

# TIME FOR A REST STOP

**We check in with those walking Te Araroa Trail this season and find rest is on everyone's minds**

**MARIA WEINMANN, 43, GERMANY, AND DAVID KLEBER, 50, USA**

**Start date:** November 16

Maria Weinmann and David Kleber are making steady progress down the North Island. About to start their river journey on the Wanganui River, they said they've been challenged by more rainforest drudgery but were buoyed by reaching the 1000km mark and finding pockets of trail magic. The highlights were the Timber Trail and Hauhungaroa Route, with "massive trees covered with velvet moss looking like something out of a fairytale" and the view of Lake Taupo.

The couple also had the opportunity to stay at a sheep farm and watch professional sheep shearers, "doing their work masterfully."

After the sheep shearing, they found a unique bit of trail magic set up by a 12-year-old boy, Sam Pepper, who created a rest stop for thru hikers, complete with fruit, candy, and refreshments. Interested in where TA hikers are from, Pepper put out a register book for hikers to sign and a map where they can pin their origin. "What a wonderful inspiring idea for such a young man," said Weinmann. "This made our day and let us forget the troubles we went through."

**MICHELLE CAMPBELL, 33, NEW ZEALAND, AND JACK FAULKNER, 43, SCOTLAND**

**Start date:** November 1

When *Wilderness* caught up with Michelle Campbell and Jack Faulkner, they'd just finished walking the North Island. They'd planned to spend about a week in Wellington to catch up with friends and recuperate before taking on the South Island.

Their journey from Auckland to Wellington was a mixed bag; they found the Waikato section to be particularly dull; Campbell described it as mostly farms and road walks, broken up by the occasional muddy forest. But, a bluebird day on Tongariro rekindled their interest and motivation.



David Kleber checks out Sam Pepper's Te Araroa rest stop

They spent Christmas on the Whanganui River, where they canoed and rode a portion of it with friends. "It felt like a holiday," Campbell said, adding that they stopped off at some hot spots like Jerusalem and the Old Mill. "We were being right tourists."

Being back in their hometown of Wellington brought them both a feeling of accomplishment.

"When I look at a map, even though I've done it, I can't quite believe I've walked from Cape Reinga all the way down here," Faulkner said. "It just seems a bit surreal. Why would anybody do that?"

"It's a little difficult to think about the next part," Campbell said, even though they're both excited for a change in scenery. The South Island will involve far less road walking, and far more backcountry trails. After they catch the ferry, the first section they'll hit is the Queen Charlotte Track, which Faulkner said she's always wanted to do.

"I'm excited but at the moment I'm a little nervous because I don't know how much

more, physically, I can do," Campbell said. "So I'm just hoping that in the next few days I can get lots of sleep and drink a lot of coffee."

**JOSH THOMPSON, 27, WHITIANGA**

**Start date:** November 13

Josh Thompson, who was walking the trail to raise money and awareness of youth obesity, has had to take short hiatus from hiking. He returned to Whitianga for Christmas and to earn more money to complete the trail.

The first section of the trail was challenging, but he said it's been worth every step.

"It's been a super hot, windy, hard, muddy, wet, miserable, incredible, stunning, wouldn't-give-it-up-for-the-world journey so far," he said. "The support I have had for this journey from my friends, family and community is unbelievable and sometimes I just don't know what to say about it all." 