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**Taking to the road with a cause**

By Amanda Durry July 28, 2011

Doug Wilson may be 75 years old but he's a man with a cause – glaucoma.

And he's taken that cause on the road as he travels from Cape Reinga to Bluff raising awareness of the eye disease through walking and hitchhiking across the country side, passing through Ashburton yesterday. It can be hard going at his age, but the Tauranga man is motivated to get his message out to the public.

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, so visual loss can go undetected until it is quite advanced.

As a glaucoma sufferer himself, Mr Wilson said a lot of people didn't understand the wide-ranging effect it has on people.

A lot of sufferers also weren't aware help was out there, he said.

"People often think glaucoma only affects older people but it doesn't, even a baby still in the womb can have it. My aim is to promote awareness and to inform people there is help out there.

"As soon as there is a hint of it, they need to get straight into the doctor and get treatment. I was about 98 per cent impaired before seeing the specialist and now I'm normal for my age. If I can get help at 75, then others can too," he said.

He can now drive a car, which helps with his independence, and even stood down as president of his local Grey Power branch to make the trip to Bluff. He admits he's extremely active for his age, having enjoyed many years of mountain climbing, and did a 42km marathon around Lake Rotorua as a warm-up to the trip.

It also isn't his first time taking part in long distance walks – he pushed a supermarket trolley around New Zealand in the late 1980s and did a similar thing in Australia a few years later to promote international understanding. He almost didn't make it to the South Island though, after illness stalled his journey when the flu aggravated a heart infection which he picked up during the Lake Rotorua walk.

He may be on 11 pills a day just to continue his journey but he said none of it was for his benefit.

"It's for other people to make them aware there is a treatment out there so the sooner they can get onto it, the better," he said.

Any donations to Glaucoma New Zealand would be a positive spin-off though and anyone who wanted to donate could do so through ASB bank, account number 12-3013-0180964-00.


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