

STANDOUT COMMUNITY EVENTS

Rotorua Walking Festival

INSPIRED BY WALKING EVENTS in Europe, such as the Nijmegen walk, which attracts well over 40,000 entries annually, the Rotary Club of Rotorua West, NZ, conceived the concept of an international walking event in Rotorua. The club noted the health benefits derived from walking and that an international walk in the shoulder part of the visitor season would bring a range of other benefits to Rotorua.

The first New Zealand International Two-Day Walk in Rotorua took place in March 1994. The festival is a recreational, non-competitive event, with day one involving walks in the majestic Whakarewarewa Forest. On day two, walkers see Rotorua's unique parks and urban environment. This includes Whakarewarewa, a Maori village and an area of hot thermal springs and bubbling mud pools, Te Puia, the New Zealand Maori Arts and Crafts Institute, and then into unique stream, forest and bush areas.

Participants can walk on either day or both days, choosing from a number of distances. On the Friday evening,

there is also a guided nocturnal forest walk by torchlight for around 1.5 hours, enabling walkers to listen to the wildlife and often see glow-worms and other interesting features, with all proceeds going to the Rotorua Botanical Society.

The Rotorua Walking Festival has attracted the interest of walkers from





“Throughout the two-day New Zealand International Walk in Rotorua, participants experience a wide range of landscapes and environments, including the majestic Whakarewarewa Forest and Rotorua’s hot thermal springs and bubbling mud pools.”

Europe, Australia and Japan. This has included walkers who are members of the IML Walking Association, which organises 27 walking events across the globe. The Rotary Club of Rotorua West's event has subsequently been recognised among the association. The walk also became an International Federation of Popular Sports accredited walk, further recognition of its high-quality and beautiful walking environments.

By its fifth year, over 750 walkers took part in the weekend, increasing to 1200 walkers four years later. Along the way, the walking festival has captured the loyal support of many Rotorua residents, walkers and walking clubs from throughout New Zealand and several overseas walkers,

who have returned on a regular basis.

The Rotorua Walking Festival has had key support from Rotorua Energy Trust, Rotorua Lakes Council, Southern Trust, Pub Charity, Four Winds Foundation and Infinity Foundation. Support and sponsorship of this kind has underpinned the event over many of the past 25 years of activity around the festival, which has been critical to the walk's ongoing success. Partnerships with Rotorua Netherlands Society, Lakes City Athletic Club, Toi Ohomai, St Chads and the Rotary Club of Rotorua West have enabled the event to have a solid foundation to build from each year.

Proceeds from the weekend have been directed to various worthy local

causes, such as rescue helicopter, Royal New Zealand Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, youth centres, maintenance of forest tracks and various health and disability charities.

After 17 years of the Rotary Club of Rotorua West operating the event, the club resolved its future would be best served by it being run separately from the club. Rotarian Deryck Shaw subsequently set up a separate entity to run the event, which it has done over the past eight years. While the Rotary club is no longer involved in the management of the event, many club members still continue to support the event as volunteers.

For more information, visit www.rotoruawalkingfestival.org.nz