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Man walks NZ to clear mind

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By CHALPAT SONTI

Most people like a stroll around the block to relieve stress – Eric Martinot decided to walk the length of New Zealand.

The 41-year-old Washington DC renewable energy expert arrived in Bluff on Thursday, about six months after setting out from Cape Reinga.

It is a route trod by many during the year, usually fundraisers for causes, but that was not the case with Mr Martinot.

He said the reason for his walk was simple.

"I was due for a break – there is a lot of stress in my job and I decided to take six months off and clear and rest my mind."

But why New Zealand? Mr Martinot, a keen trumper, said he came across this country when he checked out long walks on the internet and came across the Te Araroa Trail.

The proposed 2600km trail is the brainchild of well-known writer Geoff Chapple. If it goes ahead, it will be a public walking track that spans the length of New Zealand.

Mr Martinot said he decided to follow the route of the trail as closely as he could.

He stayed off the beaten track for the most part, only using public roads when there was no other option.

Small towns were the highlight of his trip, with Motueka a particular favourite, Mr Martinot said.



LIGHTER THAN AIR: United States walker Eric Martinot celebrates in Invercargill having walked the length of New Zealand as a stress buster.

ROBYN EDIE/ Southland Times

“The thing I’ve learned most from this walk is patience and to focus on the job at hand.” – Eric Martinot

The "physical" nature of New Zealand tracks surprised him.

"I guess Kiwis are used to it, but it was pretty hard climbing up and down rocks, much harder than I expected."

Although he was not promoting any cause on his walk, he became a trailblazer of sorts anyway, Mr Martinot said.

"I've posted a journal detailing my walk on the web. They are a tradition in the US, but not here. One Kiwi thanked me for writing what he said was New Zealand's first trail journal."

It was more than a read for couch trampers, Mr Martinot said. "One of the best things I heard about it was from an American woman living in Wellington. Her mother back home was reading my journal on the web and told her daughter she now had a much better understanding of this country."

The journal was updated at internet cafes throughout the country. It can be seen at www.martinot.info/nztrek

He would return to work refreshed from his time in New Zealand, Mr Martinot said.

"The thing I've learned most from this walk is patience and to focus on the job at hand. The one accomplishment is that I got through the whole thing in good shape without needing help or rescue."

One day he might come back to live, bringing his expertise in the renewable energy field with him.

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