

# My Shikoku O Henro San Pilgrimage #4 – 2017

By Armin Howald

## Day 1 – April 2016

Distance (km)	34.3	Vertical (m)	450	Time Taken (hrs)	10	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><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							

I walked the first ten temples in April 2016 as part of the return journey from my third O Henro San.

## Day 2 – 9 March 2017 – Yoshinogawa City

Distance (km)	4.0	Vertical (m)	100	Time Taken (hrs)	1.5	Other Travel	
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• #11 Fujidera</li></ul>						
Accommodation	Yoshinogawa Ryokan ***						

### At Haneda Airport

I am waiting for the aircraft to take me to Tokushima. Unlike other O Henro Sans, it is mid-morning and I expect to get to the Island of Shikoku early afternoon.

I'm embarking on my fourth O Henro San. I've already walked to temple #10 last year, so today will be just a short walk to the Fujidera Temple, followed by 'the big one' tomorrow, the Shoosanji.

The eternal question in me is as to whether I am ready and why I am undertaking this journey. Mentally I certainly feel ready, because I have been focusing on it for quite a while, and endeavoring to adopt the principles of the O Henro San has become part of my ordinary life. As to whether I am fit enough, I must admit that I am probably not in as good a shape as I could be or was in 2009, when I walked the O Henro San for the first at the height of summer.

For this journey I had been training diligently during the weeks leading up to Japan, though my training was seriously disrupted in the last two weeks prior to my departure because I moved from my house in Taroona, the one that Nahoko had loved so much, to a townhouse in nearby Sandy Bay. It involved a lot of hard work and created stress, particularly because the settlement only took place on the day of my departure.

So why am doing it? I really don't have a logical explanation, because there isn't one. Maybe it is because it just feels right for me or, in the language of mountaineers, 'because it is there'. When I finished my third O Henro San last year I felt I'd become a true henro and, in the previous year, I had been inducted as a 'Lay Buddhist' at Koya San. As such, I believe it is my duty to pray for the salvation of all sentient beings, for my beautiful Nahoko who is now residing with the Gods, my ancestors, my family, my friends and all those who have touched my life and I theirs.

As to my children Stephen and Melinda, sadly, they have decided to break off their contact with me completely. Melinda about two years ago, Stephen half a year ago. I hope, though, that we will reconnect some day, and this is one of the things that I will be praying for during this journey.

### Later . . .

So the first day of my fourth O Henro San has ended, and it was the easiest ever. Just a gentle uphill walk to the Fujidera Temple (one of the three Zen Temples on the journey), then a stroll back to the ryokan. Strictly speaking, it is actually Day 2 of the journey, because I had walked temples #10 to #1 on the last day of my third journey. But, then, who is counting?

Yoshino Ryokan certainly is one of the better ones. There are spacious, immaculately clean rooms, clean bathrooms and a sink in every room. Dinner was really nice too even though they served chicken schnitzel instead of the fish that I had hoped for.

There were eleven henros at the tables. I shared mine with a retired woman and an elderly man (he was actually younger than me). He said that his legs had started playing up on the way to Temple #2 (that's in the first kilometre of the O Henro San!) and he travelled by taxi from Temple #7 onward. I'm certain he won't last the distance unless a miracle occurs.

I'm thinking of having an early night. I haven't slept all that well and long whilst staying at Eri's home in Tokyo, so I hope to catch up with some sleep tonight. The glass of sake I had with my dinner is sure to help.

Tomorrow is going to be BIG – breakfast at 0545 hrs, then up the Shoosanji and over an other medium sized hill to the Dainichiji.

### Day 3 – 10 March 2017 – Tokushima City

Distance (km)	35.8	Vertical (m)	1,370	Time Taken (hrs)	10.25	Other Travel	
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #12 Shoosanji</li> <li>• #13 Dainichiji</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	Myozai Hana Ryokan **						

It's been a good, hard day judging by my feet and the rest of my body.

I'd slept nine hours aided by a sleeping tablet. Breakfast (a very substantial one) was at 0545 hrs and I hit the road thirty minutes later.

There was a chill in the air as I walked past the Fujidera Temple where I said a short prayer, then began the climb.

Shoosanji (Burning Mountain) isn't actually a big mountain; there are three very serious and steep hills (with steep descents) of which, Jooren San, the middle one, is the highest at 745 metres, 40 higher than the Shoosanji.

The Kooboo Daishi must have been on my support team because I made the temple easily, overtaking two henros one of which had been camping over night.

I made the temple in 3 hours 50 minutes, exactly the same time it took me during the last O Henro San. A light sprinkle of snow covered part of the ground. There were about half a dozen henros at the temple, all travelling by car.

The 3 ½ kilometres down to Nabeiwa were easy, then I tackled the last hill for the day, the 240 metres up the Tamaga Tooge. Very close to the top I finally ran out of steam and took the second of the energy gels for the day. That gave me a welcome boost.

On top of the pass I met Sarah, a bike-henro from Adelaide and Franklin, Tasmania – small world.

The walk down to the Akui River was most pleasant. The earlier clouds had given way to a clear, sunny and cool afternoon – so different to the past three occasions where I walked in unbearable heat or teeming rain.

I began to tire in the last few kilometres, but made Temple #13 by 1600 hrs, after being exactly ten hours on the road.

The ryokan is very basic but fine. Dinner was great and I found in my table neighbor a man with a good grasp of English.

Tomorrow should be an easier day. . .

#### Day 4 – 11 March 2017 – Komatsushima City

Distance (km)	29.5	Vertical (m)	100	Time Taken (hrs)	9.0	Other Travel	
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #14 Joorakuji</li> <li>• #15 Kokubunji</li> <li>• #16 Kannonji</li> <li>• #17 Idoji</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	Minshuku Chiba ***						

It's been a relatively easy day after yesterday's 'big one'. I walked at a good pace until I reached Tokushima City at around noon, and after that I did a 'go-slow' lest I'd arrive at the minshuku too early. Tomorrow promises to be an even shorter day before three long ones on the way to Muroto Misaki.

Funny how small the world really is. At yesterday's ryokan I met Daniela from Richigen/Worb in Switzerland, which is located about ten kilometres as the crow flies from where I grew up. She is doing her first O Henro San without any specific reason for it, but is open to whatever the journey will be presenting her (I guess a little like me).

The four Tokushima City temples are close together, located in the North Western part of the city. Kokubunji, a cultural treasure, was under wraps to save it before termites do their destructive work and Joorakuji is dedicated to Maitreya Buddha, the next Buddha destined to appear in about 6.5 million years.

After lunch I hit 'the Good Old 55', the route I know so well and which I will be following for the next few days to Cape Muroto and beyond. I smiled when I read outside Tokushima a sign '134 kilometres to Murotomisaki'. To me this was as meaningless as the knowledge that the moon is 384,400 kilometres from Earth and for ever receding. It's the next step that counts.

It has been a clear and sunny day and, travelling south, I enjoyed a following breeze.

So far I haven't had any deep and meaningful spiritual experiences. I just keep on walking, constantly reciting in my mind 'Namu Daishi Henjo Kongoo', the Kooboo Daishi's name. I strongly believe that something will happen along the way. I'm simply leaving myself wide open to whatever the Universe will be presenting me with.

There were quite a few henros at the ryokan last night, mainly elderly and car henros. With one of them, who looked older than me, I played 'tag' until I lost him after #17. He walked slower than me, but spent less time at the temples than I did.

I'm taking my time, sitting in a café not too far from the minshuku. Waiting for 1600 hrs to roll around to walk the last couple of kilometres. I think I will sleep well tonight, as I did yesterday. My feet are fine, there is no sign of discomfort and the KEEN shoes seem to be OK.

## Day 5 – 12 March 2017 – Katsuura Town

Distance (km)	14.7	Vertical (m)	100	Time Taken (hrs)	5.0	Other Travel	
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #18 Onzanji</li> <li>• #19 Tatsueji</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	Kaneko-ya *						

Yesterday was the anniversary of the Fukushima Earthquake, and I said a prayer for those departed and those who are still suffering.

Today has been quite amazing, even though I'm only halfway through.

Because of the lack of accommodation at various places for the coming days, today was an enforced 'rest day' and I finished walking at around mid-day.

It is the time of the big hinamatsuri (Japanese Dolls Festival) at Katsuura Town on which occasion thousands of ancient and new dolls are brought in from all parts of Japan and put on display.

I had a very, very special experience between Temples #18 and #19 as I was walking along the road, chanting (in my mind) 'Namu Daishi Henjo Kongoo'.

All of a sudden my father appeared before my eyes. But this time his face was soft and beautiful and he nodded in approval of me doing the O Henro San. He, the stern, unbending, hard-line Protestant who'd tried to live by the Bible and The Ten Commandments (#2 says 'thou shalt have no other Gods before me') giving his approval?? Maybe, at long last, he has come to accept the ways of his errant son, the black sheep of the family. I am really grateful for this amazing, unexpected gift. I wish I could tell Nahoko but, then, she would know anyway (it might even have been her who'd prodded my father).

I visited today's temples early and, after three hours on the road, the Katsuura Valley opened up – a wide flat expanse of fertile land, low mountains in the distance and a LAWSON Station nearby where I had coffee and cakes. There was still a chill in the air, less than ten degrees but it was sunny and calm. I'd checked my weight last night – 68 kilos, down two from my normal weight. I've got a slight cold which I might have picked up on the Shoosanji but I hope it will stay at that.

Last night's dinner was quite a convivial affair. There were five of us at the table, the same people as the night before: the old man with whom I had played 'tag' with, though he admitted he had travelled part of the way by taxi; the 68 year old man who, however, will be returning to Nagoya tomorrow because of blisters on his feet. And a man who is taking his grandson on the journey. The young man has the most angelic face and when I first saw him took him for a very beautiful young girl.

Back to the festival.

The multitude of colours, details and intricacies on the dolls is simply astounding, not to talk about the generosity of the locals. I was showered with little osettai (gifts) – a purse for handkerchiefs, mandarins and lots of lovely smiles. When I tried to retrieve my backpack the men, in their pink happi-coats made me sit down and gave me more mandarins, enough to last me for an entire week.

As to the entertainment on stage, there was so much talent on display: a solo singer, an orchestra playing three-stringed instruments with a plectrum, dancers aged five to more than twenty (only girls) and the performance ending with a 12-women band playing two-stringed Chinese violins.

The Kaneko-ya is 'just' OK, not quite of the 'I'd never take my lover to this place' category, but tired and down-at-the-heel. There were only four henros at the evening meal – two Japanese, a Taiwanese bike-henro and me.

This all doesn't matter, though, for as long as I can get my sleep.

### Day 6 – 13 March 2017 – Anan City

Distance (km)	21.5	Vertical (m)	1,050	Time Taken (hrs)	8.0	Other Travel	
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #20 Kakurinji</li> <li>• #21 Tairuuji</li> <li>• #22 Byoodooji</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	Sazanka ***						

It's been an other good day, despite the rain. I stepped out into a lightly covered sky but as I neared the top of the second temple it began to drizzle which turned into rain. Not heavy, just wet and persistent.

Breakfast at the Kaneko-ya was a meager affair – rice, a tiny handful of small dried fish and seaweed and a raw egg. Never mind, I had slept well and that was all that mattered.

The ascent to Kakurinji was quick and I reached the temple in less than an hour. I had the honor of lighting the first candle and incense sticks on the day. I was soon joined by an other henro from the night before but he soon left and I didn't see him again.

There was a great silence in the forest on the way down from the temple - no wind, no bird song, nothing – beautiful feelings washed over me.

I reached Tairuuji at exactly 1000 hrs, three hours into the day's walk. To my big surprise I met Sarah there. She said it had taken her two hours to reach the top of Shoosanji and ten minutes downhill.

The descent from Kakurinji had been steep and difficult, but from Tairuuji there is a broken-up no longer in use road leading down into the valley.

I soon reached the Asebi Bus Stop and, by now I was pretty tired and wet. But there was still one more hill to climb, the Oone Tooge.

The woman who signed my Nokyochō (Stamp Book) at Temple #22 exclaimed 'yon-kai' and showed the book to her colleagues. I guess it doesn't happen too often that a gaijin is doing the pilgrimage a fourth time.

The Sazanka Ryokan is really comfortable. It may be a little dated, but the room was spotless and warm (even though I checked in at an early 1500 hrs), the washing/drying of clothes was free and the ofuro was hot, stone-lined and large. I soaked up the warmth for some time, shaved and felt almost human again.

... and now enjoying a hot 'osake' as I am writing.

### Day 7 – 14 March 2017 – Mugi Town

Distance (km)	36.2	Vertical (m)	300	Time Taken (hrs)	7.0	Other Travel	
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #23 Yakuooji</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	Azuma (no stars awarded!)						

#### Lunchtime near Yakuooji.

I discovered a really nice café that serves lovely coffee and strawberry cake (not the LAWSON Station stuff!). I can relax for a while because there are only an other 2 ½ hours' walking ahead of me and I am enjoying the warmth inside. Besides, I feel a little feverish, maybe I've got a cold coming on.

Last night's dinner was really pleasant. There were nine henros at the table including a retired engineer who is on his tenth O Henro San. Not for spiritual or religious reasons,

he said, just because he enjoys walking and eating the fish of Shikoku, both of which I can easily identify with.

I asked for a 'hotto osake' that drew some surprised murmurs. Apparently gaijin don't usually like sake, so I've been told.

It was raining when I got up but by the time I stepped outside after breakfast it had stopped, though the temperature was down to five degrees. Into the second hour on the road I overtook a henro, and shortly afterwards Sarah came up from behind. She had spent the night in a henro hut near #22. I think this will be the last that I will see of her because, now that the mountains are behind us, she will be much faster between the temples.

Route 55 was even more deserted and devoid of traffic than it had been last time. I made good time, walking 55 minutes then resting for five. I walked the 23 kilometres to Temple #23 comfortably in four hours.

In the meantime, the clouds have given way to a milky-blue sky and a cold wind is blowing. Luckily for the henro walking south, the wind is from the north.

### Later, at the Azuma

The welcome wasn't exactly what I had expected. Sachiko san (who'd told Eri when she made the booking a few days ago that she clearly remembered me) said there wasn't a booking, but later on said yes, I could stay but would have to eat elsewhere. Later still she told me I could eat there too. She seems to have gone crazier since last year, even though her hair isn't dyed red any longer.

It had been quite an easy walk into Mugi. The sun had broken through and it was warm with a following breeze.

As I walked on I reflected on the wonderful, amazing times that Nahoko and I had spent together – in Japan, Australia and places in the world. I came to the spot where, on the second O Henro San, a man had given me 3,000 yen as an osettai. When I mentioned this to Nahoko at the time and commented on his generosity she remarked dryly: 'you must have looked really miserable and he just felt sorry for you'. How I loved this beautiful woman and her at times innocent and sarcastic remarks – still love her.

Off the Kanba Slope and closer to Mugi I admired the beautiful and green steep hills surrounding me. Lucky I don't have to climb them, I thought. I came past a rest stop where I'd stopped last year, suffering from excruciating pain in my feet and seriously beginning to doubt whether I could make it into Matsuyama. At that time I also reached, for the first time on that journey, for painkilling medication, something I don't often do.

A sign on Route 55 this morning indicated there were close to 100 kilometres to go to Muroto Misaki. Now, here in Mugi, it's only 67. A good day's walk, even if I have to say it myself.

### Day 8 – 15 March 2017 – Sakihama Port

Distance (km)	47.0	Vertical (m)	250	Time Taken (hrs)	9.5	Other Travel	
Temples	• Nil						
Accommodation	Lodge Ozaki ***						

An excellent day on one of my favorite parts of the O Henro San if the weather is fine, as it was today. From a lovely sunrise on to now, in mid-afternoon, the skies were clear, beautiful sunshine abounded with pleasant temperatures and the occasional light breeze.

As to Azuma, I don't think I'll go back there in a hurry because Sachiko has become a real pain – bossy, thumping my chest to make her point if I don't understand, rubbing her bottom against my back as I was eating dinner and, after I'd fallen asleep (early,

admittedly), she barged into my room, switched on the light and presented me with a small gift. What has happened to Japanese modesty and restraint? Thankfully there was a Japanese couple at Azuma too that garnered some of Sachiko's attention.

The hand-knitted cover she put on my kongozue immediately after my arrival (as she always does – she has a big box full of them) I left on some bushes not far from Mugi this morning because it make holding the stick uncomfortable.

I hit the road at 0430 hrs, hoping to reach my goal in ten hours.

Kaiyoo Town, two hours' south of Mugi has three LAWSON Stations on a stretch of 600 metres. I used the first one to buy a coffee which tasted unpleasantly bitter but warmed my hands, the second to go to the immaculately clean toilet and buy a few things and the third I gave a miss.

During the course of the day I overtook eight henros including two females, one of which was Daniela. She isn't doing too well, suffering from an inflammation of one of her Achilles tendon. Lucky for her I had some Meloxicam tablets to spare and I gave her a week's supply. I hope this will help.

Daniela and I crossed into the Dojo of Ascetic Training (Kochi Prefecture) together, and spent some time walking and talking together. She used to be a top sportswoman playing indoor hockey that became world champion a few years back. Incidentally, she recalled the name 'Howald', as in 'Patrick', my nephew and internationally acclaimed ice-hockey star.

I walked at a steady pace all morning, ceaselessly meditating 'Namu Daishi Henjo Kongoo'. I didn't seem to tire significantly, though, with Sakihama Port in sight I began to slow down. The occasional buzzard circled over me looking for food but, facing the prospect of having to eat the meat of a tough old henro, thought the better of it.

After nine hours on the road and at Sakihama Port I enjoyed a coffee and two pancakes. Then I thought about having all my hair cut but, with a price tag of 2,500 yen (A\$30) for a three-minute job decided against it.

### Day 9 – 16 March 2017 – Muroto City

Distance (km)	21.7	Vertical (m)	190	Time Taken (hrs)	5.0	Other Travel	
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #24 Hotsumisakiji</li> <li>• #25 Shinshooji</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	Oota Ryokan ****						

Today couldn't have been much better. Just a 3 ½ hour stroll along a sparkling blue sea, a short steep climb up to the 'Cape Temple', then the last stretch downhill and along the port facilities into Muroto City.

Oota Ryokan is simply fantastic!!! The kind old lady let me in even though it was just after 1400 hrs and my huge (8 tatami) room is facing west with a view over the harbour and its small fishing fleet, and there is a huge stone-lined ofuro.

I'm enjoying the first of two cans of Asahi Dry. The next two days are going to be long ones. . .

Mid-afternoon saw a very busy time at the local fish market, with shoppers queuing up to get today's catch. Swimming in the sea this morning and on the table tonight, I guess the fish couldn't be any fresher.

I chatted with a very friendly buyer (they all seemed to be friendly) who insisted I should stay at *her* ryokan next time. They all seemed to be astonished to learn that I am on my fourth O Henro San, all 'aruite de', walking.

This morning at the ryokan I had a nice conversation with a 70-year-old henro from Tokyo who is doing his first pilgrimage. He is suffering badly because of blisters on the sole of his feet. I got the impression he would have liked to walk with me, but I prefer to walk alone. I stopped at the Meotoiwa (Married Couple Rocks) where I said a prayer to the Kooboo Daishi and my beautiful Nahoko. I'm sure they are walking with me on this journey.

Unfortunately the Mikuradoo, the cave where the Kooboo Daishi had reached enlightenment, was closed because of rock falls so I lit a candle and three sticks of incense at the barrier and recited the Heart Sutra.

### Later

Dinner was very nice, maybe not outstanding but enjoyable. The 'Hotto Osake' made it most pleasant. I was told yesterday that, at a meal, alcohol (meaning sake but not beer) is always being consumed *before* eating rice. One of the many customs one learns on the road. I was the only one at the ryokan. I hope this lovely place won't close down because of the lack of patronage.

### Day 10 – 17 March 2017 - Koonan City

Distance (km)	35.9	Vertical (m)	620	Time Taken (hrs)	8.5	Other Travel	Train 26 km
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #26 Kongoochoji</li> <li>• #27 Koonomineji</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	Minshuku Kagami-Yado ***						

It's been a good day on the road. Much, much better than 1-½ years ago when my feet (and later the left hip) began to give me serious problems.

I made it to #26 in less than an hour, then gingerly made my way down the steep slope to Route 55 that I would follow for most of the day.

I found a barber who would give me, for 1,000 yean a 'monk's haircut'. The treatment? A hair wash followed by clippers, followed by finer clippers, then a shave of the neck and sideburns. Now if that wasn't enough, then came a full head-wash, hair lotion and massage and a *blow dry* for my half-millimeter hair!!

From here on it was just walking – Namu Daishi Henjo Kongoo, Namu Daishi Henjo Kongoo, Namu Daishi Henjo Kongoo. . . - past Hane Misaki (where I had been forced to catch the bus last time) to Nahairi where I got the most delicious coffee, a 'Berliner' (not filled with jam but sweet beans) and two tasty croissants. Soon I was on the slopes leading up to #27. It didn't take me much time to reach the temple from the first tori – just 50 minutes.

I didn't spend much time at the temple because I had stripped down to my hakui (the white vest) on the ascent and began to feel cold. So I quickly retreated to the small coffee shop where this lovely brew was being served in Givenchy cups! The owner was really kind and presented me with a large plate of grapefruit pieces (sans the skin) which would have taken some time to prepare. I gave him an osame-fuda and prayers to the Kooboo Daishi in return.

My original plan had been to stay at Aki that I could easily have reached walking by late afternoon, but there was no accommodation available because the town was booked out by professional baseball players from Kochi who were there for a training camp. The nearest available accommodation was at Kagami, some 26 kilometres up the road. This means that, with the short train or taxi ride I intend to do tomorrow, I will effectively save one walking day. Not that I am complaining. . .

At the Toonohama Station an elderly man began to talk to me non-stop, even though I told him 'sumimasen, nihongo ga wakarimasen' (sorry I don't speak Japanese). He



shepherded me onto the Kagami train at Aki and alighted at the same station as I did. When I walked away at the station he said something in a raised voice that I then thought to understand that he'd invited me to dinner at his home and I had accepted. This I couldn't really accept, because dinner was waiting for me at the minshuku. I will apologise to that man in my prayers.

The Kagami Yado is homely and nice, run by an elderly kind woman. I have my own bathroom and toilet on the first floor. Though, for dinner, pork curry was served. . .

The weather today has again been wonderful. Clear skies and a flat, sparkling Tosa Wan (Bay).

Sunset was quite spectacular. My room faces 'heartbreak hill' near the Yasu Railway Station where I collapsed with heat exhaustion on my first O Henro San during the month of August in 2009.

### Day 11 – 18 March 2017 - Kochi

Distance (km)	31.7	Vertical (m)	300	Time Taken (hrs)	8.5	Other Travel	Taxi – 9.2 km
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #28 Dainichiji</li> <li>• #29 Kokubunji</li> <li>• #30 Zenrakuji</li> <li>• #31 Chikurinji</li> <li>• #32 Zenjibuji</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	Ebishoo R **						

I was meant to have breakfast at 0600 hrs then catch the 0624 train from Kagami Eki to Noichi Eki but in my state of disorganization I woke up late, woofed down a lovely breakfast and, of course, missed the train.

So I had no option but to walk to #28 that took me more than an hour, but then I decided to take a taxi from there to make up for lost time.

As luck (or the Universe) have it, I met Daniela at #28 and we shared a taxi to #29. It is quite amazing what two like-minded people can share during a twenty-minute ride – about life, spirituality, relationships, about 'being there'.

Daniela's leg is a little better but she's decided not to push her luck too far at this stage. So she is interspersing walking with bussing and taking the train. We parted at #29, me to walk and she to use the train part of the way, but met again one hour later at #30. From here on we walked together for a while then went our separate ways, for what I think will be the final time. She said she'd felt privileged to have been walking with me – that I had taught her so much about life, the O Henro San and Japan. I was touched by her kind and heartfelt words. Though I hope we might meet again when I visit Switzerland in July this year.

I was showered with osettai today; by a flag-man on the road who gave me a can of cold coffee, the stamp office lady at #30 who gave Daniela and me a little trinket (a 5-yen coin attached to a folded paper peace crane) and a man near my ryokan who gave me 200 yen to buy a drink. Such lovely people – I asked the Kooboo Daishi for Him to bless them.

At #32 I met a young henro walking in a pair of one-bladed geta, and later saw him make a painful descent from the temple. Later on, at the ryokan, I expressed my astonishment that anyone could walk in these kind of clogs. Quite easy, he assured me – he can do up to 3.5 kilometres an hour.

At dinner I also met a couple of about my age from Brisbane. They had done their first O Henro San by bike, now they are trying to do it walking.

Mika rang me tonight and it was nice to chat with her. She's just returned from her temple at Koya San where it had been snowing.

Eri continues to do an amazing job booking my accommodation three to four days ahead.

Dinner at the ryokan was really nice. The place looks like it has recently been spruced up, because the interior and rooms are sparkling clean. The same can't be said for the bed where there were a few curly hairs between the sheets, evidence of the previous occupant(s). Two out of three ain't bad, I guess. . .

### Day 12 – 19 March 2017 – Tosa City

Distance (km)	22.1	Vertical (m)	150	Time Taken (hrs)	5.0	Other Travel	
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #33 Sekkeiji</li> <li>• #34 Tanemaji</li> <li>• #35 Kiyotakiji</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	BH Tosa ***						

Why should I have been surprised when I met Daniela waiting for the 0640 ferry to Nagahama Port? I was really pleased to see her again, and together we walked to #33. She asked many questions about Japan and seemed to be surprised at my knowledge (though I must admit that, the more I know about this beautiful country and its people, the more I realise how little I really know). Her leg seems to be better. She put herself on a double dose of Meloxicam and I gave her an other five-day's worth of supplies.

I managed to put her on the car driven by a couple doing their O Henro San to get her to #34, because there aren't any buses running today, being a public holiday. The fact that I didn't spot her on the way to #35 means they might have driven her to that temple too, maybe even beyond. I'm very pleased for her. Most likely we said our *final* sayonara today, because from here on there will be few temples and big distances in between. She will travel by train and bus to Ashizuri Misaki, whereas I intend to walk all the way.

I gave her a little memento of #33 and wished her good luck, happiness, good health and spiritual growth.

The people at #34 must be the most welcoming on the entire O Henro San because, like on the previous three visits, they gave me an osettai. At that temple I also stopped to chat with a car henro with an excellent English before wishing each other good luck and 'o kyoo tsugette' and going our respective ways.

The area I walked through today is given to intensive farming. There are hothouses everywhere and the grey/brown fields are being tilled and inundated for the planting of rice. In the gardens there is an abundance of flowers – camellia, magnolia, japonica, narcissus, daffodils and the bright yellow of mustard plants.

An other henro gave me a sweet 'Berliner' at #35 and on the way down I chatted to an attractive female henro in sporting gear from Tokyo. Further down the road I played traffic cop, trying to help untangle a few cars that tried to pass one another on the steep and twisting road in impossible situations. Incredible the lack of driving skills and common sense some of these drivers have. Most cars were actually driven by women because the men (possibly also lacking any road sense) were unwilling to publicly exhibit their failings.

I'm sitting in the Iwago Café that surely must have the best coffee, bread and cakes along the Tosa Wan. Check-in isn't too far away. I intend to 'eat in' and watch TV tonight in anticipation of tomorrow's long(ish) walk.

P.S. Saw a sign 'Matsumoto 280 kilometres' today. That doesn't include the Ashizuri Misaki. There is still a long road ahead of me. . .

## Day 13 – 20 March 2017 - Susaki City

Distance (km)	37.0	Vertical (m)	270	Time Taken (hrs)	8.5	Other Travel	
Temples	• #36 Shooryuuji						
Accommodation	BH Marutomi **						

An other long(ish) day and, no, I didn't meet Daniela.

I hit the road around 0500 hrs in darkness. Everything on the road seemed to be unchanged from last time, even the little fat Buddha with the white crash helmet. I rubbed his belly for good luck (though he's now got a 'Hello Kitty' as companion - my friend Franny from Baltimore would have kittens if she knew).

Usa Port was as photogenic around sunrise, as it always is.

Close to #36 a man ran across the street and presented me with the biggest grapefruit I've ever seen – possibly close to a kilo! I ate it at the temple because I didn't want to carry the extra weight on the road ahead.

Temple #36 was lovely among the blossoms and in the morning sun, as usual. It was here, so someone had said, that I'd spent one of my many past lives, but I still don't feel really connected to this site.

I decided to walk around the Uranouchi Bay so, for the next 3-½ hours, the road wound itself along its shoreline, sometimes doing a gigantic horseshoe, until the road rejoined the 'Skyline Route'. Not having chosen the Skyline meant that I missed out on the wonderful coffee at Sakauchi but nothing is perfect. . .

Closer to Susaki City a woman stopped her car (on a blind corner!!) to give me an osettai, a 500 yen coin wrapped in a piece of paper containing a message<sup>1</sup>. I bowed and prayed to the Kooboo Daishi to bless her for her generosity as she drove away.

I made good time and was at Susaki City after eight hours on the road. As has become my tradition, I stopped at the Ks Mart food hall for a big ramen with rice. All of a sudden I felt very hungry (I must have lost some weight).

As to the henro road, I'm about to move into the 'land of tunnels', at least until I reach #66. Tunnels are the bane of henros. They are dangerous, dirty, deafening, dark, dank, dreadful, dusty, disgusting, drafty, deplorable (the 10 'Ds') but they can also be D-lightful and welcoming in the middle of the night with no traffic and their quietness, relative warmth and light – a place to relax in.

The Business Hotel Marutomi certainly has seen better days but, then, what can one expect for 4,000 yen? The heater was working, the bath hot and the bed was clean.

I'm into my third can of Suntori Premium Malts. I'd only bought two but the third was handed out as a promotional gimmick (I couldn't imagine that happening in Australia).

Health-wise all is perfect except that I've got a corn between the big toe and the next digit. Might strap the toes together tomorrow and go to a pharmacy at Shimanto Town.

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<sup>1</sup> Mika kindly translated the message for me after my return to Tokyo. It was quite an extraordinary one. The woman said that she would like to walk the O Henro San but was prevented from doing so because she had to look after parents suffering from dementia. She said she would like to overcome the 108 earthly desires but, at this stage, was unable to do so. She said she had retired from work and at times feels she would like to die. Most importantly, however, she asked the henro (me in case) to complete the O Henro San on her behalf, due to her inability to walk the journey herself. She said that nobody could understand how she was feeling. I now believe I have fulfilled her wish, even though I cannot tell her that I have done it – for me and for her. I simply hope that the Kooboo Daishi will let her know that her wish has been fulfilled.

## Day 14 – 21 March 2017 – Kubokawa/Shimanto Town

Distance (km)	28.0	Vertical (m)	400	Time Taken (hrs)	7.0	Other Travel	
Temples	• #37 Iwamotoji						
Accommodation	Mima Ryokan ***						

It's the equinox today. This would have been a special day for celebration and workshops for my beautiful Nahoko. . .

I slept really well last night.

It had rained all night long and would continue to do so until I reached the top of Nanako Tooge at around 1020 hrs.

Irrespective of what the weather was doing, I had decided to follow Route 56 all day long. I don't like the Soemimizu Henro Trail because of its up-down-up-up-up-down profile and there was a warning that the Oosaka Henro Trail might be closed due to forestry works, and I didn't want to take the risk of walking up the valley for more than an hour then having to turn back.

I didn't expect any other henros on the road because of the inclement weather but there were a few tough souls making their way through the rain. All men in their 60's or 70's travelling alone and looking the very determined type.

The road up to Nanako Tooge went steadily uphill, never at more than at an 8% gradient and it took me 80 minutes to reach the top where I caught up with two other henros, one of whom had gone up the Oosaka Trail. I remember this pass very well from my last pilgrimage. It was here, on this pass that I became aware of the pain caused by bursitis on my left hip that left me all but crippled by the time I reached Matsuyama. No such issues at this stage, thankfully. . .

From here the road went gently downhill to Shimanto Town. Somewhere along the way a man stopped his car to tell me about his wife's Osettai Station but I either went past without noticing or it was somewhere else.

I said my prayers at the Iwamotoji underneath the gaze of Marilyn Monroe enshrined on one of the hundreds of ceiling panels.

It was too early for the check-in so I strolled around the town and bought a couple of cans of beer.

Mima Ryokan, whilst not cheap is certainly very comfortable. The apartment (the same I had last time) is 16 tatami in size and beautifully decorated. The ofuro was a huge rectangular tub, great to stretch out a full length.

Dinner was magnificent – cold fish and sashimi and pickles, a most amazing piece of fish head done in butter and garnished with peas, rice and miso soup containing six little shells. Couldn't resist ordering a 'hotto osake'.

I was the only guest at the dinner table. During the meal some nice person made up my futon for me to hop in – such luxury!

I decided to do without tomorrow's breakfast because it was set for 0730. Instead they will provide me with some onigiri for the road.

## Day 15 – 22 March 2017 – Kuroshio Town

Distance (km)	34.6	Vertical (m)	150	Time Taken (hrs)	8.0	Other Travel	
Temples	• Nil						
Accommodation	Nest West Garden Tosa ***						

I saw a bright half-moon when I peered out of the window after a marvelous sleep (who wouldn't have had in such luxurious surroundings?). It reminded me that it was time to get going, so I left the ryokan at 0515 hrs.

After a quick coffee at the Family Mart at Shimanto Town I hit Route 56, only to be almost hit from behind by a car travelling at great speed on the wrong side of the road. I think this was the closest shave I'd ever had on any O Henro San.

It was cold and the breath formed clouds of steam. Cars were covered with ice and fields were white with by frost.

In the second hour I stopped at the spot on the Katasaka Slope where I had met the Kooboo Daishi on my second O Henro San and said prayers of thanks. Momentarily I was overcome by a dizzy spell, but this soon passed.

The rest of the day's walk was simply routine. I stopped every hour for a short break. It was still freezing at 0900 hrs, but by ten I began to peel off some layers.

I passed the little town of Tosa-Saga mid morning, then followed the beautiful Shirahama Coast, stopping at the place at Nada Port where I'd had the last phone call whilst being on an O Henro San with Nahoko. She is my one and only soul-partner, has been in previous lives and will again be in the future.

I arrived at the hotel around 1300 hrs and was immediately let into my room, which I really appreciated, because I was feeling tired.

Since the KEEN shoes don't look like they will last the entire journey for which I'd bought them, I decided to go to the Nakamura Station to buy a replacement. I couldn't take the risk of the KEENs disintegrating somewhere in no-mans-land. The man at the front desk kindly offered to drive me to the Tosa-Irina Station for which I was grateful.

Waiting at the station I realised how fatigued I actually was, so I decided to listen to my body, just for once (unlike I did on my last O Henro San).

I found a pair of Dunlop shoes in Shimanto City, not my preference but the best I could chose from a very meager selection. Then I had to run back to the station despite my tiredness because I didn't want to wait for an other 1-½ hours for the next train.

The rest of the day I spent lying on the bed, drinking beer and watching sumo on TV, and enjoying two baths.

Given the state of my body I am not even contemplating walking the 45 kilometres to Ashizuri Misaki tomorrow. Instead I might do about ten and travel by bus for the remainder. A real rest-day coming up after two hard weeks on the road. . .

I looked at myself in the mirror today and noticed a few hollows that hadn't been there before. I must have lost a few kilos. My face looks quite drawn with more wrinkles than I normally have. It's a hard life being a road henro!

### Day 16 – 23 March 2017 - Ashizurimisaki

Distance (km)	0.0	Vertical (m)	0.0	Time Taken (hrs)	0.0	Other Travel	Bus – 46 km
Temples	• #38 Kongoofukuji						
Accommodation	Hotel? – 0880 880 503						

I didn't even bother to walk the token ten kilometres to the bus station. Instead I took the train to the Nakamura Station where I arrived at 0800 hrs and tried to discover what was worth discovering in this city – not much, except that it isn't possible to get a coffee until 0900 hrs! Though the nice coffee and cake made up for it!

The bus for the Misaki left at 1014 hrs and I was immediately glad I had decided not to walk, because I felt *really* tired.

I saw two henros walking through the grey of the morning and at one stage a henro, who must have been legally blind, boarded the bus and stayed on for about an hour.

The bus took a circuitous route to the Cape. Many locals boarded and left the bus, invariably old and often severely bent with crippling arthritis. I didn't spot any young people or children along the way.

The bus arrived at the Cape at midday and, after a hearty lunch, I headed for the temple. This temple is, literally speaking, a turning point because from here on the henro road winds its way north and east. It isn't exactly the halfway point, though. I expect to reach it in about three days' time.

Since Nahoko's passing (at which time I placed the juzu (rosary) into her hands) I'd changed this sacred object at this temple. Today was no exception, though I think I will make a break with this tradition on my next journey. The new juzu is light grey in colour, with lilac stones and golden tassels. Quite pretty. The old one I placed at the feet of a stony Kooboo Daishi.

It was grey, drizzly and cool at the Cape. As to the place itself, it is quite d-e-a-d!!! There are at least five huge hotels (mainly closed) with hundreds of empty rooms. I'm sure that I am the only guest in my seven-storey hotel. It's quite a nice place with a 12-tatami room, separate bath and toilet. The nearby school looks like it has been closed for years.

I had plenty of time on my hands so I strolled through the tsubaki (camellia) forest down to the Hakusan Cave. Nahoko and I were here during my first O Henro San. It had been a beautiful sunny day and she commented on how much my energy had changed after about three weeks on the road. I sent a little prayer in her direction at the cave.

Tonight I will be 'dining in'. I've got plenty of bread, dried fish (how Biblical!), sweets and packaged soup. The sky seems to be lightening. Maybe it is going to be fine for a 'serious' day on the road.

### Day 17 – 24 March 2017 - Kanaezaki

Distance (km)	33.7	Vertical (m)	400	Time Taken (hrs)	8.5	Other Travel	
Temples	• Nil						
Accommodation	Minshuku Kanaezaki *						

Instead of being a 'hard day on the road', much of it was a very pleasant stroll along the spectacular, stunning, beautiful coast from Ashizurimisaki to Kanaezaki. Large parts of the coast consist of hundreds of thin layers of volcanic rock that were uplifted by some immense force to an angle of about 45 degrees. There were also many jagged rock formations out to sea, a sign of fairly recent volcanic activity, and somewhere I spotted, a few hundred metres out to sea, a perfect cone maybe one hundred metres high with a tree growing on top.

There weren't any henros on the road today, except one who was making his way to Ashizurimisaki. Not that I expected to see any. From here on it will be a lonely road, belonging only to road-hardened individuals.

I left my room at 0615 hrs and the kind old lady, who had promised to be there to farewell me was surely waiting in the foyer. She poured me a cup of coffee. As I was sipping the brew she arrived with a handful of snacks to see me off.

I said my prayers outside the hotel and the lady stood there reverently, then watching me as I began to walk. She was still there when I reached the junction of the Sunny and Skyline Roads when she must have thought I was taking the wrong turn. She waved frantically then jogged a few hundred metres to make sure I got on the right road. How fit she must be – and how kind she was!

There is now a new road linking the Cape and Shimizu Port, which cuts down the walking distance and time. Part of it, however, still goes up and down into tiny villages

dotted along the shore. I stopped somewhere to take a peek into a factory where they were smoking or drying fish in large wood fired furnaces.

I made Shimizu Port in good time and spent a good half hour enjoying good coffee and a local breakfast of toast, a boiled egg, salad and miso soup.

Having time on my hands I allowed for half an hour to stroll through this neat little town and the long, narrow innermost harbour (outer/inner/innermost!) where fishing boats were offloading the night's catch. Then it was time to hit the road proper.

Somewhere near Misaki Port an elderly and very rough looking man stopped his tiny white pickup truck (the vehicle they all drive here) to give me a bag of candies. Such kindness!

Around midday I changed back from the Dunlops into the KEENs. The new shoes seem to be OK, and it is good to know that I wouldn't be left stranded somewhere if the KEEN suddenly disintegrated.

Mika called me early afternoon as I was sitting down for a rest. It was nice to talk to a friendly voice, because it is a bit lonely on the road. . .

The minshuku is OK (just), but run down and quite basic but the main thing for me was to have a shower (the ofuro was too hot) and a futon on the floor. Dinner wasn't 'haute cuisine', but the size of the sashimi slabs were quite remarkable. The owner seems to take the guest register very seriously. It doesn't look like they've been overrun by customers lately. I'm only the second in ten days. . .

### Day 18 – 25 March 2017 – Sukumo City

Distance (km)	37.0	Vertical (m)	350	Time Taken (hrs)	7.5	Other Travel	
Temples	• #39 Enkoji						
Accommodation	Minshuku Shima-ya **						

't was a really bad night's sleep. I fell asleep fairly early then woke up at 2300 hrs with hemorrhoid pains (which I haven't had for years), then I was beginning to feel queasy, it must have been last night's fish. Eri sent me a few messages concerning accommodation that I immediately dealt with, which wasn't conducive to going to sleep either.

I was still awake at 0300 hrs but, when I had a dream an hour later, I realised that I must have dozed off after all.

The alarm went off at 0500 hrs and breakfast was an hour later. It was huge but, given the state of my stomach, I just stuck to rice and tea. If the bathroom scales are correct, I'm down to 67 ½ kilos, a little down from my normal 70.

The Ashizuri Sunny Road certainly didn't live up to its name today because it rained, from the moment I stepped outside until I arrived at the minshuku tonight. So I just walked through this grey world with a barely discernible horizon until I turned my back to the coast. It was cold and wet and I felt miserable trudging uphill along Route 321.

After 3-½ hour's walking I reached the Agri Market at Ootsuki Town. I was exhausted, wet, cold, tired and close to tears. Though half an hour in the warmth of the coffee shop, two coffees and a nice cake revived my spirits. As I was walking further, I was fantasizing about sitting on a warm beach, watching a setting sun – maybe Thailand or any other enchanting place.

Two and half hours later I was in Sukumo, desperately looking for a coffee shop. No such luck, because there is no 'coffee culture' in this part of the world.

I finally found an eating-place and sat myself down right in front of the heater. I was chilled to the bone – and hungry, a good sign that my stomach was fine again.

I asked in my finest (non-existent) nihongo for 'sakana to gohan' (fish and rice) to which the chef replied something like 'teishoku' - set menu. What followed was quite amazing: a ten-bowl meal including rice, fish, pickles, sea snails, prawns, vegetables, fruit, sweets and coffee.

I wondered about the cost but I didn't care, I just wanted food into my belly. But when it came to paying, the bill was an amazing 1,000-yen – a mere A\$12.00!!

The minshuku here seems to be OK. It's a bit on the rough side (run by a middle aged man) but my room is warm and I am hoping for a good night's sleep.

As to other henros on the road, I hadn't expected any and I was right. They only materialised here near the temple – not all necessarily well equipped for walking in the rain.

There are two other (well equipped) henros at the minshuku. One 72 year old doing his second O Henro San, and a 70 year old doing his 6<sup>th</sup>. We all intend to walk to Ainan Town and #40 tomorrow, the midway point of the O Henro San.

### Day 19 – 26 March 2017 – Ainan Town

Distance (km)	32.0	Vertical (m)	300	Time Taken (hrs)	8.5	Other Travel	
Temples	• #40 Kanjizaiji						
Accommodation	Business Hotel Plaza Mishoo *						

Today hasn't been the best on the road; or, indeed, I could say it has been the worst so far. Though it may simply be a reminder of the second of the second of the Pilgrim's Oath which says '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'.

It was still raining when us 'three amigos' from last night's minshuku hit the road at 0630. We all were well equipped as 'road warriors' would be. After an hour's walking I came across a fourth henro and, further up the road, an elderly female henro from Barcelona who is doing her first pilgrimage.

The sky tried to clear when I entered the Ehime Prefecture, the 'Dojo of Enlightenment' and now, late in the afternoon, the sky is a milky blue.

I decided, due to the weather conditions, to take Route 56 rather than the muddy path over Matsuo Tooge, though I now I understand that the conditions hadn't been too bad.

In order to try out the Dunlops 'for real', I'd decided to wear them all day long, which might have contributed to my current sufferings.

It never felt like I was getting out of 'third gear' today, and it wasn't until later in the day that I realised I was severely dehydrated.

My walking pace slowed down over time and, as I approached Ainan Town, my left foot began to hurt, quite seriously.

Near the temple is a little cake shop with 'to die for' wares, very reasonably priced, and free coffee. I ate two of these delicacies and helped myself to as many coffees.

Temple #40 wasn't too far away but, before saying my prayers, I inspected my foot because the big toe was stinging badly. As feared, it was red and swollen, it looked like gout (something I haven't had for many years).

The two temple attendants seemed to be suitably impressed by my fourth pilgrimage and said they were looking forward to seeing me again next year.

Ainan Town, on a Sunday afternoon, must be the most inhospitable place in Ehime because there is no place to sit down and rest, except at the temple or the cake shop.



Desperate to give my feet a rest I went back to the hotel in the hope it would be open even though it wasn't even 1500 hrs and check-in was 1600. It really *was* open but I had to endure a lecture about the 'real' check in time. But with the way I felt I would gladly have endured a Catholic mass just to get into my room.

Luckily I still have three weeks' worth of Meloxicam that is as close to gout-medication as one can get, I think. I took the first of what are sure to be many tablets.

As to tomorrow, I had planned to walk the 45 kilometres to Uwajima. With the way I'm feeling I'm sure my only walk will be from the hotel to the bus stop.

### Day 20 – 27 March 2017 - Uwajima

Distance (km)	0.0	Vertical (m)	0.0	Time Taken (hrs)	0.0	Other Travel	Bus – 48 km
Temples	• Nil						
Accommodation	Hotel Clement Uwajima ***						

I slept a whopping 10 ½ hours – I guess I needed it.

I stuck to my resolve to travel by bus, even though part of today's walk would have been along a most beautiful part of the coast. Alas, today's weather was cold, wet, windy and generally unpleasant.

On the way to the bust stop I met an old henro that one would have described as a 'character': long unkempt beard and hair, tatty clothes and all his possessions wrapped in a few plastic bags. He stood outside the LAWSON Station drinking one of their (horrible) coffees.

There were quite a few henros on the bus, including one of the 'three amigos'. Everyone went their separate ways at the Uwajima Eki.

I threw out the Dunlops which might have caused yesterdays toe problems and bought as pair of Asics runners. It wasn't easy to get a pair of shoes that fitted, even though my feet aren't particularly big, just wide. I discovered a nice café and, later on, a bakery that sold excellent croissants and strawberry Danish. In the meantime, I tried to get the hotel's computer to work in English so I could send a few messages to my friends.

Eri was very concerned about the condition of my foot, she even offered to send some medication to a ryokan up the road. Such a kind person, such kind thoughts. She also sternly warned me not to walk for three days but was relieved to hear I would stay in one place today.

### Day 21 – 28 March 2017 – Seiyo City

Distance (km)	16.6	Vertical (m)	350	Time Taken (hrs)	4.5	Other Travel	Train – 8.3 km
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #41 Ryuukooji</li> <li>• #42 Butsumokuji</li> <li>• #43 Meisekiji</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	Matsuchi-ya **						

It's been a good day. The rain is gone and the sun was shining all day, even though it was slightly veiled at times.

I decided not to push my luck too far, so I took the train up to Muden after a really good sleep and nice breakfast at the Clement.

At #41 I was treated like a celebrity on account of my 4<sup>th</sup> O Henro San. The lady in the office told other henros present and I was given little treats by her and other henros. She also told me of a 'suisu jin – lady' that recently had gone through. That must have been Daniela.

The last kilometre or so leading up to #42 was lined with tulips, I guessed there would have been at least 40,000 of them. Unfortunately they weren't in bloom as yet. It would have been a magnificent sight.

The Hanaga Tooge was far less steep than I had had in mind, which may not be surprising. During the first O Henro San I'd walked up there in the boiling heat of the afternoon and on the last one my hip was threatening to give up and was hurting terribly.

Today I walked at a slower pace than usual, carefully listening to my feet. They seemed to be happy. For the last kilometre to #43, though, I was bothered by a strong headwind.

I stopped at the Donburikan Road Station where I treated myself to a bag of mandarins and a huge punnet of the most delicious strawberries – such indulgence!

I'm sitting in a really nice café near the Unomachi Station because it is too early to check in. I might get myself an other cup of their nice coffee.

Meisekiji has always been somewhat special for me. Maybe because it always is the last temple of the day with the accommodation close by. Maybe it is a particularly beautiful temple surrounded by a silent forest of old cedars, or maybe it has just a 'spiritual something'. I think it is the latter.

Having time on my hands I walked around the site, admiring the light interacting with the shadows ('where there is light must be shadows' – who said this again?), smiled at the giggling hordes clad in perfect white jostling for the best position to say their prayers, and watched with amusement the long line of henros trying to get their nookyoo-cho stamped at the office and the harassed attendants trying to organise the stamp books of the tour groups before the bus whizzed them off to the next destination. The monk at the stamp office displayed the same enthusiasm as would a postal clerk at 1700 hrs on a Friday – and who could blame him?

I chose the short but steeper path back to town. A beautiful feeling welled up in me in this beautiful silence, only occasionally broken by the distant bell of the temple.

I felt being filled by the true spirit of the O Henro San, maybe that of the Kooboo Daishi and I recognised the beautiful emotions within. I bowed deeply, put my hands together in prayer and said thanks – to the Gods and the Kooboo Daishi for having guided me in such mysterious and beautiful ways through my life and the O Henro San; to Nahoko for giving me the purest of love that only an angel could give; to my mother for her unconditional love; to my father whose stern teaching and hard love I never understood at the time; to my brothers Christophe and Hans-Peter and sister Irène who helped to created the environment that laid the groundwork to what I have become; to my three other 'significant partners, Carol, Suzanne and Pam who taught me about 'love' and what I needed to know about myself; the many friends and people in my life who had given without taking; to my teachers including my hard boss Herr Merkle who taught me my trade (cartography, for which I was absolutely not suited); those who'd supported me in my sporting activities, and more. . .

And I asked the Kooboo Daishi to continue to bless and grant enlightenment, when the time is right, to me, to Nahoko, my family, friends and all sentient beings in this world.

### Later

The lady at the coffee shop personally guided me to the ryokan, which was not marked as such. The women here were most welcoming and immediately took care of my clothes and showed me the ofuro (I wondered whether I'd smelt that bad).

Eri just sent me a message saying that the Terminus Hotel in Matsuyama was full. This is where, in the past, I used to update my Facebook. Never mind. This paves the way for a few long, fast days for my 'homerun'.

### Day 22 – 29 March 2017 – Uchiko

Distance (km)	32.6	Vertical (m)	200	Time Taken (hrs)	8.5	Other Travel	
Temples	• Nil						
Accommodation	M Sharon **						

It's been a leisurely day walked at a leisurely pace. Rain threatened a few times but, luckily, held off.

I slept poorly despite having taken a sleeping tablet. Watching Japan defeat Thailand 4:0 in a world cup qualifier (Australia only managed a 2:2 draw with Thailand) almost sent me to sleep but, match over, sleep wouldn't come. Maybe it was the occasional car that drove past that bothered me, maybe the heavy bedcovers, or something else.

Breakfast was huge and the lady of the house gave all guests an obento pack and a 5-yen piece for good luck on the road. Such kindness!

I began walking at around 0700 hrs. I had a bout of diarrhea and a K-Circle Shop 45 minutes into the walk saved me from a catastrophe. I felt better after that.

The road went gently uphill to the Tosaka Tunnel, surely one of the most dangerous because of the lack of a footpath and its length of 1,117 metres. Here began a gentle, six kilometre downhill run. There was an other henro on the road and I caught up with one of the 'three amigos'.

Four hours into the walk I was at Oozu where I'd had hoped to spend a little time relaxing. Alas, the town was DEAD including the much-vaunted Ohana Antique Street. So I just kept going.

Just outside Oozu I came across an *Alpen* sports store of the size I would never have expected outside Tokyo or Osaka. They had a huge range of trekking shoes and I paid a whopping 15,600-yen (A\$180) for a pair of Merrell shoes. I gave my KEENs as a 'gift' to the saleslady. The shoes felt good for the rest of the day but I am withholding judgment on their performance for the time being.

Speaking of gifts, osettai: as I was eating the last of the nice onigiri I'd received this morning, a very old woman, painfully bent over an pushing a walking frame, came up to me and gave me a 1,000 yen note. It's been a long time since I'd received such a big gift. I deeply bowed to her, gave her my osame-fuda and asked the Kooboo Daishi for His blessings as she wheeled away.

Near Uchiko Station I came past a baseball field where a team was practicing (with a mechanical pitcher) and stopped to watch. Upon command the players stopped, turned into my direction, bowed then continued with their practice.

Tonight's minshuku is a somewhat strange place. Downstairs is something that looks like a café/restaurant and there are four rooms upstairs. The largest has been subdivided by a 1.90 m screen so, if I jumped up, I could see what the other occupants are doing. I hope they don't snore! Though they seem to be very kind. Whilst we were waiting to get into the ofuro, the next one in line came to my room and asked me to go in ahead of him.

### Later

Dinner was quite OK. There were only three henros in the restaurant, all staying here over night. The son of the owner, probably in his forties said, from what I could gather, that he had all his life lived in this town. I don't know whether he is married. There was

a very plain woman who served or meals, and she did speak some English, but she quickly vanished after serving the food.

When I returned to my room I found my clothes freshly laundered and *ironed* in a basket (even the handkerchief and underpants).

I talked to Eri after dinner, which was very nice. It can get a little lonely on the road. . .

Tomorrow is going to be a BIG day, maybe the biggest of all on the O Henro San!

### Day 23 – 30 March 2017 - Kuma-koogen

Distance (km)	41.9	Vertical (m)	770	Time Taken (hrs)	9.0	Other Travel	
Temples	• #44 Daihooji						
Accommodation	Garden Time Hotel **						

I spent a very comfortable night indeed. The futon was softer than those in other places and the cover was a feather doona.

Breakfast was huge and the friendly owner said I'd needed it for the long journey ahead.

I took the risk of leaving my new/never worn Asics at the first stop of the day. The three or four hundred grams I so saved can make a big difference on such a long walk. As it turned out, the Merrell shoes proved to be their money's worth.

I made it into Oda, about half the day's distance, in 3 ½ hours. There I drank a Coke that has the same effect on me as an energy gel, at one third of the price.

From Oda onwards it went up and up and up. . .

The Mayumi Pass and I have a long shared history. It was part of my epic 91 kilometre day-night-day walk during my second O Henro San, and also of my painful struggle up and downhill with a fast disintegrating hip on my third. Today there were no such issues, I was simply flying up the hill, surely supported by the Kooboo Daishi. I entered the 710 metre long Mayumi Tunnel after being on the road for five hours, and was now rewarded with a long and gentle downhill run.

There was an other 'bump' on the way to Kuma-koogen, the 150-metre ascent to the Noosono Tooge. From there was a beautiful little valley down from the pass.

All of a sudden the world became silent, and there was no sound apart from my breathing, my footsteps and the tapping of my kongozue. It felt like all sounds had been sucked into one big vacuum. There was no sound of wind, no river, no birdsong, no cars, no people – just emptiness, like the most important state of being mentioned in the Heart Sutra that I recite at ever temple.

I made it into Kuma-koogen in exactly eight hours, surely a record for me. Then I spent an other leisurely hour walking to the temple and back.

An old henro presented me with his brocade osame-fuda, he was on his 102<sup>nd</sup> O Henro San, accompanied by his wife and grandchildren. The two henros I'd met at last night's minshuku also arrived at the temple as I was about to leave – tough 'road warriors', I must say.

P.S. I managed at long last to get some corn-pads for my mistreated toe. I learned that a 'corn' is called 'fisheye' in nihongo ('chook's eye' in Swiss) – so much for useless information!

## Day 24 – 31 March 2017 - Matsuyama

Distance (km)	27.0	Vertical (m)	390	Time Taken (hrs)	6.5	Other Travel	Bus – 14 km
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #45 Iwayaji</li> <li>• #46 Jooruriji</li> <li>• #47 Yasakaji</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	Choochin-ya ***						

Last night's dinner was HUGE – about six separate dishes including a big bowl of udon which in itself could have been a single meal.

As I finished dinner around 1900 hrs a henro staggered in, I'd seen him on and off since Sukumo. His kongozue was broken in half. At its top end he'd earlier clamped a device to make it a 'selfie-stick'. I wondered whether the Kooboo Daishi would have approved. The henros present talked about it a little (I suggested he should take it to a temple to be burned in a sacred fire) and one of them said 'Kuukai', then struggled for words and typed something into his mobile. The screen said 'REVENGE'.

I also chatted with the attractive daughter of the owner, she is 43 years old but I would have taken her for 20. She remembered me from last year, especially when I mentioned Nahoko. She gave me as an osettai a 500-yen note, which is no longer valid currency.

And now to today. . .

It is easy to describe it in three words: wet, dismal and horrible! Same as in Tokyo, I believe. Eri sent me a message saying the sakura were trembling with cold.

It rained all day non-stop. Cold and penetrating, even my poncho got wet inside, so eventually I bought an umbrella.

I set out at 0700 hrs hoping to make good time to the 'hard to get to temple', but walking in the wind and rain was very uncomfortable. Near the Koogen Golf Club I left Route 12 to follow an old henro trail. Maybe a good idea, maybe not, but I soon found myself at the foot of a formidable hill that I had to climb, followed by a muddy descent that gave way to a path lined with round and slippery cobble stones – a potential ankle-breaker.

After the Filtration Plant I unexpectedly came to a huge, 80 metre overhanging rock at the bottom of which were a couple of dilapidated shrines. This sight made the efforts of the last hours really worthwhile.

I exited the forest near the Furuiwaya Rock with four more kilometres to go to the temple. By now I was seriously cold and I almost ran to keep my body temperature up.

Iwayaji is definitely one of my favorite temples but, with the way the conditions were, I hardly gave it a second glance. I just wanted to say my prayers, get the stamp in my book and get back to Kuma-koogen.

This time I stuck to Route 12 in the vain hope of flagging down a taxi. I was wet and cold to the bone, despite walking at a very fast pace.

I made it back into Kuma-koogen at 1230 hrs, having walked the 22 kilometres in 5 ½ hours.

I stopped at my most favorite café on the O Henro San, the 'Petit Clef' for coffee and cake, to warm up, and to meet an old friend (well, she isn't all that old). The coffee was warming but, unfortunately, my friend had left town for Matsuyama. The owner of the café, Yuka, said my friend would be crying if she'd heard I had come to the café and she wasn't there.

I felt a tiny bit warmer after two coffees but I realised that, given my physical condition, to walk the last 14 kilometres (uphill for seven, then steeply downhill) to the next

temple would be dangerous. So I chose to take the bus which, luckily, was to leave within half an hour.

I felt a sense of elation after alighting from the bus and even sang on the way down to #46 but, when I arrived, I was frozen and barely coherent with hypothermia. To my big surprise I bumped into Daniela again. I said my prayers quickly then hastened to #47 before retreating to the ryokan and a very hot ofuro.

### Day 25 – 1 April 2017 – Matsuyama City

Distance (km)	31.1	Vertical (m)	200	Time Taken (hrs)	9.0	Other Travel	
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #48 Sairinji</li> <li>• #49 Joodoji</li> <li>• #50 Hantaji</li> <li>• #51 Ishiteji</li> <li>• #52 Taisanji</li> <li>• #53 Enmyooji</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	Resort Inn Mermaid ***						

As to Japan's weather? It must be April Fool's Day!

Yesterday I was soaked and frozen to the bones. This morning there was ice on the roofs. This afternoon it was a balmy spring day with not a breath of wind and a clear blue sky!

I had a couple of quite amazing experiences today, the first of which I have been noticing over the last few days. When I say the Heart Sutra I feel that the vibrations of my body change, it feels like being connected to higher beings, the Universe. I also noticed that when I say the Sutra my voice goes down a pitch or two. This doesn't happen just at a temple, I also noticed it this afternoon when I sat at the beach near the minshuku. Amazing what one can do when letting go of one's own thoughts or preconceptions.

This afternoon as I sat on the beach overlooking the Seto Inland Sea I became aware of the sense of emptiness within me. It was quiet, but there were sounds surrounding me – the quiet washing of the surf, the occasional footsteps of passers-by, the whisper of an aircraft high in the sky. I let these sounds enter my being, then letting them go. The same with thoughts. They came, then passed through me into nothingness – dissolving into emptiness. . .

And so to today – after yesterday's challenge. . .

I slept really well. The room was most comfortable and I had breakfast at 0600 hrs, leaving half an hour later. I left a few more Meloxicam tablets at Daniela's place on the breakfast table, just in case she needs them.

At #49 I caught up with 'the nameless henro'. He began the journey one day before me to Temple #1 and we've been shadowing each other ever since. My pace is a little faster than his, but I was taking more breaks and spending more time at ryokans.

We saw each other again at LAWSONs near #51 where I gave him a strawberry cream cake as an osettai. I'd actually bought it for myself but thought it would be a nice going-away present because he is leaving for Osaka today (I must admit I went back to the patisserie after the final sayonara to get a cake for myself, because it looked so delicious).

Temple #51, being one of the most impressive ones, was a bit of a circus, as it always seems to be. I just said my prayers, had the book stamped and was on my way across Matsuyama.

I've never actually spent much time at #52, but this temple is quite impressive. Especially the bell tower where an elderly man was teaching his grandchildren about this temple.

A short time later on the way to #53 I and a Chilean couple were, literally, hijacked by an 'osetta team', members of a henro support centre that marched us into a nearby building. There were six elderly men and a woman ready to treat us, all of which was filmed and recorded by three young students, possibly on an assignment. None of them spoke English (or Spanish) though somehow communication seemed to be fine. They treated us to a light meal (I had to say no to a huge bowl of udon) and gave us a few little presents – such kindness!

Dinner at the Mermaid Inn where I'd stayed exactly one year ago was huge! There was a large snapper for sashimi, beautifully decorated with yellow mustard flowers (shared between three henros), tempura, pickles, rice, fried fish, and a large bowl of nabe. The elderly couple (henros from Hokkaido) spoke no English, yet the husband talked non-stop to me and, to make the point, he even did it in writing (in Kanji!!)<sup>2</sup>. Maybe in the future I should just stop to smile and bow and try to get the message across that I *really* 'nihongo ga wakarimasen'.

I've got a long(ish) day ahead of me, but I know I am ready for it.

### Day 26 – 2 April 2017 – Imabari City

Distance (km)	37.3	Vertical (m)	250	Time Taken (hrs)	9.0	Other Travel	
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #54 Enmeiji</li> <li>• #55 Nankooboo</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	Imabari Urban Hotel **						

It's been a good day. It was sunny though a strong headwind sprung up mid-morning that slowed me down. I wondered why I had to have the wind in my teeth ever since leaving Ashizurimisaki!! Though, come midday, a change of the direction of the wind and road for once gave me the luxury of a tailwind.

I only saw one henro on the road today, scurrying towards a railway station. Not surprising, I guess, since on this part of the coast the henro encounters 34.8 'empty' kilometres.

A kind man stopped on the road to give me a small amount of money as an osetta. I was touched and asked the Kooboo Daishi to bless him.

Walking through a small town I came across a very old woman sitting helplessly on the road outside her home. She had been tending her 50x80 centimeter garden and now was unable to get up. An other woman, almost as old and an arm in plaster tried to help her get up but was unable to assist.

Centimeter by centimeter I lifted the old woman onto the walking frame (she must have weighed all but thirty kilos) then with infinite care helped her to straighten up as much as that was possible, fearing I might break her bones. Having achieved that, I was able to transfer her onto a chair inside her home.

Both women were effusive in expressing their gratitude and filled my backpack with mandarins, 14 pieces, despite my polite refusal. I was concerned about the extra weight, even though the mandarins were delicious. Later on I had to pile some of them beside the road. Sorry. . .

Apart from all that, it was just walking, walking, walking – Namu Daishi Henjo Kongoo, Namu Daishi Henjo Kongoo, Namu Daishi Henjo Kongoo. . .

It took 7 ¼ hours for me to reach #54. There I met a young Japanese henro who is doing his first O Henro San, anti clock wise. On 'that' horrible day, he told me, he was on

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<sup>2</sup> As it so happened, we had actually met two years ago at Koya San but, this time, I could not remember that meeting. They however could.

Yokomineji where it snowed heavily. He said that I had the demeanor, stance and energy of a Japanese, he'd only realised I was a gaijin when I turned to face him. Interesting what 17 years of exposure to Japan, its culture and people can do.

The monk at #55 was very friendly and spoke good English. He gave me a can of cold coffee and a sweet as an osettai.

### Day 27 – 3 April 2017 – Saijoo City

Distance (km)	33.3	Vertical (m)	400	Time Taken (hrs)	8.5	Other Travel	Taxi – 3.2 km
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #56 Taisanji</li> <li>• #57 Eifukuji</li> <li>• #58 Senyuuji</li> <li>• #59 Kokubunji</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	Komachi Onsen Shikokuya ***						

During the early hours of the morning I reviewed the planned schedule for the next few days and realised how ridiculously ambitious it was. So I texted Eri to ask her to cancel a few, and make other accommodation arrangements. Sorry, I hope she'll forgive me for it.

As to today, the journey was one that could be described as 'balm for the soul'. It was a beautiful day and, as a welcome change, I had a tailwind (for TWO hours anyway – one mustn't be greedy) though my pace began to flag a little in the last two hours.

I followed my well established tradition of taking a taxi from the hotel to #56 (I must be getting soft!) and began to walk at 0730.

One year ago, almost to the day, I met a professional photographer on the way up to #58. He had long grey hair, looked a little unkempt and had a most battered Nikon I'd ever seen, dating back to the 1960s. At that time he spent half a roll of film on me after which we parted, without exchanging names.

I remembered this meeting as I walked past the spot where it had taken place, but gave it no further attention. Then, two hundred metres up the road, who would appear? The same man, same clothes, same camera. Unbelievable!! I think the odds of winning the lottery would be better than this meeting at the same place, same time, one year later.

At #59 I met 'Ronaldinho', the henro with the slouch hat bearing the football star's name. We'd been playing 'tag' since #51. We just had time to exchange some osettai, then went our separate ways.

Then I walked over a little pass and below me was the flat expanse of Saijoo City. In the distance I noticed three snow capped mountains, including the craggy Ishizuchi san, one of Japan's holiest and the highest on Shikoku.

It was there one year ago that I scattered the last of Nahoko's ashes. With the mountain in sight I stopped and said a prayer to this beautiful woman, the love of my life who is now with the Gods, having become a God herself.

The onsen I'm staying at isn't cheap, but it is certainly very pleasant and comfortable. I enjoyed a long wash then sat in the hot onsen letting the heat build up in my body.

Onsen, I think, are the biggest waste of hot water and energy. But, then when in Rome. . .

Weight is still down at around 68 kilos.

The weather forecast for tomorrow predicts sunshine, as it was today. A good day for ascending the 740 metres of the Yokomineji.

And, for the statistically minded, I have now travelled more than 870 kilometres that means I would have taken more than 1,000,000 steps. I wonder how many Namu Daishi Henjo Kongoo I would have chanted during this time.



## Day 28 – 4 April 2017 – Saijoo City

Distance (km)	31.4	Vertical (m)	940	Time Taken (hrs)	9.5	Other Travel	
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #60 Yokomineji</li> <li>• #61 Koonji</li> <li>• #62 Hoojuji</li> <li>• #63 Kichijoji</li> <li>• #64 Maegamiji</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	BH Saijoo Station ***						

An other BIG day. Actually, in terms of climbing, Yokomineji is higher than the highest temple of the O Henro San, the Unpenji, which I will be facing in two days' time.

I began walking at 0700 hrs and was at the place where the 'business end' to the temple starts ninety minutes later. There I ate some fruit to lighten the load to do the next 2.2 kilometres and 451 metres up.

The way up the steep slope seemed to be like a breeze, even though I needed the last of the power gels with one kilometre to go.

There are many Jizoo Bosatsu statues lining the path to assist henros walking up and down the mountain.

I'm not really into breaking records, but this ascent has been the quickest ever for me. It took me less than 2 ½ hours from Route 11 at the bottom to the top.

There were big heaps of snow still lying all over the temple, evidence of the heavy snowfall that Yokomineji had experienced a few days ago. On the way down I overtook Ronaldinho and the couple I'd met at the Mermaid Inn. The man shook my hand and said 'cold hand, warm heart'.

There were quite a few henros ascending from #61, maybe in the belief that this way was easier. I beg to differ.

I enjoyed my lunch at a very scenic spot near a shrine on the way to #61.

I had never been inside the main part of #61 before, but what I found was truly astounding in this very modern looking temple (which reminds me of the National Gallery in Canberra). On the upper level there is a huge golden Buddha and seating for a couple of hundred people, arranged like in a theatre. On the lower part, the Daishidoo just features a large empty space, resembling emptiness.

The monks at #62 are obviously into business mode, because they close the stamp office for their lunch break between 1200 and 1300 hrs. They also asked 200 yen for the little temple slip in addition to the 300 yen 'stamp-fee' (which are handed out for free at all other temples). I didn't bother, the stamp was enough.

Coincidences? In 2009, on my first O Henro San, my friend Sadako gave Nahoko and me each a bracelet made from Hawkeye. Hawkeye is the stone of the Dainichi Nyorai, the chief protector of those born in the Year of the Monkey, which Nahoko and I were. I wore the bracelet every day until it broke at Temple #62, at which stage Sadako gave me a replacement of bigger stones, saying I had 'outgrown' the smaller ones.

And here, today, sitting at the LAWSON Station near #62 the bracelet broke again, luckily without losing any stones. Coincidence??

As to the day's weather, it couldn't have been better. It was cool on the way up to the Yokomineji and pleasantly warm with no wind when I was back down on the flat.

Cherry blossoms are emerging, changing turning the countryside into a sea of colour.

## Day 29 – 5 April 2017 – Shikoku-Chuuo

Distance (km)	38.8	Vertical (m)	310	Time Taken (hrs)	8.25	Other Travel	
Temples	• Nil						
Accommodation	Ryokan Oonaru ****						

Today I met my true match – a young Japanese henro, head cleanly shaved and with a very determined energy about him. For many kilometres we walked at exactly the same speed within sight of each other, we even had the same ‘power snack’ (sultana cake) at the same combini. We only lost sight of each other when I ducked into a shop.

Though yesterday I saw a ‘running henro’. I met him on the lower slopes of Yokomineji, me going down, he *running* up. By the time I’d reached #64 he was there too, quickly throwing on his hakui, the white vest to say his prayers, then raced off again. I wonder what’s next – maybe an ultra-ultra marathon covering the entire O Henro San?

Today’s walk led along the Median Tectonic Line that separates the Pacific and Eurasian Tectonic Plates thus creating Japan and which are the driving force behind earthquakes and tsunamis. To my right (in the south) were steep, towering mountains maybe 1,000 metres high whereas to my left was the flat expanse leading to the Seto Inland Sea and beyond.

The weather was perfect for walking – slightly overcast and barely a breeze and, if any, it came from behind. Near Temple #B12 I ate a delicious home-made obento given me by a kind woman that contained the following message:

*This is osettai for you safe and healthy journey.  
Please enjoy tastes of Japanese spring!  
Chieko Ito  
4-3 Okuracho Niihamashi  
Ehime ken  
Japan 792-0047*

Today’s walk was on side-roads following Route 11. There were many locals on the road and I received nice, encouraging smiles and greetings; somewhere I heard someone practicing the shamisen and a loudspeaker mounted on a car blared out a rousing song sung by a men’s choir.

Apart from ‘my match’, there were five other henros on the roads, some of whom I recognised from days before. All of them in their sixties or seventies apart from the young man I met early on.

Ryokan Oonaru was exactly as I remembered it from last year – impeccably clean and welcoming. I just had my ofuro and the clothes are in the sentakki. I’m a little tired, but who wouldn’t be after close to forty kilometres on the road?

### Later

Dinner was huge! Baked fish, prawns, sashimi, rice, miso soup, five or six vegetable condiments and salad. I can never get enough of the amazing variety of fish available on Shikoku.

As to the weather for the next few days, it looks like rain and more rain and that means on the day I will go up Unpenji. Though I shouldn’t be greedy, having had perfect weather on the days I climbed Shoosanji and Yokomineji.

## Day 30 – 6 April 2017 – Miyoshi City

Distance (km)	21.6	Vertical (m)	650	Time Taken (hrs)	5.5	Other Travel	
Temples	• #65 Sankakuji						
Accommodation	Minshuku Okada **						

It almost feels like a rest day. It isn't even 1300 hrs and I am enjoying a second cup of coffee, with the minshuku just down the road.

It would have been easy to include Unpenji in today's itinerary but, with the accommodation situation being as it is, that would have made things logistically impossible. On the other hand, I am feeling a little tired too.

Breakfast was big and delicious and I was on the road at 0645. I would have preferred to sleep in for a while, but the food was being served at 0615 hrs.

Today's profile was, basically, up-down-up-down in gentle sections, maybe expect the last bit of the first 'up' to #65 which was quite steep.

The pungent smell of the animals from the piggery near the temple announced its close proximity. To my surprise, the temple's toilet block had also received a make-over since my last visit. Instead the 'hole in the ground' there are now sit-down toilets with heated seats, flowers and warm water.

The 400 year old cherry tree was covered in blossoms, a beautiful sight.

The following section went gently downhill to the Joofukuji Temple where the road went up again for four kilometres. Somewhere along the way I spotted a beautifully coloured pheasant.

Today was my mother's birthday and I had stopped at the last temple to say a prayer, thanking her for her love, guidance, patience and devotion.

On the way up the last hill I discovered a barber shop to get myself another haircut. Communication with the lady cutting my hair was, basically, impossible except for a few words both in Nihongo and English. She wouldn't accept payment or the osame-fuda that I offered her.

The 855 metre long Sakai Tunnel between the Ehime and Tokushima Prefectures is the last of the long ones on this journey. Many eight and ten-wheelers traversed the tunnel and I stopped every time they passed to ensure their blast wouldn't send me flying.

It is obviously sakura time. My eyes feel a little itchy, though not as bad as they were last year because I'm using Patanol and Maxidex to stop any allergic reaction from happening.

### Later

I hadn't realised how tired and hungry I had been. I checked into the minshuku at 1400 hrs then drank a litre of tea and ate a huge bag of cookies. Then I fell asleep and was dead to the world until 1700 hrs.

Dinner time, and it was the usual 'Okada routine'. There were eight henros including one woman at the table and the owner (he never changes) spent nearly one hour talking about the day ahead (30 minutes for going up the Unpenji, and 30 for going down) showing images that I've seen three times before. I could have explained the route in all but five words: 'just follow the red arrows'.

Sitting among the henros I felt privileged and humble to be where I was. I felt being accepted without reservations, I was just a simple henro. I seemed to be the 'senior henro' too - all but one were first timers and another, 74 year old, was on his second journey.

May the Gods and the Kooboo Daishi continue to bless us and to grant us enlightenment when the time is right for us.

P.S. I haven't seen Daniela for a while, and neither Ronaldinho. I wonder where they are.

## Day 31 – 7 April 2017 – Kannonji City

Distance (km)	25.4	Vertical (m)	720	Time Taken (hrs)	8.75	Other Travel	
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #66 Unpenji</li> <li>• #67 Daikoji</li> <li>• #68 Jinnein</li> <li>• #69 Kannonji</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	Kannonji Grand Hotel *						

Unpenji to me today was kinder than the man in the next room had been last night.

The room I was in was large and divided only by a thin paper screen and the man was obviously drunk, given the amount of beer and sake he had consumed with the meal (and before and after). I tried to sleep but even after taking a sleeping tablet I couldn't. His snoring and the light and TV on bothered me greatly.

At one stage I tried to wake him up so I gently opened the screen door but my quiet 'sumimasen' elicited no reaction.

It was only after I'd popped the second tablet that I heard a big crash; he'd kicked over a beer bottle and a glass, and finally switched off the light and TV. I don't know about his snoring, because by then the medication had kicked in.

I hit the trailhead to the Unpenji at 0625 hrs and was at the temple 90 minutes later. It was cool and tried to rain, but the rain held off. Halfway up the steep, muddy and slippery (the 'henro korogashi') section a film crew had installed itself with some very heavy gear. I wondered (1) how they got themselves there and (2) who they were going to film. I couldn't imagine they'd be interested in filming a bunch of grubby walking henros. Most likely I thought, they would chopper in a few beautifully made-up and clean models to pretend they were walking the Unpenji.

I said a prayer at the tree where I had scattered Nahoko's ashes in 2014. No one could guess what secret this very spot is holding. I believe this is the way she would have wanted it to be. Disappearing into nothingness.

On the other side of the mountain there were a few henros going up and down, all walking at a good pace. Even though the O Henro San is not a road race, one must be reasonably fit to complete the journey.

I reached the bottom of the Unpenji after 3 ½ hours on the trail then proceeded to #67 and then on to #68 and 69, both of which occupy the same site. An abundance of flowers greeted me wherever I went, and the rain held off all day long. What a blessing. . .

I'm having dinner at the Joyfull restaurant across the road from the hotel. Spaghetti followed by a pizza. As much as I love Japanese food, I felt like having a change.

As to the hotel, the building might be big but it anything but 'grand'. They don't have a laundry but I was told of a coin-laundry nearby. So I decided to hand-wash my smelly stuff (I'm sitting here in slightly wet pants). They gave me a smoking room and, when I asked for a non-smoking one, they charged me an extra 540 yen. There is really no use to grumble, because the room only came to 5,940 yen.

## Day 32 – 8 April 2017 – Marugame City

Distance (km)	29.8	Vertical (m)	300	Time Taken (hrs)	10.5	Other Travel	
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #70 Motoyamaji</li> <li>• #71 Iyadanaji</li> <li>• #72 Mandaraji</li> <li>• #73 Shusshakaji</li> <li>• #74 Kooyamaji</li> <li>• #75 Zentsuuj</li> <li>• #76 Konzooji</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	Business Hotel Chisan Inn ***						

Today was the traditional 'big temple day', though the numbers are slightly down from previous years because I'd visited Temples #68/69 yesterday.

I made an early start and said my prayers at #70 even before the stamp office opened at 0700 hrs.

From here on it was an other two hours to the next temple on side streets parallel to Route 11 that I know so well.

The weather today was really frustrating. The streets were never dry and there was a constant drizzle, not enough to put on the poncho but enough to get wet. I had a little temperature so I took one of Mika's 'miracle capsules' which seemed to do the trick.

I've always liked Iyadanaji for its dramatic setting, carved into a cliff, but this time it seemed to be special to me. There is a little alcove off the Kooboo Daishi's temple, deep inside the rock that I had to myself. There I meditated and prayed earnestly to the Gods and the Kooboo Daishi for their blessings and enlightenment for myself, for Nahoko, my ancestors and parents, my children and grandchildren, family and friends and all sentient beings in this world.

The next four temples followed in quick succession and I soon was at #75, the temple at which the Kooboo Daishi was born. This temple, because of its significance, size and beauty is usually a bit of a circus but there were very few visitors there, certainly no giggling hordes of bus henros.

I prayed for a long time at the Daishidoo then stayed still for a while to let the strong and beautiful energy there was flow through me. It was quite an unearthly, amazing experience. . .

It rained heavily when I visited the last temple of the day and was thankful that the hotel was nearby.

It had taken Eri some time to get me accommodation in or around Zentsuuj for reasons not known to me. The Grand Hotel, which was supposedly full looked very deserted and several of the ryokans listed in the Route Guide had been closed. At the time of booking, Eri was told that there was only a smoking room left but they would try to find me a non-smoking one. Well, they certainly did! I was put into the room next to reception reserved for handicapped people with a huge mechanical bed and an even bigger bathroom and bathtub. There was also a sentakki and dryer off the foyer, so I got my smelly stuff clean. Happy is the henro. . .

## Day 33 – 9 April 2017 – Sakaide City

Distance (km)	21.4	Vertical (m)	80	Time Taken (hrs)	5.5	Other Travel	
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #77 Dooryuuj</li> <li>• #78 Gooshooji</li> <li>• #79 Tennoji</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	Sakaide Kokusai Hotel ('zero' star rating)						

Hey, I'm famous! At the last temple of today, the lady in the stamp office made a bit of a fuss about me being on my fourth O Henro San, and that I will be entitled to a green

osome-fuda when I commence the fifth. A henro walking nearby heard this to ask me where I was from – ‘oosutoraria’. ‘So you are the henro from Australia that I have been hearing about from other henros’, he exclaimed ‘I am feeling very proud to have met you’.

There is a man near #77 with only two lower teeth who is keeping an eye on passing henros to give them a small ceramic statue of a pilgrim with a little message inside. The message says ‘You have been at Temple #77’ (so what!!).

I had received such a statue on my last journey, which I subsequently happily lost, so I tried to tip-toe past his house because I didn’t really want another one. I’d just thought I’d made it safely past his house when I heard a voice ‘O Henro San, O Henro San!!’. Caught again. . .

An other henro closely following behind got the same treatment by the man’s backup, presumably his wife.

Today, being the 9<sup>th</sup>, means that I have been on the road for exactly one month. For the statistically minded, I’ve travelled just over one thousand kilometres.

Today would also have been my sister Irène’s 69<sup>th</sup> birthday. She took her life about five years ago, something that the family strenuously denies. I know better, though, because she told me of her intentions in so many words five days before her death. She was of the same age as my mother when she died. Her life is a sad story - a very talented violinist, quite pretty, married to an actor and acting teacher of some fame, but she could never deal with major issues in her life: the death of our mother and her husband Jean, an accident late in life that shattered her career as a performer and teacher, the flooding of her apartment.

I prayed to the Gods to bless her and for giving her a good next life.

Late afternoon I walked through Sakaide Port which, being Sunday, is DEAD! The only thing that moved was the occasional buzzard circling overhead. It was a very strange and surreal scene, old, grey, rusty and smelly - and sakura covering the volcanic outcrops in the near distance. It was the backdrop to which I would have liked to take a beautiful model to, to take some stunning photographs.

As to the Sakaide Kokusai Hotel nearby, it certainly has seen better days. It is dark, grey, dirty though everything seems to work, including the washing machine and dryer, and the bed is clean. I would definitely classify it as a ‘never take your best friend or lover to this place’ hotel. The room stinks of smoke though I didn’t complain because the manager (after some grumbling) let me in two hours before check-in time. Furthermore, it only costs 6,000 yen for dinner, bed & breakfast.

### Later

Dinner was, well, politely said, what one would expect in a 6,000 yen establishment. The condiments seemed to be OK, and that’s the good part. There was a piece of cold, shriveled up salmon, and the nabe consisted of chicken skin, fat and some vegetables which I didn’t touch. The rice seemed to be the only safe option. After the meal I wandered across the street to the LAWSON Station and got some yogurt and fruit to neutralize the stuff.

It looks like there are only two guests at the hotel that could accommodate more than 100. The other guest didn’t show up for dinner. Maybe he/she knew what to expect.

### Day 34 – 10 April 2017 – Takamatsu City

Distance (km)	39.1	Vertical (m)	700	Time Taken (hrs)	10.0	Other Travel	
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #80 Kokubunji</li> <li>• #81 Shiromineji</li> <li>• #82 Negoroji</li> <li>• #83 Ichinomiya</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	Terminal Hotel ***						

I felt like being a walking machine without an 'off' button today. My legs and body just kept on moving without any feeling of tiredness, even though I knew I was.

I actually slept well after taking a sleeping tablet. This morning I recognised my dependency on this stuff so I threw the remaining tablets into the rubbish bin.

Needless to say I did without breakfast. Last night's dinner being an indicator, I was fearing the worst. At any rate, I had a lot of walking ahead of me and therefore I decided to leave at 0500 hrs.

I had seen a full moon during the night but the morning was grey and the sky remained so during the day. Luckily it didn't rain but up on the Goshikidai Plateau a very cold wind from the north was blowing.

I'd chosen the 79-81-82-80-80 sequence of temples which means a very short day (yesterday) followed by a long one (today).

There were a few henros on the trail, some of whom I had seen before, others were new to me. I made good time and was at the first temple at 0700 hrs, and 1 ½ hours later at #82.

Business must have been slow at both temples because I was the first to light a candle on the day on both.

I was down at Kokubunji by late morning and, after a quick bite to eat, headed east for #83.

The route from #80 to #83 through Takamatsu City isn't particularly well marked and some occasional guesswork was needed to find the way. So I 'guessed' (without referring to the map book) and got promptly lost.

I wasn't feeling all that well within myself and began to make some irrational decisions in respect of my navigation.

My bladder finally forced me to stop and, after midday, I went into a LAWSON Station for coffee and sweets. It was only then that I realised I had been walking for *seven* hours without drinking and was severely dehydrated, hence my irrational decision making.

I made quick work with the remaining kilometres. At 1330 hrs I was at #83 and 1 ½ hours later at Takamatsu Station. Yesterday, when I'd planned the walk I had actually intended to get a taxi from the last temple to the station. But, as I said, I simply was unable to find the 'off' button.

### Day 35 – 11 April 2017 – Sanuki City

Distance (km)	22.8	Vertical (m)	400	Time Taken (hrs)	7.5	Other Travel	Taxi – 5.0 km
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 Ryokan **						

To last night. . .

I went Italian and had two pizzas and three glasses of Italian Red. Afterwards I received a really good massage in my room, given by a lady of about my age.

This morning my body felt much worse than yesterday. Maybe it had just remembered what 'feeling good' was like. The blurred eyesight that I'd often experienced late in the day had disappeared, so I guess this condition had more to do with the strain in my neck and shoulders rather than my eyes.

I hoped my eyes were deceiving me when I looked outside this morning. Rain again!! since I didn't fancy trudging through Takamatsu in the rain I got into a taxi that took me to the foot of the Yashima Plateau and #84.

The conditions were pretty bad. Low hanging clouds covered the top of the plateau and a strong wind was blowing even on the leeward side of the mountain.

On top of the plateau the conditions were even worse, with visibility down to maybe 80 metres.

There was an other intrepid henro, we had met on and off over the last few days and he spoke good English.

The monk at the stamp office advised us against taking the direct route down the mountain and to #85 because of the wet and slippery conditions, but I decided to take the risk. The other henro chose the safer route.

On top and the windward side of the plateau the conditions were worse still. The howling wind sent sheets of rain sideways and tore small branches and petals off the sakura trees.

The descent itself wasn't too bad once I got off the plateau, but I had to be careful about the slippery path. I've certainly seen worse conditions before. In many places the ground was freshly upturned, evidence of the wild boars' nightly feast on bamboo roots the night before. I was quite happy not to meet them or be at the end of their fearsome tusks.

The conditions had marginally improved by the time I reached #85 and would do so as the day wore on, though it kept on raining (more 'on' than 'off').

At #86, the monk in the stamp office gave me a little memento as an osettai. He and his female colleague seemed suitably impressed with the three stamps that were already there.

After #86 I stopped at the 'Henro's Café' that I had visited exactly one year ago and, as luck would have it, my now Facebook friend Saeko was there. She speaks as much English as I speak Japanese but, somehow, we always seem to be able to communicate.

It rained heavily again when I arrived at the last temple for the day. The German henro whom I had first met at #79 was there with his Japanese 'parents' and was desperately seeking accommodation for the night. In my mind I wished him good luck, because this town is renowned for its scarcity in accommodation. Luckily (or, better expressed, based on prior knowledge) I had asked Eri five days ago to book me the accommodation.

### Later

Life is full of wonderful surprises if we allow for them to occur. At dinner time I met a sixty-six year old retired professor of journalism from Napa Valley, California. He is on his 5<sup>th</sup> O Henro San. We shared many of our experiences together, including the 'strange' and unexplainable events that had occurred during our journeys.

Mika rang just before dinner to tell me she'd been able to book the last of the available rooms at the Jokiin Temple at Koya San for me.



There were six men at the table, all past retirement age, engaged in what the French would call 'bonhommerie'. During dinner the old lady of the ryokan asked me to come to the front door, the reason for which I didn't know. There was a man waiting for me with an envelope with 'Heartfelt' and my name written on the outside. Who, I wondered, would send anything like that to me?

The envelope contained a few lovely mementos including origami of peace cranes, a pair of lovely chopsticks and a page marker. There was also a note, which I wasn't able to decipher, but I was told it was from Saeko. How on earth did she know where I was staying, because I certainly hadn't told her. She must have undertaken some detective work to track me down. . .

And, as I had bidden 'o yasumi nasai' to the men at the table, the old lady beckoned me into the kitchen where she gave me a tablet of chocolate.

It's truly amazing what wonderful things can come one's way.

### Day 36 – 12 April 2017 – Higashi-Kagawa City

Distance (km)	29.2	Vertical (m)	500	Time Taken (hrs)	7.25	Other Travel	
Temples	• #88 Ookuboji						
Accommodation	Shirotori Onsen ***						

This day has been quite extraordinary, for many reasons including the fact that I reached Ookuboji, #88 from where I will complete the pilgrimage tomorrow morning.

I didn't sleep well. The three henros across the hallway decided to continue their alcohol-fuelled bonhommerie in their room though, thankfully, they switched off at 2130. The ryokan was very noisy throughout the night. My room was next to the toilet and all seven men on the floor needed to get up two or three times during the night I guess (I only went once) – that was many trips to the toilet and back during all hours.

The American couldn't sleep either, and he woke me up at 0500 hrs when he cleaned his teeth outside my room.

Anyway. . .

The old lad at the ryokan asked me for a hug as I departed and I had to bend down deeply because she hardly reached up to my chest.

It took me about an hour to reach the Maeyama Ohenro Kooryuu Salon on the shores of the Maeyama Lake where one of the henros called my name and beckoned me inside. There I was presented with a certificate naming me 'O Henro San Ambassador #1671' and with some images taken of me and other henros during the journey (including one taken at Koya San two years ago). The American was also there, waiting for the bus to take him to #88.

I had just passed the Gaku Pass and was on my way down before going up again to the temple when I met Anna. In her late twenties, quite beautiful, recently having completed a PhD at the University of Magdeburg, originally hailing from the Ukraine and now living in Germany. She was on her first O Henro San and had been on the road for two weeks longer than me.

For the next six kilometres to the temple and after our prayers we talked much and deeply about everything that came to our minds - our lives, spirituality, what the O Henro San has done and is doing to us, marriage, friendship, love, the Kooboo Daishi and what He meant for us.

It is rare for me (and Anna said the same about herself) to meet a person with whom I am in complete 'sync'. She said ours was a meeting arranged by the Kooboo Daishi and I responded by saying that there is no such as a 'chance' meeting, because every meeting has a certain purpose. A relationship thus formed may last but for a few glancing moments, sometimes for a lifetime.

We prayed separately at the Main Temple but at the same time and when we finished we both had tears in our eyes. For our own special and separate reasons, this I am sure of. At the Daishi Hall I recited the Heart Sutra for both of us, and for the world.

We had refreshments at the restaurant near the temple and continued our deep sharing. She said some very beautiful things about herself, and me. We were also surprised to learn that we both had had similar spiritual experiences in the little alcove off the Daishodoo at Iyadanaji, #71.

It was a very special communication, one that I had not had for a long, long time. One like between two completely aligned souls who had know each other for eons.

Anna was going back the same way we'd come, I was going ahead. Just as we hugged each other for the last time, the sun broke through. We cheered with delight.

I met some of the 'old' henros at the temple, and we said our final goodbyes. Most of them were taking the bus down to Temple #1.

I left my kongozue at the temple, as is done by henros. Mine was at least 15 centimetres shorter, worn down during the journey.

I began walking down the mountain, my heart filled with deep gratitude and happiness, and a feeling of elation. I sang in full voice 'my' Henro's song, 'You'll never walk alone. . . ' (referring to the fact that the Kooboo Daishi always walks with the henro), then I stopped to thank the Great Master for His teachings, guidance, blessings and protection He had bestowed upon me during this pilgrimage.

So, tomorrow, my fifth O Henro San will commence. The ongoing journey of life. . .

**Later:**

Dinner was huge and lovely, and the onsen is great. If one can trust their scales, I am three kilos lighter than when I commenced the journey.

Hundreds of cherry trees have been planted around the onsen. They are in full bloom and lit up during the night. An awesome sight. . .

**Day 37 – 13 April 2017**

Distance (km)	17.9	Vertical (m)	370	Time Taken (hrs)	4.5	Other Travel	Taxi - 11 km
Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #3 Konsenji</li> <li>• #2 Gokurakuji</li> <li>• #1 Ryoozenji</li> </ul>						
Accommodation	Hotel Sun Route, Tokushima ****						

Early morning thoughts. . .

Today, the day on which I am commencing my fifth O Henro San marks the passing of my beautiful wife Nahoko, exactly 2 ½ years ago. Even though she wasn't particularly interested in Buddhism, I know she was with me during this journey.

I will say special prayers to Her, the Gods and the Kooboo Daishi when I enter the Dojo of Spiritual awakening, the Tokushima Prefecture.

This has been an other blessed journey for me, as I had hoped it would become when I began walking a little more than five weeks ago. I am deeply grateful to the Gods, the Kooboo Daishi and the beautiful and generous people that I met on my journey – locals, people from all over the world and, of course, henros.

Compared to my last journey, this has been a relatively easy walk, maybe apart from the weather which has been unseasonably cold, wet and windy. There were no health issues except fatigue and the swelling of my toe, which I quickly dealt with.

So, what has this journey taught and given me? I think I will need more time to answer. I must let my thoughts mature over time in order to clarity of mind. 'Enlightenment means understanding one's own mind', it is said – I am afraid I am far removed from enlightenment at this stage.

Physically, I think I am as fit as I have ever been, despite my 72 years.

What I am beginning to appreciate, though, is the miracle of accepting the guidance of the Universe (some may call it God). When I reflect on my life and the many self-inflicted stuff-ups, situations and difficult times I had gone through, I am happy to say how wonderful it is to rely on higher powers.

Having said that, I am aware that there is so much that I don't know, must learn in this life. So my journey will continue.

Walking (and living) like a little child with eyes, ears, mind and feelings wide open, letting thoughts and impressions flow through emptiness is the way to go. No blockages of, obstacles to or non-acceptance of the heavenly gifts.

During this journey it may be that I have learned the first of the lessons of 'emptiness'. I must follow this path.

I also believe (and here I may sound a little conceited) that the pilgrimages have given me greater power and strength within me, and maybe even a little more understanding of myself that I am able to share with others. I find it somewhat strange to realise that I am able to give others of myself without having the need to take. Though I know that, whatever I share with others, are not my own thoughts – I am merely the conduit of the greater Universe.

Though there is a little sadness that remains in me. Over the years I have lost the connection with my children and grandchildren (whatever little connection that had remained). I know there is much I would be able to give to them, have to give. Not in a 'grandfatherly' role but the role of a simple man, a henro, who has become reliant on the beauty and wisdom of the Universe. I hope and pray that, at some stage in the future, we may be able to reconnect.

So, my life as a pilgrim will continue. Maybe I have always been the restless wanderer since I left Switzerland in my early twenties, in search of something that I need – maybe something unattainable. . .

May the blessings of the Gods, the Kooboo Daishi and my own flow to all beings in this world and to all who have made this journey special for me – those who gave me smiles and encouragement, those who gave me (and the Kooboo Daishi) osettai, the many henros, most of whose names I don't know, that shared the road with me, Daniela, Anna, and the people who, at the end of the day in a ryokan sat with me at the table, often not even talking, but simply accepting me as I am.

### Later, at Ryoozenji

The great journey is over. I don't feel triumphant or celebrating, I'm simply feeling tired. It may be that the adrenaline that has pushed me for the last 36 days is finally spent.

Maybe the Gods wanted to apologise for the terrible weather they often had presented me with, because today the sky was cloudless and the sakura particularly beautiful in the morning's dew. I took a taxi down the valley to the Hiketa Eki to shorten the day and offered a first-time henro, William from Quebec a lift. He'd been on the road for about eight weeks, mainly camping, couch surfing and just getting by.

I began walking at 0820 hrs, the first few kilometres along the calm, blue Seto Inland Sea. Then the path headed up the 370 metre high Oosaka Tooge.

The ascent was easy but frustrating because of the many false tops. Once on the real top I said my prayers then descended quickly down into the valley below.

I walked at a fast pace to the last three temples of my journey, indeed the first three of my fifth O Henro San, but I missed the tap-tap-tap of my kongozue. In the distance across the wide Yoshinogawa Valley beckoned the Shoosanji – it will have to wait until next year.

Along the way I bought a small stack of green osame-fuda that I am now entitled to have. They are to be used on journeys five to seven, before going 'red'.

Though many things will now have to be done before I can focus on my next O Henro San – settling into my new house in Sandy Bay, the purchase of which was only finalised on the day of my departure, the long planned-for trip to France, Switzerland and possibly Norway, maybe Germany in mid-June, and maybe an other overseas trip later this year.

So I want to close this journey. I do this with a weary body but a grateful heart and the deepest thanks to all the Gods and the Kooboo Daishi who'd protected, guided and blessed me, and with my heartfelt blessings to all those who have shared this journey with me, or have been part of it.

**Namu Daishi Henjo Kongoo, Namu Daishi Henjo Kongoo, Namu Daishi Henjo Kongoo...**

**14 March 2017**

### **The afterword**

I recited the Heart Sutra and said my prayers at Japan's holiest site, the Okunoin at Koya San today.

As I turned my back to the place where the Kooboo Daishi had been in eternal meditation for 1,182 years, this beautiful song came to my mind.

So I walked back to the centre of Koya San through the forest of gigantic, age-old trees, past the 200,000 graves, a feeling of lightness, happiness connectedness and freedom in my heart, humming and singing *Amazing Grace*...

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

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

774	Born into the Saeki Clan, a declining aristocratic family, at Temple #75 (Zentsuuji) in Kagawa Prefecture.
788	Began study of Chinese classics under the direction of his uncle.
791	Entered college in Nara. About two years later left school, became a monk, and spent time as a wandering ascetic.
797	Committed himself to Buddhism and wrote Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings (Sangoo Shiiki) in which he compared Buddhism with Confucianism and Taoism. Argues for the superiority of Buddhism.
797-804	It is assumed he lived as a travelling ascetic. During this time he might have visited Mt. Koya-san for the first time as well as have spent time training at Temple #21, 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	10	34.3	450	10.0	
2	1	4.0	100	1.5	
3	2	35.8	1370	10.25	
4	4	29.5	100	9.0	
5	2	14.7	100	5.0	
6	3	21.5	1050	8.0	
7	1	36.2	300	7.0	
8	0	47.0	250	9.5	
9	2	21.7	190	5.0	
10	2	35.9	620	8.5	Train - 26 km
11	5	31.7	300	8.5	Taxi - 9.2 km
12	3	22.1	150	5.0	
13	1	37.0	270	8.5	
14	1	28.0	400	7.0	
15	0	34.6	150	8.0	
16	1	0.0	0.0	0.0	Bus - 46 km
17	0	33.7	400	8.5	
18	1	37.0	350	7.5	
19	1	32.0	300	8.5	
20	0	0.0	0.0	0.0	Bus - 48 km
21	3	16.6	350	4.5	Train - 8.3 km
22	0	32.6	200	8.5	
23	1	41.9	770	9.0	
24	3	27.0	390	6.5	Bus - 14.0 km
25	6	31.1	200	9.0	
26	2	37.3	250	9.0	
27	4	33.3	400	8.5	Taxi 3.2 km
28	5	31.4	940	9.5	
29	0	38.8	310	8.25	
30	1	21.6	650	5.5	
31	4	25.4	720	8.75	
32	7	29.8	300	10.5	
33	3	21.4	80	5.5	
34	4	39.1	700	10.5	
35	4	22.8	400	7.5	Taxi - 5.0 km
36	1	29.2	500	7.25	
37	3	17.9	370	4.5	Taxi - 11 km
<b>Total</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>1,033.9</b>	<b>14,380</b>	<b>268.0</b>	<b>170.7</b>