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\$2.00

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Edition 122 November 10, 2022

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Wandering 6000 kilometres for mental health awareness

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Wandering 6000 kilometres for mental health awareness

Front page cover
photo: Bailey Seamer in Yuraygir National Park last week

By MARGARET DEKKER

This is no walk in the park. Nor is it an average day-hike or overnighter on a clearly marked trail.

The Wandering Minds Walk is a 6-thousand-kilometre trek (more or less) over a year, solo, carrying 18-kilograms of everything needed for survival with not everything going to plan, on a huge open trail from southernmost Wilsons Promontory in Victoria to northernmost Cape York in Queensland, and all that vast, changing country in between.

Doing it is Bailey Seamer, a 23-year-old Newcastle woman whose mission it is to raise awareness, education and important funds for mental health, step by determined step.

"I see it as going for a hike every day for a year," Bailey laughed when The Northern Rivers Times caught up with her, shortly after walking the length of Yuraygir National Park from Minnie Water to Yamba and the big stretch from Woody Head to Evans Head, where Bailey was catching her breath.

"My walking's not really measured in kilometres walked but hours walked each day, and usually I walk between eight and ten hours a day, most days," Bailey Seamer said.

Starting May 18 from remote South Point at 'The Prom,' Bailey's extraordinary feat is made all the more remarkable as hers is a



Bailey Seamer starts her "WANDERING MINDS WALK" a one-woman trek along the east coast of Australia.

path neither signposted nor contained whole in a guidebook, and far exceeds the 4-thousand-kilometre distance by road.

"It's kind of a course of .. just walk North!" Bailey laughed.

.. Over beaches and bushland, river crossings and scrub .. and the dreaded impassable headland requiring the dreaded "backtrack."

"I have to all the time!" NRT - wandering minds starting out Bailey said.

"It's not all fun, some days I absolutely hate it because of physical injury or psychological stress or environmental factors I face.

"But I do get these windows of absolute positivity and beauty which make it all worth it. Let's just say it's 90-percent grind and

10-percent pleasure," Bailey Seamer said.

This third-year nursing student has already raised \$30-thousand dollars for the Black Dog Institute to help fund research, resources, and services for better mental health. 1 in 5 Australians will experience symptoms of mental illness in any one year.

".. that's around 5

million people. And roughly 60% of these people won't seek help," the Blackdog Institute states.

Now 2100 kilometres into her northern ascent, it's also a personal journey for Bailey Seamer who experiences bipolar disorder.

"I was in psych hospitals as a young adult, but I got to a crossroads in my life where I said, 'this can't be it' - I was told I'd struggle to ever work, hold down a relationship, finish a Uni. degree and it really did feel like an absolute sentence," Bailey Seamer said.

"But then I thought 'this suffering can't be everything I ever have.' There had to be more to life, and I realised I could help others.

"You could say, I was more scared of living the life I was then living .. than to take the jump to do something that may actually kill me!" Bailey said.

And mid-way along her quest, Bailey Seamer is living proof anything's possible.

"You could say, I'm taking my mental illness on the road. It would seem impossible, managing a mental illness while simultaneously walking, that that's where the problems would lie, but starting was the hardest thing to do. And it's shown me that I can show others with mental illness that you can have a life and passions, you can do it," she said.

It's a journey complete with unique coping strategies, to keep this one-woman show on the road, including her 'Tantrum Timer' when feelings 'bubble' and

stress builds.

"I set the Tantrum Timer to six minutes, throw the pack down whether it's bush or beach, I scream, cry, let it all out like a toddler at the shopping centre and when the timer goes off, I pick myself up, brush myself off and get going," she smiled.

Because when the going gets tough, the tough get going, inspiring others.

"People have contacted me saying 'You're the reason I got out of bed in the morning, because of what you're doing, given what you've overcome to do this,'" Bailey Seamer said.

As she draws her own inspiration from her late Grandma's mottos:

"If you're brave enough to try, you're brave enough to succeed .."

And: "Courage is not the absence of fear but deciding something else is more important than fear itself."

As Bailey treks ever north, parallels are drawn between her and American woman Cheryl Strayed who, at a similar 22 years of age, hiked 1770 kilometres up the Pacific Crest Trail on America's West Coast, inspiring a best-selling book and movie.

"People do say, 'you're that 'Wild' movie person and I go 'yeah, kind of, but I don't have the endless views and I have a lot of mud!'" Bailey Seamer laughed.

"But it's a similar thing, giving up everything to try and create a better reality."

From here, the reality is at least 700 more kilometres of coastline to Seventeen Seventy near Gladstone in Queensland, where

Letters	14	Motoring	47	Wines	56	Classifieds	62
TV Guide	29	Real Estate	50	Cooking	57	Trades & Services	64
Rural	31	Entertainment	52	Puzzles	58	Community	66
Travel	45	Gardening	54	Stars	60	Weather	69
Business	46	Health	55	Funerals	61	Sports	70

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Directors, co-owners and co-founders: Jeffrey Gibbs and Sharon Bateman

ISSN: 2652-7928 a Heartland Media company ABN: 84 134 238 181 All rights reserved © 2022

Distribution Coffs Harbour north to Southport and west to Tenterfield weekly.

www.thenorthernriverstimes.com.au

From Bailey’s website, Wandering Minds
“It takes true courage to navigate journeys into the unknown,
And taking a first step of thousands often does not make us feel any closer to home,
Wandering minds aims to provide solidarity when our mental health seems as though falling
apart. We shall create each other’s light, as we wander together through the dark.”



Bailey finally turns in. “From there up, there are crocodiles! So, I’ll have to turn inland to get to Cape Tribulation,” she conceded.

Her father, greatest supporter, and former Newcastle Knights player Scott Seamer will join his daughter for the last leg of this epic adventure, all the way to the Cape.

“I know once it’s over, I will reflect on this trip with a lot of fondness, once it’s done, I will be like ‘I can’t believe I did that.’”

“This will be with me for the rest of my life, to take with me wherever I go, that I walked the East Coast of Australia. It’s good to have this in my back pocket, that my own capability is immeasurable,” Bailey Seamer said.

Just don’t tell this walking warrior to ‘live in the moment ..’

“These people haven’t tried a river crossing!” she laughed.

.. before I ask the obvious question to the one woman who’s walking the entire East Coast of Australia solo and carrying a heavy pack: “How are your FEET?”

“Haha! My body is refusing to grow skin now on certain parts because it just comes off again anyway .. But my Soloman boots, they’ve been phenomenal, they’re my Four-Wheel-Drives,” she said, while still on her original pair!

And her Top-3 highlights this far?

- Jervis Bay “beautiful weather, no people, sunrises and just dolphins everywhere ..”
- Yuraygir National Park “was gorgeous coming up through Yamba and Iluka ..”
- Taronga

Zoo’s ‘Roar and Snore’ experience

As Bailey Seamer laces up for yet another leg of this one-woman triumph.

“From here at Evans Head, I’ll zip up to Ballina by the beach .. it’s 40-something K’s (kilometres) then to Lennox to Byron Bay. Yes, a big couple of days!” she said.

It’s almost a marathon. In more ways than one.

“Yeah I do think of that sometimes .. But if I stop, I don’t get anywhere,” Bailey Seamer opined.

Infinite wisdom already, from this 23-year-old’s infinite journey of a lifetime.

“I didn’t expect this trip would harden me the way it already has, make me more cynical in fact, that it’s not this whimsical walk in a flowy dress but that out there, there are real life or death challenges.

“My perception on reality is now very different, what’s important now are safety, shelter, food, and water. I have a whole new understanding of what is a problem.

“And if change is going to happen, you can’t dictate how it will happen, and it’s likely to have both positive and negative aspects but that’s just what comes with it,” Bailey Seamer shared from her wandering and wondering mind.

“And I have a whole new appreciation for something as simple as a bench seat!

“You could say I had my ‘Forrest Gump’ moment,” she laughed.

Indeed, ‘Walk Bailey Walk’ - for another 2000 kilometres, and more.

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