



Birthday Suits

I was on the train the other evening, and couldn't help smiling at the sight of the family sitting across from me - a fairly young mother and father, with two children. The kids had both come to the end of their stamina, and were fast asleep, the little boy slumped against his mother's shoulder, and the little girl in her father's arms. It was clear from the things they were carrying and the 'floatable' toy in the luggage rack above, that they had spent the day at the beach and were now on the way home.

I had to smile at this because I myself was feeling exactly like that little boy - wishing that I could fall asleep on somebody's shoulder - and for exactly the same reason. I too was 'plum tuckered out' after a long day in the sun and surf at the seaside.

I had been back again to my favourite beach, the remote little cove on the Miura Peninsula that I have been using as a model for some designs in my current landscape series. I 'discovered' this place back in about 1996 or so, and I have been trekking back there ever since, both on sketching trips and simply for relaxing. Although I frequently take some overnight gear and stay until the next day, today's visit was just a day-trip. I needed some images of underwater plants to use in an upcoming print, so had watched the calendar for a good conjunction of low tide and sunny weather. It wasn't easy to get the two factors to line up, but when they finally did - just the other day - off I went!

As it happens, it was a Saturday, and it was unusual for me to be visiting this beach on the weekend. It's usually in mid-week that I go there, as I of course want as much solitude as possible. There is rarely anyone around, and I can enjoy a completely 'private' time, lazing around in and out of my tent, swimming and napping as the mood strikes. And because of the isolation, I never bother with a swimsuit.

But this time being a Saturday, I guessed that it wouldn't be possible to enjoy that kind of privacy, so packed a t-shirt and shorts to use while swimming. When I arrived shortly before noon, I saw immediately that I had been correct, as there were indeed other people around, scattered in ones and twos along the curve of the cove.

I walked along the shore, looking for a suitable place to spread my sheet and settle in; as we all know, it's customary in this kind of situation to try and find a spot kind of 'spaced out' away from other people. I walked past the first person, a man stretched out on a kind of lounge chair that he must have brought with him. He nodded a wordless greeting, as people do, and I nodded back. He was naked.

Some meters further on, another couple of guys sat on a groundsheet, and again, we exchanged nodded greetings. They were both naked.

I then came to a fairly open space, and according to the 'rules' of spacing, it seemed like this was the best place for me to park, so I settled there. I could see another guy a bit further along the beach, and he got up and took a quick dip in the sea. And yes, he also was 'au naturel'.

So it seems that this isolated cove, which for years I have been thinking of as 'my own personal private nude beach', is actually a very public one! I had no idea that such a concept existed here in Japan, although the idea is very common in other places I have lived.

David Bull
Seseragi Studio
Nagabuchi 8-4-5 Ome City
Tokyo Japan 198-0052
<http://astoryaweek.com>

Well, that settled it. 'When in Rome ...' is the rule to follow in such a situation, so I was able to have my swim in the usual 'free' way. At least I was for the first few minutes ... until I ran into a snag.

It was a very hot, and very sunny day, and this was my first beach outing of the year. My clothes had been off for no more than around ten minutes, when I felt that tingling on my arms and shoulders that warned me: if I wasn't careful, I was going to get completely grilled. All the other people in sight were a rich deep brown colour - all over - and it was obvious that they were regular visitors to this beach. I, of course, was a sickly pale white - all over. Ten minutes was all I dared, and I had to put my shirt and pants back on.

During the afternoon, I had no opportunity to talk with any of the other people on the beach, but I could well imagine what they were thinking - 'Hah! What a wimpy white guy!'

I wanted to shout back, "No, you don't understand! *I'm* the one who pioneered this place 15 years ago!" As if they would believe *that*!

David Bull
Seseragi Studio
Nagabuchi 8-4-5 Ome City
Tokyo Japan 198-0052
<http://astoryaweek.com>