

# Behaviours of a documentary-making backpacker

**“I walked over 500km in the dark, through rain, swam across a river and always found a bed, a friend and a meal.”**

— Sándor Lau

**B**arbecuing on a rusty shovel over open coals isn't something many Fulbright Graduate students would experience, but for documentary filmmaker and inveterate backpacker Sándor Lau, it turned out to be the best breakfast he's ever had.

It was just one of the many experiences he had during a two-month trek through Northland, filming his documentary thesis project, *Behaviours of the Backpacker*.

Sándor came to New Zealand as a Fulbright Graduate student in 2000 to study creative writing and film studies at the University of Auckland.

He stayed on to study Film and Television Production on the inaugural Master of Creative and Performing Arts degree at the University of Auckland's new School of Creative and Performing Arts.

“Backpackers are sort of a metaphor for a global state of middle-class alienation. The people who are supposedly best off in life, experience a strange state of cultural homelessness and often feel most at home when they're trotting around the world. My ancestors came from Hungary and China, and I've lived in Colorado, Oklahoma, Mexico, Spain, France, Taiwan, and

finally Aotearoa, so I have done a bit of research on the topic.”

With funding support from Creative New Zealand and Fulbright New Zealand, Sándor walked up to 42km a day filming 'spontaneous and unpredictable' footage of the trip from Auckland to Cape Reinga, interviewing and mingling with the characters on the way.

“I could have just written a script and filmed it, but never could I have dreamed up such sad, beautiful and amazing stories as the ones I deliberately stumbled onto filming *Behaviours of a Backpacker*.

“I got a lot of my subjects to confide in a way you can't if you have a big crew and a prearranged interview. Also when you prearrange things you get an official party-line on a subject. I was looking for a lot of viewpoints that never get represented because they don't fit within boxes.

“I was looking for people who see the world a little differently. I walked over 500km in the dark, through rain, swam across a river and always found a bed, a friend and a meal.

“Baz, a tour guide in Whangarei, invites me home to stay with him. He comes to pick me up and bellows 'I'm looking for a Chinaman to have with my puha.' The next morning we're slaughtering pigs and cooking the hearts and livers on a shovel.”

Sándor is now editing the documentary which should be finished by the end of the year, in time for the 2003 international film festivals and, hopefully, for television in New Zealand and overseas.

“I have just presented a rough cut of the first 20 minutes of the film to the New Zealand Documentary Conference in Auckland, along with other Creative New Zealand grant recipients. It was well received and I got some very good advice.”

Sándor has made several short films. *Milk and Honey* and *God and Shakespeare* have been shown at festivals in Mexico, US, Japan and Australia, as well as New Zealand (see short films online at [www.lessfilm.com](http://www.lessfilm.com)).





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*Another Man’s Treasure*, a documentary, recently received the Rangatahi Premier Award at the Media Peace Awards, won first prize at Auckland University’s Student Festival and second prize at the Otago Film Festival.

Sándor has reached an understanding that New Zealand is far from finished with him and hopes to be in the country for some time to come, writing books, making films and searching for stories. ■

## Fulbright improves education advising

**I**t’s now easier for New Zealand students to get direct educational advice about studying in the United States.

Fulbright New Zealand has launched a website chatroom to improve education advising services for New Zealand students interested in studying in the United States.

“We get up to 75 emails or phone calls each week from the United States and around New Zealand. The chatroom will mean we can answer those queries more quickly.

“We’ll be offering students a faster and more efficient service,” said Fulbright New Zealand’s Education Advising Services Manager Matt Huntington.

“As well as enabling us to identify student’s needs and answer several questions at once, the conversations can be carried out in real time.”

The chatroom will be open all the time and will be closely monitored and administered. It will be attended by an education advisor on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3-5pm.

Fulbright New Zealand is also looking at other uses for the chatroom.

“The chatroom has the potential to be expanded to provide information for careers’ counsellors in high schools and scholarship officers in universities. We’re also looking at the possibility of setting up online seminar sessions where, for example, a former Fulbrighter could discuss their experiences.”

The development of the chatroom was made possible by a grant from the US State Department’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. ■

“The Fulbright Programme aims to bring a little more knowledge, a little more reason, and a little more compassion into world affairs and thereby to increase the chance that nations will learn at last to live in peace and friendship.”

– Senator J William Fulbright