

**KIND LAND, HARSH LAND, BOUNTIFUL LAND:
A Walking Trek 2500 km from Cape Reinga to Bluff
to Connect with New Zealand and Rest the Mind
by Eric Martinot
April 10, 2004 (updated April 21)**

As I reach Stirling Point in Bluff on April 8, I think about the reactions of strangers these past six months. In the Far North, a farmer on the side of the road points to my middle and says “you’ll get rid of that by the time you reach Bluff.” Some say “you’re mad” with an uncertain wariness in their eye, as if not quite sure what kind of person stands before them. “Good on you” is offered by many. “Just take the bus” advise some school children. Others merely ask where I’m from, as if that might explain something. “Why?” is the universal question.

Why indeed? New Zealand is a vast country with abundant and spectacular natural variety and offers an easy closeness and connectedness to the earth. It is one of the few places in the world where one can walk continuously for thousands of kilometers without worry about wild animals, snakes, malicious people, or disease. Walking is good for the body and soul. In my case, the trek offered re-balancing and mental rest after many years of hard work writing, thinking, and talking as a clean energy/environment consultant and program manager for the World Bank/Global Environment Facility and as a part-time university professor. I also wanted to forge a lasting bond with the country and some of its people. And perhaps I would inspire others to do the same thing and help the development of the Te Araroa national tramping track that an Auckland group, the Te Araroa Trust, is promoting. Perhaps, in the end, “because I can” is a good answer.

Inspired by the Te Araroa web site, which I must have discovered after browsing for long trails around the world, a final decision to undertake the trek was made in May 2003. The next several months were a whirl of preparing gear and logistics, researching services and postal drops along the trek route, purchasing a full set of topo maps and tramping guides from NZ on-line bookshops, completing professional responsibilities, and getting in good physical shape. Weekly full-day hikes and about 5100 km (3200 miles) of bicycling in the year before the trek, along with past annual 300-500 km (200-300 mile) segments of the Pacific Crest Trail in the Western U.S., were my main forms of physical conditioning. Prior to arriving in New Zealand, I established a trek web site to document the trek with photos and journals, to be updated regularly as I went along, and to communicate with family, friends, colleagues, and those I met along the way. Everything taken care of, I arrived in Auckland October 11 and started walking from Cape Reinga October 15.

The first part of the trek, from Cape Reinga along board-flat and firm-walking Ninety-Mile Beach, was a wonderful way to start. The gentle weather and surf were welcoming. Sea birds stood on the beach at intervals and seemed reluctant to abandon their territory as I passed. Tour buses careened along the beach at enormous speed. Fishermen were digging up things in the sand that perhaps they shouldn’t be. On my tiny but song-packed audio player, upbeat selections by Keiko Matsui, Pat Metheny, Steely Dan, the Gypsy Kings, and Gaelic Storm enhanced my sense of my surroundings and provided a nice rhythm for walking. The sun shining behind me as I walked south was disorienting at first—it should be in front of me! Camped on the sand hills above the beach, dinnertime provided vistas of the sun setting over the sea, along with blowing sand that found its way into everything. At the end of Ninety-Mile Beach, the one shop in the small town of Ahipara offered my first taste of New Zealand “take-away” cuisine.

Then it was time to head inland and get my first introduction to bush tracks (NZ “tracks” are “trails” in American English). The Herekino and Raetia forests offered the first taste of the sucking mud, impenetrable tangled vines, viewless density, head-high grasses, deeply slotted streams, and travel

up and down steep dirt “cliffs” that characterize bush tracks. Peter Griffiths of Kaitia was one of the first of many people to help me during the trek, and coached me on bush tramping (NZ “tramping” is roughly equivalent to both “hiking” and “backpacking” in American English). “Feel the ridgetop with your feet” he advised. He also spoke of the area's history of Kauri tree harvesting. On a narrow winding Omahuta forest dirt road, a dump-truck barrels past at 70 km/hr—the “heavy machinery” to which a tiny “road closed” sign on the side of the road must have referred. A sign warning of poisonous baits being laid in the area for possum control (common throughout the country) near a stream I drank from was cause for worry that the ground water would be contaminated (it isn't).

During the walk down the east coast to Auckland, I passed new seaside mansions next to squalid trailers. All residents—rich and poor alike—seemed to have their own private beach-front even though the beaches are technically public. A visit to the Waitangi Treaty House offered just a glimpse of both NZ's “partnership” pride and the source of current and past disputes over property rights. Leaving the tourists of Paihia behind, curious cattle followed me along in their paddocks as I walked along some minor sealed (paved) roads. The bluff-top (cliff-top) ocean views were tremendous, and the many cattle and sheep grazing near the ocean seemed to appreciate the views, much to the publicly-expressed jealousy of coastal property developers seeking to make money at the animals' (and their owner's) expense.

The east coast offered a taste of the variety of interactions that continued throughout the trek. A water taxi ride across Whangarei Harbor to the beach at Marsden Point was full of school children; they advised me to hitchhike! The boaties who kindly took me across the Mangawhai river offered me a beer as they deposited me on the beach to resume my walk south. Some teenagers enjoying evening fireworks (November 5) in the Puhoi Domain quizzed me on my trek and assured me there were no policemen around to bother me if I camped in a dark corner of the rugby field. A fisherman on Orewa beach came over to lend a hand as I had trouble getting through some coastal rocks. The East Coast Bays Walk heading into Auckland was full of people to walk and talk with and relieve my solitary walking condition for awhile.

South of Auckland it was back to solitary bush walking in Coromandel, Kaimai-Mamaku, and Kaweka Forest Parks. And back to tough overgrown tracks, as the multiple lacerations on hands and legs from “cutty grass” and other sharp plants attested on several days. The one time I got lost on the trek was in the Kaimais. Several Germans in huge Pinnacles Hut were good company, with a wide range of topics (i.e., they wondered how to wash one's hands with NZ's separate hot and cold water taps). Emerging onto a highway from the dense foliage of a tough bush track, a passing motorist gave me a two-honk “thumbs up”—the kind of welcome encouragement I've felt throughout. Entering the town of Waikino after a day on a bush track, “Steely Dan,” a fellow who makes metal products in his garage, offered me a frying pan when I stopped in to ask directions to my home stay that night. But alas, I had no use for it! (And amazingly, a friend with him was someone who had given me a thumbs-up from his truck along a remote bush road in Coromandel the previous day). Leaving the Kaimais, a long dirt/gravel forestry road and short highway walk led to blueberry sorbet and juice at the Mamaku Blue Winery, followed by a few hours “tie walking” along an abandoned rail line to Rotorua.

Into Kaweka Forest Park, open beech forest offered a welcome respite from the dense bush and much easier walking along a continuous and consistent set of tracks—one of my favorite sections. A deer hunter asked me if I had seen “signs” and a father in Boyd Hut matter-of-factly described how his two teenage sons swam across the intimidating rain-elevated Oamaru River as he carried their packs the day before. My first walking along tussock-grass-covered “tops” (of the range) led to Kaweka J, at 1724 meters (5700 feet) elevation the highest reached on North Island. Views from the open range tops were consistently tremendous in the fine weather. Two of the days had 1300

meters (4300 feet) of vertical ascent each, as the “tops” route repeatedly went up and down all day long. On the way down, Department of Conservation workers removing “parasite” Radiata pine trees nearby flew off in a helicopter which landed right on the track. Later, a trail runner appeared in my hut at dusk, shared some stories, and ran off into the darkness for another hour run to the next hut.

Shifting west to the Wanganui River, Christmas midnight mass was sung soulfully in both English and Maori at the Sisters of Compassion convent in the tiny settlement of Jerusalem on the remote Wanganui River Road. Past Wanganui, crossing farmland near Ratana, a herd of steers chased me across their paddock because I didn't know any better to just walk through them! Later, it was welcome beach walking down the west coast, amidst concentrations of cars, trucks, dune buggies, motor bikes, quads, bicycles, police cars, and sand-surfers on the beaches near sea-side settlements. More boaties were kind enough to ferry me across the Manuwatu and Rangitikei rivers right at the coast so I could continue walking the beach.

In the Tararua mountains, I was thrilled to meet dozens of trampers over the New Years holiday. The first day a group of day hikers passed me and I followed them. Later, I tramped for a day with Vicki and Kevin, who later told me one of those day hikers was a hairdresser, and had cut Vicki's hair the following day—both woman realizing they had tramped with me! Not only that, an Auckland woman who had been following my trek from the start wrote me that her husband was a fellow teacher with Vicki at the same school! Small world. At Kime Hut there were two people stranded for the past few days because the severe weather on the open range top had knocked them off their feet when they tried to leave. Super tramper Tom, met at Nichols Hut, walked with me as far as the top of Mt. Crawford, from where he called via cell phone for a pick-up in just a few hours—less than half the time I ended up taking to get down! The high point of my Tararua route was Mt. Hector, at 1529 meters (5000 feet) elevation, and all together, the route involved 3400 meters (11,200 feet) of vertical ascent (almost the height of Mt Cook!). Reaching Wellington, a Dominion Post reporter took an interest in the trek and wrote a news story titled “Reduced to Tears by the Tararuas,” referring to my sobs of relief/release after the stress of scrambling up a short cliff with a sharp drop-off behind me on one of the rugged Tararua range-top sections.

Starting South Island at Farewell Spit, the coastal tidal flats southward made for adventurous wet walking at low tide far from shore. An Italian working at a Collingwood backpackers cooked a great dinner for our mixed group—French, German, Israeli, and Scottish—foreshadowing the multitudes of foreign visitors to come on South Island. Abel Tasman National Park offered paradise-like turquoise-blue coastal waters, a continuous stream of foot traffic passing me on the Coastal Track, and many kayakers, water taxis, and boaties. Motueka's Hot Mamas Cafe offered many treats with an alternative subculture in the background. At the small Mahana School on the ridgetop Old Coach Road, a teacher and some students were interested in hearing about my trek as I stopped for water and to eat lunch after school had ended for the day. In the one-building settlement of Golden Downs nestled in the forest of the same name, lodge hosts Willy and Rewa made me feel very comfortable. As I walked the roads to St. Arnaud, several cars stopped to offer me rides; how best to decline graciously?

In Nelson Lakes park, three fast trampers passed me in the rain on the Travers river track. I doubled my pace to stay with them the rest of the day, going farther than I had planned—and enjoyed a rare treat of tramping with others! Travers Hut was full of people waiting out the wet weather before attempting to go over exposed Travers Saddle, my route as well. So there was more tramping company the next day and I walked with a Korean woman and a Dutch couple over the saddle. Later at Blue Lake Hut, I prepared to go over formidable Waiau Pass, a steep rarely-used alpine route to 1870 meters (6100 feet) elevation, and the highest point reached on my trek. Four trampers arrived at the hut, having just come over Waiau Pass from the other side, and offered

information about the route. “You can do it” they said. And I did! More rain, overgrown tracks, and slick boulder fields finally led to the river-valley cattle flats of St. James Station, where herds of steers ran from my path and my newly learned no-reason-to-fear-cattle bravado. The St. James Walkway to Lewis Pass was absolutely empty; where was everyone? (On the Milford and Routeburn Tracks, I later learned.)

South of Lewis Pass, the imminent arrival of a once-in-50-year storm in mid-February that washed away road bridges and tragically flooded entire communities in southern North Island had me postpone 80-km of tramping southward that contained several major river and side-stream crossings. Hiked in late March instead, with three other companions, the river crossings and tracks were tame and fun. And conversation with Tomo, Geoff, and Kim on the track made the tramping effortless. And I could finally get some pictures of myself on the tracks! The route was much better marked than we expected west of Harpers Pass—the Department of Conservation had happily been at work. I tried my first “three-wire” bridge crossing. And in the very last kilometer of the route, Tomo and I made it across the swift thigh-deep Otira River with arms locked around each other's packs, moving together in a stable four-legged configuration. No other trampers about in this section, but there was the deer hunter who brought a fresh-kill back to the hut one night, and also a white DOC helicopter in the Taramakau river valley, which hovered over individual Gorse bushes and sprayed herbicide all afternoon in a valiant (and expensive) attempt to stem this prolific weed.

Walking down the West Coast highway from Hokitika to Copeland Valley, the vast and wild landscape overpowered the few cars and tiny towns, to leave me with a truly remote feeling. The snow-capped Southern Alps loomed nearby. Then, a thousand Australian cyclists passed me on the road as part of an organized cycle tour. I had fun giving thumbs-up or other encouragement to each cyclist, and for a day, the roads belonged to us rather than the cars. Happily, the towns are exactly a day's walk apart and I didn't need to carry much. Somehow the sun shined for some days on the notoriously rainy West Coast. Up the Copeland valley track to near ice-covered Copeland Pass over the Alps, hut warden Tim shared his climbing exploits and impressed me with his efforts to keep the tracks in good shape. But unlike one skilled mountaineer coming up the track behind me, I couldn't go over the pass myself. So it was back down the valley, and 400-km of bus riding later (the shortest road route possible), I was on the other (east) side of the pass at Hooker Lake and Mt. Cook, just 5-km straight-line distance from where I had been in the Copeland valley. Mt. Cook (Aoraki) loomed majestically among the scattered clouds. That mountaineer on the Copeland track? He made it over the pass and I ran into him again at Hooker Lake as he finished!

After Mt. Cook, the high “Mackenzie country” of Central Otago offered vast plains and tussock-covered mountains. There was more road walking between towns a day apart, but much of the land near the roads was unfenced and I could tramp across tussock plains near the roads. The proprietors of the small Omarama Hotel made me right at home. Two sheep stations kindly allowed me to walk farm/dirt roads across their land for a full day to cross the range. The views over open hills from the 1400-meter (4600-foot) high point of that day were unforgettable. As usual, the sheep were quite shy and scattered well in advance of my arrival as I walked steep dirt roads down to Hawea Flat near Lake Hawea. Those hills beckon me back for more exploration! With no lodging nearby, a bench in a schoolyard under full moonlight made a serviceable, if cold, place for my sleeping bag, before the final road trek to Wanaka.

Past Wanaka, Lord of the Rings country opened on the Dart River, as tourist safaris roamed the valley and the noise of jet boats drowned out everything. Still, the Dart River track was absolutely beautiful. A British trampster hiking the length of South Island passed me going south to north, and put my route to shame with his unimaginable untracked routes along the Southern Alps and West Coast beaches. A German woman “tramping” the remote Greenstone dirt road with her 8-month-

old in a stroller stopped to chat as I passed. The Greenstone track and hut were among the most impressively developed I'd seen, while helicopters and small planes to and from Milford repeatedly droned overhead. The Mararoa river valley and Mavora Lakes were peaceful, isolated, and calming. "Could you follow the markers?" asked a DOC worker I passed after tramping the newly re-marked and re-routed Mavora Walkway. "The track will be worn in after the first few hundred trampers" he assured me, but my ankles complained of being the first to traverse the tussock hillsides without benefit of a worn-in track!

Southland brought cold wind, rain, and hail, as winter approached, perhaps too early. The plentiful dairy cows, sheep, and deer that I passed along minor sealed roads didn't seem to mind. Finally, Foveaux Strait! The hosts of the Globe Hotel in Riverton made me hot pumpkin soup and took an interest in this trek summary, which I started writing on the high-speed internet computer in their pub as the rain and hail continued. Good weather dawned for the 25-km walk along the beach to Invercargill on the penultimate day. Then, huge double-trailer trucks passed me all morning on the highway to Bluff, almost bringing me to a standstill with their wind drafts, before I could turn off and walk the Foveaux Walkway with three companions and enjoy the ocean views. The cows along the walkway were not impressed with the moment, but it was an amazing trek and in the end, "he bloody got there" toasted a companion over fine New Zealand wine. "I think that's enough walking for awhile" I proclaimed as I reached for the signpost at Stirling Point.

Trek Facts

Leaving Cape Reinga last October 15, I reached Wellington at the bottom of North Island on January 12, and then continued from Cape Farewell at the top of South Island on January 21. I reached Bluff on April 8. My route was roughly 2610 km total in length, 1330 km on the North Island and 1280 km on the South Island. The 2610 km involved 2490 km of walking (95.4%), 110 km of bicycling (4.2%), and 10 km of kayaking (0.4%).

Of the 176 elapsed days, there were 95 full hiking days, another 20-25 full days for work on the trek web site, and another 15-20 full days for professional writing and communicating with colleagues. There were also about 8 full days for bus and car transport to accommodate the five shifts, postponements, and jumps during the trek (Section E shift to Coromandel, Section G shift to Wanganui River, Section J-2 postponement, Section K jump over Copeland Pass, and Section M jump over Cascade Saddle; the reasons for each of these changes to the original trek plan are discussed in the indicated section journal). The remaining roughly 35 days were simply for rest. Sometimes I waited an extra day for weather to clear before continuing, and these "weather days" might be used for either rest or computer work. If I had tramped over Cascade Saddle, and had walked the two bicycled bits (110 km total) in Sections F and L, I would have added perhaps 6 hiking days to the 95 days, for a total of 101 hiking days along my route.

Even though the trek route circumvented some major urban centers, the route passed through cities and towns representing almost half of New Zealand's population. The route passed through 30 of New Zealand's 74 territorial authorities (City Councils and District Councils) (*), and 14 of the country's 34 Forest Parks and National Parks (Northland, Coromandel, Kaimai-Mamaku, Kaimanawa, Kaweka, Wanganui, Tararua, Abel Tasman, Nelson Lakes, Lake Sumner, Arthurs Pass, Westland, Mt. Cook, Mt. Aspiring).

Packages containing food, supplies, and equipment were mailed ahead about 15 times via parcel post as I went along, employing cardboard "Handi Boxes" sold in six different standard sizes at all NZ Post Shops. Such forwarding involved "post restante" (mailing to yourself at a post office for later pick-up), sending to lodgings where I had advance booking, and sending to friends of friends.

In the back-country, I slept or rested in 45 different huts along the route and camped a total of 22 nights. In towns or along roads, I camped in road-accessible campgrounds or improvised spots a total of 5 nights. The rest of my lodging was in motels, small-town hotels, hostels/backpackers, home stays, and lodges. In the back-country, I ate a total of 130 freeze-dried meals (mostly brought from the U.S. since the one available kiwi brand has MSG in it), along with copious quantities of dried fruits, nuts, salami, Japanese-style rice crackers, rye crackers, almond butter, powdered soup, and "Naked Bites" gluten-free energy bars (made by Nature's Oven in Auckland). In towns I lived mostly on pub meals (steak and chips/fries), Chinese and Indian take-aways, lamb kebabs with rice, other cafe fare, and my own cooking.

Equipment was a 4200-cubic-inch (70-liter) top-load tramping backpack, 2700-cubic-inch (45-liter) top-load road-walking backpack, two trekking poles, 30F (0C) high-fill-power sleeping bag, windproof sleeping bag bivy cover with bug mesh, one-person free-standing tent, accordion-fold foam pad, water filter, and two Nalgene water bottles (quart each). Kitchen was a 3-oz (80g) screw-on burner with metal windscreen, pressurized propane/butane fuel canister, titanium 1.2-quart (1.2 liter) pot, and lexan (plastic) spoon. Clothing was Gore-tex hooded parka and pants, gaitors, fleece jacket, fleece vest, fleece cap, fleece balaclava, fleece gloves, wool hat, cotton sun hat with brim, sunglasses, polypro long-sleeve shirt and tights, convertible short/long quick-dry nylon pants, synthetic short-sleeve shirt and briefs, and three pairs Smartwool socks. Electronics were an LED headlamp, waterproof digital camera, audio player, GPS (Garman eTrex), watch with electronic altimeter (saves GPS batteries and is more accurate), and EPIRB emergency distress beacon. (Note: the GPS needs to have the NZ grid coordinate system in order to work with NZ "260" topo maps.) Compass was an ordinary baseplate model, as electronic compasses don't strike me as reliable enough and drain battery power too fast if integrated with GPS or watch. (Note: compass should be purchased in NZ to ensure the needle is balanced for the proper geomagnetic zone.) Emergency gear included first-aid kit, duct tape, fabric repair tape, matches, plastic whistle, and tiny pen-knife. Not all equipment was carried on all sections, with the unneeded pieces being mailed ahead or left behind and retrieved later. Everything was selected for being ultra light-weight. Typically, my tramping pack varied between 20-35 lbs (9-16 kg) total depending on food carried. My road pack was usually about 8-12 lbs (4-5 kg).

Footwear was three pairs of pre-broken-in boots (one very light-weight pair used in Sections A-D and two pairs of regular-weight tramping boots used for all the remaining bush sections) and one pair of running shoes (used for all road walking after Section E). However, using the light-weight boots to walk the roads in Sections A-D was a mistake, and led to a foot injury that healed slowly between Sections D and E. I should have used running shoes for all road walking from the start. However, switching between running shoes and tramping boots would have added further logistical complexity to Sections A-D, as I wouldn't have wanted to carry them both at the same time.

Maps and guides were a combination of 1:50,000 "260" series topo maps, NZ Parkmaps (which show tracks and huts better than topos), a new series of Terramaps available for some areas like the Tararuas, Routeburn/Greenstone, and Dart/Rees/Mt. Aspiring (same as 1:50,000 topos, but with tracks and huts well marked, and with complete coverage of a particular tramping area in one map), track/route descriptions from the book "101 Great Tramps in New Zealand", DOC track/route guides (one-page brochures), and route guides from NZ Trampler. With a GPS containing NZ's unique coordinate grid and the "260" topo maps, I could easily pinpoint my exact location on the map no matter where I was. GPS reception was never a problem even in dense bush with the eTrex.

High-quality polarized sunglasses were one of the most prized possessions during the trek and well worth the investment. During the time that I was here, New Zealand experienced a UV index of 11 almost every day, it seemed, which is the maximum end of the scale. My sun hat and liberal use of

SPF-45 sunblock were also important. I burn very easily but used the sunblock diligently, often re-applying mid-day. I didn't burn and didn't feel that I suffered any sun damage during the trek. This surprised me, as I had expected the sun to be much more of a problem than it was.

On isolated and rugged sections, I carried an EPIRB emergency beacon and enough gear to survive unexpected harsh weather conditions. Before every section, I sent my route "intentions" to a contact person, including expected finish date and gear and food carried. Upon finishing, I would immediately call the contact person to say I made it. (More discussion on safety in the Epilogue.)

(*) Far North, Whangarei, Kaipara, Rodney, North Shore City, Auckland City, Thames-Coromandel, Hauraki, Western Bay of Plenty, Rotorua, Taupo, Hastings, Wanganui, Rangitikei, Manuwatu, Horowhenua, Kapiti Coast, Upper Hutt City, Hutt City, Wellington City, Tasman, Buller, Hurunui, Westland, Mackenzie, Central Otago, Waitaki, Queenstown-Lakes, Southland, Invercargill City.

Impressions

So what did I think of it all? First of all, the tramping tracks were rough and much more challenging than expected. I didn't believe warnings that trampers often progress at only 2 km/hour here. That's "cross-country" (untracked/unmarked) speed, I thought. On the Pacific Crest Trail in the Western U.S., where I developed my long-distance tramping skills and endurance, thru-trampers routinely spend months walking 30 to 50 km every day because the condition and construction of the track allows easy striding with no need to use the upper body (there are plenty of serious elevation gains and losses, but the track is graded). In New Zealand, tramping is often a full-body climbing experience as constant waist-high or chest-high "steps" composed of roots, rocks, and/or dirt banks make travel closer to what would be called "scrambling" in the U.S. Streams in much of the terrain are steep-walled, making each stream crossing a climb-in/climb-out affair. New Zealand's steep and dense bush terrain ("semi-jungle" I would offer), flood-prone rivers and streams, active slips (landslides), and exposed range tops with the ever-present threat of severe weather make for challenging and sometimes stressful walking. The stress disappeared when I tramped with other people, but most of the time I was alone. Solo tramping is officially discouraged by the Department of Conservation, to which I would reply that safe solo tramping is certainly possible here but not nearly as enjoyable as going with others. Sharing the trials and tribulations of a difficult track with others certainly makes them less formidable. The result was that the trek was more stressful mentally and more exhausting physically than I had expected. And I didn't attain a state of continuous "relaxed striding" nearly as often as I had originally sought.

The difficulty of many of the tramping tracks and routes also affected my choice of trek route as I went. For example, originally I was going to take the Te Araroa proposed route through the Richmond range at the top of South Island. After the difficult walking through the Tararuas just before, I was hesitant to tackle another difficult range so soon, and especially alone. This partly influenced my decision to take a different route to start South Island, southward from Cape Farewell. I believe it would be quite tough to walk the length of the entire country continuously along bush routes and tracks. Kiwi trampers, with a commendable "go anywhere, through anything" attitude, routinely take these tough tracks and routes, and taken individually they can be enjoyed. But to string them together and do one after another is a different matter. As the Te Araroa route develops, hopefully track and route upgrades will make them easier individually, and thus more feasible to be done in long sequences one after another by the "thru-tramper."

Of course there are well-developed tracks, beaches, 4WD tracks, farm roads, forest roads, and sealed (paved) roads, all of which make for easier walking. My 2500 km of walking took 95 days,

an average of 26 km/day. But I certainly felt odd walking on sealed (paved) roads more easily traveled by car, all in the name of continuity. I was, after all, walking the entire length of the country, and tracks or dirt roads don't cover it. The Te Araroa Trust in Auckland is developing such a continuous walking track, but only parts of that route are yet available to the average trumper. I learned to walk the roads in running shoes with a light pack rather than haul my full bush-tramping pack, which made it easier but also increased logistical complexity. Even so, walking long distances on pavement is very hard on the feet, something I didn't expect. Some roads were so scenic and so lightly traveled, like the west coast from Hokitika to Copeland Valley, that the walking was quite enjoyable. Other roads I had to grit my teeth and bear the heavy traffic zooming by, almost always at full speed (100+ km/hr) no matter what the road. Some roads had grassy/dirt shoulders for soft walking, while others did not. Towns spaced a day apart, 25-40/km, made for easy logistics and light packs. And I shall always remember all the curious steers, nagging cows ready for milking, fearful run-away sheep, and shy deer in the endless series of grassy farm paddocks passed along all the roads everywhere.

The difficulty of finding good ways to "get through" some of the route was more than expected. I found that small backroads often don't go through, so one must take to main highways for a through-route. And tramping across farms or along forest road networks is harder said than done, unless there is a permanent established tramping right-of-way as Te Araroa is doing for many farms and forests. Finding the right people to ask for permission can be time-consuming. Even with permission, crossing farmland may involve going over or through electric or barbed-wire fences. In plantation forests, forest companies routinely change road networks, build new roads and remove or terminate others. So topo maps may be inadequate. Twice I tried forest roads that dead-ended unexpectedly, leaving me to backtrack or push through piles of forest debris. Heavy logging machinery and fear of fire means forest companies are often unhappy about trampers on their roads, particularly in areas of active logging operations. When I called a major forest company to ask permission to walk their forest roads, I was told that tramping was prohibited unless done with a tramping club that had posted a \$1 million liability bond against damages (presumably from fire). So I grew to feel constrained in crossing farmland and forests.

One of my favorite parts of the trek was the beach walking. Long-distance beach walking is something I had never experienced before. There are vast distances to be covered by beach here, and the trek included about 320 km of beach and tidal flat walking (Ninety-Mile Beach, Marsden Point to Waipu, Managarei Heads to Pakiri, Hatfields and Orewa Beaches, North Shore City East Coast Bays Walk, Koitiata to Waiterere, Farewell Spit to Takaka, Abel Tasman Track, 25-km of beach around Hokitika, and Riverton to Invercargill). Ninety-Mile Beach and the Cape Reinga Coastal Walkway were one of the clear highlights of the trek. Beach/tidal flat walking from Cape Farewell to Takaka and on into Abel Tasman was great fun. Negotiating the beaches and tidal rocks of East Coast Bays at low tide with lots of other people around was a particularly pleasant one-day walk. Of course, beach walking can get boring. An audio player helps tremendously, and the right music blends with the scenery, birds, and soft walking to offer true bliss.

My favorite bush tracks were in the section from St. Arnaud to Arthurs Pass, winding south through Nelson Lakes National Park, St. James Station, Lake Sumner, and into Arthur's Pass National Park. This section also included the most challenging part, going over 1870-meter (6100-foot) high Waiau Pass, and numerous river crossings and river-flat travels. Other favorite tracks were a 7-day north-to-south traverse through Kaimanawa and Kaweka Forest Parks, whose tracks and huts were very well maintained, the open vistas of the Tararua's Southern Crossing, and the smooth/easy Dart River, Greenstone, and Mavora Tracks in the southwest South Island. The northern bush forests of Herekino, Raetia, Coromandel and Kaimai were as unforgettable as they were impenetrable off of the tracks cut through the dense "semi-jungle."

To be critical for a moment, most of the tracks I walked or considered are individually quite short and must be connected together via roads, often requiring as much time off the track as on it. Many of the popular tracks are listed at 3-4 days, but a reasonably fit trumper can do them in half the published time. There are longer tramping tracks or routes but these are often difficult, weather-dependent, and require experience or a willingness to endure hardship. What the country needs more of are long, easy tracks in which one can spend a week or more continuously walking in the wilderness without worry about being trapped by weather. Also, there are too many helicopters, small planes, and jet boats in Forest Parks and National Parks—one just doesn't feel the wilderness character with such noise-makers around. And some huts and tracks are treated like tourist infrastructure—"sights" to see—rather than ways to provide access to extended wilderness, which gives a different feeling to being in/on them.

The weather seemed to cooperate quite well during the entire trek. By judicious use of a few rest days at strategic times, whether in a back-country hut or town, I was able to avoid most of the really bad weather days. Only a few days did the rain become unbearable, mostly because it was being driven horizontally by the wind. On most rainy days, the rain showers mostly came in intervals, perhaps lasting for 30 minutes or an hour or two, and then stopping for awhile. So one would dry out between showers. It was never that cold in the rain, except at the very end in April, such that a Gore-tex parka over a polypro shirt sufficed. The weather was mostly a factor in terms of the anxiety, stress and timing of weather-dependent tracks and routes, of which there were many. Rivers and side streams routinely flood during storms and can't be crossed. Seventy percent of tramping fatalities in New Zealand are due to drowning, a rescue worker told me. Good timing is critical, and it seemed that good timing was feasible due to the cyclic nature of the weather. After a storm cleared, a few days or several days of good weather would likely follow, during which a weather-dependent route could be tackled. But still, the threat of bad weather was a main source of stress—of potentially not being able to get through, or being stranded by flooded rivers or creeks, or being in a situation where the wrong judgment about a river crossing could be fatal. In contrast, in good weather, almost all river crossings were fun and easy.

On the North Island, I met very few fellow trampers, just a few hunters here and there, walking swiftly with rifle in hand and dogs ahead or behind. For example, during my six days in the Kawekas, only one night did I have others in the hut with me, and I met a total of three hunters and one trumper on the tracks the entire week. In five days in the Kaimais, I met four day hikers, two hunting dogs with hunter nowhere to be seen, and one hunter carrying a freshly killed deer carcass on his shoulder. That all changed when I came to the Tararuas during the New Years holiday. All of a sudden, my lonely tramping was relieved by literally dozens of trampers, most of them kiwis, and I learned from them and greatly enjoyed their company. On the South Island, the most popular tracks in places like Abel Tasman, Nelson Lakes, Mt. Cook, Dart River, and Greenstone had many trampers around. Most of these were foreigners, with the highest numbers being Dutch, German, Israeli, and British. A few Canadians and Americans were around, but not many. Of course, there were some kiwis too. Other South-Island tracks, like the St. James and Mavora Walkways, and the Hurunui and Taramakau valleys, were virtually empty.

In the bush (back-country) I stayed in huts or camped. New Zealand's 900-odd back-country huts are truly one of its finest assets and were almost always comfortable and inviting, some so nice that weeks could be spent in them just lounging about if time allowed. Only a few of the most popular ones were crowded, and at many of the 45 huts in which I stayed or just rested during the trek, I was alone. A NZ\$65 (US\$40) "annual hut pass" by the Department of Conservation covered the cost of all huts for the entire trip. Out of the bush, accommodation was a diverse mixture of lodges, small-town hotels, hostels/backpackers, home stays, and motels. Rates are cheap by international standards—usually NZ\$30-50 (US\$20-30) for a private room with shared bath or NZ\$60-80 (US\$40-60) for a motel room, sometimes including breakfast or dinner. (For the young or others

who can tolerate them, NZ\$20 (US\$13) dorm beds in group rooms are ubiquitous virtually everywhere.) Ironically, bed-and-breakfasts, usually cheaper than motels in other countries, are among the most expensive accommodation, and I avoided them, also because they are often farther from town services. Historic small-town hotels with pubs and good bistro fare were some of my favorite places and quite cheap for private rooms, even though I didn't drink during the trek. Mostly these types of hotels were in South Island. Among the best deals were NZ\$35 (US\$23) for a room including cooked breakfast in Omarama, and NZ\$30 (US\$20) for a room including a steak dinner in Winton.

Many people along the way advised me to see particular sights or visit particular places on my journey. It is difficult to explain that I wasn't tramping to “see the sights” but to travel. To me, there is a difference between a tourist and a traveler. A tourist “sees the sights,” often as many as possible in a given period. A traveler tries to find an interesting way to get from one point to another point while engaging with people and places along the way. In general, I try to avoid tourist-crowded areas when I travel, and rarely make a point to “see the sights.” In my mind, the two main “sights” that I took special care to see were the Waitangi Treaty House, which helped me begin to understand New Zealand's history (I'm still far from understanding it after six months here, which some would consider a major omission from my trek), and Mt. Cook. Everything else passed along the way was noted, photographed, and appreciated, but I had no agenda to see anything in particular, and didn't make any side trips. The point was to walk the length of the country in the most scenic and enjoyable way possible—and whatever I saw, that's what I saw.

Tourism is booming in New Zealand, particularly in the north, west, and south-west parts of South Island, and there are large numbers of tourist attractions and a huge variety of outdoor “adventures” and “experiences” being offered by the tourist industry, many of them guided excursions into the backcountry involving helicopters, airplanes, four-wheel-drives, and jet-boats, carrying people and/or supplies. Fine, let them do all that, but I didn't particularly want to be around it. I disliked places like tourist-dominated Queenstown, with its amusement-park-style “Thrill Therapy” advertisements for Shotover River jet boat rides painted full-length over local buses. And sometimes I felt surrounded by tourists rather than trampers on tracks and in huts—people to whom the track or hut was one further “sight” on a busy tourist itinerary. Some foreigners I met did come to NZ primarily to tramp, and spent most of their time on tracks or going from one track to another. Don't misunderstand me, tourism is good for the NZ economy and many couldn't enjoy the natural wonders without guides and other logistical help. But in some parts of South Island I felt that the presence of the tourist industry in the backcountry was too invasive.

New Zealand's small towns and settlements are cozy, friendly, and peaceful places that left enduring memories. Whether to rest, just pass through, or more often than not to settle down to some serious writing/emailing in internet cafes, I felt comfortable in places like Kerikeri, Waipu, Puhoi, Waikino, Taupo, Ratana, Levin, Collingwood, Motueka, Hokitika, Whataroa, Omarama, Wanaka, Mossburn, Winton, and Riverton.

Virtually all small towns and settlements, in addition to the larger cities, had internet cafes or some form of public internet access. Most internet cafes in larger cities or towns had several, sometimes dozens, of workstations, and excellent high-speed connections. NZ's network of internet cafes is probably the most comprehensive in the world. Wherever I was, I was able to communicate with friends, family, and colleagues, write professional papers, and keep my web site updated and maintained. Indeed, I probably spent the equivalent of about 40 full-time days during the trek on the computer from these internet cafes. Just updating the trek web site took at least half of that time—at least a full day after every trek section and perhaps 20-25 days in all. Happily, many internet cafes offer frequent-user rates, which meant I was often paying only NZ\$3-4/hr (US\$2-3/hr) for my computer use. A substantial sum when totaled across the whole trek, but still much more practical

than carrying a computer around and trying to get dial-in access.

I was very impressed with New Zealand's small-business and small-farm economy. Most everyone I met worked for a small business or for themselves, mirroring the overall make-up of the economy. (Two-thirds of New Zealand's workers work in businesses with less than 20 employees.) It seems a robust structure. And there are at least some examples of ways for small business to act with larger market clout, such as the giant dairying cooperative Fonterra, which is owned by 13,000 New Zealand dairy farmers and exports 95% of its production abroad. My personal view is that the natural and human resources available in the country mean NZ will always be able to take care of itself no matter what happens in the rest of the world—despite the many problems which appear daily in the headlines. Several I spoke to were afraid of one creeping danger in particular—NZ's integration with the world economy, leading to greater foreign ownership and control of domestic assets and businesses, as well as competitive pressures which could force changes in the character and structure of the economy and businesses here. If that proceeds too far, it would be a loss. I've seen signs on businesses here boasting that the business is locally-owned. The value that kiwis place on local ownership seems high and it would be a shame if that changed.

I was also greatly impressed with the kindness of New Zealanders. It is a kindness I may spend a lifetime learning to emulate and repaying to others. The hospitality of many who opened their homes to me; the fisherman in Orewa beach who offered a hand to help me over some coastal rocks; the family in Scott's ferry who pulled out their boat to ferry me across the Manawatu River so I could continue walking south along the beach (with best wishes after their settlement flooded in February); several other boat operators who similarly helped me cross rivers; the drivers who so readily picked me up on the roadside or made unsolicited offers of rides in pubs when I needed to leave my route and return to it later; the farmers who allowed me to walk across their land; and the lodgings that held packages for me. Kindness from the heart is a national treasure here; care should be taken to preserve it as the country becomes more internationalized and prone to competitive business pressures.

If I were to offer one self-criticism of the trek, it would be that I didn't take the opportunity to learn more about Maori culture and perspectives, as distinct from the more visible perspectives of “pakeha” (people of European descent). I did learn something from the Maori that I met, and from the editorial sections of newspapers, but it was just a start. During the trek, a number of Maori-related political issues made headlines, such as treatment of Maori vs. non-Maori by public institutions and schools, foreshore and seabed ownership/rights of Maori based on their “customary” historical usage, the meaning of New Zealand as a “multicultural” society, and competing interpretations over the meaning of the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi, which granted to Britain sovereignty, and to Maori citizenship and certain property rights. Many of the natural places that I passed through, such as Ninety-Mile Beach and the Mavora Lakes, have particular spiritual significance to Maori. I became aware of this significance sometimes, but not with enough depth or understanding. Many of the towns, rivers, mountains, forests, beaches, flora, and fauna in New Zealand have Maori names as their official geographical designation, and at least I learned to write and pronounce these properly! (Every syllable is stressed equally, something which is deceptively difficult for someone used to stressing particular syllables in words.)

Parting Thoughts

What was learned? A trek such as this teaches patience above all. Patience to walk for hours over monotonous terrain or to bodily climb up and down strenuous obstacles requiring one's full attention all day long, knowing the next day will be same. Patience to finish each day, each section, the entire trek. Over time, the goal lost importance relative to the process and minute-by-minute

experience—and this from a very goal-oriented person. By focusing on one step at a time, I would eventually discover that I had gotten to where I was supposed to be. In my journal of the Waiau Pass (Section J-1), I wrote that the section suggested philosophically that life is mostly about timing, paying attention, and patience; and that everything else would take care of itself. Other times I felt that simply being alive was enough—with shelter, food, water, and clean surroundings to walk through. The trek also taught careful attention to the well-being of the body and any potential developing injuries. (In my case, an injured foot from sealed-road walking early in the trek in insufficiently padded boots was about the worst, along with a pulled chest muscle later in the trek that healed slowly.)

What was accomplished? The future will tell a fuller story. I'm ready to go back to work with a clear head and have walked enough (for awhile anyway!). I have new friendships and professional connections here that are of great value to me. I have ideas for a new book that I've started to put down on paper, as well as a newly defined professional direction. There is a greater sense of balance and appreciation of the need for balance. There is a greater acceptance of taking what comes along on its own terms, of being flexible for unexpected conditions (the New Zealand bush almost always presented me with surprises or conditions not expected). Perhaps, in the end, I can say that a major accomplishment was to finish the trek without needing a rescue! (New Zealand leads the world in tramper/boater/aviation rescues per capita, perhaps due to the severe weather and harsh terrain, and also because many come here from other countries for a variety of dangerous outdoor pursuits, like mountain climbing and white-water kayaking.) And many people who followed me along, both from New Zealand and abroad, wrote to tell me that the trek was inspiring and the web site helpful. Some of these were considering doing a similar trek, while others just liked learning more about the country and tramping.

Would I recommend the trek to others? At the time I finished, it didn't seem worthwhile to have covered the entire distance continuously just for the sake of doing so. As time has passed, however, the accomplishment of walking the entire length of the country has sunk in. That accomplishment does mean something to me and I'm glad that I did it. However, the road walking just isn't that much fun, and is hardest on the feet. One could skip the roads, going from one tramping track, beach, or dirt road to another via car, bus, or bicycle. That would mean some substantial north-to-south sections could not be walked. If done that way, and without all my stops for computer work and more rest than others might want, the Cape Reinga to Bluff walk might take three months instead of six. I'll certainly be back in coming years to tramp new pieces of Te Araroa as they become more available to the average tramper with track development, markings, and permanent arrangements with private landholders for access.

So, did my midriff get thinner? Yes, but at 41, and with food one of the trek's constant rewards, I guess it takes more than 2500 kilometers to do the full job! No matter, the body is very healthy, with no illness during the entire trek, and the mind is refreshed and ready for the next phase of writing and teaching on clean and decentralized energy futures for us all.

* * * * *

Eric Martinot's NZ Trek website is <http://www.martinot.info/nztrek>. For further information about Te Araroa see <http://www.teararoa.org.nz>. A special thanks to John and Julie Irving, Geoff Chapple, and Miriam Beatson, all of Devonport, Auckland, for their help during the trek. Many others rendered assistance along the way, and further acknowledgments appear on the trek website.