

# My Shikoku O Henro San Pilgrimage #3 – 2015-16

By Armin Howald

## Day 1 – 15 October 2015 – Hano Town

Distance (km)	18	Vertical (m)	450	Time Taken (hrs)	6.0	Other Travel	
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• #1 – Ryoozenji</li><li>• #2 – Gokurakuji</li><li>• #3 – Konsenji</li><li>• #4 – Dainichiji</li></ul>						
Accommodation	M Morimotoyama – 0886 723 568						

Day 1 of my third O Henro San. The beginning is different to the two previous pilgrimages. On both of these occasions I left very early, leaving my beautiful wife Nahoko in bed, half awake and smelling sweetly, murmuring 'I love you'. This time, though, I left my hotel room in Ningyoochoo on my own.

Three days ago, some of my friends and I scattered part of Nahoko's ashes at her favorite tree high up in the mountains of Yamagata. She had joined the Gods one year earlier, almost to the day. A few days after her cremation in October 2014, I had returned to Shikoku to complete my second O Henro San.

I am certain that this pilgrimage will again be special. The first one was about forgiving and being forgiven, about changing my life, and about reconnecting with many people, especially with my brother Christophe, with whom I had had virtually no contact for more than forty years. On the second O Henro San I met the Kobo Daishi early one morning near Temple 37. I wonder what miracles this journey will hold in store. I will be walking like a little child – my eyes, ears and senses wide open and ready to accept what there is to be experienced.

At this stage I intend to walk to Temple 51 at Matsuyama in 28 days, including the first nine Bangai (auxiliary) Temples. A journey of about 800 kilometres. The rest I intend to walk during time the sakura are in bloom next year.

It hasn't been a very auspicious beginning to this O Henro San. I am concerned because I am far less fit than I would have liked to be. Returning from Europe two months ago I came down with pneumonia that stopped me in my tracks for four weeks. Then my (only) credit card was hacked on the eve of my departure to Japan and immediately cancelled by the bank; I only received a replacement two days ago and don't have the PIN number as yet. To cap it off, as a foreigner I can no longer obtain a pre-paid phone. However one of my friends offered to obtain one for me in her name but, better still, Takako offered me her spare phone. And, finally, yesterday after a short walk I realised that the soles of my KEEN shoes I had bought especially for the O Henro San were disintegrating. I just had time at the last minute, so to speak, to purchase a sturdier pair of Scarpa shoes.

My lovely 'adopted step-daughter' Yuko has kindly offered to book the accommodation for me on a daily basis. And the APA Hotel Ningyoochoo Eki Kita has offered to store my suitcase until my return on four weeks' time. That all is good news.

So I guess I am ready – or as ready as I can be; and the aircraft is almost ready to depart. . .

### Later. . .

It had been a good day though I am not sure about the middle and latter parts. It clearly brought to my mind the second oath that henros take: *I will not complain if things do not go well while on the pilgrimage, but consider such experiences to be part of ascetic training.*

Well, I did not complain or swear today. . .

The first four temples were easy, as they always are. I followed a route hitherto unknown to me, that is the 'correct' one, since I had always got myself lost through inattention in my two previous O Henro Sans. I was well ahead of time at Temple #4, so I decided to tackle the 440 metre high Taisanji (Bangai Temple #1).

The ascent initially was easy; I followed a road shown in the guidebook that was also clearly marked on the ground. The walk initially was easy, but towards what I thought to be the top, things got a little more difficult, though. There were plenty of signs, obviously written in Nihongo that were of no use to me and I finally decided to give up the attempt to visit the temple because it was late in the afternoon by that time. However, the many trails I followed all led upwards where I did not want to go, and the few leading down towards the valley all ended in dead-ends. In addition, the sun was setting fast and it became quite dark.

So I decided, against all generally accepted bushwalkers' wisdom, to do a 'diretissima' along a dry creek bed that I knew would eventually lead me into the valley. Or better, hopefully, to stumble across a trail that would lead me down. Not a really good idea, I knew, but I felt I had no other option.

I made good progress down the mountain and congratulated myself on my smart decision. However, the slope got steeper and steeper, the bush denser and denser, and there were many small dams that needed to be circumvented or climbed over. At that time the option of going back up the mountain had all but disappeared.

So I fought my way through the increasingly dense scrub. Thorns ripped my skin, clothes and backpack, and my bare arms were soon covered with blood. At times I needed ten minutes to walk a mere ten metres. Darkness descended quickly, and I soon realised I had no chance of making it back to the minshuku before complete darkness fell.

In my desperation I called Yuko and asked her to call the hosts and advise them I would be arriving late. I also said I was lost on a mountain and did not know where I was and how I'd get out of this predicament. I surprised myself on how calm I sounded. Even though I realised, if I broke a leg or something serious happened, my body would not be found for a long time, if ever.

It was almost dark when I exited the forest near the foot of the mountain only to have my way blocked by a big swamp. To get around I had to climb up a more than one hundred metres on 45-degree slope that led me to the top of a large landslip (or maybe a quarry) from where I finally spotted a road at the bottom of an equally steep descent.

I finally came to a house and luckily there was a woman outside. I must have scared her in the state I was in. I washed the blood and sweat from my face and arms and she pointed to the way to Temple #5 where my accommodation was located.

It was closer to seven than six o'clock and completely dark when I finally made it to the minshuku with the assistance of a neighbor who guided me there. The woman of the house was clearly impatient and steered me directly into the dining room rather than letting me clean myself. I obviously had disturbed her routine.

Then it was a well-deserved 'ofuro' for my body and 'sentakki' for the clothes. I slept soundly.

## Day 2 – 16 October 2015 – Yoshinogawa City

Distance (km)	27.7	Vertical (m)	300	Time Taken (hrs)	9.5	Other Travel	
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• #B1 - Taisanji</li><li>• #5 -Jizooji</li><li>• #6 - Anrakuji</li><li>• #7 - Juurakuji</li><li>• #8 - Kumadaniji</li><li>• #9 - Hoorinji</li><li>• #10 - Kirihataji</li></ul>						
Accommodation	R Sakura - 0883 24 2404						

I decided over breakfast not to allow Taisanji to defeat me. So I said my prayers at Temple #5 and tamely took a taxi up the mountain. The distance travelled and height of the temple showed that yesterday's 'challenge' (I cannot refer to it as a 'bad' experience) might have been for the better because I would never have made it back to the minshuku before nightfall, even had I found the right way.

Talking about accommodation, the minshuku Morimotoyama was very comfortable and good value at ¥6,400, a bottle of beer and clothes washing included.

Taisanji is a beautiful mountain temple; the fountain is especially memorable, the spout being made from a tree trunk and adorned with countless five-yen pieces.

I didn't spend too much time there, because I had a long day ahead of me. From that point onwards on it was 'basically routine' including the four hundred steps up to #10. I received two 'osetta', including a little money from a woman who stopped her car and a cup of coffee at the little shop halfway across the Yoshinogawa Valley where I usually stock up on supplies.

I always think of the Yoshinogawa (River) being my 'Rubicon'. From here on the only way is forward, there is no way back. I crossed the river on the long Awa-Chuo Bridge, and found the ryokan without any difficulties.

I'm quite happy with my new Scarpas; they didn't seem to get damaged in yesterday's 'adventure'. My new Deuter 36 litre backpack is most comfortable and weighs a tiny eight kilos, drinks included. So little that I fear I might have left something in Tokyo (so far I'm not missing anything).

At dinnertime there were four Japanese men, two young(ish), two retired. They all are doing the O Henro San for the first time. Funny, this seemed to make me the 'senior' henro. During the day I'd also met two Dutch women, mother and daughter who'd enquired about accommodation for the night. I suggested they should try the Sakura because I knew they would probably have space. However, they weren't there. Maybe not surprising, because I know that minshuku and ryokan owners usually like 24-hour warnings so they can cater for dinner and breakfast for their guests.

### Day 3 – 17 October 2015 – Kamiyama Town

Distance (km)	33.3	Vertical (m)	1,390	Time Taken (hrs)	10.25	Other Travel	
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #11 – Fujidera</li> <li>• #12 – Shoosanji</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	Pension Yasuragi – 088-678-0196						

Today was 'the big one'. I was on the road at 0615 hrs and thirty minutes later arrived at the Fujidera Temple.

The trail had just begun to climb up the mountain when a little bird flew onto the path just ahead of me – brown and brilliant blue body and wings, like the male Blue Wren, a white head with a black stripe from end to end. I had never seen a bird like that before<sup>1</sup>. The bird seem to be very tame and let me get close, just a couple of steps away, then flew a little further only to repeat the game. I knew this was Nahoko or a messenger sent by her, because the bird behaved exactly as she would have done, playfully teasing, hiding, running away, letting me getting close but never allowing me to catch her.

'Nahoko' played this game for thirty or forty metres then, seemingly losing interest, flew into the dense undergrowth. I stopped and said a payer to my beautiful Woman-God, and thanked our Gods for sharing this amazing event with me.

There are three big hills to climb on the way to #12. Given the lack of my training every successive hill became more difficult for me although, track-wise, they actually became easier. Half an hour

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<sup>1</sup> And indeed did not see an other for the rest of the journey

before reaching the top I sucked the first of my three sports-gels that I carried with me. I don't know what's in there, but it certainly gave me big enough a kick to get going.

On the way up I overtook about twenty henros of varying ages and both sexes. Some were clearly struggling and later in the day I heard of stories of henros needing twelve hours to get to the top. (The guidebook suggests a time between four and six hours, I did it in three hours and fifty minutes).

I sang 'my' Kooboo Daishi song as I was walking down the hill, 'You'll Never Walk Alone'. A reference to the fact that the Kooboo Daishi always walks with a henro on the journey.

The last ten kilometres went, mercifully, downhill but the last couple were a struggle. I incessantly recited 'my' mantra 'Namu Daishi Henjo Kongoo' to ease the stress of the journey.

The room at the Yasuragi is quite comfortable; it even has its tiny bathroom (such comfort!!). The owner has a very big belly and is very loud, as some Japanese men seem to be. The quality of the dinner was, well. . .

One does not expect gourmet food at every accommodation place on the O Henro San.

#### Day 4 – 18 October 2015 – Naka Town

Distance (km)	30.3	Vertical (m)	160	Time Taken (hrs)	10	Other Travel	Taxi – 9 km
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #B2 – Doogakuji</li> <li>• #13 – Dainichiji</li> <li>• #14 – Joorakuji</li> <li>• #15 – Kokubunji</li> <li>• #16 – Kanonji</li> <li>• #17 – Idoji</li> <li>• #18 – Onzanji</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	M Chiba – 0885-33-1508						

Today was an 'almost normal' day even though I realised mid-morning that I was three hours behind schedule when compared to my first O Henro San. So I decided to take a taxi from Tokushima Station for part of the way.

The Bangai Temple Doogakuji took some finding and a Japanese henro and I jointly tried to figure out how to get there. My map was woefully inadequate as was the other man's ability to read his map. Finally, my training as a cartographer and occasional navigator on a boat came in handy.

Temple #B2 is an absolute jewel and reflected its glory in a glassy pond near the gate. It is to here that the Kuukai was sent in order to learn calligraphy. I also learned that one's temple book is being stamped in exactly the same as the 'normal' temples. This means I will have to return to #B1 at the end of this O Henro San early next year to receive the stamp.

Physically I didn't do too well today. Maybe it is the lack of intensive training prior to leaving for Japan, or maybe yesterday's mountain walk is taking its toll. There are still a few very long days ahead but I have already decided to have a 'rest day' with a 'tiny' 27 kilometres in four day's time.

People were really friendly along the way. The woman at the stamp office of #B2 gave me a bag of mandarines (they taste like a cross between mandarines and lemons – delicious) and just after Temple #13 a woman gave me an osettai of ¥1,000. I bowed and asked the Kooboo Daishi to bless this woman as she went her way.

Minshuku Chiba is very nice and arriving at 1615 hrs gave me time to get my washing ad ofuro over and done with before dinner, as well as having a cup of tea and biscuit. Dinner was lovely! There were two other guests at the table, a grey headed woman who didn't communicate at all and an Ide San, 73 years old and retired petro-chemical engineer with whom I had a very enjoyable

conversation<sup>2</sup>. He said he had not had the opportunity to talk in English (which was excellent) since his retirement.

### Day 5 – 19 October 2015 – Kamikatsu Town

Distance (km)	30.7	Vertical (m)	550	Time Taken (hrs)	8.5	Other Travel	
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• #19 – Tatsueji</li><li>• #B3 – Jigenji</li></ul>						
Accommodation	Sakamoto Centre – 0885-44-2110						

An other hard but good day. Body is doing quite well but the same can't be said about my feet. I haven't been game enough to look at them but it feels like there are corns developing on the little toes, or maybe they are blisters. A thought that I really don't relish. The shoes feel a little tight in places.

I dedicated this day to the memory of my parents, two wonderful people that I really never bothered to understand, and who didn't understand me neither, or so I always felt.

I prayed at both temples and a few times 'en route', asking the Gods to keep them safe, to bless them and to give them what they need to enjoy a happy life when they return again. (Recognising that my father would never have entertained the thought of a re-birth, he having been a hard, right-wing Protestant with there being only *one* God). I asked the Gods to tell them of my love for them, even though they might find it difficult to believe because we, especially my father, never saw eye-to-eye. And I thanked my parents for the love and difficult times we'd endured, especially during my teenage years, which made me, over time, more resilient, tough and determined (qualities I certainly will be needing on the O Henro San).

Temple #19 is a 'barrier temple' and to reach it one must ask for a pure heart before crossing the red bridge near the Temple. Thereafter the walk took me up the Katsuura River Valley, a strong breeze mercifully in my back.

The monk at Temple #19 appeared to be as interested in stamping the nokyocho (stamp book) as a postal clerk would be in Australia at 1700 hrs on a Friday. Dressed in a black tracksuit top he carelessly banged on the three stamps, collected three hundred yen, and turned back to his computer – I was almost sorry for the disturbance I caused.

I made it to the Sakamoto Centre by 1130 hrs. A friendly local (elderly man) expertly drew me a map on how to get there for the last few hundred metres – I was highly impressed.

Half an hour later I was ready to hit the road to the Jigenji. The road there, as it turned out to be, was beautifully signposted (unlike #B1) and it would have been difficult to get lost, even in the dark.

The trail up the mountain varied from steep rocky tracks to pleasant narrow flat forest paths and a sealed road for the last few kilometres.

I was happy to see a few cars on a parking lot that meant the Temple was nearby. A few kind car-henros gave me sweets, drinks, mandarines and even a tub of lovely ume-boshi (sour/salted dried plums) – almost enough for an entire lunch.

Jigenji rests against the backdrop of a craggy mountain, and there is already a hint of colour in the surrounding forest, sign of the coming autumn.

Further up the mountain is a cave called Anazenjoo where the Kuukai trained as a nineteen year old. I thought about going there but decided against it because one had to hire a special white gown and I felt that the one kilometre up the mountain would exceed my physical abilities.

Walking downhill was, well, simply torture for my maltreated feet. Now I am enjoying a large can of Asahi Super Dry and it is almost bath time.

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<sup>2</sup> We met again in Tokyo in 2016, after both of us having completed the O Henro San

## Day 6 – 20 October 2015 – Ainan Town

Distance (km)	21.8	Vertical (m)	1,150	Time Taken (hrs)	8.0	Other Travel	Bus – 5 km
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #20 – Kakurinji</li> <li>• #21 – Tairuui</li> <li>• #22 – Byoodooji</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	R Sazanka – 0884-36-3701						

An other hard day, though the feet seem a little better (maybe I'm kidding myself). The short distance was more than made up by the height of the two mountain temples, #20 and #21, both requiring an ascent of 450 metres over very rough paths (and of course down again).

The Sakamoto Centre provided transport down the valley to the trailhead to #20, saving a walk of at least five kilometres.

There were a few familiar faces at the dinner table last night including Ide San, though none of them entertained any thoughts of heading up the Jigenji. They merely used it as an overnight stop to tackle #20 the following day. Ide San thought I looked very tired, and I could not agree with him more. There was also a huge Indian man (Anil) from Mumbai who thought he was probably the very first Indian to walk the O Henro San. He wasn't in good shape with huge infected blisters on both of his feet and swollen ankles. A few days earlier he had teamed up with a Japanese henro and was hoping to do the journey with this man's help.

There were five of us on the bus. I only saw two of them briefly on #20 and one on #21 (my feet seem not to understand how to walk at a slower pace). As I am writing, the five are slowly trickling in – I have already had my ofuro and washed my clothes. The washing and drying was free of charge, as an 'osetta' from the woman who runs the ryokan.

On the way up #20 an elderly man passed me at great speed. A little while later I spotted him sweeping the fallen leaves from the grounds of a tiny shrine.

I reached Kakurinji in just over an hour (450 metres, 3.5 kilometres – my father always told us that the maximum height a walker should do was 300 metres per hour – well. . . ).

The path down #20 was very rocky and steep and I walked with great care because I couldn't afford to twist an ankle or worse.

Once I crossed the Naka River at the other side of #20, I needed a similar time to ascend to #21, even though the path was a little longer and more benign.

Near the Naka River Bridge I spotted a trolley of the kind that is often wheeled by homeless men near Shinjuku Station; it had a 'sugegasa' (conical hat) and 'zudabukuro' (henro's white bag) tied to the top. A homeless henro, maybe? Its owner soon materialised crossing the bridge, and he certainly looked the part. Well, and why not? There could be worse things for a homeless man than pushing a trolley from temple to temple, and maybe collecting a few osettai on the way.

Tairuui is truly beautiful! It is styled after Koya San and surrounded by huge, age-old cedar trees (hence its name 'western Koya-San').

The walk down from Tairuui wasn't too difficult, though my feet again began to hurt – badly.

I walked past the Sakaguchi-ya where I'd stayed on the two previous pilgrimages, then painfully up a 100 metre high pass and, worse, 200 metres down on the other side. The last few kilometres were a bit of a struggle.

I'm enjoying a bottle of Asahi Dry on top of half a litre of tea. Tomorrow I'm planning to walk about 35 kilometres, though on relatively flat roads.

Dinner was a very lively affair – who would believe that Japanese men could really let go, be loud and enjoy one another's company?



There were nine henros at the table, including a woman. Ide San struggled in just as we were about to commence dinner.

One of the henros had bought two bottles of red wine yesterday in anticipation of drinking them with a fellow henro. Alas, he ended up lugging the bottle over two mountain top temples. So, as not to commit this folly again, he presented me with a glass with the best wishes for tomorrow's birthday. That should help me sleep. . .

### Day 7 – 21 October 2015 – Mugi Town

Distance (km)	35.3	Vertical (m)	300	Time Taken (hrs)	8.0	Other Travel	
Temples	• #23 – Yakuooji						
Accommodation	M Azuma – 0884-72-0141						

I've now been on the road for seven days and covered a little more than two hundred kilometres. Just a little short of my target, but I am certain to make it up in the coming days.

Last night was very comfortable and enjoyable but I was DEAD and fell asleep soon after dinner, even without the sleeping tablets.

Dinner had been excellent, both in quality and quantity but in comparison, breakfast was fairly modest.

I hit the road at 0630 hrs. . .

P.S. As I am trying to write, the landlady is leaning over my shoulder trying to decipher what I'm writing (she doesn't speak a word of English), talking incessantly and tugging my arm when I don't respond. She said her name was Sachiko (Sachiko with a screw loose, I think. Or maybe she is just suffering from loneliness despite having a husband in the background). . .

Back to my story. . .

It took me about an hour to reach Route 55, which I will generally follow over the next few days.

I made good progress and covered the 21 kilometres to #23 in about 4 hours. Route 55 in this area is rarely being used since the completion of the expressway a few years back, and as a result all the businesses along the way have folded. There is only one drink-dispensing machine on the entire stretch of road.

My feet were feeling fine, and I attributed this to the ointment that my friend Mika had prepared for me. I would have liked to tell her that but I had deliberately decided not to communicate with friends during this journey, except the daily contact by email with Yuko who is arranging the accommodation for me.

I had lunch at Minami Town where I chatted for a while with a life insurance representative. He offered me a bed and nights in town if ever I came to Tokushima.

The second part of the journey, the 15 kilometres from #23 to Mugi took longer and my feet began to hurt again. I took a few rests in the 30+ heat of the afternoon. Every time I got going after sitting down, my feet screamed in pain. I finally gave in and swallowed an anti-inflammation tablet (Meloxicam). That seemed to help a little.

For the second time in a week the jirey (little bell) detached itself from the kongozue. Maybe I am not meant to carry a bell on this journey, so I won't be getting a replacement.

I'd stayed at the Azuma in 2009 and 2012 and the couple running it have barely changed since that time, although Sachiko has dyed her hair red. As the first thing Sachiko confiscated my kongozue to put a knitted cover on the grip (she has a big box full of these useless things – sorry it will come off tomorrow because it is too uncomfortable and hot on the hand). Then the couple tried, I think, to talk me out of going to the minshuku I'd selected for tomorrow. I firmly stood my ground. Then they talked incessantly upon me even though I'd told them (and they knew) that I didn't speak

Japanese – *sumimasen, nihongo ga hanasemasen*. I finally managed to maneuver myself into my bedroom the lady following, jabbering incessantly.

Dinner was HUGE, enough for two hungry henros. Included was a big glass of shochu, 40% alcohol spirit. Nice stuff, and I am sure it will help me sleep.

Today I focused my memory on my beautiful Nahoko. I prayed to the Gods to bless and protect her, to treat her kindly, and to teach her what she needed for an even more beautiful future life. And I asked the Gods to tell my very special soul-partner of my undying love for her.

### Day 8 – 22 October 2015 – Ikumi Surfin Beach

Distance (km)	27.0	Vertical (m)	300	Time Taken (hrs)	6.0	Other Travel	
Temples	• #B4 Sabadaishi						
Accommodation	M Tosa – 0887-29-2439						

The road sign reads ‘Kochi 122 kilometres’ – it has the same significance to me as the fact that the earth is 147 million kilometres from the sun. At this stage it is just the next painful step that counts.

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I’m sitting at a beachside café inside the Kochi Prefecture. It is just after 1330 hrs and the day’s walking is all but done, save looking for the minshuku that I’m booked into for the night. I’m enjoying an ice cream cone in front of an iced coffee next to an iced tea that a kind lady has poured me.

Breakfast was at 0700 hrs. I had slept for about ten hours though a few mosquitoes had bothered me during the night. I’d kept the door to my room locked, not knowing what the landlady would be up to during the night. This morning she gave me a ‘love letter’, the only two words she seems to know in English. I’ll have to ask Yuko for a translation.

The little toe on my right foot stings a bit and I discovered a huge blister. The socks I’d brought from Australia are definitely unsuitable so I bought a new pair at a LAWSON Station.

Bangai Temple #4 is a real jewel. There were only one or two people at the temple including a woman dressed as a Buddhist ‘important person’ and travelling with her own chauffeur. Why, I wondered, aren’t some of these temples included in some of the bus tours? People on such trips really don’t know what they are missing out on.

A kind car-henro stopped along the way to give me a can of cold coffee. He was taking his elderly mother to the 88 temples.

As it has been since the beginning of the journey, the weather has been brilliant. There are hardly any clouds in the sky and the daily temperature generally is in the mid to high twenties, although it is pleasantly cool at night.

I haven’t seen any walking henros since leaving Temple #22 – the 76 kilometres between Temples #23 and #24 are a most likely deterrent.

I stopped under the sign ‘Kochi Prefecture’, indicating that I was moving from the ‘Dojo of Spiritual Awakening’ to the ‘Dojo of Ascetic Training’. I thanked the Kooboo Daishi for guiding me through the first of the four dojos, and asked Him to continue to be with me on this journey.

Today I said special prayers for my children Stephen and Melinda. Especially for Melinda, from whom and her family I have been cut off for about a year (her decision) and for Stephen, who is battling his own demons health-wise. During today’s journey I stopped a few times to pray and to wrap my children in a golden, healing light.

I’m enjoying a very leisurely afternoon, and just opened the second can of beer. The minshuku seems to be a surfers’ hangout, a bit grotty and run-down but, I guess, OK for surfers and sweaty henros. The room was ready and the futon laid out when I arrived, though it looked like the futon had been there and used the night before by someone else and nobody had bothered to straighten the bed covers (there were no sheets).



My feet are definitely feeling better, which is a great relief. I'm sure that Mika's cream and my doctor's prescription medicine are doing what they are intended to do. And also maybe the new socks.

### Day 9 – 23 October 2015 – Muroto City

Distance (km)	42.0	Vertical (m)	350	Time Taken (hrs)	11.0	Other Travel	
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #24 - Hotsumisakiji</li> <li>• #25 - Shinshooji</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	BH Takenoi - 0887-22-1624						

I hit the road at 0430 hrs because there was a long way ahead of me. For the first hour I simply followed the white line painted on the side of the road. The night sky was simply amazing! Orion straight ahead and to the east two planets located very closely together. Possibly Venus and Mars – the true opposites. I even heard the sound of 'silverbell' for the first time on this journey. An insect, I guess, that gives out a little 'ping', like one striking a little silver bell.

Slowly dawn broke, darkness giving way to light. Beautiful how light is always stronger than darkness – or maybe the good always being stronger than the bad. . .

I was dying for a cup of coffee but on this stretch of road there was no 'combin' to be found – fifty kilometres without a LAWSON Station? Incredible!

At Sakihama Port I finally found what I had been longing for, even though it was only around eight o'clock. Women were sitting in the back of the café having breakfast, men sitting in the front smoking. The man opposite me on the table smoked three cigarettes during the space of time me having a quick cup of coffee. I'm sure almost the entire population of Shikoku will eventually die of lung cancer.

About an hour later I stopped at the Meotoiwa (Married Couple) Rocks. Four huge steep rocks rising from the seashore, two of which were joined by a sacred rope. I prayed to the Gods to bless our union, because I still feel married to Nahoko, even though she joined the Gods a little more than a year ago. Our union was forged by the Universe a long ago, we are soul-partners who have been together for many lifetimes in the past and will be together again in the future – though we doubt it will be on this planet.

There weren't any other henros on the road and I just focused on walking and playing my mantra in my mind – *Namu Daishi Henjoo Kongoo, Namu Daishi Henjoo Kongoo, Namu Daishi Henjoo Kongoo. . .*

I was tiring badly as I neared Mikuradoo, the cave in which the Kooboo Daishi attained enlightenment. There was a beautiful energy inside that made me not want to leave.

I prayed to the Kooboo Daishi to grant me enlightenment if I am deemed worthy of this status and asked for His blessings for Nahoko and me, my family, my friends in Japan, in Australia and all around the world, and all people of the world.

Halfway up the steep track to Temple #24 I met the Indian henro, Anil and his companion. They had travelled the 76 kilometres from #23 by bus this morning. A smart move, I guess, given the state of my feet. Two butterflies, of the same colour as the little Nahoko-bird performed a dance in front of me for a while.

Temple #24 was crowded with bus-henros, as it usually seems to be. I often wonder why it is that the more popular temples are usually crowded whilst others, less popular such as #74 are not. Surely these henros would want to have 88 stamps in their book – maybe it is the task of the tour guides to 'do the rounds' to all the temples to get the stamps whilst the bus-henros are enjoying a less crowded and more leisurely itinerary.

The last few kilometres to #25 were painfully slow, and the pain in climbing the 125 steps up to the temple was killing.

Luckily for me, the business hotel wasn't too far from the temple, and I had a bowl of hot noodles for a belated lunch nearby. The Takenoi Business Hotel certainly has seen better days. I would definitely classify it as an 'I would never take my potential new girlfriend there' establishment. But at least it has sheets, what looks like a clean pillowcase and a yukata, items that were missing from the last place. But then, at the latter, the kind owner had given me three 'onigiri' (rice balls), scrambled eggs and salad that kept me going well into mid-morning.

As to the toilet at the Takenoi, the 'western style' one was a new experience. When sitting down there was about as much legroom to the door as there is behind the driver's seat on my MINI Cooper, about five centimetres. This meant the door to the cubicle had to be left open. Then I realised that the contraption was simply a plastic seat placed on top of a squat-down toilet that explained its instability. The seat is called 'beauty seat'.

### Day 10 – 24 October 2015 – Aki City

Distance (km)	30.4	Vertical (m)	200	Time Taken (hrs)	7.25	Other Travel	Bus/Taxi 12 km (440 m height)
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #26 – Kongoochooji</li> <li>• #27 – Konomineji</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	BH Benchoo – 0887-34-1177						

I slept the sleep of a very exhausted henro, even without taking medication. Some time after midnight a siren sounded and a very calm male voice seemed to explain something. I hadn't felt the earth shake so I was sure it wasn't a tsunami, and there was no chance of a typhoon bearing down on the town. Moreover, nobody stirred in the establishment and I didn't want to be the first to run outside clad in my yukata. The announcement was followed by the sound of two emergency vehicles driving up the road and half an hour later there was an other blast of the siren followed by more explanations. I think the town folks (and henros) could have done without this disturbance.

As I have said, the hotel wasn't the greatest, but for some reason it had been difficult to get accommodation around the Cape. Many of the numbers that I got from the guidebook had been disconnected and the few ryokans that answered Yuko's calls appeared to be full (or didn't want to accept guests).

Breakfast was as good as one would have expected from this establishment and I hit the road at 0645 hrs.

Temple number 26 is said to hold untold treasures including the Kukai's original writings, which obviously are not meant to be shown to every sweaty henro. I was just as happy to be the second person to light a candle for the day at the temple .

There were a few henros on the road, but most of them were walking in the opposite (anti-clockwise) direction.

It may have been yesterday's exertions or maybe the heat that made me wilt after four hours' of walking. Muroto Misaki seemed to be caught inside a heat-bubble with a glassy ocean and virtually no wind and with a temperature well into the thirties, which is very rare for October.

A few hours on, near Hane Misaki I was struggling badly. Just as I was contemplating my future a lady henro emerged from a car and gave me a lovely osettai of an orange drink, sweets, crackers, and a mandarine. I held my hands in prayers of thanks as she sped away.

That gave me a bit of a boost, and my pace quickened after a short break.

Alas, the boost didn't last and about a kilometre north of the Cape I decided to catch the next bus that came along. By that time I could not walk in a straight line, and was suffering from heat exhaustion. The bus dropped me off near the trailhead to #27.

There was an other henro on the bus, a 74-year-old man from Chiba who was doing his 30<sup>th</sup> O Henro San. He intended to take a taxi to the mountain temple and invited me to join him, which I declined after much hesitation. So I began to walk but soon changed my mind and returned,

accepting the lift gladly. I realised I would never have made it up the 440 metre temple in the condition I was in.

We said our prayers, then had a meager lunch. The coffee (not cheap at ¥400) was served in a 'Givenchy Paris' cup and was excellent (I'd remembered it from the last O Henro San). Such class high up in the mountains of Shikoku!

I had the feeling that my fellow henro would have liked to walk down the mountain with me and felt mean for leaving him behind, but in was worried at the slow speed at which he was travelling and I knew I would be struggling to make it into Aki by 1600 hrs.

A few kilometres before Aki, a wild looking man with long hair and beard chased after me to give me a sweet energy drink. Such kindness! (had he been carrying a stick I think I would have run for my life).

The Business Hotel Benchoo is a bit run down but, hey, I've got my private facilities, TV, clean sheets, a cold beer and the clothes are in the sentakki – all for ¥6,140, dinner B&B included – seventy Australian dollars!

Tomorrow is a short(ish) day to Temple #28 on the outskirts of Kochi. The sign now says 'Kochi 39 kilometres' which is an improvement from the '122' a few days ago.

My feet are still very painful and it looks like I might lose the nail on the right small toe. As to the future, I've come to realise that age might finally be catching up with me. I'm just not as fit as I had been six years ago! I might have to reconsider my walking itinerary or do what all the other henros do, travel part of the way by public transport or taxi.

### Day 11 – 25 October 2015 – Konan City

Distance (km)	26.9	Vertical (m)	100	Time Taken (hrs)	7.25	Other Travel	
Temples	• #28 – Dainichiji						
Accommodation	Kochi Kuroshio Hotel – 0887-56-5800						

Last night I came very close to calling the O Henro San off. The events of the day, general exhaustion and the fact that the cell phone had stopped working brought me to that point. Worst of all was the loss of communication with Yuko, because I heavily rely on her to arrange my accommodation. I guess I could have done what other gaijin henros are doing, asking the place they are staying at to arrange the bookings for the following night. But my state of mind was such that I would and could not have entertained this thought. Later on I discovered, though, that I had inadvertently switched off the phone myself. . .

Dinner at the BH Benchoo had been quite amazing, certainly in quantity. The huge fried snapper they served in itself could have constituted an entire meal.

Things looked different this morning, though. I reminded myself that being in the Dojo of Ascetic Training meant having to deal with unplanned issues, and overcoming physical weaknesses was one part of it. I however recognised that I might need to modify my very ambitious walking program and occasionally, if needed, resort to the use of buses, trains or taxis.

The sky was blue and the sea absolutely flat with barely a ripple on its surface as I was walking north. Though around midday I had to battle quite a strong headwind. There was just one other henro on the road that I overtook, and one bicycle-henro. Three hours into the walk I stopped at a K-Circle 'combin' for a really nice cup of coffee and two apple Danish (having become somewhat an expert on combin' coffees, I believe that the K-Circle ones are by far the best but the LAWSON ones are best avoided, except in an emergency)<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Later on I would change my mind, though. . .

Walking the six kilometres on the cycle road through the Geisei Village was a real delight – in the shade of trees, flowers growing by the side of the road and the occasional glimpse of the deep blue sea through gaps in the shore fortifications.

A few kilometres earlier, closer to Aki, though, it was a different story. Words such as ‘disgusting’ come to my mind. Here hundreds of tons of rubbish piled high on both sides of the road – fishing and agriculture waste, plastic, thousands of pet bottles in various states of decay, rusting tractors, holed fishing vessels, discarded furniture, household rubbish. . .

I crossed my personal ‘heartbreak hill’ and stopped at the nearby fruit and vegetable market. On that hill (actually not very high), in August 2009, I collapsed from heat exhaustion. Three years later I was shivering as I walked through a typhoon. How different things can be! At the markets I bought an ice-cream cone with a filling that looked like pineapple but actually turned out to be sweet potatoes. One always learns something new.

I made it to the hotel by midday and, there being nothing else to do, took a stroll to the Dainichiji Temple where I said my prayers. On the way back I bought some extra wide ‘New Balance’ canvas shoes, two sizes too big. My feet felt like me walking on clouds. True, it means I will have to lug the much heavier Scarpas in my backpack, at times anyway, but I’m happy to do this if it means saving my feet from further damage. In the meantime I will try to see whether I can have the Scarpas widened in a shoe repair shop (if they still exist) before going into more mountains.

I spent the afternoon drinking beer and watching sports, after the obligatory bath and washing of my clothes.

### Day 12 – 26 October 2016 - Kochi

Distance (km)	23.4	Vertical (m)	200	Time Taken (hrs)	5.0	Other Travel	
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #29 – Kokubunji</li> <li>• #30 – Zenrakuji</li> <li>• #31 – Chikurinji</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	H Tosaji-Takasu – 088-882-7700						

A very easy day indeed, maybe the calm before the storm. From now on until Matsuyama in about two weeks’ time there will be fewer temples and long, hard distances in between. Will I be ready? I really don’t know. My little toes sang songs of praise for the new shoes, though the pack seemed to be a little heavier.

There were a few walking and bus-henros at breakfast including three male walkers. One of them was limping badly and I was concerned about his immediate future, tough probably not as much as he was.

I found a quicker way from my hotel to #29 by taking Route 364 to Gomenmachi, then Route 45. Only a saving of about one kilometre and it required a little bit of navigational skills, but I guess every step not taken counts at this stage.

Between #29 and 30 I caught up with a female henro that I’ve been noticing a few times in recent days. She is from Seoul, Korea, a professional photographer apparently intent on photographing the O Henro San. Together we walked to Temple #30. She seems to be incredibly fit and intends to walk to Temple #33 today. I myself am happy with a much slower pace just across Kochi.

There were many very generous people on the road today and I received many osettai – mandarines, sweets and, from a henro at the hotel, pumpkin caramel sweets – oishii!

It was here in Kochi when I visited the city with Nahoko in 2008 that the seeds for walking the O Henro San were sown. It was also here in Kochi, staying at the same hotel, that I commenced the last étappe of my second O Henro San in which Nahoko would be my ‘accommodation manager’. She appeared to be well at that time but, maybe, the cancer had already taken hold of her. I shall be dedicating the walk to Nakamura Station from here on to my beloved wife.

Chikurinji has always been one of my favorite temples. Nahoko and I visited here in 2008.

Behind the Honzo (main temple), to the right of the impressive red pagoda are two little ponds and beyond them a lovely moss garden with statues of Jizoo Bosatsu, Gods tasked to protect travellers and stillborn babies – how multi-skilled they are!

The quiet of my surroundings is amazing, it is hard to believe that I am a just few kilometres from the city's centre. There is the barely audible rumbling of the city in the distance, but no sound close by. Near the top of the hill is a cave, its entrance guarded by three huge stones and a heavy door, securely bolted. I wonder what kind of secrets it holds. Nearby is a huge old tree with a big hole in its trunk just above the roots.

I sit on a rock, close my eyes and let the energy of this special place wash through me. I open myself to the energy of the Universe and feel a tingle on my outstretched hands as the energy reaches me. I let the energy soak into every part of my body, every cell. Feeling at peace.

I read the English version of the Heart Sutra, amazed at the powerful message that it contains. Even though I have read it many times before, its deeper meaning has still eluded me. Maybe I will gain enlightenment in this life, maybe not. Maybe in the next, no one knows but I will be ready should I receive this grace.

I leave this special place full of deep gratitude and peace in my heart.

### A little later

Bed and breakfast came to ¥5,800 (A\$66) and the hotel gave me a ¥1,000 voucher to eat at the diner across the road. Room, bed, bath, shower were very comfortable.

I am still quite worried about my feet, so I've ordered a taxi to take me to #32 tomorrow morning. Right now it's only 1800 hours, I've just had a very filling dinner and am thinking of an early night.

### Day 13 – 27 October 2015 – Tosa City

Distance (km)	26.7	Vertical (m)	200	Time Taken (hrs)	7.5	Other Travel	Taxi - 6 km
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #32 - Zenjibuji</li> <li>• #33 - Sekkeiji</li> <li>• #34 - Tanemaji</li> <li>• #35 - Kiyotakiji</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	BH Tosa – 088-852-5322						

A relatively easy day, but tomorrow will be serious. From here to the Ashizuri Misaki (Cape) there will be just three temples (including one Bangai) on a road stretching 140 kilometres – a fairly daunting task. . .

I still don't quite trust my shoes and wasn't sure the feet could make it, so I took a taxi to #32 which reduced the walking time by one hour.

The walking itself began at 0730 hrs towards the Urado Wan. A place I remembered well from 2008 when Nahoko and I visited the nearby Katsurahama (Moonlight Beach). At every temple I prayed to the Gods to bless her and give her the necessary learnings so she can ascend higher in future lives.

The locals were quite friendly, and many wished me 'o kyoo tsugette' as I walked along the road – 'take care'. At temple #34 the kind office lady gave me a sweetened fruit drink (come to think of it, I have always received an osettai at this temple).

There were a few henros on the road including a middle-aged Caucasian couple, a motorbike and a scooter henro. But large groups were absent.

I'd desperately been looking for a shoe repair shop in Kochi and Tosa City but to no avail. I would like to have my Scarpas widened so I could wear them on the long stretches of road ahead. Today I managed to go without any medication, so that's an improvement.

It felt good to be on the road again, and out of the city. I feel the energy is ‘fractured’ in big towns, unlike the calmness of certain parts of the countryside. I envied the Kooboo Daishi for having been able to walk through an unspoiled nature but, then, he had wild beasts, raging rivers and impenetrable forests to contend with. . .

I’m sitting in a lively little bakery (the ‘Iwate’) just next to the hotel, where I bought tomorrow’s provisions. Quite expensive, but the fruit and nut bread and apple Danish are delicious.

Yesterday I saw the first clouds in the sky and today the sky was covered in grey. Tomorrow it will be raining, so the meteorologists predict.

### Day 14 – 28 October 2015 – Susaki City

Distance (km)	35.2	Vertical (m)	550	Time Taken (hrs)	8.25	Other Travel	
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #36 – Shooryuuji</li> <li>• #B5 – Daizenji</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	R Yanagiya – 0889-42-0175						

I’m sitting at the same time and place (a big Fruit and Vegetable Market in Susaki City) as I did two years ago, it’s 1330 hrs (or maybe a little earlier). Enjoying a coffee and a sweet marron cake for a very low ¥390. The walking had gone well but I wish the niggling stinging in my little toes would go away.

Like two years ago I left the hotel at 0530 hrs. Luckily the weather forecasters got it wrong because a setting full moon greeted me and the two planets to the east that I’d observed a few days earlier had moved a little closer together.

Nothing had changed on the road since I had been here two years ago. Even the fat, laughing Buddha with the white crash helmet was still there. I rubbed his stony belly for good luck.

Usa Port at sunrise is always pretty and I interrupted my walk to take a few pictures.

I’d actually forgotten how beautiful Temple #36 really is. This is the temple where I had been at in a previous life, so I had been told. Mika had given me a Vajra to carry on my journey, and I recalled that this sacred object has a significant connection with the creation and history of this temple.

On my first O Henro San I had chosen to walk the endless up and down of the Yokonami Skyline; on the second the endless twist and turns along the northern shore of the Uranouchi (Bay). (There is also a third, and much easier way – going by boat). This time I chose the high road again.

I enjoyed the beautiful sunshine and the sight of the distant mountain ranges along Tosa Bay that I would be crossing tomorrow. A hawk descended to eye me closely but, realising that my meat would probably too tough, soon lost interest and flew away.

It took me just over 2 ½ hours to traverse the Yokonami Peninsula, at the end of which I treated myself to a lovely cup of coffee attached to a wood processing plant.

There were just two henros on the road, a European couple that I’d seen earlier. They didn’t appear to be too friendly when they overtook me as I was having a rest at a henro’s hut (but they might have thought the same about me!).

I’ve been thinking about death (among many other issues) while I’m walking every day and today was no exception. To me death holds no fear – it simply is an essential part of life and an important preparatory stage for the next life. Nahoko’s death was a beautiful example of dying with grace, beauty and dignity, and I was privileged to be there as she took her last breath. She would have listened to my words even though she had been in coma for more than 24 hours and when I said the words ‘please Darling, go now’, after which she took three more breaths and most peacefully slipped away. (One of our friends who was there said she’d even opened her eyes for a moment, but I don’t recall). I too hope to be able to die with the same dignity as did my beautiful wife. When that occurs, I will know that I had lived well despite the many faux pas and stuff-ups I’d created in this life. But, then there is no such thing as failures – they all are great learning experiences.



Though when I go I may regret letting down my wonderful friends, if not my children. But I am certain that the world will continue to turn with me being there. . .

### Later

I bought myself an other pair of shoes. The canvas runners are quite good but I doubt they will last the distance. There don't appear to be any shoe repairers in this part of Shikoku who could stretch the Scarpas, so I will have to be content with carrying the weight of a further pair of shoes.

### Day 15 – 29 October 2015 – Shimanto Town

Distance (km)	26.3	Vertical (m)	600	Time Taken (hrs)	8.0	Other Travel	
Temples	• #37 - Iwamotoji						
Accommodation	R Mima - 0880-22-1101						

There were three other henros at the dinner table last night – a Japanese man who said I'd been going 'hayai' (fast) when he saw me earlier in the day (I guess my feet don't understand that there is also a slower pace) and a Dutch couple, he a potter, she a writer. They live in France, are 73 and 60 respectively, and are doing the O Henro San for an amazing sixth time!! They've also done the Compostella journey that didn't appeal because of the huge crowds and the ever-increasing commercialization (they talked about dormitories with 100 beds, one shower and very few toilets – compare this to the small number of walking henros on pilgrimage on Shikoku where everybody is assured of his own room and often private facilities!).

People were really friendly along the way, with many giving me good wishes for my journey. A man near the Tosa-Kure Station gave me a cold drink then pedaled for a while with me to ensure I took the right turn.

There is a beautiful valley from Tosa Kure leading up to the Nanako-Tooge (Pass) with much fertile land, rice fields and the Kochi Expressway crossing its upper reaches, high above the valley floor. Yet much of this land is being taken over by weeds, a sure indication of smaller families and young people moving away.

The 'hard bit', the 250 metres up the Nanako Tooge took just 25 minutes. I recalled that, last time when I took this trail, it was teeming with rain but today the sun was shining. Climbing up the last few slippery steps I fell 'victim' to a photographer who I am sure would never again get the opportunity to photograph a sweaty 'gaijin' henro. He took many shots while his wife ran to the drink dispenser nearby to get me a cold drink as an osettai – nice people!

I smiled when I saw the dilapidated service station on top of the pass. Seven years ago it was quite respectable even though it had been closed, and it provided me with shelter during the rainstorm. This time I noticed that vines had taken over. I doubt whether anyone will ever buy this piece of real estate.

From the Nanako Tooge to Shimanto Town it is, in the main, a gentle downhill run. I remembered walking down this road in 2009. It was a very wet Sunday and I was soaked to the skin by the sideways splashing of passing cars. At that time there were many shops and businesses along the route, even a LAWSON Station. Now the road is almost deserted because of the new expressway that was opened up in the not too distant past. Signs of the time, I guess.

The Dunlop shoes that I bought yesterday proved to be more trouble than both the canvas shoes and Scarpas combined, so I left them at a henro hut for someone who needed them more than I did.

Apart from the recently harvested rice fields there are also large fields of ginger in the valley and the harvest was in full swing. Dozens of old people were at work, the aromatic scent of ginger in the air.

Today is the approximate halfway point of this year's installment of my pilgrimage, distance-wise. I'm doing OK, having covered a little more than 450 kilometres, which is about 30 kilometres per day.

Iwamotoji is also the last temple that Nahoko celebrated with me during her life (from Tokyo, though, she would never have considered walking the O Henro San).

The temple is also famous for its ceiling panels, easily in the hundreds. Included among the motifs are saints, pheasants, a cabbage, famous and not so famous people and believe it or not, a picture of Marilyn Monroe next to a copy of a well-known painting by Manet showing a lady with a black hat (I couldn't imagine a Christian Church displaying an image of Lady Gaga or Beyoncé).

The Ryokan Mima appears to be, at first glance, very nice. I got a huge corner room measuring eight by four metres that can be partitioned into living and sleeping areas and a huge, sunny verandah. Dinner was quite amazing too including 'nabe' (vegetable stew with fish balls) and the various other dishes that traditionally go with meals on Shikoku. There were two other henros at the table who couldn't (or didn't want to) communicate with one another and I was happy to be left to my own thoughts.

Tomorrow's breakfast is at the late time of 0700 hrs. I guess nothing is perfect. . .

### Day 16 – 30 October 2015 – Kuroshio Town

Distance (km)	34.5	Vertical (m)	200	Time Taken (hrs)	8.0	Other Travel	
Temples	• Nil						
Accommodation	Nest West Garden Tosa – 0880-43-0101						

Yesterday I saw a sign declaring 'Matsuyama 256 kilometres' – Hmmmmm. . .

Today's walk was very special because it was on this stage that, two years ago, I met the Kooboo Daishi.

Breakfast was late but the food delicious. The ryokan charged a little more than ¥9,000 which I thought was a bit steep but, then, I didn't complain about the services either.

In a little more than an hour I came to the Katasaka Slope where I'd met the Kooboo Daishi in 2013. I said a prayer, asking Him for his ongoing blessings for Nahoko, and me and to grant me enlightenment whenever He feels I'm ready for it.

Then I walked down the big slope singing 'my' Kooboo Daishi's song, *You'll Never Walk Alone*.

From here on it was just walking, walking, walking. The kongozue tapping its rhythm on Route 56. I began to tire after four hours but then saw a welcome LAWSONS sign. An 'onigiri' (rice ball), sushi roll, sweet roll and a coffee at the nearby agricultural centre restored the flagging energy.

There were four or five henros on the road – not surprising since Shimanto Town is the logical stopover on the way to Ashizuri Misaki.

It took me another three hours to reach the coast. In the distance, through the haze, I spotted a few capes and mountain ranges that I would be tackling tomorrow.

Near Nada Port I stopped to say a prayer for Nahoko. It had been here at this spot that we'd talked to each other on my second O Henro San and I recalled how happy she was for me when I told her about my meeting with the Kooboo Daishi, and about her excitement of the thought of us being together the following day. She said she loved me, and I said I loved her too. . .

In my prayer I asked the Gods to guide my beautiful woman towards an other special life, and thanked my wife and soul-partner, friend, lover, teacher and student for our shared times. May the highest of Gods bless her!

I felt revived and briskly walked the last few kilometres. I stopped at the Bios Ogata and then realised that we had stopped here in 2012 when Nahoko and I were running a tour to Ashizuri Misaki for friends.

The Nest West Garden seems to be a 'white elephant' like so many places in this area, given the ratio to its size to the number of guests.

Dinner was really nice. In addition to the obligatory sashimi and pickles etc. there was a bowl of udon soup (rather than the miso soup) and the head of an oversized bream that was absolutely delicious. I also had a 370 ml flask of hot sake that is sure to send me to sleep.

My left hip and thigh feel a bit tender since yesterday when I walked up the Nanako Tooge. I hope it isn't anything serious.

I also stuffed my Scarpas with tightly rolled newspaper and shoved them in a bucket of water for the night. If this doesn't help, I guess, I will have lost nothing and I'll throw them out to lighten the load.

As to tomorrow, I am not sure what I will be doing and how. The cape is too far away for a one-day walk and I don't know about the bus schedules. Certain however is that I will be overnighing at Ashizuri Misaki.

### Day 17 – 31 October 2015 – Ashizuri Misaki

Distance (km)	27.1	Vertical (m)	250	Time Taken (hrs)	6.5	Other Travel	Bus – 18 km
Temples	• #38 – Kongoofukuji						
Accommodation	Hotel Hatto – 0880-88-0753						

It was quite an easy day, considering. Taking the bus for part of the way, as I will be doing tomorrow, puts me ahead of schedule but I may need a day or so in reserve to do the Shusseki Temple, located near Oozu on a 600 metre high mountain.

Breakfast was late at 0700 hrs but it didn't matter, because there was always the bus as a fallback option. I left at the same time as two other henros but I soon left my walking companions behind – that is until I took a wrong turn that brought us back together again. It was at that stage that a woman (I'd met her at the hotel yesterday) stopped her car and gave me an osettai of drinks, cakes and sweets. I wondered what the other two were thinking, being left out. . .

I walked briskly to the Wild Bird Park where I waited for thirty minutes for the bus to arrive. I got off the bus at the Oki-no-hama (Big Beach) stop from where I walked the remaining fifteen kilometres to Ashizuri Misaki and the temple, where I said my prayers.

The cape area reminds me very much at Oshima Island, with its dense forest of camellia trees and tropical ambiance.

The 'Hotel' of the 'Hatto' surely is a misnomer, I think a 'second or third-rate ryokan' would be a better label. The guidebook however refers to it as 'preferred'. I wonder who it was that conveyed this status to that place (all the establishments rated as 'preferred' in the guidebook have invariably turned out to be disappointments!). On the other hand, a sashimi plate of more than forty centimetres in diameter heaped with six kind of fish and orange and kiwi fruit slices would have done every master chef proud.

The lady doing our washing lost a pair of my socks and gave me a replacement, which turned out to be much better than those lost.

There were four henros at the table including a woman with steel grey hair and impeccable table manners. The henro next to me drank, in quick succession, two big bottles of beer followed by close to half a litre of sake that didn't seem to affect him at all. Who said Japanese can't hold their liqueur?

As to my Scarpas, the overnight treatment seemed to work. I wore them all day, they felt quite comfortable and by the end of the day were completely dry and a better fit on my feet. It looks though like I will be soon be losing quite a bit of skin and one or two toenails.

## Day 18 – 1 November 2015 - Sukumo

Distance (km)	28.0	Vertical (m)	100	Time Taken (hrs)	6.25	Other Travel	Bus – 50 km
Temples	• #39 – Enkooji						
Accommodation	Business Hotel Akizawa – 0880-63-2129						

It was a big struggle today, despite the apparently good time that I made, walking from Nakamura Station in Shimanto City to Sukumo. I took the bus to Nakamura Station but could have stayed on all the way, but being delivered ‘at the doorsteps’ of the temple so to speak didn’t appeal to me (after all I *am* a walking henro, even though a slightly crippled one).

I recognised that this may be part of my learning on the O Henro San, having to realise that I am no longer as fit as I used to be. Maybe I will learn about pain and old age, which will for ever be a human’s curse unless one attains enlightenment.

There were quite a few henros making their way to the Misaki, singly and in small groups. Somewhere along the way I thought I spotted the Korean photographer heading south.

There have been good weather conditions for walking for the last two days – slightly overcast, little wind and temperatures in the high tens.

My favorite café, the Rino near Nakamura Station was closed being Sunday, so I had to do with a bitter ‘LAWSONS coffee’ a couple of kilometres up the road.

Two hours into the walk I had to swap the Canvas for the Scarpas, because my toes hurt badly. Then my hip became very sore (I must have strained it going up the Nanako Tooge a few days ago and the muscle hasn’t had the time to heal). This is a very serious concern to me, given the days and kilometres that are still ahead of me. So much so that I decided not to visit any Bangai Temples any more, unless they are located directly on the walking route. Honestly (and secretly), Shussekiji had been worrying me for a few days.

I’m writing this entry at the dinner table, just finishing a hot sake. There are only three others in the dining room. The meal was HUGE!! – pickled sashimi (four huge pieces of maguro – tuna), two sorts of fried fish, pickles, turnip, salad, rice, an egg dish (with bacon), miso soup and tea. A veritable feast for a hungry henro. (I am very conscious about not looking into the direction of the over-attentive waiter who seems to be eager to come across to attend to any possible wishes of mine).

Tomorrow will be a long day but, given my condition, I might resort to a bus or taxi for part of the way. I shall also be entering the Dojo of Enlightenment, the Ehime Prefecture.

## Day 19 – 2 November 2015 – Uwajima City

Distance (km)	31.2	Vertical (m)	400	Time Taken (hrs)	7.0	Other Travel	Bus – 7 km
Temples	• #40 - Kanjizaiji						
Accommodation	Nishi Yuugyo Centre – 0895-35-0917						

The night’s steady rain made the decision on whether to take the dirt track up to the 300 metre Matsuo Tooge or to follow Route 56 easy. So I hit the ‘long, hard and lonely roads of Ehime’.

All day long I saw only one other henro on the road, which did not come as a surprise.

The feet were going really well but the left hip, with pain and much of the flexibility gone gave me much trouble. I finally took a pain relief tablet. I wonder whether I am a hypochondriac, being obsessed with an ailing body. But body, soul and spirituality (not necessarily in that order) are the most important ingredients of a pilgrimage.

It didn’t rain all day but remained overcast until I was at the temple that the sun tried to break through.

Temple #40 is the one being the furthest from #1, in either direction. Meaning that, from now on, it will be going downhill all the way – only figuratively speaking, because in my way there are still three more ‘big ones’ - #60, 66 and 88 and maybe even Ishizuchi San. I understand that many henros make it to temple #40 (as a ‘milestone’) but, after this, don’t complete the rest of the journey. The ‘lonely roads of Ehime’ are just too daunting.

There is a line of statues of Gods at Temple #40 and prayers are reinforced by ladling water upon them. This I did, and earnestly prayed for my estranged daughter Melinda who, I had heard, is going through a very rough time, both mentally and physically.

I had lunch at the temple then changed my shoes to the Canvas, just as a precaution. The Scarpas had been performing well but there was no point in pushing my luck.

I took the bus for a stretch of the road just ‘to lighten the load’. I think I could have walked the distance but didn’t want to take any risks.

I’m staying at the same place as I did a year ago – beautiful facilities, a tatami room with my own facilities, and the most amazing sunset thrown in for free.

Happy is the henro. . .

### Day 20 – 3 November 2015 – Uwajima City

Distance (km)	23.6	Vertical (m)	200	Time Taken (hrs)	6.0	Other Travel	
Temples	• #B6 - Ryuukoojin						
Accommodation	H Clements – 0895-23-6111						

A road sign said ‘Matsuyama – 96 kilometres’ but the henro road is significantly longer – from now on it will be going inland and up into the mountains – though not very high, the road there will be long.

What I walked in the last two journeys in one day I did I two easy days today. But I’m feeling very tired. I’ve never walked for close to three weeks without a rest day and I’m feeling it (even in the Tour de France they have a rest day every week, so I recall). Still I think I have enough medication with me to get me through to Matsuyama. Come to think of it, apart from Day 1 when I damaged my toes I have barely walked a single step without being in pain – maybe I should call this O Henro San the ‘Pilgrimage of Pain and Endurance’??

So I took it easy today, it was almost a ‘coffee and cake run’. The first coffee just came after one hour coinciding with the first scheduled stop of the day, when a coffee house appeared out of nowhere and where they served delicious coffee to the strains of Mozart. Then the walk took me down the gentle slopes of a beautiful valley. Somewhere I stopped to watch a group of young men perform a ‘deer dance’ (shishi odori). Like all Japanese dances, there is a history to it, this one being about fertility and the buck seeking a doe. The old woman for who the dance was apparently for (or maybe it was for her daughter or grand-daughter) gave the dancers a small envelope containing money.

I met, within the first thirty minutes of walking in the day, two henros walking anti-clock wise. This must have been some kind of record, seeing so *many* in such a short space of time on the west coast. After that there were no other henros on the road, expect one waiting for the train at Uwajima Station.

Near Tsushima Play Land the road went gently uphill again and though the Matsuo Tunnel, probably the longest on the O Henro San with its 1,710 metres. It took about twenty minutes to traverse. Tunnels are really horrible and all have the same in common: they are dirty, noisy and (at times) dangerous, though the tunnels in Ehime generally seem to be a cut above the rest. But, then, using them save a tired henro from hours of arduous mountain walking that I probably wouldn’t be up to now.

After the tunnel I had a ‘morning set’ at a café - coffee, toast, scrambled egg and a mandarine. Great value at only ¥500. Somewhere at a road stall I purchased a bag of mandarines for ¥120, and one

hundred metres further down a man gave me three as an osettai. I felt like a wandering fruit and vegetable shop, loaded down with fruit.

Around midday I made it into Uwajima. The sky had been cloudless for most of the day but a strong headwind added to the struggle.

Ryuukoojin is quite a lovely temple and it almost made me regret my decision not to do Shusseki. However, the big mountains surrounding Uwajima could easily dissuade anyone from attempting to reach a mountain temple.

Dinner at the Clements: Nahoko and I had stayed at the Clements in Tokushima in 2008 and I was very much impressed at that time. When I saw the hotel today I immediately thought about a ¥10,000 plus room, but it turned out to be a little less than 9,000, breakfast included. And it was sleeping in great comfort!

They even have a computer for use by guests and internet access at the hotel! True, the connection is painfully slow but who am I to complain? I was able to connect with some of my friends on Facebook, and deal with some credit card related matters. They don't have a 'sentakki' though – nothing is perfect.

I felt like a little change in my diet so I am 'staying in' and enjoyed two really nice pizzas. I also enjoyed a glass of shochu (rice spirit) in hot water.

### Day 21 – 4 November 2015 – Seiyō City

Distance (km)	27.4	Vertical (m)	650	Time Taken (hrs)	8.0	Other Travel	
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• #41 - Ryuukooji</li><li>• #42 - Butsumokuji</li><li>• #43 - Meisekiji</li></ul>						
Accommodation	2 <sup>nd</sup> BH Matsuya						

A relatively easy day, but an overall tiredness has set in. Yuko by now has arranged for all of my accommodation to Matsuyama, which means that I will be flying back to Tokyo on the 9<sup>th</sup>, four days earlier than originally planned. I feel relieved!

I really don't know what I would have done with my wonderful 'adopted step-daughter' (she calls me 'step-dad'). There were no slip-ups with the bookings except, maybe, that today's hotel wasn't on the location shown in the guidebook – but I can hardly blame Yuko for that. The hotel was closed down some time ago and relocated to a more central area in the city, after the publication of the book. The friendly owner of the liquor shop helped me out of the dilemma and find the hotel.

This day could almost be classified as a 'coffee and cake run'. After walking for 1 ½ hours up to Muden I stopped for a LAWSONS' Coffee (questionable quality but it was hot) and a delicious apple Danish I had bought at a bakery at Uwajima Eki. From here it was just a few short kilometres to Temples #41 and 42.

It was T-shirt weather again today – strange, the shortest day of the year is only six weeks away. . .

In the past I did Temples #41 to 43 at the end of the day and in a hurry, but this time I really enjoyed exploring the temples.

After #42 the 500 metre high Hanaga Tooge was looming. The first part was a very ancient path, deeply carved into the steep mountainside by millions of henro feet over the last 1,200 years. On the lower slopes the path was paved with stones, its upper part was a comfortable forest track and the last two kilometres to the pass were on a sealed road.

A work gang on top of the pass greeted me in a friendly manner and pointed to the track that would take me down into the valley. I appreciated their care and kindness, even though I could have found the track myself, even in the middle of the night.

The convoluted approach to #43 has always intrigued me but I followed it anyway because I had got so used to it. Alas, in being so sure of myself and thinking I knew the way I headed up the road



to the Museum of Ehime History and Culture which was not only closed for the day, but on the hill adjacent to the temple.

So, tomorrow will be the third last of the 'big' days. My hip feels a little better and, as a precaution, I'd been wearing the Canvas all day.

The dinner was HUGE with twelve dishes – fried and pickled fish, sashimi, sushi, nabe (with pork), salad, pickles, rice, miso soup, and dessert. The washing was done by hotel staff as an osettai. There were only two other people in the dining room, judging by their clothes they were workmen. They liberally shared their sake with me. One commented on the dexterity with which I was handling the 'ohashi' (chopsticks). They didn't know that I have been using ohashi for the last fifteen years, even in Australia.

## Day 22 – 5 November 2015 – Uchiko Town

Distance (km)	32.5	Vertical (m)	200	Time Taken (hrs)	8.0	Other Travel	
Temples	• #B8 – Toyogahashi						
Accommodation	Shinmachi-soo – 0893-44-2021						

Today it rained for the first time on this O Henro San. The sun valiantly tried to get through the cloud cover as I set out but for the rest of the day it drizzled enough to wear the poncho at times and it remained cool.

Tosaka Tunnel, in the second hour of walking ranks highest in my hate-list of tunnels. It is more than 1,100 metres long with no elevated footpath and cars and trucks thunder past at arm's length. The noise is deafening! I didn't mind so much the trucks (despite their blast of air and noise) because the truckies seem to understand their business but cars (often without their headlights switched on and driving erratically) were a different story! I usually stopped and stood still to let the trucks go by, often for cars too.

On the other side of the tunnel was the 'henro's dream road' gently descending many kilometres of road with a really nice café halfway down the pass, or so I thought. Alas, the café no longer exists and had given way to offices of an adjacent steel manufacturing plant.

In Oozu around midday, two henros with whom I've been playing tag for a few days overtook me as I had my second cup of coffee for the day. Apart from these two, there were no other henros on the road – they must be made of pretty stern stuff too.

A short while later I booked my flight from Matsuyama to Tokyo at a travel agency. Surprisingly they didn't accept credit cards, but I had enough cash on me. A little later in the day I also booked the four additional nights at the APA Hotel Ningyoochoo Eki Kita where I have been staying whilst in Tokyo. I'm looking forward to spending a few more days with friends and recovering from the rigors of the journey.

Pondering as I walk about my Japanese friends, I often think that I am much closer to them than with my own family, brother, children and grandchildren. I feel very privileged to have them in my life!

I had not intended to stop at the Toyogahashi Temple, but it looked so forlorn on the side of the road that I decided to stop for prayers. This is the temple from where the notion arises that one should not tap the kongozue on a bridge. The legend goes that, having been refused accommodation everywhere, the Kooboo Daishi had to resort to sleeping under a bridge, hence one should not tap the stick because He might be sleeping underneath.

The temple itself doesn't seem to be anything really special, looks-wise, but the bridge next to it certainly is (or better what's underneath). Here stands a little shrine and a stone plaque depicting a sleeping Kooboo Daishi as well as a row of Jizoo Bosattsu. Funny, I'd been walking twice above this wonderful place in the past without realising it.

I caught up with the two henros as I neared Uchiko.

At the station I enquired at the 'tourist office' about a bus that could take me part of the way towards #44 tomorrow. The clerk was able to give me this information as well as the direction to the ryokan but when I asked him to find me the phone number of the hotel in Tokyo on his computer he sniveled and sadly shook his head. The stationmaster, a strikingly beautiful woman of about 25 was far more helpful and got me the number in an instant.

The ofuro was almost ready as I arrived as was the sentakki, guarded by a small Akita dog. Dinner was nothing short of amazing. I counted 14 dishes with twenty different morsels and ingredients (some big enough themselves for an entire meal); there were eight fish dishes, all prepared in a different manner.

I checked my weight today, I've only lost one kilo which is not surprising, given the huge amount of food (and maybe beer) that I've been downing on this O Henro San.

I'll have to do without breakfast tomorrow, though, because it is scheduled for 0730 hrs, the same time my bus leaves.

Health wise, my toes seem to be reasonably OK but my left hip is creating very serious problems, especially when I'm walking downhill. I have enough pain relief tablets to last me to Matsuyama, though.

### Day 23 – 6 November 2015 – Kuma-Koogen

Distance (km)	14.7	Vertical (m)	400	Time Taken (hrs)	5.0	Other Travel	Bus – 20 km, Taxi 8 km
Temples	• #44 - Daihooji						
Accommodation	Garden Time – 0892-21-0005						

If ever there was a struggle on the O Henro San, today was it. Given my physical condition I knew that the 43 kilometres to Kuma-Koogen would be beyond me, so I took the 0735 hrs community bus from Uchiko to Oda. It was crammed full of students, it reminded me being on a school bus but these kids were well behaved: no one said a word, they either slept or were busy with their mobile phones. Once at the end station of the bus, I thought, my body should be able to handle the distance.

Smoke and the smell of grilled fish caught my attention as I began my walk. There was an old man on the side of the main street of Oda barbecuing a few large river fish, for sale I presume.

From Oda on it went all the way up to the Mayumi Tunnel, some 535 metres ASL. I remembered that this stretch of road had been part of my epic 91 kilometre walk in 2013, when I walked almost non-stop for two days and a night from #43 to #45 and back to #44. How one's physical condition can change in just a year. . .

My feet were now in perfect shape but the left hip was getting worse by the hour and minute and I soon began to struggle. The road on the upper reaches of the pass was quite steep and my tortured body was longingly looking for the entrance to the tunnel at every new bend in the road.

The tunnel was horrible and I was unsteady on my feet. I stopped every time a vehicle approached me, because I feared I could fall.

It drizzled lightly as I exited this dirty hole, but not enough to put on my poncho. Funny, a year ago, around midnight, I loved being in that tunnel because it provided me with warmth, light, and there was no noise except the tapping of my walking stick.

Halfway down the pass I began to limp badly and began to wonder how much longer my legs would be able to carry me. I stopped at the henro hut a little past the small town of Fujimine (where I had tried to sleep last time but couldn't because of the cold) and was surprised how much distance I had actually covered.

A few kilometres later, at the junction of Routes 380 and 33 I knew I could walk no further. Luckily there was a bus stop and I decided to wait for the next bus, no matter how long it would take. As

luck would have it, though, an empty taxi came my way and took me right to the gate of Temple #44.

This temple has a beautiful gate adorned with two huge straw sandals that are being changed every one hundred years. They looked the same as they did on both of the last occasions, so their time obviously isn't up as yet.

It was a real struggle to get out of the cab but I somehow managed and climbed the steps up to the temple. It looked beautiful in its autumn colours and there is an amazingly huge ginkgo tree in its grounds.

I said my prayers then realised that my pains had disappeared. Had a miracle happened?

Gingerly I walked the two kilometres into town and to one of my favorite cafés on the O Henro San, the *Petite Clef*. The pains had reappeared, but their coffee and cakes are 'to die for'.

Tomorrow will bring an other challenge, but I try not to think about it – that's an other day. . .

### Later. . .

As I went to pay for the coffee the pretty young woman looked at me with astonishment and exclaimed 'Armin San!'. Then she rushed to her bag in which she kept the osame-fuda I had given her on my last journey. Funny how things happen.

At the hotel there was a 22-year-old woman from London, Jess, who is doing her first O Henro San. She appeared to be short of money so I invited her to dinner rather than her getting a take-away meal. She gladly accepted. She said that today had been the happiest day in her life, because she felt free for the first time in her life. May this freedom last for her entire life, I pray.

As to the quality of the dinner, maybe a 2 ½ out of 10 will do. The lady at the front desk, the owner's daughter, was very pleasant, though.

### Day 24 – 7 November 2015 – Kuma-Koogen and Matsuyama

Distance (km)	7.0	Vertical (m)	0	Time Taken (hrs)	3.0	Other Travel	Bus – 16 km / Taxi – 24 km
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #45 – Iwayaji</li> <li>• #46 – Jooruriji</li> <li>• #47 – Yasakaji</li> <li>• #B9 – Monjuin</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	Chochin-ya Ryokan – 089-963-0280						

So stage one of this O Henro San is ending in a whimper. This morning I took a taxi to and from Iwayaji because I would have been unable to walk the required 24 kilometres. If I were an old draught horse then someone surely would have taken me to the knackery by now. But I am certain that my body will heal and I will be ending this O Henro San during 'sakura-time'.

There were quite a few henros on their way to and from the temple. A tinge of sadness was within me because I would have wanted to be among them. But, then, this injury might just be part of my learning experience of this walking journey – walking in pain every step since Day 2. . .

Early afternoon I will be taking the bus towards Matsuyama where, from the other side of the Misaka Tooge, it will only be a short walk to today's four temples.

I'm continuing to write this story at my favorite café along the route. Kumi Inoue, the young waitress rushed up to me to show a picture she had taken of both the osame-fuda I had given her. She must have told the other staff about me because they all rushed up to me to welcome me like the prodigal son (more likely the long missing (errant) grandfather).

So, am I disappointed with this étape of my third O Henro San? In a sense yes, but only just a little. I had set out with an open mind (I think) and some expectation of great things to happen, like on the first two journeys. But injury had been the furthest from my mind. But I must remember the oath that I took upon embarking on this journey: *I will not complain if things do not go well while on*

*the pilgrimage, but consider such experiences to be part of the ascetic training.* Did I ever complain or even swear? I don't think so.

But then I had the amazing experience of meeting my precious 'Nahoko-bird'. That alone made up for any pain and discomfort I may have suffered.

I asked myself this morning why it is that I always chose pursuits involving loneliness. Loneliness or, better still, aloneness, is part of a pilgrimage because it enables me to focus on issues of importance. Though the daily contact with Yuko has become very important to me, however brief it is and always in text. I felt very privileged to have this 'O Henro San-step daughter' on my support team.

Yuko texted me this morning, saying she was looking forward to seeing me again back in Tokyo, and to take care to ensure my health wouldn't deteriorate further. I agree with her. Going back to my 'home-town' and being among friends is something I am really looking forward to. . .

. . . and still in the café. Kumi and the confiseur (both very attractive young women) have just presented me with two huge cookies (especially made for me, they said). Such kindness!

### Day 25 – 8 November 2015 - Matsuyama

Distance (km)	13.2	Vertical (m)	50	Time Taken (hrs)	4.0	Other Travel	
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #48 - Sairinji</li> <li>• #49 - Jodoji</li> <li>• #50 - Hantaji</li> <li>• #51 - Ishiteji</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	Hotel Terminal Matsuyama						

Yesterday I waited at Kuma-Koogen for the 1331 hrs bus to take me to the Shiogawori stop on the other side of the Misaka Tooge from where there would be a short 2.8 kilometre downhill walk to #46. Once I dropped the pack at the ryokan and said my prayers at #46 I walked as fast as my legs would allow (painfully slow, that is!) to #47 and #B9.

Earlier in the day after my visit to the café I hung around Kuma-Koogen. It isn't really a place to get excited about in terms of its beauty, things to do or style. To kill the time I walked a few times back and forth between the bus station and the shopping centre with its ten shops or so.

At one stage I noticed a pair of very hairy legs on the far side of the bench of the waiting room that appeared to belong to a sleeping individual with a Rastafarian hair-do, wearing some clothes on top (it was quite chilly) and only 'fundoshi' (loin cloth) and shoes further down. No pants. Maybe he was a travelling mystic or ascetic. He smelt really bad (worse than I!!) and was incredibly dirty. When I returned half an hour later there were two policemen sitting next to him, one talking on the phone, the other scribbling notes. All of a sudden, without anyone saying a word, 'hairy-legs' got up and strode out of the bus station.

There was a lively crowd of walking henros at the dinner table last night, some of whom had on occasions walked together. I talked for a while with Alain, a Frenchman from La Bretagne who is doing his second O Henro San and was very pleased to talk French for the first time in weeks.

### To today

I had breakfast at 0600 hrs and was on the road thirty minutes later. The walking was painfully slow but I was determined to make it to #51, no matter what.

When I sat down heavily at the last temple four hours later, tears of exhaustion, pain and relief welled into my eyes and I quietly sobbed into the towel that I always carry.

There was a group of therapists at the temple, assisting henros with their services as an osettai. A kind man helped me up the steps of a temple building and explained the treatment he would give me was 'moxa/moxabustion'. I'd never heard of it, but he said it would involve fire and a very special Japanese herb (but assured me it wouldn't hurt).

I had heard about this treatment before (though not by name) and it never interested me greatly because of the thought of being burnt for the sake of healing didn't appeal to me. At this stage however, and the state of pain that I was in, I would have gladly accepted surgery without anesthetic, so I happily underwent the treatment.

To my great astonishment, it actually worked, the pain went away!! But by the time I had walked the one kilometre to the Dogo Onsen the pain had come back and was as bad as it had been before. But at least I didn't need to walk any more. . .

I spent the afternoon 'housecleaning' and eating. Throwing out a few things that I no longer needed including my canvas shoes which showed virtually no sign of wear and tear (but what would I do with a pair of runners two sizes too big?). That also made me contemplate the wisdom of spending ¥22,400 on 'good' walking shoes when a ¥6,700 pair seemed to have performed equally well, if not better.

I indulged in eating and drinking 'comfort food' such as bread, Swiss Raclette cheese, tomatoes, boiled vegetables and a bottle of French white wine.

So, it's Tokyo tomorrow - then the continuation of the journey in March/April of next year.

May the Kooboo Daishi and all the great Gods and Buddhas continue to give us their blessing. . .

### Day 26 – 24 March 2016 – Matsuyama City

Distance (km)	12.3	Vertical (m)	100	Time Taken (hrs)	4.25	Other Travel	
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #52 Taisanji</li> <li>• #53 Enmyooji</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	Resort Inn Mermaid - ¥6,800						

### At Haneda Airport

My journey resumes today.

I muse that it was seven years since I took the first and tentative steps on the O Henro San and became a henro.

It seems such a long time ago, so much has happened since then: my marriage to Nahoko, a beautiful relationship with the most amazing woman; her death and; for me to go on with life thereafter.

A few weeks earlier, in Tasmania, four of Nahoko's friends and I had scattered (almost) the last of her ashes in three places that had been significant to her. Marion's Lookout at Cradle Mountain (for air), Miles Beach on Bruny Island (water), and the Mystery Creek Cave in southern Tasmania (earth). Her body had already been consumed by fire. The scattering of her ashes was an important step for me to reach closure. Now I intend to scatter the very last remnant of her ashes, together with our marriage stones, on the slopes of Ishizuchi San during this journey.

I still remember the struggle I went through during last year's stage of the O Henro San. I later recognised it had all been my fault because I had been focusing on covering as much distance as possible rather than on the spiritual part of the journey. This experience has led me to change my attitude, one from covering big distances to walking shorter days and spending more time at temples reflecting and praying. And enjoying the journey. I know that the good wishes and love of many of my friends go with me.

The two weeks since arriving in Tokyo had been very pleasant. I had been invited to stay at a friend's home where I experienced wonderful hospitality.

I feel privileged to have so many beautiful people in my life.

Yesterday I went to the barber to get myself a #1 haircut. My friend Mika laughed politely, saying I looked like a monk. Maybe there is a little bit of truth in this statement.

For the coming 18 days or so I will be on the road. I will be seeking the blessing of all the Gods and the Kooboo Daishi and ask them to guide me, teach me, protect me and, if I am deemed to be worthy, to grant me enlightenment.

Namu Daishi Henjo Kongoo. . .

### Later

It had been a dead-easy day, but it won't be like that tomorrow.

The flight arrived in Matsuyama on time, as one would expect of Japan Airlines. Forty minutes after touchdown I was at the Matsuyama JR Station where I said my prayers, thanking the Gods and the Kooboo Daishi for their assistance on this journey so far and asking for their blessings for the road ahead, and commenced my journey.

It didn't take long for me to get into my walking routine. Tapping the kongozue in step and reciting endlessly in my mind the Kukai's name – Namu Daishi Henjo Kongoo. . .

Either temple that I visited today is quite beautiful. The first is situated on a hill, the second located in suburbia surrounded by houses, but it somehow has retained its integrity and beauty.

The ryokan is, as one would guess by its name, just a short stroll from the shore where a few kite-surfers were demonstrating their skills.

Tomorrow promises to be a long day, or maybe just as long as I intend to make it. It is 37 kilometres to Temple #55, though I think I will most likely go part of the way by train or bus.

On reflection, I should have walked much further today, at least ten kilometers more. Though I still feel a little uncertain about my feet. They seem to be OK and the much-maligned Scarpa shoes of last year (now with new heels) felt most comfortable.

It has been a cold winter in Shikoku, and the sakura are out late. A few pink ones are out, with the white ones yet to come.

There was quite a number of walking henros on the road today, including an other gaijin and a few women. Very few bus henros, though, which was a little surprising.

I was the only guest in the dining room. There were six dishes, every one of which could easily have been served as a (small) main course on their own.

Just after dinner I stepped out to a most amazing sunset.

Happy is the henro. . .

### Day 27 – 25 March 2016 - Imabari

Distance (km)	36.2	Vertical (m)	100	Time Taken (hrs)	9.5	Other Travel	
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• #54 Enmeiji</li><li>• #55 Nankooboo</li></ul>						
Accommodation	Imabari Urban Hotel - ¥7,215 (room only)						

A long(ish) and satisfactory day in which I covered a greater distance than I had originally planned. I'm happy!

Health-wise I seem to be OK, I still have a slight cold but not the slightest sign of blisters and the hip seems to be fine as well.

I stepped out into chilly air at 0650 hrs and headed north, right into the teeth of a bitterly cold wind which didn't abate until later in the morning.

I found that everything I'd brought along and was wearing to be most useful – the henro baseball cap, gloves and the purple neck-warmer that probably once had belonged to Nahoko.



Without really noticing, I was clocking up the kilometres fast. I had coffee after one hour, then the walk took me up then down a lovely hill just north of Hoojo. North of Asnami I stopped at the Henjooin Temple which, I felt, would have deserved to be included in the O Henro San route because of its beauty and size. I stopped at the temple for prayers. Further to the north-east I stopped at Iyo Kameoka, the little town not far from the polluting (but essential) petro-chemical complex, where I had had a past life experience in my first O Henro San.

It was around midday when I stopped at the small Tako Tako shop on the side of the road where I enjoyed eight tasty balls, 'tako', made from a dough and octopus, smothered with a spicy sauce and covered with bonito flakes – delicious and all for ¥350 or A\$4.00.

I was beginning to tire a little as the road turned south-easterly and Temple #54 came into sight.

A short distance from #54 I came across two elderly female henros who were in animated/confused discussion with a council worker and an old woman as how to go to #55 from where they currently were. The man asked me (in Japanese and sign-language, of course), to guide the two women to #55 which I agreed to do, even though I knew they would slow me down. Strangely enough, the path was clearly marked with red arrows everywhere. Even though the women appeared to be walking henros, I doubt they had walked all the way from Temple #1 to where they now were, given some more serious navigation challenges they would have had to face.

I felt quite good within myself when I entered the grounds of #55 at around 1600 hrs. A short time later I reached my hotel.

I'm having dinner at the same restaurant as I did on my previous O Henro San. I've got my own booth. In a nearby booth there seems to be a party for young women happening, they are frequently shrieking with laughter. Did someone tell me that Japanese were always restrained and generally *very* quiet?

### Day 28 – 26 March 2016 - Komatsu

Distance (km)	34.0	Vertical (m)	300	Time Taken (hrs)	10.25	Other Travel	
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #56 Taisanji</li> <li>• #57 Eifukuji</li> <li>• #58 Senyuuji</li> <li>• #59 Kokubunji</li> <li>• #61 Koonji</li> <li>• #62 Hoojuji</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	BR Komatsu ¥6,200						

It's been a long and hard day, but a good one. I left the hotel at 0630 hrs and was at the first temple half an hour later, just around opening time. A few henros were already there and, as I was saying the Heart Sutra, the first load of bus-henros arrived.

At that temple in 2009 there were two little white dogs in the stamp office that supervised the proceedings. Only one came up to the counter to greet me this time.

On the way up to #58 I was stopped by a friendly *true* photographer who was astounded to hear that I was on my third O Henro San. He had two seriously battered Nikon cameras from the sixties with him, obviously well used and loved, and he spent close to half a roll of film on me.

I had considered taking the train to Komatsu after #59 but, feeling well within myself, I decided to walk. I had lunch at a roadside stop with 13 kilometres to go to Komatsu and

resumed my walk in bright sunshine. In the distance loomed Ishizuchi San, which seemed to be growing bigger with every step.

People were very friendly along the way. A silver haired lady had wished me 'o kyoo tsugette' as I was walking towards the first temple of the day, and a bunch of bikers on their Harleys gave me friendly waves as they roared past.

I was tired as I was approaching #61, the 'modern' temple, so I quickly said my prayers and got moving.

With tomorrow's ascent to #60 in mind, I decided to do a reconnoiter to find the road leading up the mountain. Armed with a hand drawn sketch given to me at the stamp office I set out to explore, but without success. A friendly driver stopped as I stood undecidedly at a road fork but was unable to assist despite frantically working on his mobile for 15 minutes. By that time I had become nervous, because I still had to visit #62 and purchase provisions for the next two days, just in case there was no food to be had on the way.

I finally said the Heart Sutra at #62, ten hours after having hit the road.

The BR Komatsu almost makes it into the 'I would never take my girlfriend there' category. The 19 guests that stay here share one bathroom and two toilets. I was allocated a room downstairs next to the entrance but at least the bed is comfortable.

Dinner was quite awful, shabu-shabu containing chicken and meat (thin pinkish-red slices marbled with big globs of white fat), none of which I ate and a few vegetables that I boiled in the nabe. But, then, who am I to complain for dinner, bed and breakfast for about \$A70.00, a small flask of hot sake included?

### Day 29 – 27 March 2016 – Ishizuchi San

Distance (km)	22.8	Vertical (m)	1,200	Time Taken (hrs)	7.5	Other Travel	Ropeway
Temples	• #60 Yokomineji						
Accommodation	Tamaya R ¥8,000						

This day was the most auspicious of my O Henro San for it included the scattering of the last of Nahoko's remains on sacred ground. But, first, I had to get myself there.

I had decided to take a taxi to the jump-off point for the Yokomineji along Route 11. Distance-wise it wasn't an advantage but I was ensured of a trouble and panic free commencement of the day.

I made excellent time along the valley road then the last two kilometres along a steep, well worn O Henro San trail through an age-old forest and across foaming mountain creeks, arriving at Yokomineji 2 ¼ hours after I'd set out.

In the past I had descended towards #61, but this time I climbed a little higher to the ridge above the temple to the Yakushidoo, a favored view point of the Ishizuchi San. Alas, today, the mountain was hiding behind light clouds.

There was a steep and very rough trail leading down the Moe-Zaka Slope. In places it had deteriorated badly, and occasionally followed dry creek beds formed by huge boulders. I wondered what one were to do in the case of rain.

I walked very carefully the 600 metres down to the valley floor, because I knew that a fall and resulting injury would mean almost certain death, because the trail was rarely used. Towards the end of the descent I actually *did* meet an other henro, but I wasn't to know that on my descent.

Once off the slope I followed the beautiful green mountain stream without encountering an other soul. Then I came to the valley fork and turned right and up the valley again, towards the Ishizuchi Ropeway that would take me halfway up the 1,852 metre mountain. I was lucky because the 1200 hrs car was about to leave and quickly took me up to 1,400 metres.

I congratulated myself for having had the foresight of buying provisions, because there were no shops in this area.

In the early afternoon Nahoko and I commenced our very last journey together. I bowed at the 'tori', the gate marking the beginning of the sacred land, carrying the precious load. Even though it is early spring, there was no snow on the trail and so I decided to walk up the mountain as far as time would allow. Alas, I didn't manage to get very far, because the efforts of the last few days were beginning to catch up with me. I felt exhausted.

At a seemingly insignificant spot, a little off the trail, I purified myself with the very special incense powder Yuka had given me and said my prayers to the Gods of the mountain, and the protectors of Nahoko. I asked them to continue to bless this beautiful woman, to gently teach her what she needed to learn, and to help her to gain enlightenment and a good new life. Then I filled my cupped hands with Nahoko's grainy, white remains and the two marriage stones we had given to each other – mine a small pink one, Nahoko's a slightly larger grey/green.

With my eyes closed I sang our favorite song, 'The Rose'. Yet the strong wind made singing difficult. Tears welled into my eyes when I came to the verses *it's the one who won't be taken, who cannot seem to give; and the soul afraid of dying that never learns to live*<sup>4</sup>.

Then I quickly thrust my hands upwards. I heard the 'thunk' as one of the stones hit a tree. When I opened the eyes, Nahoko was gone<sup>5</sup>.

I believe I have now made good on my vow to be there for Nahoko until the end of my days. What a privilege it was for me to be part of the life of Nahoko Ueno-Howald.

A song came to my mind as I walked down the mountain, we'd learned it with the choir I was with a long time ago: *Over my head, I see freedom in the air; over my head, I see freedom in the air; there must be a God somewhere. . .*

I spent the rest of the afternoon relaxing, writing and planning for the next few days. I really needed the rest.

At 1700 hrs, after having had my ofuro, I dressed again and went for a stroll around the Ishizuchi Jinja (shrine). The low clouds had cleared and the clear blue sky was dotted with a few white clouds, promising a fine day for tomorrow. Ishizuchi San presented itself with all his majesty, and the low sun provided its own magic.

Dinner was marvelous – *nabe* a fish stew with lots of mushrooms presented in a huge dish over a gas burner, a small river fish, steamed vegetables, rice, various pickled vegetables and two apple slices for dessert.

The entire stay up here, at a little less than \$A100.00 represents great value, considering that everything has to be hauled up the mountain – more than 20 kilometres by truck and a small ropeway. I'm the only guest for the night.

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<sup>4</sup> I decided there and then that I would never sing this song again

<sup>5</sup> I hope environmentalists will forgive me because I even left the small zip-lock bag on the mountain, just to ensure that I would not even take a small grain of my beloved woman down into the valley

I'm into my second flask of hot osake. I've grown fond of the rice wine, haven't even touched my hitherto favorite, Asahi Dry, since arriving in Japan.

Tomorrow sounds almost like a holiday – downhill and flat and two temples. The following day will also be a flat one.

### Day 30 – 28 March 2016 – Saijoo City

Distance (km)	30.2	Vertical (m)	100	Time Taken (hrs)	7.0	Other Travel	
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #63 Kichijooji</li> <li>• #64 Maegamiji</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	BH Saijoo Station ¥6,150 (room only)						

I had an other good day on the road, though it took slightly longer than I had expected.

I didn't trust my eyes when I looked outside this morning and saw a light dusting of snow on the roofs and on the ground.

I had the luxury of a late breakfast because the first cable car would not leave until 0840 hrs., so I enjoyed walking through the landscape coated in white, beautifully illuminated by the rising sun.

My thoughts were with Nahoko as I walked off Ishizuchi San. And me. Scattering her ashes means closure for me. Though I know that there will always be a connection with her, forged through many lives together, and I was privileged to have spent fourteen years of this my live with this remarkable woman. Nobody can take the time with her away from me.

I cannot know where life will take me from here, and I don't worry – new learnings, new challenges, maybe a new relationship, using the time to heal myself and try to right some of the wrongs I may have done in my life. I feel privileged to be supported by the greatest of Gods.

I thanked the Gods as I turned to leave the mountain, asking for their ongoing blessing. And for enlightenment if I was deemed worthy of it.

\* \* \*

The serious walking began at 0900 hrs at the bottom of the Ishizuchi San Ropeway. Heading down the valley flanked by huge, steep mountains on either side, many hundred of meters high. A beautiful river below crashing over smoothly polished rocks and boulders, green, pink, grey and white in colour.

As time went by and kilometres added up the steep slopes gave way to low, rounded hills speckled with the occasional cherry tree or plum tree in bloom. At midday the valley opened up and afforded me a clear view of the Seto Inland Sea and Saijoo City.

Temple #63 is small and squeezed in between Route 11 and the railway line. Number 64, by contrast, occupies a large area with many buildings at various levels and a small, natural sacred water feature. As I was about to leave, an elderly henro whom I had overtaken earlier struggled in. Out of curiosity (when he was out of sight) I lifted his 75 litre pack. It must have weighed at least 25 kilos (by comparison, my 36 litre pack only weighs nine kilos and that includes food and 1 ½ litres of water).

Quite a few kind people gifted me with osettai today. A man at a LAWSON Station gave me a bottle of cold tea and a female bus henro at #64 gave me a few trinkets. Further along the road I was stopped by a man, a henro apparently, who seems to be spending his time taking photos of passing henros. As reward for allowing him to take my picture he gave me

some salt cookies. Judging by the silver osame-fuda he gave me, he must have completed the journey 25 to 49 times.

The room in the hotel is very comfortable and facing east, the direction tomorrow's journey. I was also able to wash my clothes for the first time in three days (they were beginning to smell a little today). As to the dinner, I should have told management beforehand that I don't eat meat or chicken, so I caused quite a flurry in the kitchen after I was presented with a chicken schnitzel. The fish they later gave me as substitute had the texture of sawdust and was quite inedible. The rice, vegetables and sashimi were OK, though. But one cannot expect too much for a meal that costs only ¥1,200.

I'm enjoying a hot sake which was served in glass inside a small wooden box, also half filled with that liquid. The box is leaking and some of the sake is spilling onto the table.

I've been having problems with my eyes; blurred vision especially when I am tired or if it is windy. I hope it is simply an allergic reaction to the sakura. I got some eye drops the other day which sting like hell but otherwise don't seem to help.

Tomorrow is going to be an other long day. I saw a sign today that said 'Tokushima - 180 kilometres'. A few more days on the road, I guess, plus six more medium to high mountains are yet to come. . .

I'm thinking of turning early.

#### Day 31 – 29 March 2016 - Mishima

Distance (km)	37.2	Vertical (m)	200	Time Taken (hrs)	9.0	Other Travel	
Temples	• #B12 Enmeiji						
Accommodation	R Oonaru-so ¥7,000						

A good day on the road, but I had to deal with a couple of unwanted surprises/disappointments.

First I discovered that the new heel on one of the shoes was detaching itself, tho' I was able to get some glue from the local 'combin' to fix the problem. The second was the discovery that the track over Mt Hiraishi from #65 to #B13 was closed due to unsafe conditions. I decided, reluctantly, to accept the advice from locals and not to take the risk. Getting lost in dense forest on the first day of this journey whilst trying to reach a Bangai Temple had taught me a lesson.

Apart from this, it was a day of walking and walking and walking. Endlessly reciting 'Namu Daishi Henjo Kongoo' in my mind.

Walking like a finely tuned walking machine – Namu Daishi Henjo Kongoo.

Come late morning I had two coffees and was walking on autopilot – Namu Daishi Henjo Kongoo.

Some of the day's walk was on Route 11, which was like any other highway. Lots of heavy trucks thundering by, smaller delivery vans and cars. But much of the walk took me through smaller side streets that ran parallel to R11 which were largely devoid of traffic. I walked through lightly built up areas, interspersed with fallow fields, fields of green wheat, and flowers everywhere - sakura, plum blossoms, japonica, tulips, camellia, rhododendron and many more. A veritable flower garden.

At 1230 hrs I said my prayers at #B13. The young lady who stamped my book looked more at home in a gym than at a temple in her black *Le Coq Sportif* tracksuit. Then I resumed my journey – Namu Daishi Henjo Kongoo. . .

The area that I am currently walking through is one of the most unstable regions in Japan, geologically speaking. It is on the major fault line between the Pacific and Eurasian plates.

At 1420 hrs I saw a most welcoming sight, the huge smoke stacks of the paper manufacturing plants of Shikoku-Chuo City.

I had been walking at an unrelenting pace for eight hours but, with two kilometres to go, I hit the wall. Maybe it was that, whatever adrenaline had been left, was now completely gone.

The Ryokan Oonaru-so is a real gem! It is new, spotlessly clean and the kind elderly lady that runs the ryokan practically begged the sweaty/dirty clothes off my body so she could wash and dry them.

I mused about the future of minshuku and ryokans, accommodation places mainly run by families or individual persons. Most of the owners seem to be elderly ladies and I doubt that young people would be prepared to take over once the old folks are gone.

There were quite a few henros on the road today, walking in either direction. There is an other henro at the ryokan whose name I didn't catch, but said he had walked from #64, a little further than me<sup>6</sup>. He, the old lady and I tried to communicate with one another, me with the help of a dictionary, but most of it was lost in translation.

Tomorrow will be an easy day. Not quite as planned, but I seem to have learned to accept that which is impossible to do.

### Day 32 – 30 March 2016 – Miyoshi City

Distance (km)	20.0	Vertical (m)	620	Time Taken (hrs)	5.5	Other Travel	
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• #65 Sankakuji</li><li>• #B14 Joofukuji (Tsubakuji-do)</li></ul>						
Accommodation	M Okada						

Tomorrow was meant to be a rest-day but, because of the enforced route change, today's walk was shortened by a considerable distance and became a rest-day in it self. It is now around midday and I am less than two kilometres from the minshuku I will be staying at tonight. The Minshuku Okada is well known to henros and is usually fully booked as it is the most convenient jumping-off point for the Unpenji. I had stayed there in 2009 but the minshuku was fully booked when I went through in 2014.

I have now been on the road for seven days, I think, and have walked about 200 kilometres. Pretty much according to plan. No blisters or injuries, just a few little niggles here and there that usually disappear as quickly as they'd come. My eyes are still troubling me with the amount of pollen in the air, but I think I will have to suffer it because I don't have any medication that seems to work.

I'd slept marvelously well and breakfast was wonderful! A quick check of my shoes showed that the running repairs are holding.

I left at 0640 hrs and followed the well-marked henro road to #65. Somehow there is always a bad smell permeating the air near the temple – from a pig farm nearby and the less than salubrious toilet block adjacent to the benches where henros leave their packs.

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<sup>6</sup> As it turned out, we would be playing 'tag' with each other until the second last day of my journey, when we met at Temple #84. At that time he told me he was using a combination of walking/bus/train to get around. I called him '



In my planning I had overlooked the ‘camellia temple’, so named after the flower that sprung from the walking staff the Kooboo Daishi drove into the ground before saying a prayer to rid the locals of fever. From this temple onwards the Route 11 went gently uphill for about four kilometres to the border between the Ehime and Tokushima Prefectures.

I traversed the last of the long tunnels of this journey, the 855 meter Sakai-me Tunnel. On its far side, in the Tokushima Prefecture, I stopped and prayed to all Gods and the Kooboo Daishi, thanking them for their protection and teachings they had afforded me whilst crossing the Ehime Prefecture; and asked for their continuing blessing for Nahoko, myself, my ancestors, family, children and grandchildren and my friends, especially Eri, Yuko and Mika, and all people on this earth.

I tried to walk as slowly as I could, half-pace at best, and there were no cafés along the road that could have slowed me down. So I am here, at the roadside eatery near the tunnel, into my second cup of coffee, and contemplating what to do for the rest of the day. . .

### Later

I spent a very leisurely afternoon in the village in which the minshuku is located. Dinner was quite a lively affair; there were seven henro at the table including a woman from Sapporo and ‘The Henro from #64’). The dinner was quite nice, not ‘haute cuisine’, but nourishing. I murmur of surprise went around the table when I asked for the second ‘hotto osake’.

After dinner the ojisan (grandfather) handed out hand drawn maps then proceeded to explain the way to next few temples (including showing pictures of road signs and traffic lights they should observe!!!). The audience listened, seemingly enthralled, to the 40-minute didactic dissertation which was followed by the showing of certificates that I didn’t understand, but elicited a murmur of approval from the audience. It spoke volumes about the Japanese way of at times explaining the obvious.

### Day 33 – 31 March 2016 – Awa-Ikeda

Distance (km)	24.2	Vertical (m)	500	Time Taken (hrs)	7.5	Other Travel	
Temples	• #B15 Hashikuraji						
Accommodation	BH Awa-Ikeda						

It’s been an easy/breezy day with just one big hill.

I hit the road at 0630 hrs, the ojisan and his wife bidding me farewell outside their house.

It was quite fresh and I exhaled clouds of steam as I trundled down the valley towards the broad expanse of the Yoshinogawa (river). A thermometer above the road indicated a cool ten degrees.

The ropeway and the beginning of the track to the temple were easy to find, but I had to walk for three hours to get there (and to get my first cup of coffee).

The ascent was easy, and I reckoned I would need about 45 minutes to reach the temple, located 400 metres above the valley. So I was very surprised to reach the gate in just under thirty minutes. From here on a wide pathway, slightly curved and gong uphill and flanked with sakura trees led to the temple.

Alas. . .

I came to the red bridge that two Dutch henros had talked about last year and that I had been eager to see. From here on there were steps going up to the temple, but the steps seemed to be never ending. They were going up and up, endlessly. . .

When I finally reached what I believed to be the main part of the temple where the stamp office and the end of the ropeway are located, I realised there were still more steps to climb (in all, I counted 719 steps on the way down, just for the record).

As to the temple itself, it is a real gem. There are many beautiful buildings with amazing carvings surrounded by age-old, huge cedar trees and white sakura in full bloom.

It was then that I realised how allergic I was to sakura pollen and my eyes felt as someone had thrown pepper into my face. And my nose was streaming constantly. I beat a hurried retreat.

I'd hoped to get some medication at the local hospital but was told I'd have to see a doctor first, for which I didn't have the time. So I again settled for some eye drops at a local drug store that looked more like a perfumery. Hopefully they will help.

### Later

I am actually more tired than I had thought, and a little short tempered. I was feeling quite exhausted when I arrived at Awa Ikeda and was hoping for an early check-in at the Marufuku Ryokan and a beer. But even though the front door was open at the ryokan, no one answered to my call. Above all, I badly needed to go to the toilet.

So I hit the road again and found this Business Hotel. It has seen better days but the bathroom and bed are clean and I am assured of a good night's sleep because I seem to be the only guest here. I have a nice view over the Yoshinogawa from my room. I sent a message to Yuko, my 'O Henro San manager' to call the ryokan to apologise for my apparent no-show and to assure them I would pay if there was a cost involved in the cancellation.

The eye drops seem to work. . .

Looking at myself in the mirror, I noted that my face looks quite drawn and I have probably lost a few kilos.

Breakfast at the hotel is at 0700 hrs but I'm sure to be on the road by that time for the haul up the Unpenji.

### Later still

Sitting in the hotel's restaurant. I am the only guest here and the chef is killing time sharpening knives. I think I should have brought my blunt Swiss Army knife with me to keep him occupied. Dinner consisting of rice, fried fish, salad and miso soup wasn't gourmet style but filling, so I am happy. They only had large bottles of beer, no osake or wine, but that doesn't matter. I'm feeling quite mellow.

Looking through the window to my left there is the BIG mountain range I will be crossing tomorrow. I've also just realised that I will be able to visit an other Bangai temple without adding too many kilometres.

### Day 34 – 1 April 2016 – Kanonji City

Distance (km)	34.9	Vertical (m)	950	Time Taken (hrs)	10.0	Other Travel	
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• #66 Unpenji</li><li>• #B16 Hagiwaraji</li></ul>						
Accommodation	Kanonji Sunny Inn ¥5,900 (room only)						

Today was HUGE! I can hardly believe I did it (or maybe it is just April Fool's Day).

I woke at 0400 hrs to see low clouds covering the valley, obscuring the view of Unpenji. One hour later I was on the road in cool temperatures and a light rain falling, which made me unpack the rain poncho for the first time this year.

More than twelve kilometres and 800 metres elevation lay ahead of me and I reckoned I'd need about four hours to get to the top. But, as usual, I felt the Kooboo Daishi was carrying my pack for me and I am sure that Nahoko was skipping ahead of me in the mist and rain, just out of sight, dancing and laughing.

I made it to the temple in amazing time, just on three hours. On top it was cold, wet, windy – simply unpleasant. By that time other walking henros (including 'The Henro from #64') had arrived, who most likely would have overnighted at the M Okada which is an hour's walk closer to the Unpenji.

I said the Heart Sutra and my prayers, in which I especially asked the Gods to bless and protect Nahoko, part of whose ashes I scattered at this temple in 2014.

I went to the place where the last remains of my beautiful woman are at rest. The purple wagesa, the stole I had left at that spot, had long since been removed.

Softly I sang 'You'll Never Walk Alone'. This brought tears to my eyes – it was a most moving moment for me.

I called, through my tears and into the clouds 'I love you, Nahoko – so much!'

Unpenji had been a most inviting place in 2014 but today, as it had been in 2009, it wasn't. I began to feel the cold despite the many layers of clothing I was wearing and headed down the mountain as quickly as I could, past the stone statues of the '500 Enlightened'.

Through the fog I gingerly walked down the steep, wet and slippery path, singing more loudly my 'O Henro San Song'. Once I stopped and called out loudly 'Thank you, Kooboo Daishi! Arigatoo!! I love you, Nahoko!!!'

One hour later I was at the bottom station of the Unpenji Ropeway where I took off some of my wet clothes and enjoyed two cups of coffee.

Hagiwaraji wasn't too far away. On this day it must have been the loneliest temple on the entire O Henro San because there were no burning candles or incense in their stands, despite it being mid-morning.

Temple #67 was very different, though. I arrived there just when two huge buses stuffed with 'clean, dry and non-smelly' henros pulled up. The temple looked beautiful, bathed in the white of countless sakura trees. I was immediately worried about what it would do to my eyes, but the ongoing drizzle must have cleansed the atmosphere.

I'd been booked into a minshuku near #67 but I arrived there at 1400 hrs, far too early to call it a day. I paid the owner a ¥3,000 cancellation fee (he'd only asked for two thousand) and I was soon on my way.

The last two kilometres, as was to have been expected, were painfully slow.

Now I am recovering with two large cans of beer, I have had my bath and a shave and the clothes are in the washing machine. Dinner isn't far away either.

Tomorrow is going to be much easier – lots of temples but a much shorter distance. While I am writing the sun is trying to break through the clouds. Maybe there is a good day coming up. . .

## Day 35 – 2 April 2016 – Zentsuuj City

Distance (km)	27.6	Vertical (m)	300	Time Taken (hrs)	9.0	Other Travel	
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #68 Jinnein</li> <li>• #69 Kanonji</li> <li>• #70 Motoyamaji</li> <li>• #71 Iyadanaji</li> <li>• #72 Mandaraji</li> <li>• #73 Shusshakaji</li> <li>• #74 Kooyamaji</li> <li>• #75 Zentsuuj</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	Zentsuuj Grand Hotel ¥4,900 (room only)						

An other day I would call ‘a good one’. A reasonable distance and eight temples.

I left the hotel at 0630 hrs with the intention of saying my prayers before the official opening of the next two temples (#68 and 69) at 0700, then moving on quickly.

Having achieved this, I headed for #70, the sight of which confused me from a distance because there was no five-tired pagoda in sight, just a rectangular wall of grey surrounding a tall structure. The pagoda seems to be in need of an overhaul.

It was a clear and warm(ish) morning. In the distance loomed Unpenji, looking far less indomitable than when I was on its slopes. A light grey cloud was covering its peak. That’s where the temple’s name comes from – ‘Hovering Cloud Temple’.

I arrived at #70 just as a big bus was disgorging more than fifty henros and an even bigger one was pulling up so I immediately headed for the stamp office to have my book stamped, because I was worried about losing walking time whilst the monks were stamping more than one hundred nokyochō. Having brought that out of the way I concentrated on reciting the Heart Sutra and saying my prayers.

The next eleven kilometres followed Route 11 on small side roads with no traffic. I felt slightly tired which wasn’t surprising, given yesterday’s effort.

Sakura were in full bloom everywhere and the locals were exceptionally friendly. There were also a few other henros on the road.

Number 71 is a real jewel, with many parts of it having been carved into the mountain that serves as its backdrop. Many steps are leading to hidden places, some of which I had never discovered before, even though this was my third visit.

Praying at the temple is said to be curing illnesses so I prayed earnestly for the health of many of my friends: my daughter Melinda and son Stephen, Tony, Naoko, Phil, Davida, Mika and many more.

I enjoyed lunch at the temple among the multitude of flowering white sakura trees. There were many sounds in the air, subdued voices, the crunching of gravel under henros’ feet, the occasional booming sound of the huge bronze bell, the song of birds and the rapid-fire sound of a woodpecker.

Most of the day’s walking was done after #71, because the next few temples are located very closely together. There was a big throng of henros at #72 and 73 (there were absolutely wonderful dark red and snow white sakura at #73), but my suspicion that #74 was simply being ignored by tour operators was confirmed when I called on a virtually empty temple a short time later. This temple lacks glamour and its location next to a cement factory, as well as its close proximity to #75 seem to work against it.

The last temple for the day, #75, is the birthplace of the Kooboo Daishi. It covers a huge area, and one of its showpieces is the five-tired pagodas among other very significant buildings. Contrary to my expectations, though, today the temple was almost devoid of tourists and the majority of worshippers appeared to be locals.

I'm staying at the Zentsuui Grand Hotel. Maybe a misnomer, because it is anything but 'grand' though it might have been many years ago.

I'm having dinner at the adjoining restaurant, same place as in 2009. Just had a wonderful fried 'unagi' (eel) with rice and a glass of hot shochu (rice spirit). Everything most enjoyable. I think I will sleep well tonight.

Tomorrow sounds almost like a rest-day. Just short of 30 kilometres and four temples. I might even allow myself a little sleep-in.

### Day 36 – 3 April 2016 – Sakaide City

Distance (km)	24.3	Vertical (m)	80	Time Taken (hrs)	7.5	Other Travel	
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #76 Konzooji</li> <li>• #77 Dooryuui</li> <li>• #78 Gooshooji</li> <li>• #79 Tennooji</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	Hotel New Century ¥4,900 (room only)						

Today I was bestowed with many gifts and small deeds from beautiful people.

As I neared #77 the voice of an elderly man calling from a nearby house 'O Henro San, O Henro San' made me stop. He presented me with a tiny porcelain figure of the Kooboo Daishi with a scroll inside that I will ask Mika to translate for me<sup>7</sup>.

At #78 I received a lovely smile from the beautiful young woman who stamped my book and one more from a female worshipper. The German song I learned many years ago came to my mind which means, roughly translated 'I'd like to rest and look, but the (postal) wagon rolls on. . . '.

A little further down the road an elderly woman presented me with two delicious rice cakes filled with bean paste, and wrapped in oak leaves. Oishii!

After finishing my prayers at #79 and heading back to the hotel a very old man stopped me to shake my hand. He could barely speak but his handshake was worth more than a gift of money to me.

And, a little later, I met the 'The Henro from #64', though we don't always stay at the same place over night. He is travelling incredibly light, carrying just a small canvas bag. I advised him not to visit the next few temples in chronological order but to go 79, 81, 82, 80, and 83. I had learned about this much easier sequence in my two previous journeys. He gave me a beautiful orange as an osettai.

And, closer to the hotel when I asked a man for directions, he walked part of the way with me to make sure I wouldn't get lost.

I realised only too late that I'd checked into the wrong hotel but the lady at the front let me in even though it was only 1430 hrs. I guess I was just too tired, in need of a shower and a bed and too switched off to realise. If that is causing any difficulties, I will ask Yuko tomorrow to call the original hotel to apologise.

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<sup>7</sup> It simply said 'you are at temple #77'

In the meantime, I am through half a bottle of Sicilian Cabernet. The restaurant in the hotel is closed being Sunday (I think the entire town shuts down on a Sunday, unlike Tokyo). I think I will dine in 'à la' LAWSON Station style.

### Day 37 – 4 April 2016 – Takamatsu City

Distance (km)	31.3	Vertical (m)	600	Time Taken (hrs)	9 ¾	Other Travel	
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #81 Shiromineji</li> <li>• #82 Negoroji</li> <li>• #80 Kokubunji</li> <li>• #81 Ichinomiya</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	Kirara Onsen ¥4,900						

I stepped out into a steady, drizzly rain at 0530 hrs. The coffee as LAWSONS' wasn't too bad. I think it is the best of all the other 'combi' including 7/11, K-Circle, Family Mart, and Mini Mart etc. Initially the road was flat and took me past fertile fields in which farmers grow vegetables, mainly onions, cabbage and broccoli. Then Road 180 headed up towards the 500-meter high Goshikidai Plateau.

I arrived at #81 at 0830 hrs. I must have been the first to be there on the day, because there were no candles or incense burning on their stands. Two other wet and bedraggled henros arrived as I was saying my prayers. Interestingly, today I counted a total of twelve road henros and none of the 'bus version' until I arrived at #83 mid-afternoon.

From #81 it went up and down and up and down (though mainly up) across the plateau on dirt tracks to #82, one of my favorite temples. (I congratulated myself on doing the 79, 81, 82, 80 temple sequence, because it avoided some backtracking and maybe one hundred metres of elevation).

There is a beautiful display of thousands of identical tiny Buddhas inside the main temple of #82.

By now the rain had eased and the roads were almost dry when I reached #80 around midday.

I had hoped for a hot meal at that tiny restaurant I'd visited in 2014, but it looked like it had been closed for some time. So I devoured the last of my provisions, an onigiri (rice ball), a handful of chocolate coated almonds and fruit at the temple's gate.

Kind people stopped me on the way including a woman who gave me two big oranges and a man in a delivery van who gave me some money to buy a drink. He explained, in bad English (much better than my Nihongo), that he had walked the O Henro San himself some time ago...

#### Later

I've returned from a very pleasant onsen. There were many locals and a few henros scrubbing themselves before hopping into the huge communal bath. An elderly woman pushed a trolley loaded with towels through the steamed up room filled with naked men. No one seemed to mind.

I checked my weight today – 70 kilos, must have lost a couple.

#### Later still

I had dinner with two henros. One of them, from Saitama is 63 years old, retired, and had recently completed a cycle tour around Japan in which he clocked up more than 10,000



kilometres. He bought me two sweets, I can't figure out what they were but they tasted deliciously. The other was the 'Henro from #64' who had popped up again.

### Day 38 – 5 April 2016 – Sanuki City

Distance (km)	34.0	Vertical (m)	570	Time Taken (hrs)	10.0	Other Travel	Ropeway to #85
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #84 Yashimaji</li> <li>• #85 Yakuriji</li> <li>• #86 Shidoji</li> <li>• #87 Nagaoji</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	Azumaya R ¥5,800						

I had breakfast at 0500 hrs outside the LAWSON Station near the Ichinomiya. I must have made a strange sight, sitting on a concrete bollard chewing two egg sandwiches and downing a café latte. A little more than three hours later I was on the 300 metre high Yashima Plateau. There were many elderly (and very fit looking) men and women going up and down the steep slope.

The temple site is also remembered for a ferocious battle that took place between two rivaling clans hundreds of years ago. The little pond was said to have been red after the warriors of the victorious clan had washed their swords.

The slope down on the other side was even steeper and I thanked the weather Gods for the dry conditions. Rain would have made the descent slightly dangerous.

I took the cable car to #85, located high up on Mt Goken, a beautiful and large temple.

My friend Davida came to my mind strongly as I strolled through the temple grounds, and I said a prayer for her wellbeing and happiness at the main temple.

I was making good time so I stopped for lunch at the Genpei-no-sato MURE, a community centre that sells local produce and offers meals at very reasonable prices. I chose potato salad, pumpkin, mixed vegetables and a white fish fillet dishes, all delicious and filling, which came to a very reasonable price of ¥972 (A\$11.00).

The meal gave me the necessary energy boost to continue my journey. I was at #86 I no time, an other beautiful temple with its five-tier pagoda and extensive well kept gardens.

I was thinking 'coffee' when I came upon the 'Home's' centre near #86, a place staffed by volunteers that provides coffee and a chat free to passing henros. I recalled having stopped there in 2009 as well.

The non-English speaking committee headed by a woman whose English was as bad as my Nihongo must have been laying in wait to drag some henro off the street and I was a very willing victim. The coffee was quite nice and I was sorry not to be able to communicate with these lovely people except telling them the basics of myself - name, family, age, profession, Tasmania and its interaction with Japan.

This wasn't the only osettai I received today. The man at the stamp office at #84 gave me some sweets, as did a young man on the cable car to #85. To top it all, the lady running today's ryokan gave me a flask and half a glass of hot sake, indicating I had to pay for the flask but not the glass, which was considered to be an osettai. In addition she gave me chocolate and an energy drink for tomorrow's walk.

The last seven kilometres were easy. My body operated like a perfectly maintained and well oiled walking machine performing at top level. I've come to the conclusion that tiredness is simply a 'mental condition', like a disease, that can be overcome. In my case,

the cure is through walking through the pain and tiredness barriers and reciting ‘Namu Daishi Henjo Kongoo’, Kukai’s name. I wondered how many tens of thousand of times I’d recited His name on this journey.

Temple #87 could be a nice place if they converted the huge unpaved car park into something more resembling temple grounds. While I was at the stamp office, a crow was skillfully trying to open the zipper of my backpack to get at the food inside – clever beast. . .

I had stayed at the Ryokan Azumaya in 2009. Apparently the same owner, but this time the old lady seemed to be a little neurotic and controlling than she had been last time. She gave me a big hug (barely came to my chest) when I told her I’d been at the ryokan in 2009.

So, there are two more big days coming up, the second slightly easier than tomorrow. Today I saw a sight that proclaimed ‘Tokushima 71 Kilometres’. The end of the journey is definitely in sight.

### Day 39 – 6 April 2016 – Awa City

Distance (km)	44.4	Vertical (m)	1,000	Time Taken (hrs)	10.0	Other Travel		Car 10 km	
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #88 Ookuboji</li> <li>• #10 Kirihataji</li> <li>• #8 Kumadaniji</li> <li>• #9 Hoorinji</li> </ul>								
Accommodation	R Yawata ¥8,200								

This has been the biggest day of my journey. In terms of a Bicycle Grand Tour in Europe it would be called the ‘Queen Stage’ on the second last day of the race. Designed to destroy all but the hardiest.

The day began benignly. A 0645 hrs start followed by a gentle walk uphill to the Maeyama Dam on the way to My Nyotai.

I’d chosen for myself a hitherto untried route, called the ‘Popular Route’ up the 774 metre high mountain then 300 metres down to #88. I was instantly rewarded with an abundance of beautiful sakura, reflections in the glassy waters of the lake and foaming mountain creeks.

Alas, I couldn’t while for too long to take photos, because I still had a lot of work ahead of me.

I had guessed that the walk to #88 would take me about four hours, and I wasn’t far wrong.

The henro trail was well marked, the path dry and there were many steps to climb. The higher it went, the steeper the slope became.

Wild boar, deer and monkeys inhabit this forest. Alas, they all kept out of sight, except a little squirrel that hopped across the trail. A lone henro came down from the mountain and we exchanged polite greetings but did not stop to talk.

The last two hundred metres were quite tough, especially the final 80 metres which resemble a huge pile of rocks that had to be carefully climbed.

I had to restrain myself from racing down the steep path to the temple, because I didn’t want to risk an injury at the end of my journey.

On the last two visits to #88 I felt highly elated, almost euphoric, about having reached this temple, and (almost) the end of my journey. This time, however, I felt rather subdued. I felt that, on this my third O Henro San I had become a *true* henro and that my journey of walking and praying would continue. Once having taken on the task of praying for others, I feel, there is an obligation to continue with this holy task. It won't be possible to opt out any more. I feel privileged, however, for having chosen by higher powers to remain a henro, be it in Japan, Australia or anywhere in this world. The oath I took as a henro are binding, and I also had been inducted as a 'lay Buddhist' in my previous visit to Koya San. If there is nothing else I have learned on this journey, then it is this one: praying for others and accepting the blessings of higher beings really works.

It is usual for henros leave their kongozue (walking staff) at #88 in recognition of the Kooboo Daishi having done similarly. However, I decided to keep mine because I had not come to the end of my journey. My journey is simply continuing.

On the last two journeys, the road from #88 to Temple #1 took me back to Itano Town near #3 via the coast. This time, however, I decided to take the flatter and slightly longer inland Route 2 towards Temple #10.

I sang with big voice 'You'll never walk alone' as I walked downhill from #88 and thanked the Gods, the Kooboo Daishi and Nahoko for their blessings and support – then I called out loudly 'I love you, Nahoko!'.

Somewhere along the road a kind motorist stopped to buy me a coffee, then drove me the remaining ten kilometres to #10. I didn't mind, because at that time I was running out of steam. He too had walked one O Henro San.

Having now plenty of time on my hands, I decided to visit temples #8 and 9 so that, by tomorrow afternoon, I would have visited the first ten temples of my forth O Henro San – it sounds awesome 'yon-kai' (four times). I think I will be continuing my walking journey next year.

Not having eaten much since late morning began to take its toll and I was struggling to reach #8. Severe tiredness led to poor decision making and I only found my way with the help of a few friendly locals.

But from #9 back to the ryokan was straightforward, and it was easy walking with a strong wind in my back. My special mantra came to my mind:

Unless U go too far, U will never know how far U can go . . .

#### **Day 40 – 7 April 2016 – Bando Station**

I'm waiting for the train near Temple #1 to take me back to Tokushima. At this time of day there is one only every 90 minutes. I guess this isn't Tokyo.

Dinner at the ryokan last night was really enjoyable – it made up and I forgave them for the tough and totally inedible octopus they served me last year . . .

There isn't much to write about today. I took a taxi from the ryokan to Temple #7 from where I walked back to #1. I had contemplated, at one stage, to catch the train near #3 but pride and determination would not let me do it. I stopped at #1 just briefly to say a prayer of thanks.

Now, having four stamps in my book for the first ten temples, it means that I'm well and truly into my forth O Henro San. Next time I walk, whenever that will be, I will be crossing my 'Rubicon' on the first day - the wide expanse of the Yoshinogawa from where there is no turning back.

Whilst I am waiting to walk my next O Henro San, I will continue to be a henro and, as such, be bound by the oath of the henro that I have taken. . .

May the highest Gods continue to give us their blessings.

And my love and blessings goes to all of the readers of this journal. . .

### And the afterword

I travelled to Koya San as any henro is expected to do at the end of their completion of the O Henro San.

I took the Nankai ferry at the early hour of 0535 and six hours later I found myself in at this sacred place, 900 metres up in the mountains of the Wakayama Prefecture where the Kooboo Daishi had established His first temple and place of learning about 1,200 years ago, where He taught and prayed, and finally entered His state of eternal meditation at the age of 62, just as He had predicted.

I stayed at the Joki-in, the temple to which Mika's supervisor, Itten San, had invited me to last year to witness and participate in the initiation ceremonies of a number of novice monks – an incredible privilege for an outsider and gaijin.

It was unusually quiet (as quiet as can be at Koya San) for a Friday. The following day would see a big influx of worshippers, henros, tourists and sightseers, though.

Immediately after my arrival I left my backpack at the temple to commence the very last part of this my third O Henro San.

The Okunoin is dissected by a 2,000 metre path through a stand of huge, age-old cedar trees, studded with more than 200,000 tombstones and mausoleums holding the remains of many, from emperors to common people.

I said my prayers at the big hall (Lantern Hall) at the end of the Okunoin praying for the health, happiness, prosperity and wellbeing of Nahoko, my ancestors, my family, children, grandchildren, friends, people that are important in my life, and for all people in this world. Whilst so doing, I felt an universal energy descending upon me, like a pure, white, gentle waterfall. I felt I was being blessed by the Gods and the Universe. Tears of gratitude welled into my eyes.

Just behind the great hall, in front of where the Kooboo Daishi rests in eternal meditation, I lit the last candle and three incense sticks and recited the Heart Sutra for the very last time on this journey.

I spent the rest of the afternoon resting and strolling through the Danjo Garan Complex which, like the Okunoin, is a place of special significance to the Japanese and the world and has been registered by the UNESCO on the list of world heritage sites. I was filled with a deep sense of gratitude, wellbeing, peace and happiness.

The following morning I joined the head priest and monks and a number or guests in the morning service at 0600 hrs. As it had happened at the Okunoin, I felt a stream of universal energy descent upon me and I felt truly blessed.

After breakfast which was taken in my room I packed up my henro gear and left Koya San like any other tourist.

I was going back to a 'normal' life, whatever 'normal' may mean. But I knew that a big change had occurred within me. My journey is continuing. . .

My blessings go to you all!

And may we continue to receive the blessings from the greatest Gods and the Kooboo Daishi.

Arigatoo!

\* \* \*

## The Heart Sutra

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

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

**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,

**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.

**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.

**SHIKI SOKU ZE KUU KUU SOKU ZE SHIKI**

Form is emptiness, and emptiness is form;

**JU SOU GYOU SHIKI YAKU BU NYO ZE**

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

**SHA RI SHI ZE SHO HOU KUU SOU**

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

**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.

**ZE KO KUU JUU MU SHIKI MU JU SOU GYOU SHIKI**

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

**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;

**MU GEN KAI NAI SHI MU I SHIKI KAI**

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

**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;

**MU KU JUU METSU DOU**

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

**MU CHI YAKU MU TOKU I MU SHO TOKKO**

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

**BO DAI SATTA E HAN NYA HA RA MI TA KO**

Because Bodhisattvas rely on the Perfection of Wisdom.

**SHIN MU KE GE MU KE GE KO**

Nothing obstructs their minds. Because obstructions exist not,

**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.

**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,

**TOKU A NOKU TA RA SAN MYAKU SAN BO DAI**

attain Unsurpassed Perfect Enlightenment.

**KO CHI HAN NYA HA RA MI TA**

Therefore, know that the Perfection of Wisdom

**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

**NO JO ISSAI KU SHIN JITSU FU KO**

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

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

Therefore is said the Mantra of the Perfection of Wisdom:

**GYA TEI GYA TEI HA RA GYA TEI HA RA SOU GYA TEI BO JI SO WA KA  
GATE GATE PARAGATE PARASAMGATE BODHI SVAHA**

**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 cause discord.
8. I will not be greedy.
9. I will not be hateful.
10. I will not lose sight of the Truth.

### The Henro's Gear

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

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

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774 Born into the Saeki Clan, a declining aristocratic family, at Temple #75 (Zentsuujii) in Kagawa

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	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, Tairuuji, and a cave (Mikura-doo) at Cape Muroto Misaki in Shikoku.
804	Left for China with the plan to stay for 20 years to study Esoteric Buddhism.
806	Returned to Japan after becoming the 8 <sup>th</sup> Patriarch of Esoteric Buddhism. During his time in China, he studied under the previous Patriarch, Keika (Hui-kuo) at a temple called Shooryuuji.
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)	Other Travel
1	4	18.0	450	6.0	
2	7	27.7	300	9.5	Taxi - 5 km
3	2	33.3	1,390	10.25	Taxi - 9 km
4	7	30.3	160	10.0	
5	2	30.7	550	8.5	
6	3	21.8	1,150	8.0	Bus - 5 km
7	1	35.3	300	8.0	
8	1	27.0	300	6.0	
9	2	42.0	350	11.0	
10	2	30.4	200	7.25	Bus/Taxi - 12 km
11	1	26.9	100	7.25	
12	3	23.4	200	5.0	
13	4	26.7	200	7.5	Taxi - 6 km
14	2	35.2	500	8.25	
15	1	26.3	600	8.0	
16	0	34.5	200	8.0	
17	1	27.1	250	6.5	Bus - 18 km
18	1	28.0	100	6.25	Bus - 50 km
19	1	31.2	400	7.0	Bus - 7 km
20	1	23.6	200	6.0	
21	3	27.4	650	8.0	
22	1	32.5	200	8.0	
23	1	14.7	400	5.0	Bus - 20 km / Taxi 8 km
24	4	7.0	0	3.0	Bus - 16 km / Taxi - 24 km
25	4	13.2	50	4.0	
26	2	12.3	100	4.25	
27	2	36.2	100	9.5	
28	6	34.0	300	10.25	
29	1	22.8	1,200	7.5	Ishizuchi San Ropeway (1,000 m height)
30	2	30.2	100	7.0	
31	1	37.2	200	9.0	
32	2	20.0	620	5.5	
33	1	24.2	500	7.5	
34	2	34.9	950	10.0	
35	8	27.6	300	9.0	
36	4	24.3	80	7.5	
37	4	31.3	600	9.75	
38	4	34.0	570	10.0	Ropeway to #85
39	1 <sup>8</sup>	44.4	1000	10	By car 10 Km
<b>Total</b>	<b>99<sup>9</sup></b>	<b>1,087.6</b>	<b>15,820</b>	<b>299.0</b>	

<sup>8</sup> Three temples of the 4<sup>th</sup> O Henro San

<sup>9</sup> Includes 11 Bangai Temples