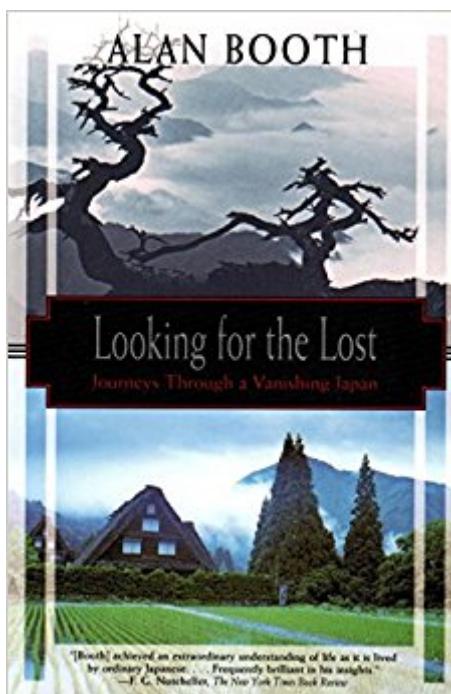


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Looking For The Lost: Journeys Through A Vanishing Japan (Kodansha Globe)



Synopsis

A VIBRANT, MEDITATIVE WALK IN SEARCH OF THE SOUL OF JAPAN Traveling by foot through mountains and villages, Alan Booth found a Japan far removed from the stereotypes familiar to Westerners. Whether retracing the footsteps of ancient warriors or detailing the encroachments of suburban sprawl, he unerringly finds the telling detail, the unexpected transformation, the everyday drama that brings this remote world to life on the page. Looking for the Lost is full of personalities, from friendly gangsters to mischievous children to the author himself, an expatriate who found in Japan both his true home and dogged exile. Wry, witty, sometimes angry, always eloquent, Booth is a uniquely perceptive guide. Looking for the Lost is a technicolor journey into the heart of a nation. Perhaps even more significant, it is the self-portrait of one man, Alan Booth, exquisitely painted in the twilight of his own life.

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Customer Reviews

Booth's *The Roads to Sata* (Weatherhill, 1986), which recounts his impressions and experiences during a 2000-mile walking tour of Japan, is considered a classic of its genre. In the present work, Booth, who died in 1992, offers a sequel. The book is divided into three parts, each involving a journey connected to a famous person or event in Japanese history. The first, entitled "Tsugaru," follows the path taken by the Japanese novelist, Osamu Dazai (1909-48), in a work by the same title; the second, "Saigo's Last March," follows the retreat of the tragic leader of the 1877 Satsuma Rebellion, Saigo Takamori, to his death in his home city of Kagoshima; and the third part, "Looking

for the Lost," explores the setting of the 12th-century Japanese classic, *The Tale of the Heike*. All three episodes contain Booth's customary blend of rich historical and cultural background with fascinating and often humorous anecdotal experience. Recommended for all libraries with an interest in Japan and especially for those owning Booth's earlier work. --Scott Wright, Univ. of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minn. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Likening Booth to fellow quirky British traveler-writer Bruce Chatwin is inevitable, but Booth was kinder and gentler--less of a curmudgeon, more down to earth, more of a collector of people. For this book, the last before he died of stomach cancer while still in his 40s, Booth set off to retrace three journeys through Japan originally made by literary and military figures. The resultant miserable, rain-sodden walks he made yielded him seldom-seen, tiny villages populated by Japan's lost generation of rural, elderly, unsophisticated folk. He delighted in them but realized, bittersweetly, that such people will soon be lost forever as the new Japan of laser discs and karaoke creeps into even their precincts. Always, Booth transmits his fascination with life's small moments and the country's small details and thereby makes of his book a truly engaging, fascinating look at the Japan that doesn't make headlines. Booth's love for and frustration with his adopted country and his traveling both come out, too, and seem particularly poignant because we know that these journeys were his last. --Mary Ellen Sullivan --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I was really impressed with Alan Booth's *Roads to Sata* and was relishing the chance to read his follow up, *Looking For The Lost* (1995). And again I was impressed, the first section, "Tsugaru" is Booth's retracing the path of Aomori author Osamu Dazai, who was famous for his writing and booze fueled life and many suicides attempts-one of which, was successful. The name of Dazai's book that Booth uses as his guide of the region was *Return to Tsugaru: Travels of a Purple Tramp*, which gave Both points of reference even though that trip was undertaken 50 years earlier. In the book Booth tells a waitress at the inn that was once Dazai's home that he wasn't particularly a fan-and I can believe it. (I'm not such a huge fan of a selfish miserable man either) I think it was merely a good excuse for him to explore this remote northern-most region of Honshu-an area that he professed his love for earlier and mentioning that when he first arrived in Japan he lived just south of Amori in Akita prefecture. I know very little of the region save its regional products, the Namahage devil festival / costumes, and the famous colorful float festival known as the Nebuta

festival. But his observations of the people and region are intriguing. He was particularly impressed with Hirosaki, which he called one of his favorite places in Japan. In the second section, "Saigo's Last March," Booth follows in the footsteps of Saigo Takamori's famous retreat from Mount Enodake in the northern part of Miyazaki prefecture through mountains down to his home town of Kagoshima. I suppose I would like to read more about Takamori and his impact on modern Japan sometime. However, in this sparsely populated area Booth has many false starts and he is not able to keep up with Takamori's timetable for the march. Along the way locals tell him the history of Takamori's doings in their villages during his long march home. As usual, beer is drank, chats are had, and this trip seems more miserable than others because of the constant rain he encounters on his walk. Again wry observations about the people and Booth's impressions are made as well. Of those two prefectures I have only been to the main cities of Miyazaki and Kagoshima, so the descriptions of the rugged land is somewhat of a revelation-however, the impression was made on trips from the airports into the main cities on those trips. In the final section, "Looking for the Lost," Booth attempts to follow and explore the retreat of the Heike (also known as the Taira) clan that was said to have been chased out of Kyoto into the north most likely along the Nagara River. Like the previous two entries there are witty exchanges with locals, more wry observations, and more historical recounting. However, this section also tells the reader more about the author and his obsessions that brought him to Japan in the first place, and why he abandoned them. This is triggered by the staid historical museums and preserved houses for tourism that are scattered about the region: "I was reminded, strolling around the breezy paths, of why I had come to Japan in the first place-not in search of the coyly picturesque but of something I had thought might be living and was dead." "So culturally edifying is the Noh that great pains have been made to pickle it. like much else in Japan that is deemed worthy of awe, the Noh has been stripped of any connection with life as it is actually lived and frozen into a fossil." But rather than retreat, he finds other interests that keep him in Japan writing about the land, the people, the culture, and the customs as he experienced them firsthand on his travels. The book ends with a powerful prophecy of the author's future. It is a fitting companion to his earlier masterpiece *The Roads to Sata*. Booth has earned a rightful place among the ranks of the best visitors who wrote so insightfully about Japan like Donald Richie and Ian Buruma.

...but the encounters along the way,, usually over beer, that make the journey significant. The *Roads to Sata: A 2000-Mile Walk Through Japan*, which I read a year and a half ago, was my introduction to the works of Alan Booth. It is the account of his journey - walking every step of the way - across the four principal islands of Japan, from the very northern tip of Hokkaido to Cape

Sata, at the southern tip of Kyusha. (He exhibits his droll wit by describing his insistence never to take a vehicle, even over short distances, as his "Protestant Walk Ethic"). It was a long walk of 2,000 miles. Given his fondness for beer (he never mentions, ever, drinking water), he notes in the present volume that one reviewer called The Roads to Sata: A 2000-Mile Walk Through Japan a "...2,000 mile pub crawl." In the process though, Booth reveals that he is an incisive observer of the Japanese, and a Japan that is beyond the experience of virtually all non-Japanese speakers. He had come to Japan in 1970 to study Noh theater, married a Malaysian of Chinese decent, and decided to stay, becoming fluent in the language as part of the process. This would be his last work, published posthumously. He died of cancer in 1993. Booth's last work is composed of three parts. Each part is structured around a hike of two to four weeks. The travelogue part covers sore feet, welcoming to rude ryokan innkeepers, and, for anyone thinking of duplicating these trips, a LOT of rain. But then, at least he is not camping in it. Even by the late '80's, there is still the general assumption of many he meets that he cannot speak (or read) Japanese because he is a gaijin (foreigner). But his wanderings are not random; he structures them around a historical personage or event, and thus the "looking" (or, as Proust would say, the "searching") for the impact of the past on the present. In the first two trips, he went to "extremes" of sort. Although he did not visit the northern most island, Hokkaido, this time, he did hike the Tsugaru peninsula, in far northwestern Honshu (which is the largest island). It is May, and cold, though the cherry blossoms will soon be abloom. He decides to follow the travelogue of Dazai Osamu, who journeyed in this area in 1944, during the final year of World War II for the Japanese. Osamu was certainly a strange character, who attempted suicide on four occasions, and succeeded on the fifth. Booth, in his humorous way, debunks and disputes much of Dazai's account. Still, many in the region recognize him for placing this remote peninsula on the "tourist map." The second trip is in the far south, on the island of Kyushu, in the heat of August. Booth wanted to retrace the steps of the defeated army of "the lost cause," at the same time of year that it had actually occurred. It was the last "civil war" on the main islands of Japan. Saigo Takamori, much romanticized in the region, led the revolt of the last of the samurai class. Swords against the guns of the central government, with predictable results. Saigo did his own version of Mao's "the long march", and it taxed Booth to keep up with the schedule. The third trip was in the middle, starting from Nagoya, which had to be completely rebuilt after WW II bombing. (Fittingly, the town is located between Kyoto and Tokyo (Edo, as it was once called). Booth is chasing down the remnants of a much earlier conflict, which commenced in 1180, and lasted five years. This is related in The Tale of the Heike, a constant companion of sorts. The winners might write the history, but Booth demonstrates that it is the losers that write the literature.

After the Kyoto faction was defeated, the remnants fled into the remote mountainous regions of the "spine" of Honshu... one of the town's names, Taira, is probably derived from a leader of the Heike. Many of the houses in this region have roofs that are thatched, and steeply pitched, because of the snow. But those that can repair them are dying off, with no replacements, and Booth predicts that, say, by now, only a few at designated "tourist spots" will remain. The book is replete with wise observations. A chapter that resonated with me is entitled "Pickled Culture", and it reflected my one experience with the Noh theater. And by someone who had come to Japan to study it. He says: "...(a Noh production) is about as comprehensible to a cross-section of modern Japanese society as an oral rendition of Beowulf in the original would be to a cross-section of modern British society." Finally, what he calls the "niggling" in his gut was felt when he crossed the spine of Honshu, which would be diagnosed as cancer, 27 months later, and to which he would succumb. A keen observer, with a humanist heart, and I wish we could have shared a beer. He is missed. 5-stars, plus.

If you're sick of the usual "Japan is a country of opposites"-type schlock that appears in most travelogue about Japan, then "Looking for the Lost" (or Booth's other book, "The Roads to Sata") are wonderful antidotes. Through simple, real-life observations and exchanges -- no grandiose oversimplifications and cliches here! -- Booth presents the complexity, silliness, friendliness, biases, perspectives, history, modernity, antiquity and culture of the Japan beyond the big cities. As a Tokyoite for seven years (transplanted from NYC), I can say without equivocation that Booth's two tomes are the most accurate, truest, loveliest texts you will ever read about the country.

I first read Alan Booth's books when I was living in Kyushu, and wanted to learn more about Saigo Takamori. His tale of trying to trace Saigo's epic trek through the back mountains of Miyazaki mixed scholarship and the travel essay brilliantly, and made me want to learn more -- though definitely not to retrace the steps! The author's fatigue and misdirections were skilfully reflected in passages on the physical torments Saigo Takamori endured. The reader feels like he is peeking into the period of the Satsuma rebellion and will feel grateful to return to modern time. Booth's affection for Japan is not without exasperation, but is limned by an acceptance of himself and Japanese society that borders on the luminous. You might appreciate some of his reflections more if you have lived in Japan, but no historian or connoisseur of language can fail to appreciate his writing, which deftly moves between the philosophical, the absurd, and the purely human.

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