuki City

| Distance (km) | 34.1 | Vertical (m) | 300 | Time Taken (hrs) | 9.5 |
|---------------|---|--------------|-----|------------------|-----|
| Temples | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ichinomiya - 83 (First Shrine) • Yashimaji - 84 (Roof Island) • Yakuriji - 85 (Eight Chestnuts) • Shidoji - 86 (Fulfilling One's Wish) | | | | |
| Accommodation | Sakae-soo Ryokan | | | 3 ½ * | |

It was a good day's walk after yesterday's struggle. Breakfast was at 0530 hrs, set up by the lazy owner (who was nowhere to be seen) the night before, and I was on the road by 0615 hrs.

The initial part of today's walk was through the streets of Takamatsu. The henro trail was well marked but if one lost it, either intentionally or not, the city was easy to navigate through using main roads and the river as reference points.

I saw road signs that made me smile: Matsuyama - 154 km, Kochi - 137 km, Tokushima - 73 km.

A light rain was drizzling down as I set out, but cleared during the day. The Yashima Plateau, on which Temple #84 is located, was shrouded in mist. Halfway up the slope I overtook an other henro, as well as the Mexican woman and her travel partner.

Temple #84 is quite beautiful and there was a lovely pond reflecting the colors of autumn. It is said it ran red with blood after a major battle, when the victorious warriors washed their swords in the water.

The dirt path down from the plateau was very slippery and, even moreso lower down, where it had been replaced by smooth concrete, which was now covered with wet moss. I made it down without a fall, though.

The marked path on the valley floor between temples #84 and 85 is confusing to say the least. It goes, for no good reason, right and left and back even though the cable car to #85

where the track up the hill begins is straight ahead. So, my advice to other henros is, just ignore the arrows and follow your nose.

Temple #85 is 220 metres ASL and I indulged in travelling up there by cable car. I reasoned there was no point in being a martyr as I was feeling very tired.

I also received osettai today, from two passers-by and the man at the stamp office at #86. I will also feature in many bus-henros photo albums, as my presence at #84 set out a photography frenzy.

Further south, Temple #86 is a real gem with its five-tiered pagoda. I was ahead of time, so I enjoyed strolling around the gardens, admiring the beautiful gold and reds of the trees blending in with the buildings. Somewhere I also caught the sight of the French henro that I had met a few days earlier, but we did not talk. She must be a really tough walker.

Ryokan Sakae-soo seems to be very popular, and is very good. Nice room, ofuro, welcome (with a very patient owner who doesn't speak English), dinner and sentakki.

So, it looks like #87 and 88 tomorrow, before returning to #1 on Saturday.

Day 35 – 7 November 2014 – Higashi-Kawaga City

| | | | | | |
|---------------|--|--------------|-----|-----------------------|-----|
| Distance (km) | 33.6 | Vertical (m) | 550 | Time Taken (hrs) | 9.0 |
| Temples | • Nagaoji - 87 (Long Tail) • Ookuboji - 88 (Large Hollow) | | | | |
| Accommodation | Shirotori Onsen | | 3 * | 6,300 yen (no B'fast) | |

My journey is over – well, almost. Tomorrow I will be returning to Temple #1 where, for all intents and purposes, I will be commencing my third O Henro San in the *Dojo of Spiritual Awakening*.

I hit the road at 0645 hrs, heading south for Temple #87. It was a cool morning, and my pace was brisk.

The authorities operating #87, to put it mildly, lack imagination. The temple's grounds are flat and quite extensive, but these good people didn't have any better idea than to turn it into a parking lot, with car spaces neatly marked with white powder.

From here the shortest route to #88 is via the 741 metre high Mt Nyotai (exactly the same height as Yokomineji) but I didn't feel like going up there and then dropping 300 metres down into #88. So I chose the longer, less steep Routes 3 and 377.

On the way there, a piece of rubber from the heel of my KEEN shoes parted company. AND I HAVE WORN THESE SHOES FOR LESS THAN THREE WEEKS – ONLY THREE!!! I must have a serious talk with Mr/Ms KEEN about their product. . .

On the way up to #88 I again overtook the Mexican woman and her partner. I can't work out their walking pattern. They must either set out incredibly early (which is doubtful) because they walk very slow or alternatively have a support vehicle. The man today carried a light cloth bag compared with the bulky backpack he had two days ago and the woman doesn't carry anything.

Apart from them there were no henros on the road, except one on a bicycle who came the other way.

The Hondo is located quite dramatically against the backdrop of Mt Nyotai. There I said the Heart Sutra for the last time on this journey, having visited the Kooboo Daishi's temple earlier on the way in from the side gate. I asked the Gods once more to gently lead Nahoko into their world, and for them to help her to release her bonds to this Earth.

Then I asked for the God's (Yakushi Nyorai – the God of Healing) for his special blessings for my family, children, grand children, friends in Japan, Switzerland, Australia, the world and of course Maki, my wonderful 'O Henro San Manager'.

I slowly walked back from the Hondo to the Kooboo Daishi's Temple. Next to it stands a big statue of the holy man. I tried to thank Him for His support and teachings, but tears began to flow and a deep sob escaped my throat. It felt good to let go of something, whatever it was. . .

A TV crew from the SANYO Broadcasting Co LTD in Okayama hung around the temple doing some program to commemorate the 1,200 years of the O Henro San, and they picked on me for a 30-minute 'on camera' interview. They asked me about my reasons for doing the O Henro San, my philosophies, why I was in Japan, and dozens of other questions. They even asked me to walk into the Hondo, just for show. The things one does for one's ego. . .

I hung around the temple, because I did not feel like letting go. The O Henro San has become part of me, I am a henro, and will for ever be one. Being guided by special, benevolent forces. I feel very privileged to be in this space.

From this temple high in the mountains I gave my blessings to my family, my relatives, friends and acquaintances all around the world. Asked the Gods to ease their sufferings, and to help them to find enlightenment. Then I headed down the road.

I had actually hoped to walk a little further today, but the next accommodation seems to be more than ten kilometres or two hours away. For today, an other 'marathon distance' would have been a little too much.

I checked my weight at the Onsen tonight. If the scales are correct, I'm 66 kilos, four less than my normal weight.

Day 36 – 8 November 2014 – Tokushima

| | | | | | |
|---------------|---|--------------|-------|----------------------|-----|
| Distance (km) | 12.9 (walking) 16.0 (taxi) | Vertical (m) | 370 | Time Taken (hrs) | 3.0 |
| Temples | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ryoozenji – 1 (Vultures Peak) • Gokurakuji - 2 (Pure Land) | | | | |
| Accommodation | Tokushima Station Hotel | | 2 ½ * | 5,600 yen (no meals) | |

I'm sitting at TULLY's Coffee place near Tokushima Station, where it all began in August 2009. Nothing has changed – even the apple pie is the same, as are the smiles of the staff (undoubtedly *they* have changed over time, though).

I'm waiting for the Station Hotel open at 1500 hrs, which is still a couple of hours away.

And so the story ends, and a new one begins. The never-ending wheel of life. . .

This morning I completed my second O Henro San and commenced my third. I don't know when I will be continuing the third, but it means that I will remain a henro, being bound by its commandments and the henro's oath.

My day began when a taxi picked me up at 0600 hrs for a drive down to the coast. Yes, a taxi! Technically this disqualifies me from calling myself a 'walking' henro, but I don't care.

I had decided to make the day an easy one for me, I just didn't feel like arriving at Temple #1 in mid-afternoon. The investment of a 4,110 yen fare was a really good one, and the taxi driver gave me a nicely packaged boiled egg with the change, the significance of which escaped me.

The taxi took me to the junction of Roads 11 and 1 near the 'Love Hotel' I had stayed at in 2009. This facility is no longer available to henros, or may have even been closed.

From there it was a steady climb through the coolness of the morning to the 370 metre Oosaka Tooge. There was barely a sound in the air. No bird song and I missed the clunking of my Kongoozue, which I had left at #88 to be consumed by a sacred fire.

I reached the pass with ease, and it didn't take me long to walk down to Itano Town and past Temple #3.

As I walked in silence, I reflected on the learnings from this O Henro San, which I'd commenced in October 2011. Never in my life could I then have foreseen the turn of events, especially the death of my beautiful wife Nahoko. But life is about light and shadow, and the brighter the light, the deeper the shadow must be. I am grateful for the bright light and darkness, because being eternally in the grey zone, without light and shadow, is not a life well lived.

I recall singing last time I descended the Oosaka Tooge. This time I was a little more subdued. Maybe tiredness, certainly some sadness in me that I am yet to overcome. So I simply concentrated on walking, reciting my 'Namu Daishi Henjoo Kongoo' over and over again.

At Temple #1 I said my last prayers on this O Henro San, and the first on my third. Then I gave my blessings to all those close to me and the people of this world, praying for their enlightenment.

The monk at the stamp office gave me a bracelet of prayer beads, they look like some kind of seeds.

At this temple I also met, by chance, David C Moreton, who had significantly contributed to the Japan 88 Route Guide, the book I'd so heavily relied on to get me around Shikoku. He was giving a small group of American people a 'taster' of the O Henro San, walking from Temples #1 to #5.

Then I commenced my third O Henro San, walking to Temple #2. The sun had almost broken through the clouds, and it made for pleasant walking.

Then I took the train from Bando Station back to Tokushima. Tomorrow I will be in Koya San.

9 November 2014 – Koya San

To yesterday

The Tokushima Station Hotel certainly doesn't look much from the outside, and it took me a while to find because it was wrongly marked on the map. But the room was very comfortable. The fact that I didn't sleep well had nothing to do with the accommodation.

Mid-afternoon I had a curry at COCOcurry, which must rate among the worst slop ever served up in Japan. So I decided to 'dine in' with a nice loaf of bread, a piece of Gruyère Cheese and a bottle of Bordeaux.

In the afternoon my friend Jude told me that her husband had been diagnosed with a serious illness. I promised to say a very strong prayer for his complete healing and recovery at Koya San.

During the night I dreamt (nightmare??) that I had completed the 88 temples, and was now desperately looking for Temple #89 that was nowhere to be found.

Today

Today was an other long day but, for once, not due to walking. The taxi picked me up at 0450 hrs, then I caught the Nankai Ferry to the Port of Wakayama for the 2 ½ hour crossing. Then, three different trains and the Koya San cable car later, I arrived at this sacred place more than 900 metres up in the mountains. I arrived just before mid-day. The entire trip only cost 2,000 yen.

It felt strange to be in Koya San, the place where the Kooboo Daishi had walked and worked some 1,200 years ago and is now in eternal meditation, awaiting the appearance to the next Buddha, Maitreya.

I walked silently through the Okunoin, site of over 200,000 gravestones and monuments. I said my final prayers then had my nookyoo-cho stamped one more time.

I took my time walking back to the Fugen-in Temple where I would stay over night. Nahoko and I had stayed there four years ago.

Heavy clouds covered Koya San giving mighty cedars in the Okunoin a mysterious and mystical appearance. I wished Nahoko could be there with me, but then I realised she was probably enjoying her new life as a spirit even more. What's more, she was probably there with me anyway.

Outside the Okunoin there was a riot of autumn colours, gingko's gold and the reds, pinks and orange of the maple trees. That got me thinking about returning in mid-April to view the sakura.

And a few final thoughts. . .

I am asking myself whether this O Henro San, which I have walked over a period of four years, has changed me in any way and, if so, how.

I will leave it to others to judge, because they are more objective than I can ever be.

In the past, when Nahoko visited me on the O Henro San or when I returned home, she always commented on how my aura and energies had changed. She was one of these rare people who could see auras easily. At one stage she even said I had a halo around my head. Sadly, this time I will not know.

I have had some amazing experiences on this O Henro San that have shown me the energies of the Universe that are available to us if we allow ourselves to open up and use them. I've walked on occasions with an 'empty mind', I have met the Kooboo Daishi though

only fleetingly, and I still haven't figured out the significance of 'Buddha's Tears' at Temple #76. I might learn about it in the future.

I know that walking the remainder of this O Henro San immediately after Nahoko's death has significantly helped me to deal with my grief and sadness, and has helped her with her journey to the world of the Gods and Spirits. I know my prayers were answered.

And, finally, a word of thanks. To the great Gods that helped me to heal my soul and guided Nahoko into her new world, to the Kooboo Daishi for His ongoing guidance, support and teachings and who helped me to carry my backpack, to Maki and all my other friends who supported me during this journey, to all the henros that I met on the way, the wonderful people of Shikoku and, of course, to Nahoko for being with me!

Let there be peace and light among all of you!

Arigatou!

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 CHI YAKU MU TOKU I MU 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
unequaled 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 SESHU 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.

* * *

The 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

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.
- Kyooohon – the sutra book.
- Incense and candles.
- Jirei - small bell to help the henro to focus on the journey.

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 th 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 of Temples | Distance (km) | Vertical (m) | Time (hrs) |
|--------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1 | 6 | 19.6 | 200 | 6.5 |
| 2 | 5 | 27.5 | 400 | 9.0 |
| 3 | 1 | 25.4 | 1,200 | 8.5 |
| 4 | 5 | 29.8 | 300 | 9.0 |
| 5 | 2 | 14.7 | 200 | 6.0 |
| 6 | 2 | 18.2 | 1,100 | 6.5 |
| 7 | 2 | 42.6 | 600 | 12.0 |
| 8 | Nil | 47.0 | 500 | 11.5 |
| 9 | 3 | 30.2 | 500 | 10.0 |
| 10 | 1 | 34.7 | 650 | 10.0 |
| 11 | 1 | 24.7 | 200 | 5.5 |
| 12 | 3 | 24.0 | 250 | 8.0 |
| 13 | 4 | 33.7 | 300 | 10.0 |
| 14 | 1 | 36.7 | 300 | 8.5 |
| 15 | 1 | 31.6 | 600 | 8.0 |
| 16 | Nil | 44.0 | 400 | 10.75 |
| 17 | Nil | 18.1 | 200 | 3.25 |
| 18 | 1 | 42.0 | 300 | 9.5 |
| 19 | 1 | 38.9 | 350 | 8.5 |
| 20 | 1 | 37.0 | 900 | 8.5 |
| 21 | 3 | 47.0 | 450 | 12.0 |
| 22/23 | 2 | 90.8 | 960 | 24.0 |
| 24 | 3 | 18.8 | 190 | 8.0 |
| 25 | 5 | 30.8 | 100 | 10.0 |
| 26 | 2 | 35.0 | 150 | 9.5 |
| 27 | 4 | 32.6 | 430 | 9.25 |
| 28 | 5 | 32.1 | 720 | 10.0 |
| 29 | Nil | 34.5 | 250 | 7.5 |
| 30 | 1 | 22.4 | 500 | 6.0 |
| 31 | 5 | 30.2 | 750 | 9.5 |
| 32 | 6 | 28.8 | 250 | 8.5 |
| 33 | 6 | 42.3 | 700 | 12.5 |
| 34 | 4 | 34.1 | 300 | 9.5 |
| 35 | 2 | 33.6 | 550 | 9.0 |
| 36 | Nil | 12.9 | 370 | 3.0 |
| Total | 88 | 1,146.3 | 16,120 | 317.75 |