



Monkey trainers (a drawing by an unknown artist)

couple of mats to sit on and something to eat and drink. I am sure he was up there for peace and quiet away from his family. He told us we were on the wrong road; we should start from the village where he lived and he led us back.

In the village he turned us over to a farmer who said that yes indeed, the path still existed, and pointed to the ridgeline high above. "That's the border between Tosa and Iyo," he said. "On this side the path is good, but on the Iyo side it's not well maintained," and he started us out.

It was a good path, only a bit overgrown. The weeds had been cut back not much earlier but thistles had already sprung up and were nettlesome. As we gained altitude we began to get those belauded views, the coastline, islands, the strait between Shikoku and Kyushu. We had not gone far when a boy appeared at our heels, a smiling kid who fairly sprinted up the path wearing rubber sandals. Clearly the mountain was familiar to him. When we began to find divergent paths and were unsure, we moved him up front. Someone murmured, not facetiously, that Kobo Daishi had appeared to guide us.

We had trouble only with the last hundred yards or so, where timber had recently been harvested and the path destroyed in the process, as usually happens; it takes a while for feet that know the mountain to mark the path again. We struggled up, mostly on all fours, but the ridgeline was so close there was no sense of being lost.

Once we gained the ridge all was easy again; through a break in the forest another sweeping view and then the pass. Two memorial stones, quite new, mark the site, but of the buildings that used to stand here—the barrier was a bit lower but up here were two teahouses (where everyone stopped to rest and where henro overtaken by darkness could spend the night) and a chapel enshrining a statue of the Daishi—nothing remains save a bit of stone wall.

I already knew the story of that Daishi. When the new road was built travelers over the pass became so few that the teahouses were abandoned, and about fifty years ago the people of a village on the Iyo side decided to bring the chapel down where they could care for it. A bit later a meeting hall was built nearby and the

horses tethered there made the surroundings much too dirty for the Daishi. Finally the old men's club of the town at the foot of the mountain offered a suitable location and the villagers accepted gratefully. One of the members of the club has shown me to the little chapel that stands on the grounds of the chamber of commerce building, the town's social center. Inside was a crutch, offered by someone who no longer needed it; this Daishi, he told me, is renowned for its power to help cripples. And there was the image: a seated figure about two feet high, carved in sections—primitive art with simple strength.

Once we achieved the pass we sat to rest like thousands of *henro* before us, and pulled from our packs some of the snacks we always carried. The boy, having delivered us, vanished just when we wanted to share our food with him, but almost immediately the farmer who had set us on the path appeared. "I saw that you were having difficulty," he said, "so I hurried up to help." He sat with us in the little clearing, chatting and eating, until we started down into Iyo. He had been wrong about only one thing: on the Tosa side it was certainly a good path, except for that last short stretch, but on the Iyo side it was even better—clean, often shaded, and with lovely views of the mountains and valleys. Unfortunately it ended where a great gash had been cut in the slope to build a new highway, and we had to inch our way down to the road.

And so Morikawa and I, now that we know the path exists, cross the border from Tosa to Iyo over Pine Tree Ascent as *henro* should. In the town we find a comfortable inn and then we go to pray before the Daishi. Presently we are relaxing in a hot bath. As we are finishing our dinner and it is growing dark, two new guests, young men, limp past the open doors of our room. They are so evidently footsore that Morikawa grins in sympathy. "Henro," he says.

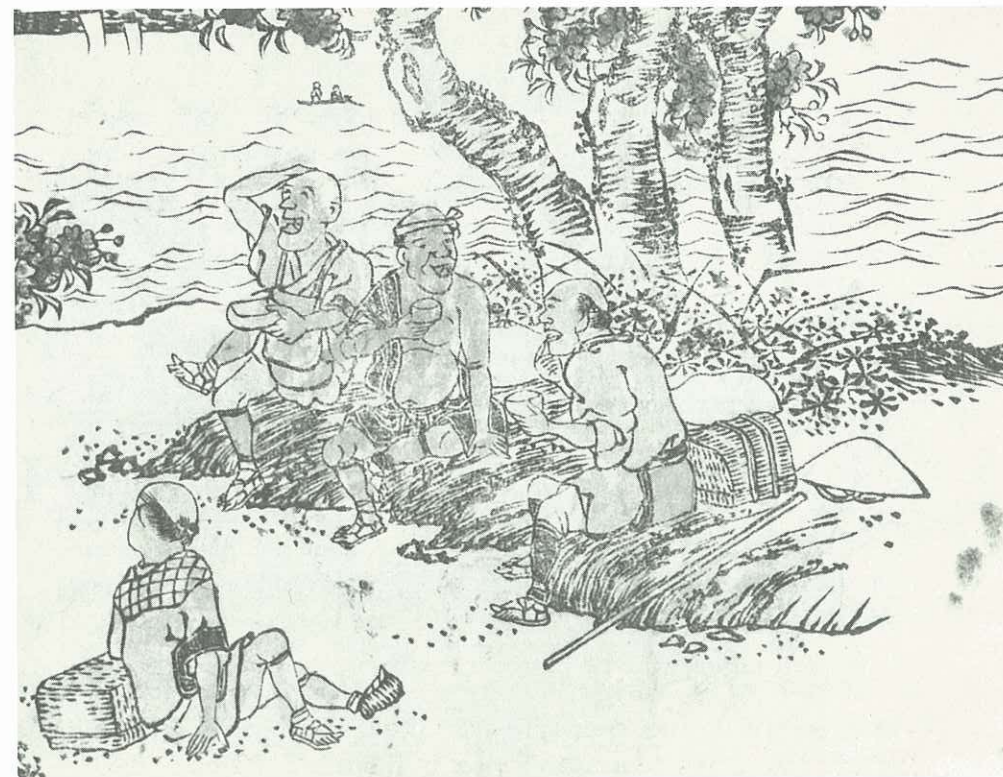
After they have bathed and dined we call on them. The older, whom I guess to be in his thirties, does the talking. He tells us that he works in an office in Osaka. Year before last he began his pilgrimage and he has continued it every time he could get a few days' holiday. Sometimes the younger chap has accompanied him,

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Henro resting (detail from a book illustration by Shugetsu)

sometimes not. They have walked the pilgrimage not in sequence but choosing a section according to the time available. (Japanese employees are granted a week or two of annual holiday but few consider it within the work ethic to take it.)

We are now in the midst of what is called Golden Week: seven days that include three holidays—April 29, the Emperor's birthday; May 3, Constitution Day, celebrating the new constitution; and May 5, the ancient festival of Boys' Day (now given the unisex name Children's Day). By using the weekend and taking one day off from work, these two have given themselves five days. They traveled all last night to make an early start this morning. They have today walked more than forty miles, and worshiped at Temple Forty along the way. We admit that to us such a walk seems