

In the last week of July, 2008 I visited the small Japanese fishing town of Shimofuro. The town is located at the northern tip of mainland Japan, just below the remote island of Hokkaido. My grandmother's younger brother, a retired fisherman, has lived there all his life.

Shimofuro was once a prosperous fishing town, and hot springs in the area have long attracted tourists. (The town's name derives from the term Shuma-Fura, or fume-rock, in the language of Hokkaido's indigenous Ainu people.) Tourism has recently slowed though, and many of the town's young people have left to look for better paying jobs.

I decided to go to Shimofuro because I wanted to visit my grandmother's brother, whom I had never met. No one from the family had been there since the 1950s and '60s, when my mother and two aunts had visited from time to time. Given that family has been a continuing theme of my work, I decided to photograph Shimofuro and perhaps, in the process, fill in some of the blanks in my personal history.