

Once a Week ...

... a short essay/story from woodblock printmaker David Bull

At Last!

One day, just a short while ago, riding the shinkansen from Tokyo to Osaka, I finally, finally had the experience that I have been waiting for ever since first setting foot in this country back in 1981. At last, I was able to get a good view of Fuji-san!

I have travelled down the Tokaido route from Kanto to the Kansai many times in the past 14 years, but I had never before been able to see this sight. Of course, I have seen the beautiful tourist pictures, with the majestic snow-capped cone rising into a clear blue sky, but until now, I thought that such pictures must be a kind of trick.

Each time I rode the shinkansen, I was careful to reserve a seat on the north side of the train. It is the other side, with the south facing windows, that actually has the better view, overlooking the sea during parts of the trip, but it wasn't the ocean view I wanted! It was that world-famous view of Japan's most well-known landmark that I wanted to see. But every time - every time - I passed by, I was always disappointed. Where was that mountain?

On some occasions, the trip would be made in gloomy weather, with dark rain clouds hanging overhead for the entire distance. During these trips, I knew there was no chance, and didn't even bother looking up from my book ... Sometimes though, I would depart from Tokyo station in gorgeous sunny weather. 'Surely today will be my day!', I thought. But it was not to be. As the train drew closer and closer to Fuji-san, the sky would inevitably become darker and darker ...

I became more and more convinced that Fuji-san didn't exist; it was just a myth! Perhaps it had actually been there many years ago, but construction companies had dug it up bit-by-bit to use for building super-highways or something like that. Nobody noticed that it was gone, because there are always so many clouds gathered at that spot!

What made the situation worse were the friends who came back from trips in that area invariably reporting the same thing: "We had a fantastic view of Mt. Fuji during our trip!" My friend Sadako did this to me just a couple of weeks ago, eagerly describing the long snow-dusted curves of the mountain-side standing out against the sky. Surely all these people couldn't be lying to me, could they?

But as I said, the other day, to my immense relief, I saw it at last, so now I too believe it is real. I remember hearing an old proverb about Fuji-san: 'Each true Japanese must climb Mt. Fuji some-time in his life ... but only a fool will do it twice'. Well, I don't know about climbing it, but at least I have now seen it once. Do you think there will be a second time?

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