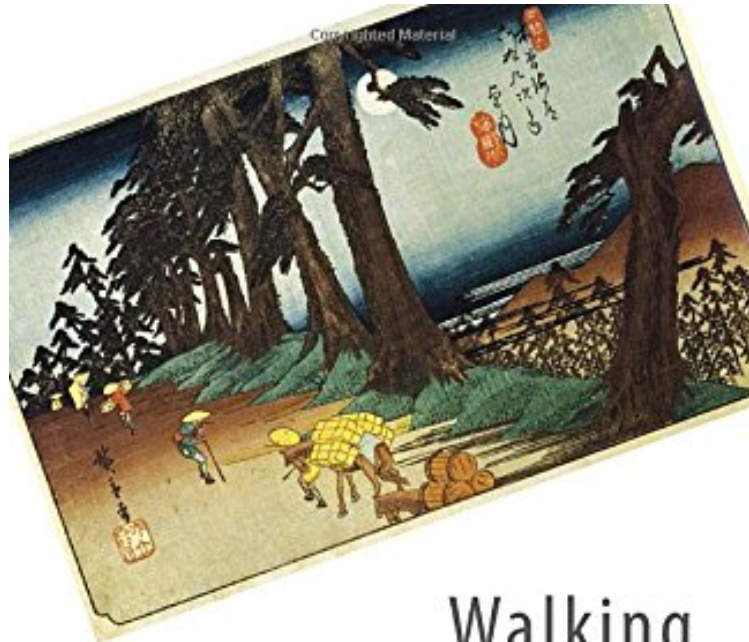


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William Scott Wilson

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William Scott Wilson : Walking the Kiso Road: A Modern-Day Exploration of Old Japan before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Walking the Kiso Road: A Modern-Day Exploration of Old Japan:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Delightful and Wonderful By Serena A quietly beautiful book that allows the lucky reader to accompany Mr. Wilson on his walk along the Kiso road. I have been all over Japan and just when I think I've done about all I need to do there I read another book that gives me more ideas for making plans.

What makes this book unusually special is that the author translates all the haiku and other poetry he reads along the way. I loved the description of climbing the steaming Mount Ontake in the 70's and his friend telling him it hasn't erupted in 6,000 years. The author goes home and just happens to see an article stating that the Mountain erupted not long after he was there. And much later, in 2014, there was a major eruption and at least 54 people were killed. And then I very much enjoyed the giant rubber duckies that marked a highway construction area. That is just so Japanese. It made me smile. The old Japan is disappearing quickly. Mr. Wilson's lovely book describing what he sees along the Kiso Road reassures me that it is not all gone yet. There are a lot of books written by westerners who have lived in Japan a couple of years. Most are enjoyable, but only a few are extra special. Walking the Kiso Road joins my favorite books about Japan which include: Alan Booth's books, Rebecca Otowa's *At Home in Japan*, and *The Road through Miyama* by Leila Philip. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Neither a travel guide nor a personal exploration. By Dog-year-old Wilson is a martial arts expert--as a translator of treatises and as a practitioner. Here is text about a classic trek that the author has done a few times, but whose love of hiking is to empty his mind. He walks from post-town to post-town along a road that modern train travel has more or less bypassed. Thus we are offered some concrete descriptions (flora, food, shops, lodges, elevations, views, blisters, and vignettes from his own non-solo hikes on the Kiso-ji in the past), and some lovely poetry (in Japanese and in English), but without any romanticizing or many historical or cultural digressions. This is not a "travel book," in the sense that it has no maps or pictures; nor is it trying to be a personal reminiscence, although the snapshots of the aging locals are vivid. Though easy to read, it feels like a text stitched from notes, both his own and from writers in the past who travelled this forested, mountainous road. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A Writer Intimately Acquainted With Japan's Language, Culture and Geography. By vorpal We live in a time when travel and writing about it have become a crowded field, with lots of noisy look at me! blogs and books and tweets and all, competing against one another for our attention. You get the sense many of these authors are ripping around as far and wide and as speedily as they can to generate underwriting for an adrenaline-driven travel addiction. And while the writers are too hip to sign up for a bus junkets and cruises, so many don't seem to really get the places they write about having only the most superficial grasp of the genius loci of their destinations. It makes you long for the days of Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh and Freya Stark, when the going really was good. Just when I had despaired of finding travel writing I could abide, along comes *Walking the Kiso Road*, by the notable translator of Japanese literature, William Scott Wilson. Mr. Wilson, obviously, has an advantage over the world hoppers, in that he speaks and writes Japanese, knows the culture and history intimately, and is well versed in the country's spiritual and physical geography. What a delight to walk along with Mr. Wilson as guide. He is never intrusive, but allows us to know a wee bit about him through brief albeit tantalizing glimpses. More importantly, though, he ushers us to the various stops along the storied pilgrimage route, helping us experience the myriad sights and sounds, while pointing the way toward the Kiso Road's less obvious mysteries. It is a revelation to those such as myself who know relatively little about the country, to discover that meditative pilgrimages in a nation as populous as Japan are still possible. To be sure, a pilgrimage is not a trek, nor is it strictly speaking even travel. Kiso Road, much like the better known (to Westerners) Camino de Santiago is probably most profitably experienced by those who at least have a sense of what a spiritual pilgrimage is meant to be, although trekkers and hikers and even lowly tourists may enjoy it too. And that goes for this book its virtues are many, and open to whatever type of explorer might choose to read it. Mr. Wilson's writing is polished but understated, wry rather than ironic. This book was as refreshing as one of those inns on this ancient road where the footsore Mr. Wilson found rest and renewal.

Step back into old Japan in this fascinating travelogue of the famous Kiso Road, an ancient route used by samurai and warlords, which remains much the same today as it did hundreds of years ago. Take a trip to old Japan with William Scott Wilson as he travels the ancient Kiso Road, a legendary route that remains much the same today as it was hundreds of years ago. The Kisoji, which runs through the Kiso Valley in the Japanese Alps, has been in use since at least 701 C.E. In the seventeenth century, it was the route that the daimyo (warlords) used for their biennial trips along with their samurai and porters to the new capital of Edo (now Tokyo). The natural beauty of the route is renowned and famously inspired the landscapes of Hiroshige, as well as the work of many other artists and writers. Wilson, esteemed translator of samurai philosophy, has walked the road several times and is a delightful and expert guide to this popular tourist destination; he shares its rich history and lore, literary and artistic significance, cuisine and architecture, as well as his own experiences.

A gemlike book, brimming with sharp insights on the way Japan's ancient past continues to inform its present. . . . A carefully observed and sagacious travelogue. *New York Times Book About the Author* WILLIAM SCOTT WILSON is the foremost translator into English of traditional Japanese texts on samurai culture. His best-selling translations include *Hagakure*, *The Book of Five Rings*, and *Taiko*. He is also the author of *The Lone Samurai*, a biography of the legendary samurai Miyamoto Musashi, and *The One Taste of Truth*, on the history of tea and Zen. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. From the introduction: "The Kiso Road--the Kisoji in Japanese--runs about sixty miles through central Nagano Prefecture and mostly follows first the Narai and then the Kiso River (traveling from

north to south) through the granite forest-covered mountains of that same name. It is the heart of the longer 340-mile road, the Nakasendo (also called the Kisokaido), which stretches from Tokyo to Kyoto. It is called a 'road,' and it often runs parallel to or on Highway 19 but just as often wanders into the mountains as a smaller paved road or just a narrow path of dirt or ancient paving stones. The Kisoji has been in use for perhaps over two thousand years, although it was most popular as a thoroughfare during the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries, when travelers walked, rode on horseback, or were carried in palanquins through the mountains, along scary suspension bridges built on cliffs overlooking the swift river, and over the steep passes. "It is not too easy to get lost on this road, although it can be done, as I have sometimes proven; markers are posted along the way in Japanese, English, Korean, and Chinese because the authorities do not want to go looking for you. There are also eleven villages, established in 1601 as post towns, about six to seven miles apart, where the modern hiker can stop for the night in traditional inns just as his counterparts did far back into the past. And, although there are sometimes quick gains and drops in elevation as the road meanders through the mountains, even people in moderate shape can walk the entire sixty miles in less than a week. My preference, however, is to take it at a much more moderate pace. The beauty of the mountains and rivers, and the experience of the traditional baths, cuisine, and bedding in the inns are not to be rushed through. "This account is also somewhat of a story map. Over the years that I've traveled the Kisoji, I've been lucky enough to meet with a number of people--innkeepers, coffee shop owners, farmers, Buddhist priests, and hikers like myself--who have generously shared their knowledge of the rich history, traditions, and folklore of the area. Because of the antiquity of the road--it is first mentioned in a Japanese chronicle dated 701 CE--there are also a number of books that describe not only the geography and topography of the road, but also local spots inhabited by ghosts and animals like foxes and badgers that bewitch the unwary traveler, or that are famous for some romantic or tragic event. These guidebooks, many of which were written in the early 1800s when the Kiso Road was at its greatest popularity, were intended for the inquisitive traveler of those times, and are still wonderfully informative. Poets and journalists such as Basho and Shiki also loved traveling the Kiso Road, and, along with excerpts from the early guidebooks, I have included a number of their poetic impressions, many by Santoka, the shabby Zen priest/haiku poet/sake drinker, whose presence I felt constantly. "In this way, the territory covered here is not just geographical, the time line not limited, and the hike not mine alone."