

Waters of Gold

Journeying with Bashō at St Georges Lake

Haiku by Debrah Gai Lewis



Waters of Gold: Journeying with Bashō at St Georges Lake: Haiku by Debrah Gai Lewis

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All haiku were written by Debrah Gai Lewis, unless otherwise stated, in the period 2010-2012.

All photographs were taken by Debrah Gai Lewis, unless otherwise stated, in the period 2010-2012.

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DEDICATED TO

Matsuo Bashō
(1644-1694)

*The greatest master of haiku
~ then and now*

INTRODUCTION

Near the end of 2007, my partner and I moved to Langdons Hill, Victoria – a small rural hamlet off the Midland Highway in-between Daylesford and the city of Ballarat. In our early explorations of the area, Creswick, one of the regional towns near to us, became a favourite place to visit, especially one of its most beautiful attractions, St Georges Lake.

My first and enduring impression is that while being quintessentially Australian landscape, St Georges Lake also resembles Japanese landscape. Perhaps it is all the pine trees! Actually, it is the pine trees *and* more. Having long been a devotee and writer of *haiku*, a Japanese nature-based poetic form, my first and subsequent walks at St Georges Lake felt like walking in a living, breathing haiku! In this evocative haiku landscape, I strongly felt, and continue to feel the presence of Bashō with me on the walking trail.

Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694) was the most famous poet of the Edo period in Japan. During his lifetime, Bashō was recognized for his works in the collaborative *haikai no renga* form; today, he is universally recognised as a *haiku* master and many say, the greatest haiku master of all time. Bashō completed several walking and writing pilgrimages in Japan. The written accounts he left us, his *haibun* (a literary composition that combines prose and haiku) – include *Oku no Hosomichi* or ‘*The Narrow Road to the Deep North*’.

My love of haiku, of walking and of landscape and nature, set me on a path of taking photographs of St Georges Lake in various seasons and writing haiku for the photos I selected. Both my photographs and my haiku signify my ‘haiku moments’ - moments of total and absorbing awareness where the world is seen with great clarity. I consider my photos to be *haiga* and I present them in this spirit. While traditionally, *haiga* are small sketches or paintings which accompany haiku, photographs (original or digitally altered) are now accepted forms of *haiga* in the worldwide haiku community.

I am an amateur photographer, a recreational naturalist and a novice *haijin* (a writer of haiku). This book, which arises from a passion for all three of these noble pursuits and from my spiritual connection with them, is offered to readers in the hope that you will come to experience the profound beauty of St Georges Lake through word and image and that this will lead you to one day visit, or again visit, this wondrous place. Ultimately, I created this book to pay homage to St Georges Lake... and to Bashō.

Debrah Gai Lewis, 2012



St Georges Lake – Creswick – Victoria - Australia



Creswick, a town in central-west Victoria, Australia, is a former gold-mining town, established during the Victorian gold rushes in the 1850s. It is located 18 kilometres north of Ballarat and 129 km northwest of Melbourne.

St Georges Lake, now part of the Creswick Regional Park, was originally built to supply water to the Government battery for the recovery of gold near the end of the gold mining era. Construction of the lake commenced in 1900 using 73 men with horses and drays to transport materials. The lake covers 46 acres and has a capacity to hold 136 million gallons of water. **Waters of gold!** Today, this tranquil lake is a popular base for water activities, picnics and walking. The gently undulating walking track - a 2 km, 40 minute loop around the shore of St Georges Lake, is a wonderful place to meander through several different terrains including natural eucalypt forest, deciduous forest and pine forest. There is also an upper dirt road for cars which can be used for walking and observing other vistas of the lake and its surrounds. Many birds, fauna and flora can be seen in all seasons.

St Georges Lake Trail



Path on St Georges Lake Trail, Creswick, Victoria, Australia

Photograph by Debrah Gai Lewis (2010)

Bashō's Trail



Path on Natagiri Pass, Yamagata, Japan

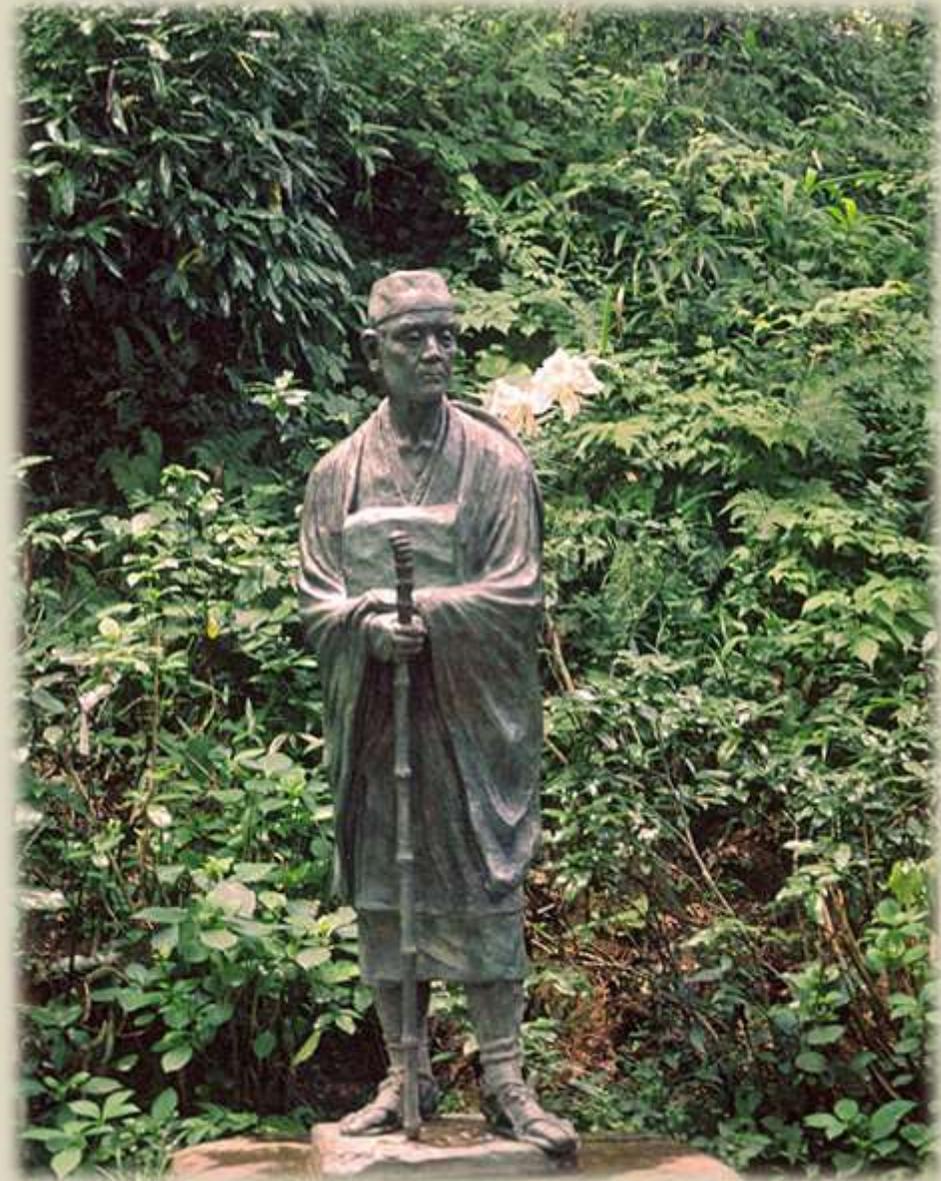
Photograph by Michael Yamashita - National Geographic (February 2008)
<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2008/02/bashos-trail/yamashita-photography>

Bashō

Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694) was the most famous poet of the Edo period in Japan. During his lifetime, Bashō was recognized for his works in the collaborative *haikai no renga* form; today, after centuries of commentary, he is recognized as a master of brief and clear haiku. His poetry is internationally renowned, and within Japan many of his poems are reproduced on monuments and traditional sites.

Bashō was introduced to poetry at a young age, and after integrating himself into the intellectual scene of Edo he quickly became well-known throughout Japan. He made a living as a teacher, but renounced the social, urban life of the literary circles and was inclined to wander throughout the country, heading west, east, and far into the northern wilderness to gain inspiration for his writing. His poems were influenced by his firsthand experience of the world around him, often encapsulating the feeling of a scene in a few simple elements.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matsuo_Bashō



Statue of Matsuo Basho, Chusonji, Hiraizumi, Iwate Prefecture, Japan (2008)

the autumn full moon:
all night long
I paced around the lake

BASHŌ



“The Moon Rises Above Nanko Lake”.

Photograph by Michael Yamashita - National Geographic (February 2008)

<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2008/02/bashos-trail/yamashita-photography>

...haiku, more than any other form of verse, requires the personal involvement of the reader. The haiku poet, knowing that words are not enough to capture the fullness of any moment, inscribes a partial idea that leaves an all-important space for the reader to fill in. As you question what the poet has omitted, the poem comes alive through your own memories and feelings... The [haiku] poem tells us as much with omission as it does with inclusion.

Jonathan Clements. [The Moon in the Pines: Zen Haiku](#). (2000: 8)

Waters of Gold

Walking with Bashō at St Georges Lake

Haiku by Debrah Gai Lewis

around the lake
seeing Bashō everywhere
pacing... pacing



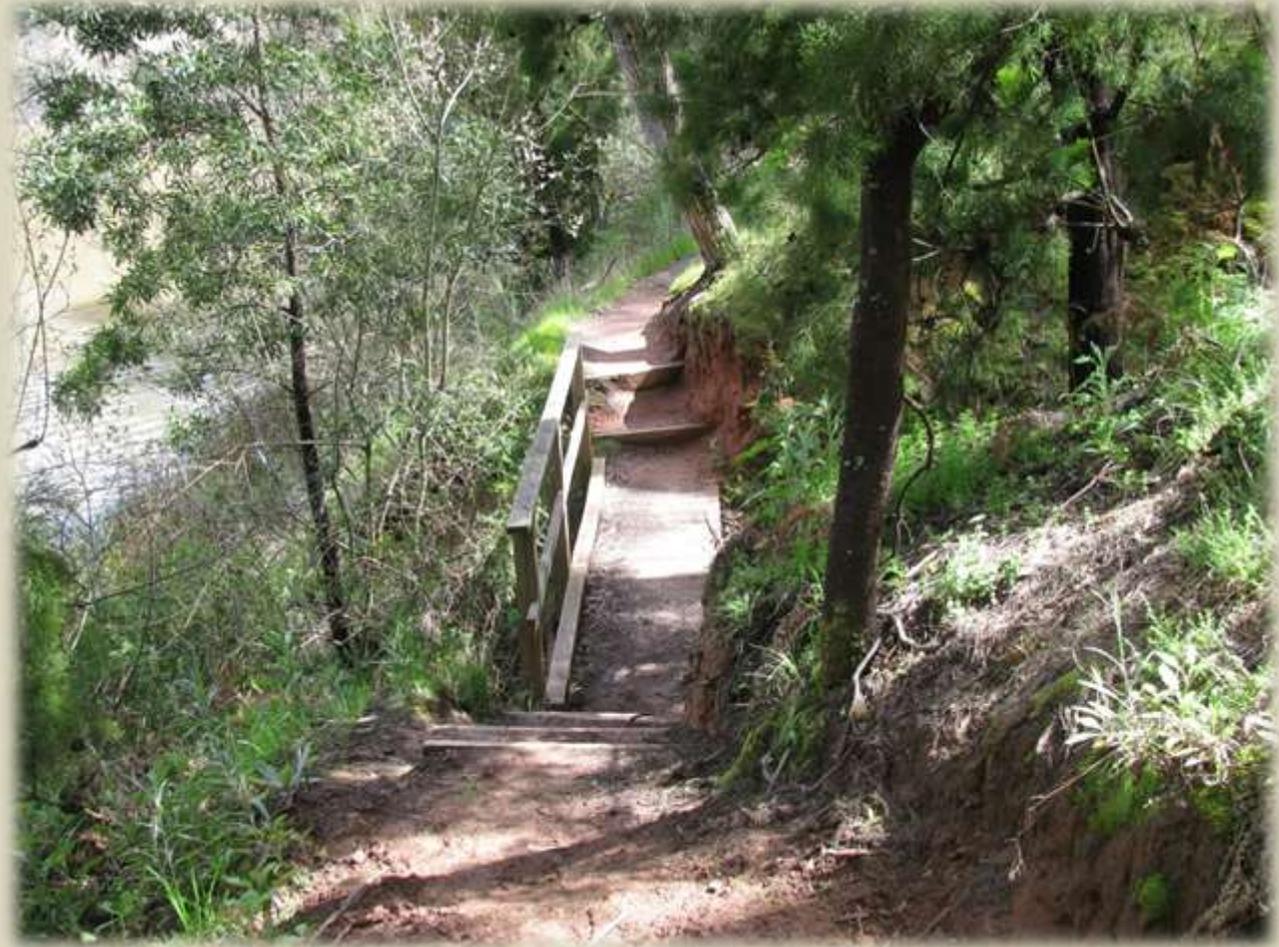
**pine-needles
underfoot:
Bashō's footsteps**



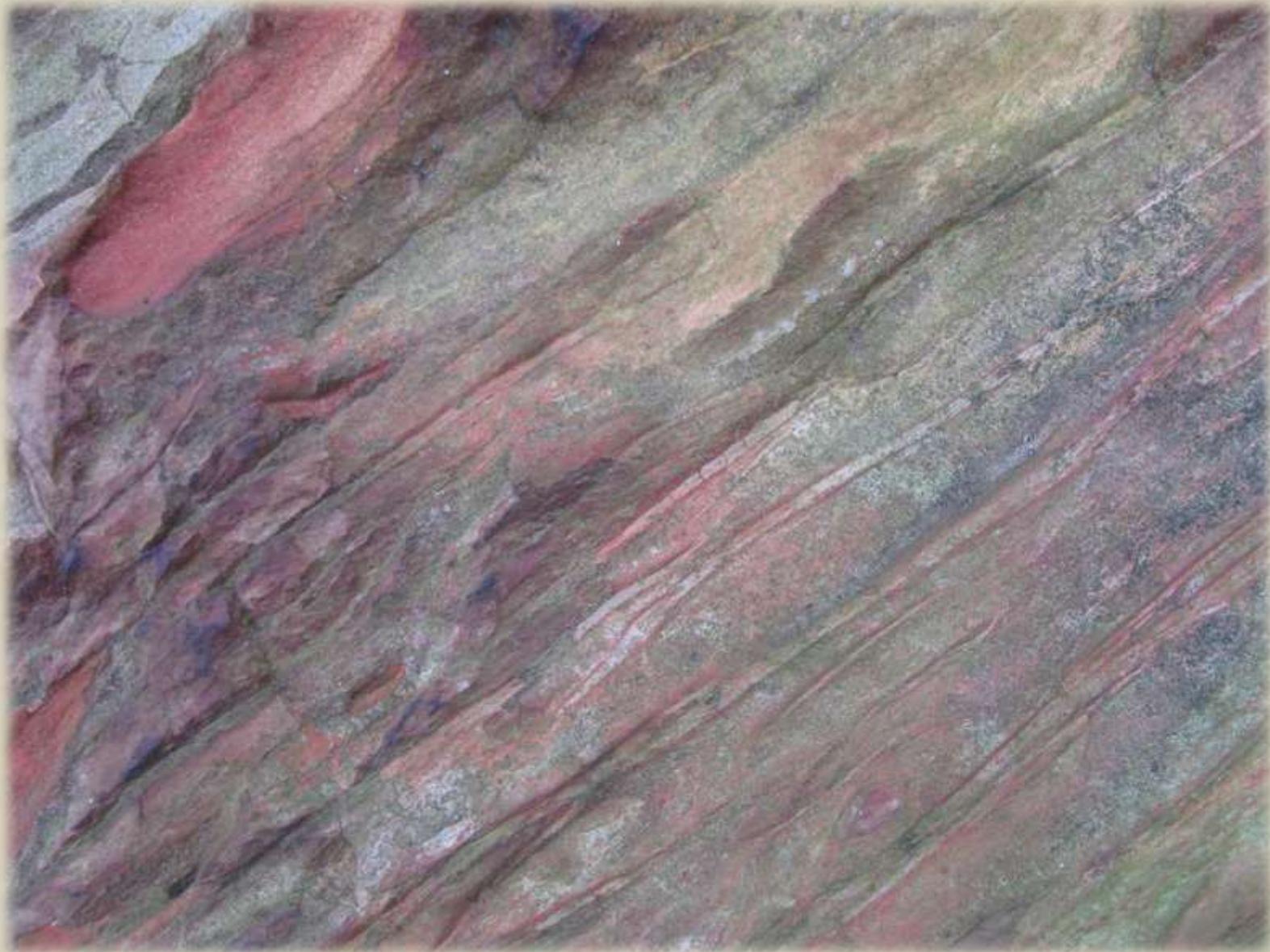
**immortalised
in the pine tree's bark -
Bashō's face**



**wooden bridge -
sound of Bashō's
bamboo cane**







in ancient rock...

all the many colours of

the rainbow







cold autumn day
the picnic area
deserted...





**a dead tree
overhanging the lake
...its beauty lingers**

still lake
still reeds
still reflections



**ripple rings...
all that remains of
the water-fowl**



**a cormorant
watching... waiting
the old bridge**





ducks leaving

their wake behind them

**enshrined in rock -
the gnarled roots of a
felled pine tree**





old roots...
a new tree
emerges



on the forest floor

redundant bark and leaves...

New Year's Day



wattle...
priceless
nuggets of gold

giving and taking...
the flower
the butterfly





fungus and lichen
alive
on the rotting branch



red capped mushrooms....



searching for fairies

I start dancing





thinking life is hard...

a mushroom rises up through rocky ground

Flood

(22 August 2010)



winter deluge
dormant creeks and waterfalls
awaken... quicken





drought – storm – flood a twin-trunked tree falls and separates forever

POSTSCRIPT

Since taking my photos and writing my haiku there have been changes to St Georges Lake due to a major dam upgrade in 2014-2015, in response to previous floods and the damage caused.

The \$3.4 million project, which began in June 2014 with the closure of the park and the draining of the lake, is the biggest regional dam project in Parks Victoria's history.

The dam rebuild, which includes a deeper and wider primary spillway and secondary spillway, has created a lower water capacity in the lake of 160 megalitres.

The park reopened in mid-August 2015.

While I acknowledge the necessity and importance of this project due to the property and environmental damage caused by the flood of 2010 and a subsequent flood, the "new" St Georges Lake, for me anyway, has lost some of its natural charm and wabi-sabi. In place of many organic rocks, rock walls, waterfalls, rustic timber railings and gnarled trees there is now concrete, metal, uniform sized boulders and slipways. The upper hills around the lake have also been stripped of thousands of their pine trees during a plantation processing. The cool, lush green of the pine forest, alive with many bird and animal inhabitants, is no more. The remaining landscape is barren, desolate, stark and dispiriting. For this reason, my photos of St Georges Lake in the period 2010-2012 are even more precious and dear to me.

Regardless of the changes at St Georges Lake (which still has plenty of beauty), I continue to treasure this place and to visit and walk there often. I also continue to see and feel the presence of Bashō there and enjoy my many haiku moments, even if I do not always write them down!

Debrah Gai Lewis, December 2015

REFERENCES

St Georges Lake:

Parks Victoria <http://parkweb.vic.gov.au/explore/parks/creswick-r.p./things-to-do/st-georges-lake-and-dam-wall>

Visit Creswick <http://visitcreswick.com.au/activities>

The Courier <http://www.thecourier.com.au/story/3170533/creswick-dam-rebuild-nears-completion/>

Poem

‘The autumn fool moon...’ by Bashō. Translation by R.H. Blyth, in *Haiku* (4 volumes). Hokuseido Press, Japan: 1952.

All other haiku were written by Debrah Gai Lewis©

Photographs:

Basho statue. Wikimedia Commons; Public Domain. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:MatsuoBashoChusonji.jpg>

“Natagiri Pass”. Photograph by Michael Yamashita - National Geographic (February 2008)

<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2008/02/bashos-trail/yamashita-photography>

“The moon rises above Nanko Lake”. Photograph by Michael Yamashita in National Geographic (February 2008)

<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2008/02/bashos-trail/yamashita-photography>

All other photos were taken by Debrah Gai Lewis© using a portable digital Canon PowerShot SX100 IS camera. Some of the photos have been cropped for presentation in this book but none have been photoshopped or otherwise altered.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Debrah Gai Lewis was born in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia on 7 October 1955. From the age of 7 she lived and revelled in Sydney's Northern Beaches (living mainly in Warriewood) until age 19 when she departed for her first adventure overseas to the UK, Europe and the Middle East, including living and working for 6 months on a kibbutz near Tel Aviv. Her subsequent overseas travels have been overland through many countries of Asia, two subsequent trips to India, and most recently, two trips to the west coast of the USA, both inspired by [SoulCollage®](#). Debrah has also travelled extensively in Australia and has lived in four Australian states (NSW, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia) and the Australian Capital Territory, for varying periods of time. She now lives in the Central West of Victoria with her partner and their dachshund on a peaceful and beautiful three acre rural property in a divine landscape blessed with birdsong.

Debrah has an undergraduate honours degree in Information Science (B. App. Sci. Info.) from the University of Technology, Sydney (1990) and had a 17 year career in information management, information services and libraries, in both the private and public sectors before retiring to dedicate her life to yoga teaching and SoulCollage® facilitation.

Debrah's love of reading and writing haiku started in the 1980s and several of Debrah's haiku have been published in print and online haiku journals under the name "Jyotimitra", a name she no longer uses.

oOo



~End~