



IN DECEMBER 2014 I was diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease. Four months later I embarked on a six-month world tour. I was quick to learn the frustrations experienced by many when using a conventional wheelchair on varied surfaces: cobbled streets, narrow footpaths (or no footpaths!).

When I returned to New Zealand I was determined to find a chair that I could use on adventures. This led me to inventor and engineer Peter Thompson, who has designed the ViMo wheelchair, which is both easy to transport and push over rough and uneven surfaces. Peter is also experimenting with a user-operated electric version of the ViMo.

I started wheeling tracks around

the West Coast to trial which ones can be wheeled by someone using the ViMo all-terrain wheelchair. So far I have completed most of the West Coast Wilderness Trail, the Mananui track, the Hokitika Gorge and sections of the Punakaiki Pancake Rocks.

The Department of Conservation paired up with the Halberg Disability Sport Foundation and I undertook a wheelchair accessibility trial on the Abel Tasman Coast Track. We spent two nights in DOC huts, and a total of 30 kilometres were covered.

A lot was learnt over the three days, and DOC now has a greater understanding of the requirements of people who have limited mobility. The track is one of our less demanding Great Walks and is finished to a much higher standard than most tramping tracks, but the terrain in places was still challenging and at least two strong people were required to manoeuvre the chair.

DOC, friends, family and I, armed with some specialised equipment we've shown that it is possible to have a substantial adventure in the great outdoors. The trial was an exciting venture and the start of something great, and that I'm hoping it will be a project to help others.

With the trial completed I am continuing to head out into nature with support crews to test what other places can be navigated by the wheelchair. I am helping my friend Peter Thompson promote his wheelchairs, and working with The Hokitika



Lions and Rotary clubs who bought two chairs for the town's i-Site, to be hired out to people wanting to explore the West Coast's cycle trails and other accessible tracks and promoting the new wheelchair van. I am really keen for more people to find out about the chair that Peter Thompson has built

Being outside in beautiful natural environments is good for everyone – it's associated with lower blood pressure, faster healing, lower rates of depression, better mood and many other benefits.

My trip and the associating planning for it "brought a big zest and spark to my life" and the confidence to get out and about. I hope that the West Coast will become a destination for people who want to have a great time and enjoy the benefits of being in the outdoors.

I had been a fairly regular trumper, heading out about twice a year. I thought my tramping days were over, but the trial has given me confidence that I was able to get out on tracks. Consequently, I want as many people as possible to come to Hokitika and hire a ViMo wheelchair for \$20 per day and enjoy the many accessible tracks Hokitika has to offer.

