

Epic journey to shed light on glaucoma

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Arthritis, glaucoma and paralysis has not stopped one determined 75-year-old man.

Beating the odds against all three conditions, and "knocking out all the sceptics and critics", Grey Power member Doug Wilson, from Tauranga, made it to Bluff this week with the help of his nordic walking sticks after setting off from Cape Reinga on June 20, walking about 10-15km a day.

The walk was to raise awareness of glaucoma and how it can affect the community, and funds for research.

Mr Wilson was diagnosed with glaucoma last year, but has been treated.

"The sooner you get treatment, you've got a better quality of life," he said.

He attended a glaucoma seminar and spoke with Glaucoma New Zealand executive manager Helen Mawn. He asked her where their funding came from and she told him it was through private donations.

"I decided to walk to promote the awareness of glaucoma, and that's what I've been out there doing."

Along the way, Mr Wilson challenged city mayors, asking why the government was not funding glaucoma research.

He said it was a community problem.

Four and a half years ago Mr Wilson was struck by a drunk driver and left paralysed.

"I couldn't even lift my hands ... I took to it (nordic walking) like a duck to water, and look at me now, I can boogie," he joked.

Nordic sticks had been a great help on his journey and with them he could do 10.2kmh, without his pack.

"It leaves walking for dead. It gets your whole body going and blood flowing ... the nordic sticks cured my arthritis."

No stranger to walking, Mr Wilson completed the Rotorua marathon earlier this year, and in the late 1980s walked around New Zealand with a supermarket trolley.

"I love my walking. I usually average around 10-15km every day with my nordic sticks."

Throughout his journey Mr Wilson said he was shocked by all the support he received.

"The public of New Zealand have just warmed to me and really looked after me. Even the police have been pulling along beside me ... wherever I got a bed, I got a bed. I didn't plan anything, I've been out there all on my own."

He plans to carry on his crusade next year and raise more funds to supply glaucoma research with a vehicle. However, he had not yet decided how he would do it.

"Not by walking ... my body has told me this time is the last time."

Grey Power Southland president Geoff Piercy said upon Mr Wilson's arrival in Invercargill he had been taken to Bluff by vehicle, as he was exhausted.

Grey Power Southland presented Mr Wilson with a cheque for \$100 for glaucoma research yesterday.

FACT: "Glaucoma is the name given to a group of related diseases where the optic nerve is being damaged. The nerve fibres progressively die, taking away the peripheral or side vision first. Therefore visual loss goes undetected until it is quite advanced." Source: glaucoma.org.nz

- The Southland Times

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