

Bloggers join hands to create Japan 'Quakebook'

March 29 2011, by Daniel Rook



A couple walks past debris in Rikuzentakata city, Iwate prefecture on Tuesday. Inspired by a desire to help victims of Japan's deadly earthquake, a group of bloggers and writers have come together through the Internet to create a book of stories about the disaster.

Inspired by a desire to help victims of Japan's deadly earthquake, a group of bloggers and writers have come together through the Internet to create a book of stories about the disaster.

The result, "Quakebook", is a moving collection of photos, memories and reflections about the massive tremor and monster tsunami that demonstrates the power of the web to unite people around the world in times of tragedy.

The project is the brainchild of a British man living in Japan who blogs

under the name "Our Man in Abiko" on websites such as [Twitter](#), where the project uses the hashtag #quakebook.

On March 18, a week after the tsunami hit Japan's northeast coast, he sent a [tweet](#) saying: "I want to compile a book of [quake](#) experiences and publish it in a week and donate all profits to Red Cross. We have the technology.

"If everyone wrote 250 words -- one page -- or submitted their favourite (original) tweets, pics or artwork, I could edit, publish it in days," added the resident of Chiba Prefecture just east of Tokyo, who prefers to keep his identity secret to preserve the collaborative spirit of the project.

"I was having a shower thinking, here we are relatively unscathed and we're doing nothing and it's infuriating," he told AFP. "There's a massive crisis on my doorstep and I couldn't forgive myself if I didn't do something to help."

Less than 45 minutes after his first tweet, he received the first contribution.

"That gave me a clue. I thought: I'm on to something here. I've hit a raw nerve," he said.

More than 200 people have been involved in the project, including volunteer editors and translators from as far afield as the United States and Ireland.

"The reason it works is because we all want to do something. It's very therapeutic for people to tell their stories. They feel like they've been ignored or forgotten," its creator said.

"It's been great. You realise you're not alone. And that's maybe even

more valuable than anything else."

The project has received dozens of contributions from Japanese nationals, expatriates as well as people watching the tragedy unfold from overseas.

"I have been around Tokyo for 15 years and I feel I am needed here now more than ever. The decision whether to stay is the most complex one I have ever had to make in my life," wrote Tokyo resident Dan Castellano.

"Japan is my adopted home. I would not leave a burning house alone if my family were still inside," he said, according to excerpts on the project's blog quakebook.blogspot.com.

The 9.0-magnitude earthquake which crashed into Japan's northeast coast at 2:46 pm on March 11 has now left more than 28,000 people dead or missing and triggered a nuclear emergency at the Fukushima power plant.

Hundreds of thousands more have been left homeless and are now living in temporary shelters, while many others have been affected by food shortages and rolling power blackouts.

Some of the Quakebook contributors, like Yuki Watanabe, a Fukushima native now living in Tokyo, have family in the affected zone.

"My parents' house is within 40 kilometres of the Fukushima nuclear plant. They've been told they must stay indoors. Although the house wasn't greatly damaged by the earthquake or tsunami, as the house is built on solid ground, they have to contend with the problem of radiation," she wrote.

"What have we done to deserve this? We are suffering like others in

disaster affected areas. The difference is we have an unnatural and unseen danger to deal with. Please don't abandon Fukushima," she pleaded.

It's a project that would not have been possible in such a short space of time before the explosion in social networking sites like Twitter.

"We've talked to people in Fukushima and Miyagi (another devastated area), all through tweeting, blogging and through technology," the Quakebook creator said.

"I think people are responding because we are amateurs. People are opening up. We finished it in one week so memories are fresh and the emotions are still raw."

"Quakebook (2:46: Aftershocks: Stories from the Japan Earthquake)" will be available soon to download online via the blog site and later in a print edition, possibly through Amazon, with proceeds going to the Red Cross.

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