

## **Jean reaches Cape Reinga, NZ**

When some men have a mid-life crisis they buy a fast car or run off with the secretary. Jean Béliveau decided to walk around the world.

Eleven years, 70,000km, 64 countries and 50 pairs of shoes later, the 55-year-old completed the penultimate leg of his journey yesterday when he walked the last few kilometres to Cape Reinga.

Now all that remains is a 5000km stroll across Canada back to his home town, Montreal.

Mr Béliveau was accompanied yesterday by 15 supporters, a guide dog, a police escort and the three-wheeled trundler which has carried his meagre possessions across five continents. Reaching the end of his final country before returning home he said he felt a mixture of joy, sadness and trepidation ahead of his final leg across the Rocky Mountains in winter.

"It's an indescribable moment. I feel my heart is going up and down. I feel like the walk is not my walk any more, it is the walk of humanity, of these people who came with me in hope of a better world."

In the 11 years the French Canadian has been walking he has lost his father and become a grandfather twice over. He has seen his wife, Luce, just once a year.

Mr Béliveau started out promoting UNESCO's decade for peace and non-violence for children, although he was still walking when the decade ended. In New Zealand he has been working with the children's charity Barnados.

Asked what had inspired him, Mr Béliveau said when he was 43 he fell into depression and tried to cure himself through exercise. Long-distance running led to the idea of walking around the world, but it took him eight months to pluck up the courage to tell his wife.

"I didn't sleep well that night. I told her, 'I'm going for a long walk, for more than ten years'."

He set out on August 18, 2000, the day of his 45th birthday. He walked south from Montreal, across the US and to South America.

By 2003 he was in South Africa and heading north, crossing into Europe in 2005. He then walked through Iran, India, China, South Korea and Japan, arriving in Australia in 2009.

His arrival in New Zealand was marked with a powhiri and civic welcome from Waitakere Mayor Bob Harvey - Mr Béliveau described it as "one of the most astonishing greetings I've had the honour to be given" - and he set out from Bluff on October 11.

Since his walk began he has slept in cemeteries and jails, learnt new languages, including English, and met four Nobel Peace Prize winners, including Nelson Mandela.

Physically, the toughest challenge was crossing the Australian outback; the lowest ebb came in Ethiopia, when his wife and children had to convince him to keep going.

Here he has been supported by Adrian "AJ" Cooper and his partner Dezma McGregor, who hails from Waimate North in the Bay of Islands.

The Kiwi couple met Mr Béliveau in Nepal three years ago and instantly struck up a rapport.

"It's hard not to be inspired by him. We knew New Zealand was going to be his last country, so we wanted it to be memorable for him, and make sure he got back to Canada in good shape," Ms McGregor said.

The couple set about finding sponsors and hosts, saying New Zealanders had done themselves proud because Mr Béliveau had slept just four nights in his tent. Air New Zealand boss Rob Fyfe personally arranged free air tickets.

After reaching the Cape around noon yesterday, where Mr Béliveau said he sensed the spirit

of his father, the epic walker planted a pohutukawa and celebrated with his supporters at Tapotupotu Bay.

Once he arrives home on October 16, he wants to spend time at home with his family to make up for 11 years away. A book is on the cards, as is public speaking.

"We will see what the walk will bring me. Maybe then my real mission for peace will start."

See <http://www.walk.org> for more information.

by Peter de Graaf



Jean Béliveau (pushing the trolley) walks the last few kilometres to Cape Reinga on his epic 70,000km walk around the world, accompanied by supporters and a police escort. PICTURE / PETER DE GRAAF



Young supporter Nikolas Stafford, 13, takes a turn pushing Jean Béliveau's trundler, with Cape Maria van Diemen in the background. PICTURE / PETER DE GRAAF





Jean Béliveau shares a hug with supporter Farren McGregor-Smith, 11, after walking 70,000km to Cape Reinga. PICTURE / PETER DE GRAAF



Jean Béliveau shares a hug with supporter Jeffrey Jordan after walking 70,000km to Cape Reinga. PICTURE / PETER DE GRAAF