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Dozens of feet march into Spring in the Far North

Over 100 Far North walkers and some dazzling fine weather came out in force for the inaugural Pipiwaharuroa Hikoi for Healthy Nature, Healthy People walk at Lake Ngatu today (*Note to editors: Wednesday September 14 2016*).

A first-time joint initiative between Ngai Takoto, the Department of Conservation and Healthy Families Far North, the inaugural walk was held to mark the beginning of Spring, while promoting physical activity and access to the district's many walking tracks and reserves for Conservation Week 2016.

In a twist to the national promotional drive, which encouraged children and young people to get out into the outdoors, the Far North Conservation Week event placed kuia and kaumatua up front as community champions for good health and wellbeing.

In his opening address, Ngai Takoto spokesperson Shane Jones spoke of the symbolism of the pipiwaharuroa, or shining cuckoo, whose distinctive call traditionally marks the change in season.

Far North District Mayor John Carter said the event was a significant turning point for community collaboration in the Far North: "I want to thank Ngai Takoto, the Department of Conservation and the Healthy Families Far North team for helping to bring this about. This walk is truly about a community getting stuck in and looking after each other," he said.

He then went on to challenge Shane Jones to try and keep up with his walking partner – his 92-year-old mother.

As walkers from local kaumatua and kuia groups, health providers, kohanga reo and schools took the 4km loop at their own pace, they took the opportunity to identify and talk about the rongoa Maori native plants growing along the route.



Meanwhile, students and adult helpers from local Paparore School used the opportunity to collect rubbish along the track and check in on the thriving manuka seedlings they had planted in previous terms.

Waiting at the end of the route was a sausage sizzle, a rongoa Maori workshop, traditional Maori games and kayaks for those inclined, while others simply relaxed and chatted in the shade.

Department of Conservation community ranger Shayne Storey said she was delighted with the turnout of the day: "This has been a huge success; we couldn't have wished for a finer day and I'm so pleased to see so many of our community getting out here and making the most of it," she said.