



German couple walks in Americans' footsteps

By Tanya Mitchell

VillageSoup/Waldo County Citizen Reporter

BELFAST (Sep 20): It is said the best way to understand another person's perspective is to walk a mile in his or her shoes. Detlev Henschel opted to learn about Americans by walking several thousand miles in America.



For six months, Detlev Henschel has walked across the United States. (Image courtesy of Detlev Henschel)

When the German scientist, adventurer and writer arrived Monday in Belfast with his partner, Katrin Frommhold and their Phoenix camper van, Henschel had walked 3,778 miles across the country.

Henschel, 49, began his trek March 17, in Santa Monica, Calif. He will end his journey after hiking another 700 miles to St. John in Newfoundland, Canada.

Henschel and Frommhold have visited Japan, Hawaii, Greece, Sweden, Siberia and for the last 10 years, have owned a safari company in Namibia, Africa.

Three years ago, Henschel quit his high-paying job as head of an environmental planning company in Germany to focus on traveling and writing. When trying to learn more about people and their culture, Henschel said walking is his preferred mode of travel.

"It's a different kind of awareness, you see more things and meet different kinds of people," said Henschel. "I want to know about Americans, the 280 million people who are not Desperate Housewives, Ally McBeal or Sex in

the City."

The quest to meet Americans took Henschel and Frommhold to Route 66, an artery Henschel sought to experience because of its billing as "the mother road of America."

The Grand Canyon was another favorite stop for Henschel, who called the natural attraction his Disney World. Henschel and Frommhold also traveled through Navajo and Hopi reservations to Santa Fe, NM. In Kansas, Henschel said he "almost got hit by a twister," as it touched down about three miles from where he was walking.

Frommhold manages postings on Henschel's website, detlev-henschel.com. The site has photo galleries and a journal of his adventures.



Detlev Henschel likes lobster. (Image courtesy of Detlev Henschel)

In Maine, it didn't take long for Henschel and Frommhold to get a close-up meeting with Mainers, though not exactly as they had planned. "We wanted to come to Camden, but yesterday we broke down in the car," said Henschel.

Due to mechanical problems, the vehicle was parked on a roadside in Somerville. A group of passersby immediately stopped to help. "It took them three hours to help us," said Frommhold of the persistent lot.

Sunday night, Henschel and Frommhold arrived in Searsport, and set up at Searsport Shores Campground. They have greatly enjoyed dining on lobster and fish in Maine.

The couple said opportunity is rich in America, and referred to the popular "Life is Good" T-shirts and hats, noting the idea stemmed from two college students with \$78 in seed money.

America, said Henschel, is "a wonderful country" but there are drawbacks. "We saw all sorts of poverty in this country, and it was there before the real

estate slump but now it's even worse," said Henschel. "There used to be the haves and the have-nots, but now you have a new layer of the have-nothings."

While many Americans associate European countries with free health care, for Henschel and Frommhold, health insurance costs \$16,000 per year. Germany, though, offers a free college education to everyone.

Henschel said the best thing that has ever happened to him was meeting Frommhold. She convinced him to leave his high-stress job in exchange for his current lifestyle. He reflected on his contemporaries in Germany, and said he was thankful for the life he's chosen.

"My friends in the last three years, one bites the dust, two have cancer and are in chemo now. One is almost deaf," he said. "They are all divorced, very rich, and all are unhappy and I am not. So why worry? Life is good."