

The Road Less Traveled: Edo's Nakasendō

November 9, 2024 - May 4, 2025

The Nakasendō, one of Japan's main highways during the Edo period (1615–1868), connected Edo (pronounced AY-DOH; now Tokyo) and Kyoto. An alternative to the more heavily traveled Tōkaidō route that ran along the eastern seaboard, the Nakasendō snaked inland across Japan's central plains and highlands. Over 335 miles, this route covered spectacular terrain, from rugged snow-covered mountains to expansive serene lakes.

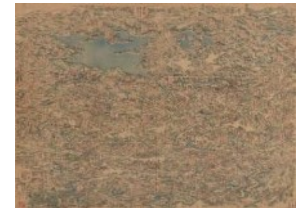
This exhibition highlights an 1819 map by illustrator Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849). The map details the Nakasendō (also known as the Kisokaidō) and its 69 stations, or rest areas where travelers could find lodging and meals. Different factors spurred Hokusai and other print designers to create aerial views of travel routes; these included the rising popularity of landscape prints and the new demand for printed maps with the emergence of a leisure travel industry. The prints in this gallery offer portals into Hokusai's map of the Nakasendō, including the views and activity encountered along the journey.

–Wai Yee Chiong, curator of Asian art

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CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Katsushika Hokusai 葛飾北斎
1760–1849; b. in Edo, Japan; worked in Japan
Famous Places of the Kisokaidō at a Glance (木曾街道名所一覽
Kisokaidō meisho ichiran), 1819
Polychrome woodblock print
Elizabeth T. and Dorothy N. Casey Fund 2023.31



This printed map, designed to be folded into a packet, depicts an aerial view of the Nakasendō (or Kisokaidō) route, one of five major highways travelers used during the Edo period (1615–1858). The road, which begins in Edo, seen at the bottom left of the map, winds its way to Kyoto, located at the top middle. Compared to a map of same route today (right), Hokusai's map does not conform to a conventional orientation.

Densely marked with post stations, castle towns, villages, scenic sites, and geographical landmarks, Hokusai's map was designed to be viewed from multiple angles, providing travelers with an overview of the terrain. Today it serves as testament to the popularity of travel in Japan in the 1800s, when visitors combined sightseeing activities with pilgrimages to famous shrines and temples.

Utagawa Hiroshige 歌川広重

1797–1858; b. in Edo, Japan; worked in Japan

Iseya Rihei 伊勢屋利兵衛, publisher

Edo, Japan; ca. 1790–1879

Ōkute 大久手, from the series *The Sixty-Nine Stations of the Kisokaidō* (木曾街道六拾九次之内 *Kisokaidō rokujūkyū tsugi no uchi*), late 1830s

Polychrome woodblock print (*nishiki-e*)

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.1056



Two travelers trudge past the Ōkute station on their way to the Biwa Pass, known to be treacherous and slippery in bad weather. Exposed boulders jut out from the side of the mountain. Many rock formations in this area were named for their shapes, such as Hat Rock (*Eboshi ishi*). Mount Ibuki and Mount Hakusan, famed peaks in Gifu, Japan, are visible in the distance, beyond the rolling hills.

Utagawa Hiroshige 歌川広重

1797–1858; b. in Edo, Japan; worked in Japan

Iseya Rihei 伊勢屋利兵衛, publisher

Edo, Japan; ca. 1790–1879

Tsumago 妻籠, from the series *The Sixty-Nine Stations of the Kisokaidō* (木曾街道六拾九次之内 *Kisokaidō rokujūkyū tsugi no uchi*), late 1830s

Polychrome woodblock print (*nishiki-e*)

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.1059



Between the Tsumago and Magome stations, travelers come and go. Smaller routes branch off this stretch of the highway, making it an important crossroads. In the foreground, a religious pilgrim, recognizable by his striped basket-like hat and white garments, carries a portable shrine on his back. He passes a traveler with a walking stick. At the upper right, a woodcutter lugs brushwood down a different path.

Katsushika Hokusai 葛飾北斎

1760–1849; b. in Edo, Japan; worked in Japan
Nishimuraya Yohachi 西村屋与八, publisher
Edo, Japan; 1759–1869

Lake Suwa, Shinano Province (信州諏訪湖 Shinshū suwako),
from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji* (富嶽三十六景 Fugaku
sanjūrokkei), ca. 1829–1833

Polychrome woodblock print (*nishiki-e*)

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1189



Utagawa Hiroshige 歌川広重

1797–1858; b. in Edo, Japan; worked in Japan
Tsutaya Kichizō 蔦屋吉蔵, publisher
Edo, Japan; 1830–1859

Lake Suwa, Shinano Province (信州諏訪之湖 Shinshū Suwa no
mizuumi),

from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji* (富士三十六景 Fuji
sanjūrokkei), 1858

Polychrome woodblock print (*nishiki-e*)

Gift of Marshall H. Gould 46.294.9



Surrounded by the Kiso Mountains, Lake Suwa provides scenic views for travelers on the Nakasendō. On the right, Hokusai depicts the lake with the Kawaguchi Benten shrine in the foreground. On the left, Hiroshige captures a view of the lake from above, boats dotting its wide expanse of water. In both prints, the floating Takashima Castle rises at the middle left, with Mount Fuji in the distance.

Sometimes in the winter, large cracks form on the surface of Lake Suwa, a phenomenon referred to as *omiwatari* (御神渡り), or God's crossing. According to Japanese Indigenous belief, these fractures form when the lake's guardian deity crosses the ice.

Katsushika Hokusai 葛飾北斎

1760–1849; b. in Edo, Japan; worked in Japan

Nishimuraya Yohachi 西村屋与八, publisher

Edo, Japan; 1759–1869

Ono Falls on the Kisokaidō (木曾海道小野ノ瀑布 Kisokaidō Ono no bakufu),

from the series *A Tour of Waterfalls in the Various Provinces* (諸国滝廻り) *Shokoku taki meguri*, ca. 1831–1832

Polychrome woodblock print (*nishiki-e*)

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1222



Located near the station of Agematsu, the Ono Falls was a highlight for travelers. The waterfall was featured in travel gazettes of the time, and its popularity was reflected in the numerous depictions made by Hokusai and others. Here Hokusai pictures visitors marveling from the bridge in the foreground, a small shrine separating them and the falls.

Utagawa Hiroshige 歌川広重

1797–1858, b. in Edo, Japan, worked in Japan

Takenouchi Magohachi 竹内孫八, publisher

Edo, Japan; 1833–1850

Vesper Bell, Mii Temple (三井晩鐘 Mii banshō),

from the series *Eight Views of Ōmi* (近江八景之内 Ōmi hakkei no uchi), ca. 1835

Polychrome woodblock print (*nishiki-e*)

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1278



Utagawa Hiroshige 歌川広重

1797–1858; b. in Edo, Japan; worked in Japan

Tsutaya Kichizō 蔦屋吉蔵, publisher

Edo, Japan; 1830–1859

Kusatsu: From Kusatsu to Yabase, a Bow and Bowstring (草津 草津よ

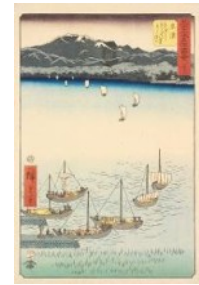
り矢ばせは道の弓となる Kusatsu, Kusatsu kara Yabase michi no

yumi to tsuru), from the series *Famous Sights of the Fifty-Three*

Stations (五十三次名所図会 Gojūsan tsugi meisho zue), 1855

Polychrome woodblock print (*nishiki-e*)

Gift of Marshall H. Gould 46.294.2



The Nakasendō followed the banks of Lake Biwa, Japan’s largest freshwater lake. Believed to be home of the goddess Benzaiten, the lake was named for the musical instrument she favored—the lute, or *biwa*. Hiroshige’s prints show the lake from two different vantage points. On the left, mountains overshadow it, while on the right, its size is highlighted by the line of boats disappearing in the distance.

Utagawa Hiroshige 歌川広重

1797–1858; b. in Edo, Japan; worked in Japan

Okasawaya Taiheiji 岡沢屋太平治, publisher

Edo, Japan; active 1850s

Mountains and Rivers Along the Kiso Road (木曾路之山川 Kisoji no yamakawa), 1857

Polychrome woodblock–printed triptych (*nishiki-e*)

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1295



Utagawa Hiroshige II 二代目 歌川広重

1826–1869; b. in Edo, Japan; worked in Japan

Uoya Eikichi 魚屋栄吉, publisher

Edo, Japan; 1855–1866

Snow in the Kiso Gorge, Shinano Province (信州木曾の雪 Shinshū Kiso no yuki), from the series *One Hundred Views in the Various Provinces*

(諸国名所百景 Shokoku meisho hyakkei), 1859

Polychrome woodblock print (*nishiki-e*)

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.1298



Utagawa Hiroshige 歌川広重

1797–1858; b. in Edo, Japan; worked in Japan

Yokokawa Takejirō 横川彫武, block carver

Active in the mid-1800s in Edo, Japan

Koshimuraya Heisuke 越村屋平助, publisher

Edo, Japan; 1843–1865

Kōzuke Province: Mount Haruna Under Snow (上野 榛名山雪中 Kōzuke, Harunasan setchū), from the series *Famous Places in the Sixty-Odd Provinces*

(六十余州名所図絵 Rokujūyoshū meisho zue), 1853

Polychrome woodblock print (*nishiki-e*)

Gift of Marshall H. Gould 46.295.9



The Nakasendō ascended to some of the highest altitudes in Japan, winding across high plateaus that were sparse and relatively unpopulated. These prints highlight the beauty of this route in winter. Barely visible against the majestic cliffs, travelers in hats and straw coats make their way, some with spikes attached to the soles of their sandals to avoid slipping on the ice.

Katsukawa Shunzan 勝川春山
Active ca. 1782–1798 in Edo, Japan
Cormorant Fishing, ca. 1782–1798
Polychrome woodblock print (*nishiki-e*)
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 34.323



In this fan-shaped print, a man practices a traditional fishing method known as *ukai* (鵜飼). Using a fire lantern at the front of the boat to lure the fish, he releases leashed cormorants to catch the fish as they rise to the water's surface. *Ukai* demonstrations are still popular with tourists visiting the Nagara River today.

The poem at the top of the print echoes the image:

うかひ たか瀬さしこす ほどなれや むすぼほれゆく
かがり火のかけ

The cormorant-fishing boat poled through the shallows, pitching in the flashes of fire

Utagawa Hiroshige 歌川広重
1797–1858; b. in Edo, Japan; worked in Japan
Takenouchi Magohachi 竹内孫八, publisher
Edo, Japan; 1833–1850
Tsuruya Kiemon 鶴屋喜右衛門, publisher
Edo, Japan; 1620–1852
Nihonbashi: Morning View (日本橋 朝之景 *Nihonbashi asa no kei*),
from the series *The Fifty-Three Stations of the Tōkaidō* (東海道五十三次之内 *Tōkaidō gojūsan tsugi no uchi*), ca. 1833
Polychrome woodblock print (*nishiki-e*)
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 41.080.1



During the Edo period, Nihonbashi—a neighborhood in the center of the city of Edo (present-day Tokyo)—was where all journeys on the major highways began. When the ruling Tokugawa government constructed a bridge in Nihonbashi in 1603, they made the bridge the starting point of all routes leading from Edo. Hiroshige's print underscores the liveliness surrounding this iconic site, with vendors selling wares and produce as groups of people cross.

Utagawa Hiroshige 歌川広重

1797–1858; b. in Edo, Japan; worked in Japan

Takenouchi Magohachi 竹内孫八, publisher

Edo, Japan; 1833–1850

Tsuruya Kiemon 鶴屋喜右衛門, publisher

Edo, Japan; 1620–1852

Kusatsu: Famous Post House (草津名物立場 *Kusatsu meibutsu tateba*),
from the series *The Fifty-Three Stations of the Tōkaidō* (東海道五十三
次之内 *Tōkaidō gojūsan tsugi no uchi*), ca. 1833

Polychrome woodblock print (*nishiki-e*)

Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 41.080.53



The busy hub of Kusatsu was the next to last station on the Nakasendō as well as a stop on the Tōkaidō highway. Hiroshige depicts travelers stopping to rest and eat at the Yōrō-tei teahouse. Patrons might enjoy the uba mochi advertised on the storefront—a treat made from locally grown rice and sweet red-bean paste. Porters bustle in the foreground, carrying cargo and passengers.

Utagawa Hiroshige 歌川広重

1797–1858; b. in Edo, Japan; worked in Japan

Takenouchi Magohachi 竹内孫八, publisher

Edo, Japan; 1833–1850

Tsuruya Kiemon 鶴屋喜右衛門, publisher

Edo, Japan; 1620–1852

Ōtsu: Hashirii Teahouse (大津 走井茶屋 *Ōtsu hashirii chaya*),
from the series *The Fifty-Three Stations of the Tōkaidō* (東海道五十三
次之内 *Tōkaidō gojūsan tsugi no uchi*), ca. 1833

Polychrome woodblock print (*nishiki-e*)

Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 41.080.54



Loaded ox-carts descend past the Hashirii teahouse in Ōtsu, the final station on the Nakasendō. A well outside offers fresh water to travelers, while the teahouse serves Hashirii mochi, a sweetened rice cake that is still popular today. In the 1800s, Ōtsu was a populous town that serviced several important routes, including the Tōkaidō. Today it serves as the capital of Shiga prefecture.

Utagawa Hiroshige 歌川広重

1797–1858; b. in Edo, Japan; worked in Japan

Takenouchi Magohachi 竹内孫八, publisher

Edo, Japan; 1833–1850

The Great Sanjō Bridge, Kyoto (京師三条大橋 Keishi Sanjō ōhashi),

from the series *The Fifty-Three Stations of the Tōkaidō* (東海道五十三

次之内 Tōkaidō gojūsan tsugi no uchi), ca. 1833

Polychrome woodblock print (*nishiki-e*)

Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 41.080.55



At the end of the Nakasendō, travelers crossed the Great Sanjō Bridge to enter Kyoto. Like the Nihonbashi Bridge in Edo at the beginning of the journey, the Sanjō Bridge was a lively site. In this print, workers transport cargo past vendors and travelers, all of them navigating the busy traffic.