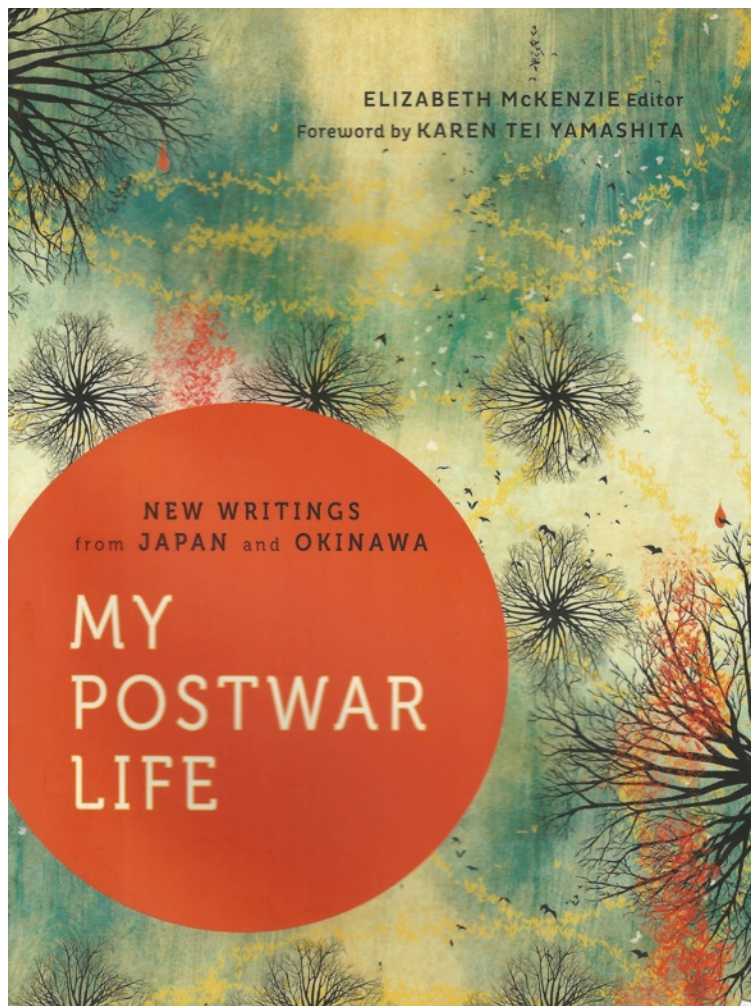


An Exchange for Fire— The Final Pilgrimage of Poet Craig Arnold

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By Christopher Blasdel (all rights reserved)



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On the morning of April 28th, 2009, I was settling into my workday at the International House of Japan in the Roppongi district of Tokyo. After several weeks of cold weather, it had finally warmed and the day promised to be glorious. Vivid rows of azaleas bloomed in the Japanese garden outside our office.

Suddenly a secretary appeared with an urgent message: the police chief from Yakushima Island, a well-known tourist spot far south of Tokyo, had called, asking if we knew a foreign traveler named Craig Arnold. The police chief wanted us to return his call right away.

Such an inquiry, coming out of the blue, could not be good news, and so with a sense of foreboding I made the call. After I got the chief on the line, he told me the news: A traveling foreigner named Craig Arnold had apparently gone missing the previous evening on Kuchinoerabu Island; a small, rugged volcanic island located about 12 kilometers west of Yakushima. Since there were no police stationed on Kuchinoerabu Island, a contingent of policemen from Yakushima made their way over to Kuchinoerabu Island on the morning ferry to begin a search for him. A card with my name and contact number of the International House of Japan was found in the backpack Craig left at the inn. The police chief wanted to know who Craig was, how I might be connected with him and, most importantly, how they could get in contact with his next of kin.

It was no coincidence that Craig had my card. As director of the Arts Program of the International House of Japan, it is my duty to oversee a program known as the US-Japan Creative Artists Program. This program, sponsored by the Japan-US Friendship Commission and the NEA, sends five US-based artists each year to Japan for an extended residency. Craig was chosen as one of the recipients from its highly competitive application process. The International House of Japan, also known as the I-House, facilitates the residency and provides both general and specific support to each artist during their residency in Japan. We act as the artists' entry into the culture and provide logistic, artistic and personal support.

Craig arrived in Japan on March 16, 2009, a little less than six weeks prior to the phone call from the Yakushima police. As one of the artists chosen for the 2009 program, he had written an ambitious proposal: to climb the various volcanoes of Japan,

explore their surrounding countryside and research their history and geology. In his application, he also proposed to converse “with people who live in their shadows, with other travelers, other writers and record impressions of landscapes both natural and social.”

Craig described this proposal as a “pilgrimage,” and the experience in Japan was to tie in with a larger project, a collection of poetry entitled *An Exchange for Fire*, where he planned to chronicle his travels through the volcanic countryside of Greece, Sicily, Guatemala, and Nicaragua—places he had already visited. Japan was to be the final stop for his pilgrimage.

The seeds of this project began while a Rome Prize fellow at the American Academy of Rome. He was there, along with his fiancée Rebecca Lindenberg and son Robin, to finish his book of poetry, *Made Flesh*, but he became bogged down and had problems concentrating. On the suggestion of Rebecca, Craig took off for a solo visit to Sicily’s Mt. Aetna, in order to “find a new landscape for his thoughts.”¹

Mt. Aetna impressed Craig with its violent history of eruptions and made him acutely aware of the destructive power of volcanoes. Later, he traveled to the Greek island of Santorini, a huge volcanic caldera in the southern Aegean Sea, where he could see the ferocious remnants of eruptions. He made special note of an extraordinary explosive eruption that occurred in the second millennium BCE. This eruption, said to be one of the largest in recorded history, destroyed the Minoan civilization possibly inspired Plato’s story of Atlantis.

Although humans from all cultures or ages share hopes and struggles, worldly aspirations pale when put into context of topic cycles of destruction and creation. These cataclysmic occurrences became a fascination for Craig, and “the volcano became an emblem of geology’s indifference toward humanity.” The title of the proposed work itself, *An Exchange for Fire*, comes from the Greek philosopher Heraclites, “whose mystic notions of change and impermanence comes closest perhaps, to the insights of Zen Buddhism, blurring our conceptions of what constitutes Western, what Eastern thought.”

¹ Interview with R. Lindenberg, Nov. 18, 2010

Craig continued to search out active volcanoes and climb them. Their extreme and violent landscapes were for him a kind of ritual; each step up the mountain a meditation. In this reverie, he could ponder not only the fate of history or the locals who lived close to omnipresent danger, but he could also view his own life and mull questions of artistry, fatherhood and partnership. Sauntering the rugged physical terrain became a metaphor for traversing the shifting inner geography of the mind.

Japan, as a country with a long history of violent volcanoes and a culture where the idea of impermanence is an integral part of the national aesthetic, was the natural next step on Craig's journey. Japan also has a long tradition of the pilgrimage as developed from ancient Buddhist, native animistic and shaman traditions. Pilgrims in Japan range from the legendary, hard core *yamabushi* monks who undergo austere physical disciplines over a period of years and gain, at least in the popular mind, extraordinary prowess in both the physical and spiritual realms. There are also less rigorous pilgrimages, most notably the Shikoku *junrei*, where lay folk take a few days or weeks out of their lives to visit a series of 88 temples located throughout the Island of Shikoku. No matter what the level of difficulty, each pilgrimage becomes an outer reflection of an inner necessity to rise above the vicissitudes of the mundane world and attain understanding and peace. In this light, Craig's volcano pilgrimage became the "independent variable that everything else is tested against."²



Craig arrived at our office on March 17th for an orientation that we arranged for him to explain the conditions and details of the grant. He walked into our office dressed in jeans, a long sleeve T-shirt and a colorful cotton scarf wrapped around his neck. Tall, with shaven head and unshaven face, he was a refreshing anomaly to the formality of a Japanese office. Although tired and jet lagged from a long flight and even longer period of intensive travel in the US, he sat down and smiled, immediately softening the situation. Soon the conver-

² R. Lindenberg, *ibid.*

sation, which began on topics of mundane business, became vitalized with talk of poetry, travel and life experiences.

My first impression of Craig was that of an extremely intelligent and loveably engaging man, exuding an immediate, sensual intimacy. He had the power to effortlessly direct this sensuality toward anyone. This included my assistant, who later confided to me that she felt Craig was flirting with her, but I admitted to her that I felt the same thing. Such openness on a first meeting is rare in Japan, but it was perfectly natural with Craig. There was nothing forced about his familiarity, and this fascinated me.

Craig announced he planned to commence his volcano climbs as soon as possible. The first volcano he wanted to climb Mt. Asama, in Nagano Prefecture, only an hour or so away from Tokyo. The mountain is close enough to Tokyo that on a very clear day, one can see its upper slopes shimmering in the distance.

Craig asked me about climbing the mountain. I told him that it probably wouldn't be possible, for two reasons. Firstly, the peak, at 2568 meters, was still covered in deep snow, and secondly, Mt. Asama is an active volcano and climbing has been officially prohibited since 1972, although there are lulls in the volcanic activity and times and routes when it is possible to climb the peak in a minimal amount of danger. In actuality, however, the volcano had erupted just a month ago, in February, and it was presently being monitored very carefully.

As I spoke, I could see Craig's eyes widen, his interest intensifying, as if I had just given him more reason to make the climb. He seemed to think that the snow would be no problem, telling me he was used to climbing active volcanoes in extreme conditions. He must have then sensed my concern, however, for he quickly added that he was wise enough to know when to stop.

Soon afterwards, around March 20th, Craig took the bullet train up to Karuizawa and set off for the mountain. Karuizawa, located near the base of Mt. Asama, is famous as the summer home and playground of wealthy Japanese who escape the sultry summer heat of Tokyo in the town's high altitudes. During the summer months the town is bustling and full of specialty shops that cater to the city folk, but in the winter it returns to a quiet mountain village.

Karuizawa lies along one of the main *shinkansen* trunk lines radiating out from Tokyo. It passes by Mt. Asama, but the station is not all that close to the base of the mountain. Craig apparently thought about taking a bus from the station to the trail head, but decided to walk, thinking that the hike would focus his “restlessness, give it a pace and a direction.” He liked the idea of making the entire trek up the mountain on his own, without relying on public transportation.

Volcano Pilgrim, a blog³ Craig kept almost up to the day he disappeared, details his attempted trek up Mt. Asama and dealing with the snow and cold. The lower slopes where he began his hike were wintry but dry. It was easy hiking and the poet made keen note of everything around him.

Above the town you turn off the road onto an old nature trail, signposts with peeling pictures of wildlife, and follow its erratic switchback up and down the sides of ridge and gully. You meet no other hikers. It is still winter here, leafless and budless – the trees are some type of larch that loses its foliage in winter, and the only green thing is a globe of mistletoe in the high boughs of a tree. A few wax-pale berries have fallen on the path, and when you pick one up it pops between your fingers, releasing a sticky pearl of jelly.

Every now and then you pass a gap in the bare branches and catch a glimpse of Mt. Asama, still snow-topped and glittering.

As he climbed higher, his observations changed to reflect the increasing difficulty of the hike. There was more snow, the trail, leading deeper into the mountain, became more difficult, and even though he was still far from the summit, his wet feet bothered him. A hint of misery permeated his lines.

The going is not pleasant, steep and slippery. ... you are more exquisitely attuned to the unique sensation of dragging your ankles through snow that has fallen and melted and frozen again.

Craig often added personal haiku poetry to his blog, each one carefully following the 5-7-5-syllable rule of the genre:

*it is hard to feel
moved by natural beauty*

³ <http://volcanopilgrim.wordpress.com/>. The dates in his blog, for some reason, are unreliable. The dates I give here are recounted from my daily memos and receipts Craig left.

when your socks are wet

Unbeknownst to Craig, a well-paved road paralleled the trail. He discovered this when the trail finally crossed the road several kilometers up the mountain. There, to his relief, he found a small store—one of Japan’s ubiquitous konbini—and he stepped inside to dry off. While inside, he befriended a Japanese couple, Shin and Keiko, who, happen to be headed to the same hostel that Craig booked. They offered him a ride, which he gratefully accepted:

*the sweetest five words
to a hiker with sore feet –
do you want a ride*

Serendipitous encounters were not unusual for Craig. His sense of ease and warmth with complete strangers manifested even when fatigued, troubled or lost.

Shin and Keiko took a grateful Craig to the hostel. That evening during dinner, the hostel owner showed Craig a photo of himself, as a toddler, at the summit of Mt. Asama. This excited Craig and he began, in his basic Japanese, to pepper the man with questions on how to climb the mountain and where to find the best trail. When the owner realized that Craig was seriously thinking about climbing the volcano the next day, he clearly warned Craig that it was dangerous and officially closed. The hostel owner didn’t speak English all that well, and Craig struggled with Japanese, but the man made his point by saying that the mountain is a *deesu zoun* (“death zone”) while making an X sign with his hands. Craig turned to his new friend, Shin, to confirm; is it really unclimbable? Shin just countered with an enigmatic smile, which in Japan can mean a number of things, but in this case the unmistakable nuance was “yes, but I don’t want to tell you so directly.” Craig now had all the confirmation that he needed to know that the volcano was too dangerous to climb. Shin added in English: “self-responsibility,” as if he were worried that Craig might still try to make the trek up the mountain.

Still, Craig's purpose in coming to Japan was to climb such mountains, and there were many on his list. If he didn't make it up this one, now that he was so close to the summit, he may never again have the chance. In an almost prescient passage in his blog, he mulls the idea of self-responsibility versus his need to continue up to the summit.

These days you are low on self-responsibility. Only last month Mt. Asama erupted, throwing lava bombs a kilometer from the crater. A four-kilometer exclusion zone has been declared around the volcano, a perimeter that barely excludes the highway and the shrine of Onioshidashi-en to the north. Climbing it now would be, as with so many of your plans, a bad idea. This does not make it seem any less attractive. Whatever holds you back, it is not self-responsibility. There is also the matter of the snow. Climbing a mountain in the face of sudden fiery death has a certain romantic pathos to it, but slipping on ice and ending up in pieces at the bottom would just be embarrassing.

During his many climbs, Craig must have been intensely aware of the possibilities of falling. It is, of course, an unavoidable danger of mountaineering. But there is also a primordial fear of falling that we are all prey to. It is as if, once having learned to stand upright as a child, we spend our lives in fear of falling back down, either by accident or old age. Craig described an exercise in his drama class that was aimed to transform the fear of falling into a sensation of trust in the other.

There is a game you would play called Circle Fall. The cast forms a ring, with one of their number in the middle, close enough so that they may reach out and grasp him by the shoulders or under the arms. He stands with feet together, stiff and straight, closes his eyes. Then he gradually lets himself topple, forward or backward or to one side, like a tree the lumberjack has just given a final stroke of the axe.

Now he is in the hands of the others. As he falls, they must catch him, taking the weight of his body gently and gradually, raise him upright again. Then they give him another push, maybe in this direction, maybe in that. He falls, and is caught; he is stood back up, and toppled over again. One might think there would be the one joker in the pack who would let their fellow fall, but no one ever does. It would be more than a betrayal.

The next day Craig wisely decided not to try to climb the mountain and instead explored the perimeter and the area around the hostel, in particular the Onioshidashi-en; a five-kilometer lava flow consisting of sharp, crystallized lava that burst forth from the mountain when it erupted in 1783. A shrine constructed amongst the lava rocks is a popular place for tourists. The area is also the closest one can get to the summit of the volcano by highway, and from here one can clearly see Mt. Asama's peak. There are no large trees or vegetation obscuring the view.

He spent the day in the shadow of the peak, watching it but unable to climb. At the end of the day, on what he thought would be an easy return to the hostel, Craig got confused in the warren of small roads that criss crossed the mountainside and lost his way. Again, in a prescient passage, he describes his mounting anxiety at not finding his way back.

Somewhere between Onioshidashi-en and the hostel, you take a wrong turn, or several. It would not be hard to do—few of the road names are posted, and the arrows on the signs point in directions that make no sense to you, even if you could read them. You stumble on for an hour for two, for four.

Now dark is falling, and you are nowhere near anything you recognize. At times you catch glimpses of Mt. Asama through the trees, each time in an unexpected direction. You grow frustrated, you curse the hand-drawn map you made this morning. Anger drops you into sadness, and sadness into that slow sinking that you have never learned to pull yourself out of.

There is a sense of desperation and near panic in the account of this misadventure, though, being on paved roads and in the general proximity of civilization, Craig was never in any particular danger. Nonetheless, it was unnerving for him. Once again, he was “rescued” by his friends Shin and Keiko, who happened to pass him on their way to the train station. The hostel itself turned out to be just a block away; Craig had actually walked around it several times and had probably passed it without recognizing it.

Craig returned to Tokyo on the *shinkansen* on March 23rd. In order to save on hotel costs, he planned to leave for his next trek that very evening on the overnight

ferry. This time he headed to the more temperate waters south of Tokyo—the island of Miyakejima.

Miyakejima lies about 180 kilometers due south of Tokyo and is one of several volcanic islands that make up what is called the Izu group. Craig describes the islands in his blog:

Miyakejima, or Miyake Island, is one of the Izu-shōtō, the chain of islands that begins just beyond of Tokyo Bay and continues south along the juncture of two continental plates. All are to some degree volcanic. Miyake in most cases means “royal estate,” but here it probably remembers an older word, yake, that means “burning.” Like Stromboli, the island is essentially one big volcano, Mount Oyama.

During the last century, the volcano was fairly regular in its habits. Every twenty-odd years, a vent would open and pour lava down one face of the mountain, or a new cinder cone would be thrown up. This happened in 1940, 1962 and 1983. Lava flows are not good if they happen to end up in your backyard, but they move slowly and can usually be seen coming. At the old summit, all was relatively quiet. The crater lake became a tourist site, with a visitor’s center, pathways to scenic views, a gently steaming fumaroles surrounded by tropical flowers.

But in 2000 the volcano broke character. The pressure in the magma chamber had built up faster than any small pressure valve could relieve, and the result was what volcanologists call a Plinian eruption—sudden, violent, voluminous, and with a bang. (There are also super-Plinian eruptions, but records of these, as well as of the populations that experience them, tend not to survive).

Between June and August, there were three such major eruptions. Luckily, they all went up rather than sideways, or the result would have been catastrophic. As it was, no one died, but authorities were taking no chances, and the evacuation began.

The evacuation of the entire island was major news in Japan when it occurred in 2000. Most of the island’s 2800 residents were elderly and had known nothing but life on the island all their years. They were relocated to a busy suburb in Tokyo, where, bereft of their normal sense of community, vocations and activities, many suffered serious physical and mental stress. Residents were not allowed to return to the island un-

til 2005, and even then parts of the island were off limits. Poisonous emissions of sulfur dioxide still emanate from its fissures, and the authorities set up loudspeakers across the island to warn residents of the dangerous gasses and the wind conditions. A sudden shift in wind could bring disastrous results, and the inhabitants continue their lives under this threat. This human element of the cataclysmic aspects of volcanoes was of great interest to Craig, and one of the impulses driving his pilgrimage.

Craig set off from the small pier after the ferry arrived Miyakejima in the early morning. He had slept very little, didn't have a chance to change clothes, and was hungry. Yet at 5:30 in the morning there were no shops open, so Craig was relieved when he encountered one of the ubiquitous vending machines that dot every corner of Japan. He purchased a small can of hot coffee and sat down to wait for the bus to take him to the trailhead.

Craig was an inveterate chronicler of the immensity of detail that surrounded his peregrinations. As he sat on a road, he noticed a small animal stick its head out from the lush vegetation, readying to run across the road. Craig read the creature's intentions, but realizing that a car was approaching, he made a sound to frighten the animal, causing it to dart back into the bushes and thus preventing it from being run over. This act gave Craig a small pleasure.

If nothing else you have saved a life today. A life other than your own, that is. Danger has a way of cutting through melancholy, the real fear blinding you to the fear dimly imagined. If you could only always just have escaped death, you would never be sad again.

Miyakejima had none of the wintry, forbidden quality of Mt. Asama. It was warm and welcoming and appeared more like a picnic than a climb fraught with danger. Yet even in this complacency, Craig sensed foreboding and struggled to free himself from his fears. Danger, whether it be from a car about to run over a small animal or a sudden volcanic eruption, was never far from the poet's mind.

Suddenly the island's loudspeakers crackled to life. Craig understood only the *ohaiyō gozaimasu* "good morning," and wondered if a warning for the sulfurous gasses had been issued. Since he could not understand, and no one was around to explain or warn him, he decided to ignore it. It was more important that he begin his climb.

But the hot coffee has helped you reach a kind of resolution. There is nothing for you to do but to walk, following the slope of the roads upward, to see how far you can get before something or someone makes you stop.

As he began his ascent, Craig realized that the climb was not difficult. In less than an hour he found the road that circled the base of the volcano and discovered where he could follow the road leading to the summit. To Craig's experienced estimation, he imagined he could be up and down the mountain in time to catch the afternoon ferry back to Tokyo. He continued around a bend in the road, where he suddenly had an unimpeded view of the summit. However, a single glance of the gasses streaming off the peak and the havoc wreaked by the eruption nine years ago made him realize he had made a serious mistake in judging the mountain.

It is as if you have wandered into some post-apocalyptic science fiction movie. There is the husk of what must have been the visitor's center. There is a backhoe, resting on its side, yellow paint pitted with rust. Whatever road once went to the summit is now under a lot of dirt and rockfall and dark gray ash.

The destructive effects of the eruption still lingered, and what was once a popular tourist path up the mountain, along with a public visitors center and sightseeing spot, now lay in ruins. He also realized that the huge plumes of sulfur dioxide gas spurting from the peak could not have been seen on his approach from the boat, since he arrived in the dark. But the plume was towering and the danger real. He then heard another siren, loud and piercing. He couldn't tell if it was a warning, but suddenly the wind shifted and the gas bore directly down on him.

This seems like an opportune moment to reconsider your plans for the morning. Luckily there is another road down, and you take it. The metal guardrails have been eaten half-away, and they twist off easily in your hand.

Back in Tokyo, Craig recounted these adventures to me in his inimitable storytelling technique; a way he had of relating events that made the mundane seem like high adventure and any subsequent danger like minor mishaps to the narrative. But when he related this story and its description of decay, I felt a sense of loneliness. Many

years ago, when the volcano was still asleep, I climbed the same mountain, and the landmarks he recounted in his story were familiar. Yet when I climbed it was in the company of others; happy families on picnics, young backpackers from Tokyo and industrious locals selling snacks and drinks at the visitors center. He had seen only ruins, and I think it made a profound effect on him. In Japan, there is nothing more forlorn than coming across abandoned, derelict structures that once hosted human activity.

I also had experiences getting lost in Japanese mountains. Trail and roads are often not marked, or if they are, it is only for only a few kilometers, providing hikers with a false sense of security before totally bewildering them. According to Rebecca, it was unusual for Craig to become totally lost, as he did on Mt. Asama. He was usually level headed and careful. Nonetheless, she did point out that he could be sometimes blasé about the inherent dangers in climbing. He had a singular focus and would only see what he wanted to accomplish. This at times blinded him to danger and made him seem rash, but it also provided a focused, almost visionary way of seeing the world.⁴ This is the world he shared with us in his writings.

I looked forward to hearing of his subsequent adventures. He planned to travel down the length of Japan and visit the active volcanoes of Kagoshima Prefecture (on the southern tip of Kyushu) and slowly make his way to Okinawa, where he lived briefly, years back, when his father was stationed there in the US Military.

In one conversation, Craig mentioned his strong interest in music and his early career as a musician. I was not surprised: his poetry reads with a definite musical cadence, and the clips I had seen of him reading his works had an element of an *avant-garde* musical performance. Since my specialty is music, in particular traditional Japanese music, I invited him to a concert I gave on April 4th, the night of his planned departure south.

The performance, at a small temple in the suburbs of Tokyo, was part of the opening events for an exhibition, *Sakura Kūkan* (“The Space of Cherry Blossoms”)

⁴ Lindenberg, *Ibid*.

hosted by the Japanese photographer Eikoh Hosoe, who had asked me to play shakuhachi⁵ to accompany his photographs.

Hosoe is one of Japan's most influential post-war photographers and is perhaps most famous for his depictions of the writer Yukio Mishima in a series of photographs Hosoe directed and took entitled *Ordeal by Roses*. The book has been out of print for many years, and Hosoe decided to exhibit large-scale digital scanings of the original photos of this and other older works in scroll like photographs placed face up on low tables that extended the length of the temple anteroom. One entered the large *tatami*-mat room, followed these scrolls, like a story unfolding, and then continued into the main hall where the shakuhachi performance took place. Craig attended with writer Patricia Chao, who also resided in Tokyo on the Japan-US Creative Artists' Program.

The small temple hall provided an intimate connection between the performer and the audience. Craig told me it was the first time to hear the shakuhachi, and he was much interested to hear it in a temple setting.

Hosoe and his son Kenji, also a photographer, chronicled the performance and audience with their cameras. In one of Kenji's photographs, Craig sits in the audience



a few feet from the music with an incredulous expression. Totally unaware of the camera, his face registers a look of extreme surprise. One wonders what kinds of tones he heard from the shakuhachi that occasioned this expression. I suspect that such a reaction—a look of inquisitiveness innocence bordering on disbelief—was not unusual for Craig,

and that it demonstrated the process by which he inquired into the world, whether at the vast and dangerous beauty of nature or the soft, subtle sounds of the shakuhachi.

⁵ Japan's vertical, five-holed bamboo flute. The instrument has a long relationship with Buddhism and the process of meditation. It is also very flexible and used in much contemporary and experimental music around the world.

After the performance there was a short reception, after which Craig took his leave to catch the night bus. As he left, he approached and hugged me goodbye. He held very tightly and suddenly, as we pulled apart, kissed me. It was an unexpected yet wonderful gesture; a heartfelt thanks from the poet and, I felt, the yearning of a very sensitive soul for others who might share his sensitivities. It was also, as it turned out, his parting gift to me.

Craig's plan was to be away for about six weeks and return to Tokyo to do a series of public readings. Later on Rebecca and son Robin were to join him from the states. He was very excited about his family coming to visit

In Kagoshima City, located on the southwest tip of Kyushu, he visited the active volcano Sakurajima, famous for its eruptions that spew forth smoke and detritus on almost a daily basis.

Kagoshima is the departure point to the volcanic chain of islands that lay on the way to Okinawa, many of which are still active. From Kagoshima Craig took the ferry to Yakushima Island.

Yakushima is one of the most idyllic of all Japanese islands and is known for its stunning scenery and biodiversity. In 1993, it was designated as Japan's first UNESCO World Heritage Site, mainly due to the presence of huge cryptomeria trees, some believed to be over 3000 years old.

Craig based himself for about ten days in Yakushima.⁶ According to the unedited and unpublished dairies found in his computer, he stayed in the local youth hostel and spent his days hiking, bicycling and, true to his gregarious nature, making friends and writing about his encounters. Underlying these entrees, however, was a restlessness and need to keep moving. He seemed impatient when weather or other unavoidable



⁶ The movements of Craig from this point on to his disappearance on April 28th were uncovered by the detailed investigation of the local Yakushima Police and my conversation with Rebecca.

circumstances weather stalled his journey. He couldn't sit still. In Volcano Pilgrim, he describes this need.

...it is like the shark who must keep moving, moving to breathe, moving to stay afloat, or else sink, into the dark blue depths, under the weight of endless tons of water, where even the light of the sun, if it could reach that far down, would be pale and cold.

The true significance of a pilgrimage is not in its completion, but in the process itself.

Craig's plan was to visit two active volcanoes near Yakushima: Satsuma Io-jima and Kuchinoerabu Island, before traveling on to Okinawa. For his first visit, he chose Satsuma Io-jima, a small island of about 11.6 square kilometers and 142 inhabitants, situated between Yakushima and Kagoshima Bay. Satsuma Io-jima's volcano is classed as an A type volcano⁷, and its steep sides soar 704 meters above sea level. It erupted as recently as 2004.

A local ferry services the island only three times a week. Craig did not want to spend any more time than necessary, so he arrived on the morning ferry, immediately began climbing and returned to the village by evening, where he spent the night and caught the morning ferry back to Kagoshima. He accomplished here what he had wanted to do on Miyakejima; a daylight climb timed to match the ferry schedule. Another reason for his haste was the lack of Internet or cell phone connection on these small islands. He loved to keep in touch with his friends and family in the US through Facebook and his blogs. He had, in fact, just purchased a new I-Phone and was using it for the first time on this trip. He kept in regular touch with Rebecca through his travels. Whenever he had Internet connection, Craig updated his activities.

Craig departed Yakushima on the morning of April 27th by ferry and arrived at the small island of Kuchinoerabu Island at 2:40 PM. Following the same *modus operandi* as Satsuma Io-jima, Craig planned to arrive in the afternoon, run up the moun-

⁷ The Japan Metrological Agency classifies volcanoes into type A, B and C. Type A volcanoes, the most dangerous, are ones that have been active over the last 10,000 years with high eruption activity for the last 100 years. There are a total of 13 type A volcanoes in Japan.

tain, then descend in time for dinner and leave the next day so he could post his recent activities online, since there was no Internet service on Kuchinoerabu island.

Craig befriended two passengers on the ferry. When they learned he had no place to stay, they offered to take him to the inn they had reserved, called Minshuku Watanabe, situated just few meters from the ferry dock in Honmura, the main settlement of the island. After the ferry landed, Craig went to the inn with his new friends, dropped his bags off and was informed that dinner was served at 7 PM. He asked directions to the mountain, drank a vitamin drink then left the inn with two hiking sticks.

Craig left the Honmura heading toward the mountain, passing by the island's only store, the Co-op, where several people saw him. They could not but help noticing a tall foreigner with a shaved head purposefully striding out of the village with hiking sticks. A little further out from Honmura, Craig came across a small settlement called Maeda, where a local guide, Mori Kifune, lives. Kifune saw Craig walking up the road past his house. Craig initiated conversation and asked if this road was the right way up the mountain. Kifune said yes, but also warned him against climbing at this late hour. Craig answered *daijōbu* ("no problem") and started to walk on. Kifune saw that Craig was in shape and an experienced mountain walker so was not too worried, though he decided to give Craig a ride to the trailhead in his car.

In third world countries, like Nicaragua, Craig always hired a local guide to take him up the mountain. This not only helped him navigate the terrain and kept him from getting lost, but it helped him steer through the local bureaucracy and, through interaction with the guides, provided him insight to the culture. Why he didn't hire local guides in Japan is still a mystery. Perhaps because he thought that Japan, being a first world country, would be safe enough, or that the cost of hiring guides would be too expensive or the language barrier too formidable? Whatever reason, Craig was lured by a sense that Japanese mountains would not be too dangerous.

Kifune took Craig up the mountain on a narrow but well maintained, paved road to a sand dam that lay at the head of one of the several trails up the mountain. This trail is steep but the fastest way up to the peak, Shindake (654 m), which is the island's active volcano. Considering the late hour, Kifune believed this to be the safest route for Craig to get up and down before dark.

When Craig didn't return to the inn on the evening of April 27th, the innkeeper became concerned. He took his car and made a cursory look around the village and up the road toward the mountain. When he couldn't find Craig, he called the local fire brigade. These men, including Kifune, searched for Craig along the various roads under the mountain, calling out his name, until around midnight. When they didn't find him, they notified the Yakushima police.

The police arrived the next morning, April 28th, from Yakushima to begin the official search. A total of 43 people, including five police officers from the Yakushima Police Station, reinforcements from the Kagoshima Prefectural Police, two dogs, two helicopters and a boat joined the search. Their standard method of operation consisted mostly of a grid (also known as rolling) search along the sand dam trail Craig ascended and areas they thought he might have descended.

After the Yakushima Police called me at the International House, I immediately contacted citizen's services at the US Embassy, who in turn contacted the Fukuoka Consulate in Kyushu. The assistant to the Consulate General in Fukuoka called me for further details about Craig and his residency.

I did not look forward to my next task, however—contacting Rebecca to inform her of the situation. No amount of mental preparation makes this job easy, and I dreaded having to tell her the bad news. To further complicate matters, I only had her Facebook contact and would have to message her. I thought long and hard about how to compose it:

Hello Rebecca, this is Christopher Blasdel of the International House of Japan, Craig's contact point in Japan. A serious matter concerning Craig has arisen and we need to contact you ASAP. Can you give me a call in Japan? Sorry to contact you through Facebook, but this was the only way I could think to get a hold of you.

I left my phone number and instructions to call anytime day or night. At about 1:00 the following morning she called me.

I did my best to try to keep the conversation calm and just repeat the facts as I knew them. Rebecca was understandably flustered and anxious, but she remained level headed and thought of ways to help us understand Craig's possible movements. She

provided background on his climbing experience and what he might be carrying. All this information I passed on the consulate. At the end of the conversation she told me of their method of staying in contact:

Craig and I have an understanding that if he did not check in with me at least once every 48 hours, I would contact you to inform you that I had not heard from him - this was one of our "safety" precautions. In about five hours, that 48-hour time window will have elapsed, and I will not have been in touch with Craig.

She also gave my contact information to Craig's brother, Chris, who called me later that morning.

By law, Japanese police are required to search only three days for missing persons. This is usually enough time to rescue someone who is lost or discover their remains in the case of a fatal accident. The police rescue team from Yakushima originally planned to follow this rule and had no intention of extending the search. Furthermore, it was right at the beginning of Japan's main holiday season, Golden Week, and the police felt pressure to get back to Yakushima to oversee the safety of numerous tourists who visit during the holidays. Because of the many popular mountain trails on Yakushima, the local police spend a lot of time and resources on search and rescue.

The officials from the US Embassy were, from the outset, very concerned and put a great deal of effort into trying to liaison between the family and the local authorities. It turned out the Consulate General in Fukuoka was a friend I knew from the time she was stationed in Tokyo, and I was able to talk to her directly to obtain information. She told me that she was trying very hard to get the local police to extend the search to six or even nine days, but was not having very much luck.

In the meantime, a Facebook page dedicated to finding Craig and various blogs and Internet sites sprung up to inform the literary world about Craig. Many of the blogs announced that the Yakushima police were only going to search for three days, as required by law, and implied that the Fukuoka Consulate was dragging their feet on the search efforts and implored everyone to write the US Embassy or their congressman and urge the Consulate to take more action. A typical blog read like this:

My friend Craig Arnold, a father, poet, and professor is missing in Japan and the authorities are only required to search for three days. Today is the third day. To encourage the authorities to continue the search, media attention and pressure from American authorities could help. Read the details [here](#) and write your representative [here](#).⁸

Obviously the same post had been copied and spread to various sites, because before long every blog seemed to be saying exactly the same thing. Although some of the information going around the Internet was not well informed, it was effective—government officials and politicians began contacting the Fukuoka Consulate to request action. As a result, the Fukuoka Consulate had to spend a lot of time dealing with these requests, unfortunately taking valuable time from their work in assisting and arranging the actual search.

I flung myself into the effort to coordinate and keep everyone—the family, the NEA and the Friendship Commission—informed as best I could. I did this not only because it was the obvious thing to do, but because when faced with a possible tragedy, either on a professional and personal level, sometimes the best response is just to act. At least it kept me from imagining the worst.

The embassy in Tokyo was also taking action. One of the highest-ranking officers there arranged for a number of Okinawa-based US military aircraft (including helicopters) in the area on a training mission to assist in the search. On April 30th, they appeared suddenly over the island and circled for two or three hours, using infrared and other state of the art devices to aid in the search. Around this time, the Consulate General in Fukuoka called me to announce that they had convinced the Kagoshima police to extend the search for three more days and increase the number of men on the ground.

By May 1st, Craig had been missing for over three days. For the next three days, the police widened their search area to include not only the trail Craig used for his ascent, but all areas of the mountain where he might have wandered. At this point, the number of people involved in the search included three locals, 22 Kagoshima riot police and seven policemen from Yakushima, including the police chief. Two police heli-

⁸ <http://mamatrue.com/2009/04/30/my-friend-craig-arnold-is-missing-please-help/>

copters continued their search from above. For a small island with no more than 150 residents, the activity was unprecedented, and the local housewives gathered in the schoolyard to cook meals every night for the influx of searchers.

It soon became apparent that someone from Craig's immediate family would have to be available to take charge in the event Craig was found, so his brother Chris decided to make the trip from New York to Kuchinoerabu Island. The Friendship Commission agreed to cover my expenses from Tokyo as his interpreter and guide.

Chris arrived in Narita on May 2nd, and I waited for him outside the arrival lobby. It happened to be at the height of the swine flue scare and the authorities were inspecting every plane before allowing the passengers to deplane, so it took him over an hour to pass through immigration and customs. Although tired from the long flight from New York and the immense stress of this situation, he was ready to jump right into action. We took the bus to Haneda, Tokyo's domestic terminal, where he stayed overnight. I met him again in the morning, and we flew to Kagoshima and then changed to an inter-island flight to Yakushima.

At first, I could not get a reservation on the inter island flight because they were fully booked due to the peak Golden Week holiday season. Again, the Fukuoka Consulate came through and somehow secured passage for me on one of these flights.

It could not have been an easy journey for Chris to make, but like Craig, he had a single mindedness of purpose and was determined to find his brother, no matter the costs of money, time or energy.

Around noon on May 3rd, Chris and I arrived at Yakushima and took a taxi to the ferry. After boarding the ferry, there was nothing to do but wait. Chris busied himself writing press releases, hoping that increased media attention would spur the authorities to prolong the search. I stood on deck and watched the island of Yakushima recede into the distant. The ferry turned into the open ocean and the sea became noticeably rougher, and I went inside. Also on the ferry were a squad of Kagoshima riot police who had been pressed into search duty. I struck up a conversation with one of them, a youth no more than 18 or 19, just out of high school. He was reticent to talk at first, but he opened up as I pressed on. I asked him what he had heard of the incident about Craig. Nothing he said, except that he was told to report to

Kuchinoerabu Island on this ferry. Had he ever been there before? No, but he had read about its volcanic activity in school. I pointed to where Chris was sitting, and told him that was the brother of the man who went missing. The young policeman regarded him for a moment in silence, then just said, Oh, really? But I could see in his expression a realization that this job had been suddenly given a face. He was going out to search for a family member. This would not be the last time I witnessed such a reaction by a local.

We when arrived at Kuchinoerabu Island we were met by the Yakushima police who guided us on the exact route that Craig took, beginning from the Watanabe Inn, where he left his luggage, up past Kifune's house, and continuing up to the head of the sand dam trail. Together we walked several kilometers up the trail.

Since it was beginning to get dark, we returned to Honmura village where the police chief held a thorough briefing on the search situation.

We gathered in the small tatami-matted meeting room in the concrete building that served as the ferry office and town hall. It was the largest and most secure structure on the island. The very first thing the police chief said was that they were all searching for Craig as if he were family. He said this not in a patronizing or bureaucratic way, but in a sincere and softened voice. I was moved by his dedication to his job, but I also realized that the arrival of Chris on the scene had the effect of making the search very personal for all those concerned.

After the police chief briefed us on the search, Kifune arrived. This was the man who gave Craig a ride up to the trail, against his better judgment, and the last person to have spoken to Craig. As an expert on the island and its topography, Kifune, together with a man named Yamaguchi, were directing the search efforts.

I expected Kifune to be an older man, wizened and made reserved through years of hard work in the outdoors. Whom I saw instead was a young man, in his mid thirties, with a slight build and sensitive face, not unlike Craig himself. When he met Chris, he suddenly broke into tears and began profusely apologizing. He clearly felt a responsibility for not having stopped Craig from climbing.

Both Chris and I did our best to assuage Kifune's feelings. We told him that Craig was not a person who could be dissuaded from his path and there was abso-

lutely no need for Kifune to take responsibility. Yet for Kifune there was much more at stake than just finding a determined American hiker who became lost; there was a matter of deep pride in his island home and his sense of responsibility to visitors. Someone had been lost on his watch, so to speak, and he felt a grave responsibility, whether deserved or not. One never operates in Japan in a vacuum; there are always those around who want or have to take responsibility. Craig's volcano pilgrimage may have been an intensely personal one that led him to active volcanoes around the world, but on Kuchinoerabu Island, he had become a missing family member who garnered the concern of every individual on the island.

The police chief ended the briefing with the welcome announcement that they had decided to continue the search for another three days, for a total of nine days. The pressure from the US Embassy in Tokyo had born fruit.

In the meantime, Rebecca arranged for a professional tracking service, the Joel Hardin Professional Trackers, an NGO based in Idaho, to come to the island to assist in the search for Craig. This team consists of professional trackers, founded by veteran tracker and former Border Patrol Officer Joel Hardin.

Members of this tracking service use highly refined methods of scientific observation of footprints, vegetation and subtle changes in the surroundings to discern and follow where and when a missing person may have gone. They have made a significant name for themselves in the arena of law enforcement, location of missing persons and search and rescue. They agreed to take on this job for expenses, but it would take another two days for the team to make their way to the island.

During the wait, I found myself beginning to wonder if Craig would be found alive. My gut feeling at this point said no, though even now I can't say why I felt this way. Perhaps it was looking at the desperation on Kinfune's face every evening when he returned home from unsuccessful day of searching, or the realization that if Craig were alive, he would have already made his way out of the mountain, even if injured. One cannot share such reservations in the middle of a search when everyone is trying to stay focused and optimistic, so I kept silent. Anyway, there was still logical hope for his discovery. For example, the island is riddled with deep volcanic vents covered over with vegetation. Kifune mentioned that someone could fall into these holes and not be

able to climb out. Perhaps he was waiting to be found in one of them. The search team was methodically checking out all the possibilities.

The following day, May 4th, I stayed with Chris to translate and assist him while the police continued their search. Together with some other volunteers, Chris and I walked along the roads under the mountains to keep an eye out for any sign of Craig. It was a way to keep us occupied more than anything else, as it would have been too dangerous for us to participate in the search on the volcano itself.

The weather was perfect, and as we rounded the bends on the mountain road we were confronted with truly stunning scenery. After leaving the sand dam, the paved road climbs the side of the volcano, and from its vantage points we could see the peaks that beckoned Craig and the turquoise sea, far below, shimmering in the sunlight. In the distance Yakushima seemed to float in the mist above the sea. Just as I began to forget the stressful reason for my visit to the island and enjoy the stunning views, Chris began to call out his brother's name, hoping that he may in the area; hoping that with his voice he might call his brother back.

Chris' voice poignantly reverberated through the hills but went unanswered. Chris' calling reminded me of a dream Craig wrote about where he tries to save his younger brother from a mountain tragedy.

It is not our first memories but our first dreams that make us. You are climbing with your little brother up the slope of a mountain, You lead, he follows. It seems not a particularly difficult mountain to climb. You turn just in time to see him being carried suddenly away by a river of molten lava. There is no noise, no heat, no horror: the rock seems only as hot and as liquid as your young imagination can make it. Only you look behind you and there he is, going away, beyond the reach of your outstretched hand. The expression on his face, if he even had one, has long been lost to you. What you do recall, what is still familiar and intimate as the shudder of your own heartbeat, is the shock of panic and guilt—that it is your fault, that you have failed to pay close enough attention, that you have neglected some responsibility toward another person, that something is now irretrievably, irrevocably ruined.⁹

The roles had been reversed.

⁹ From "Atlantis: Prologue to a Pilgrimage," as quoted in Craig's residency application.

On May 5th, the trackers arrived and went immediately to the entrance of the sand dam where Craig was last seen. Rebecca provided them with a photograph of Craig's footprint he had taken while standing in the soft sand at Miyake Island a few weeks earlier. This photograph proved invaluable to the professional trackers as they tried to follow Craig's footprints. They discerned Craig was wearing a 12 ¼ inch Merrell boot with lugs on the outer rim, and this is what they looked for.

The tracking team spent about 40 minutes examining the entrance to the trail, in order, as they explained to me, to calibrate their eyes and decide which of the hundreds of footprints that now littered the trail belonged to Craig. Since this was the main entrance to the mountain, most of the police and other searchers had passed this way. It amazed me that, from the myriad of footprints, they could actually find Craig's.

From Kifune, the trackers knew that Craig started up the trail at the sand dam trail around 4 PM and probably took about an hour or so to reach the top of Shindake, putting him there around 5 PM. Although most of the sand dam trail follows a



The steaming fumaroles of Furudake.

river basin and is easy to hike, near the ridge one has to scramble up a steep basin of scree. The trackers spent the rest of the day following his footsteps up the river bed and climbed up to the scree below the edge of the caldera.

Above the scree basin is the Shindake caldera, extremely deep and rugged. Although one can approach the rim, there are areas that are extremely unstable and prone to breaking off. Adding to the danger are plumes of sulfur dioxide gas that continually emit from numerous fumaroles both inside the caldera and along its edges. The poisonous gas vapors were not as bad as what almost overcame Craig at Miyakejima, but they are thick enough to make breathing difficult.

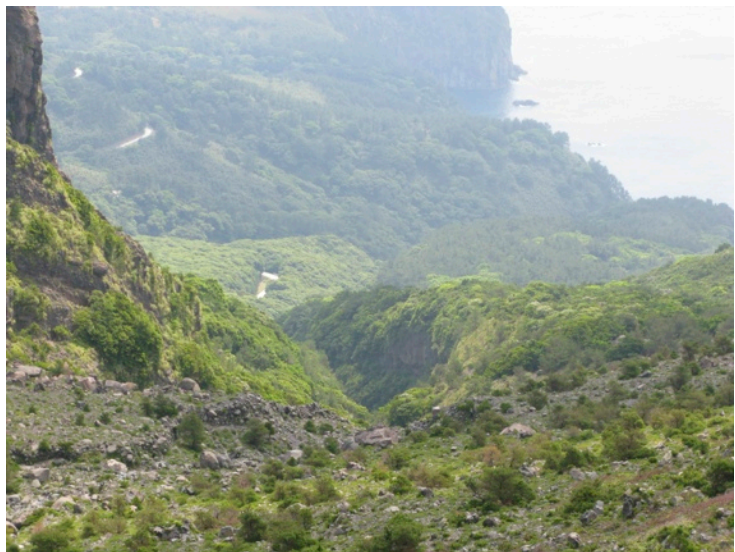
Next to Shindake is Furudake, an older yet still active volcano. From the rim of Shindake it is only about a 20 minute level walk to the Furudake caldera. In contrast

to the Shindake caldera, Furudake is easy to enter. It is flat and contains several interesting natural phenomena, like a bubbling pit of mud, high-pressure steam vents that make a loud hissing sound, and colorful sulfur vents. Although there still remains the problem of sulfur dioxide gas, the caldera is easily accessible, to the extent that the island school children make yearly excursions there to learn about volcanoes.

The next day the tracking team continued their observations. They discerned that Craig went first to Shindake then over to Furudake, where he stood in the shallow caldera and, again, left his footprints in the sand.

Craig probably stayed too long in the Furudake caldera before he realized it was getting dark. In late April, there is a residual light until about 7 PM, but only in the open spaces, like the mountain peak. Everything but the peak is covered in dense vegetation, so the trail was quickly darkening. In addition, the night he climbed the mountain was a new moon. Once the sun went down it would be pitch black.

From the caldera of Furudake there is a relatively short trail, the Hatake Trail, about 1 kilometer in length, leading down the backside of the mountain. The beginning of this trail is obvious, and from the summit it seems to lead right down to the road. The trackers surmised that Craig must have thought that instead of scrambling back down the steep sand dam trail, the Hatake trail would



The head of Hatake trail and the cliff that parallels it.

be the best way to descend in the waning light. Once he got to the road the darkness would not bother him, since he could just follow the pavement to the village.

Hatake Trail, however, is deceptive. Although the beginning section is easy to follow, further down the trail is not well marked and weaves through thick brush. To complicate matters, the native deer on the island have carved numerous false paths that criss cross the trail and lead to dead ends. Many places along the descent it is just

impossible to follow the main trail. For this reason, only the most experienced island guides use this trail.

Although one cannot see it because of the dense vegetation, a very steep cliff parallels Hatake trail about 100 meters to the left.

On May 7th, the tracking team started up the Hatake Trail on the back side of Furudake, thinking to hike up to the caldera and trace Craig's footsteps down the trail. This time I accompanied them to see how they worked. Two-thirds the way up the mountain, however, they discovered Craig's footprints veering off in the direction of the steep cliff on one of the many false deer trails. They spent the rest of the day following his footsteps through the brush.

The next day the tracking team continued their search of this area. Their painstaking and exacting work allowed them to cover only a few meters every hour. Not only did they look for footprints, but they searched for holes left by Craig's walking sticks. They also observed leaves and branches that were broken or littered on the ground. The color and rate of decay told them how many hours or days had passed since they had snapped. Fortunately, there had been no rain since Craig's disappearance so the dirt was still intact. Kifune accompanied the team to this area. It was a section of the mountain that the police had not searched and was uncompromised by other footprints.

The team discovered that Craig determinedly walked or ran through the brush trying to find the trail, anxious to maximize his time and get off the mountain while there was still light. Like on the roads on Mt. Asama, he began zigzagging to pick up the lost trail, all the while heading northeast—what he thought was the general direction of the road (though the road actually lay more to the east from this point). The trackers discovered indications that he moved generally in circles, stopping and climbing up boulders in an attempt to rediscover the trail and find his way down to the road. At one point, they saw evidence that he fell, picked himself up and continued with a limp, perhaps because of an injured leg or knee. It was at this point they noticed his footprints heading toward the hidden cliff.

Obscured by darkness and thick brush, Craig was probably unaware of the danger looming before him. When he broke through the brush, he suddenly found himself

precariously balanced on the edge of a 60-meter drop but was going so fast to stop. It seems he sat down and grabbed a branch of a dead tree to stop his forward momentum. The branch broke off and he fell over the edge. At the bottom of the cliff lay a deep, narrow valley, so forbidding that even the island's most experienced guides, like Kifune, rarely ventured into.

Once the tracking team discerned the exact spot where Craig fell off the cliff they marked it on their GPS device and then returned to the road, found the valley below the cliff, and made their way to the spot at the bottom of the cliff corresponding to their GPS coordinates. They did not find any of Craig's remains at the bottom. They realized that the cliff was not a straight drop down; in the fall line were several ledges. They ascertained that he must have hit a ledge and gotten caught partway down the cliff. Unfortunately, the face of the cliff is overgrown with vegetation, making it impossible to visually confirm this, either from below or above.

The search team believed that if they could make it down the cliff and continue their tracking efforts they might be able to find Craig. The problem was that they did not have the necessary equipment to rappel down the cliff, and the police were adamant in not allowing the search team to do so, due to the inherent dangers. The trackers and police surmised that if Craig got caught somewhere down the fall line, he might have scrambled horizontally along a ledge hoping to find a way down. It was certain, however, that 12 days without water and in the hot sun, Craig would have little chance of survival.

Up until this point we prayed Craig might be found alive, even though each passing day held less and less hope. But at this news even that hope seemed to vanish. The police chief very gently explained the likely scenario; that we would only discover his remains. Using a great deal of tact, he also informed us what a twelve day old corpse might look like, adding that if a body were indeed found, the police would have to be in charge of recovery.

That evening, I noticed a subtle change in Chris' attitude as he acquiesced to the new reality. The drive and energy with which he had thrown himself into the search was now replaced with a sense of resignation as the focus of the search shifted from rescue to recovery.

Unfortunately, the police had to return to Yakushima to attend to other cases. The tracking team had done what they could, so most everyone involved in the search left the island on the afternoon ferry that day. Only Chris and a low ranking policeman stayed behind.

In the meantime, the Fukuoka Consulate located a professional rappelling team, based in the mountainous prefecture of Nagano, who agreed to search the face of the cliff. They arrived on May 13th. The next day, together with 10 locals, they rappelled down the cliff to look for Craig's remains. Incredibly, they were unable to find any traces of Craig or his remains, in spite of expanding the search area to both sides of the cliff and up and down the valley. What that team did discover was that there were two opportunities, or shelves, where Craig might have landed and crawled horizontally, most probably continuing in a northeast direction. This team was not a tracking team and they cleared any evidence from the fall line so they could search more efficiently. Clearly, Craig was not in the fall line.

These results were disappointing for everyone. They expected to find something, but not a single item was found, and subsequently there was no closure for Craig's family or friends. It was especially hard on Chris, who left the island with a sense of personal failure to find his brother. In reality, he did the best he could. He came to a foreign land on a highly stressful mission, not knowing the language, culture or customs, and acted with grace and strength, adapting himself to a situation he could have never imagined.

Not satisfied with any of the results, the family put together another team from the Joel Hardin Professional Tracking Services to continue a search of the cliff. Although there were two trackers in this team, it basically consisted of a search team. This team arrived in June, before the start of the rainy season, and spent a whole week searching. They scoured the cliff and other areas but found nothing. The lead member of the first tracking team, Sharon Ward, described the problems this team would have faced in trying to find evidence of Craig.

The team was not able to find sign (evidence of Craig) over the edge. This is not surprising in the least. The mountain climbing team had clear-cut the entire fall line, erasing, in their almost 100 rappels, any evidence of where Craig may have landed. Trackers would have

had to sign cut (look for evidence of the presence or passage of Craig) outside of the clear cut area and that would have been a task, at that point, that I, and every tracker I know, would have had one heck of a time sorting out. This is especially true because they would be tracking while harnessed up over the edge of the cliff. The clear cut and the time lag of weeks would have made the footprints or other evidence very, very hard to find.¹⁰

The second team proposed some theories of what may have happened to Craig, and others also added their speculations. Since there were no remains, there was no way to be positively certain that Craig had perished.

Basically, there are only two ways a body could disappear on this island—either falling into a volcano or the ocean. Some suggested he made his way down the mountain and fell into the ocean or slipped away on a boat. This is unlikely as he would have crossed the road back to the village on the way to the sea, and even if he did make it down to the shore, there are only two or three places on the island where boats can safely approach the rugged shoreline. Being such a small-knit community, someone on the island would have certainly noticed a tall foreigner trying to leave. Just to make certain, however, the Fukuoka Consulate conducted a check to see if his passport had been used to leave the country, but the Japanese immigration had no record of anyone by the name of Craig Arnold departing Japan.

There is also speculation that the trackers mistook Craig's footprints and he didn't fall off the cliff but disappeared some other place on the mountain. Sharon Ward also addressed this point:



My team followed a Merrill boot up the volcano and down the backside. It was the right size, right shape, right age, right sole pattern, right character and right composition to be that of Craig Arnold. Could it have been someone else? Yes, but that person would have had to have been there at the same time, with the same shoes, intention, etc. The footprints we followed stayed pretty much on a northeast bearing. If, after going over the cliff, he landed on one of the shelves, there is reason to believe he would have continued on a northeast bear-

¹⁰ Sharon Ward, in a personal E-mail.

*ing. As I understand the second search, northwest was the search area pursued.*¹¹

There was speculation he fell into Shindake's deep caldera. It is steep and filled with hidden crevices where a body might never be discovered. Then there are the numerous volcanic vents on the island. The intense search efforts of the first few days focused on these two possibilities, but they were both discounted because of the lack of clear evidence. Simply put, no trace of Craig, other than his footprints, was ever found.

Meanwhile, there was an outpouring of concern and mourning from Craig's colleagues, friends and family in the US. *The New York Times*, in a May 20, 2009 blog called *Paper Cuts*, published an article entitled "There will be no more poems from him." The author bemoans that Craig was silenced before he could leave a significant oeuvre of works, but points out that, by no means, was his short life of 41 years without literary significance.

It would also be a mistake to think of him as a writer silenced before his prime. Arnold's first book, "Shells," won the Yale Younger Poets Prize and is an assured, fully-formed collection. In "Hot," for example, he uses smartly executed, slant-rhymed couplets to tell the story of a man burned from within by his need for hotter and hotter food. As the poem ends, the man takes the speaker's hand and

*...lifts it to his lip,
presses it for a second, the torn flesh
as soft, as tenuous as ash,
not in the least harsh or rough,
wreck of a mouth, that couldn't say enough.*

However sophisticated we make our dishes, the poem suggests, those embellishments are born of simple craving and can never entirely transcend it. We want heat — and Arnold is a poet of "want," in both the word's senses. He's interested not only in our hunger for consummation, sexual or otherwise, but

¹¹ *Ibid.*

*the lack which causes that hunger and follows each flickering moment of satisfaction.*¹²

What actually happened to Craig remains a mystery, but in some ways, there is no mystery. A deeply sensitive and poetic soul, Craig had a simple craving—that of yearning for the beauty and crystal awareness found only in the cataclysmic experience of danger. This un-transcended need led him down the paths he took, and he perished doing what he loved.

As I departed on the boat from Kuchinoerabu Island, I had the feeling that his remains would never be found, and that the whole island would become, in essence, his final resting place. As I watched the rugged peaks of Shindake and Furudake fade into the distance, their vents relentlessly emitting scalding steam and gasses, I felt there could be no more fitting tomb for Craig.

Yet, my mind kept returning to the awful moment of self-awareness he must have had when he veered over the cliff, trying desperately to catch himself and failing, slipping and falling into the darkened depths. I wondered, in that moment, did he feel betrayal, or did he feel he would be caught, like in his high school falling game? Or, after the rush of awareness at his fate, did he achieve a peace, finally escaping his captivity to fear?

At first the temptation is strong to catch your balance, to put one foot out to stop yourself, not yet quite believing that you will be caught. But you learn no longer to think of catching yourself, to lose yourself in a dark loop of falling and falling, feeling at every turn a pair of hands to pick you up and put you into the hands of someone else. And your memories of this game, from your mistrustful teens, are of great comfort. Now, many years later, it occurs to you that you like being talked out of these volcano-climbing adventures, a reassurance that someone is looking out for you, has your welfare in mind, if not at heart.

It was impossible to talk Craig out of a volcanic climb, but I found myself wishing that Craig could have seen how much we all, from the villagers of Kuchinoerabu Island, the police of Yakushima, Chris, Rebecca, his son, family and friends loved him and had his welfare in our hearts. But now, it was just too late to catch him.

¹² David Orr, <http://papercuts.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/05/20/there-will-be-no-more-poems-from-him/>



Kuchinoerabu Island. The high, jagged peaks in the center are Shindake and Furudake.