



□ Documentary film student Sandor Lau has backpackers Lee McKinnon, left, and Sarah Williams in the picture.

— PICTURE / Tania Webb

Backpacker puts NZ in the picture



Northland

By Rochelle Long

They're a strange breed of creature commonly found in Northland... and now a documentary is under way to capture the culture of backpackers.

Documentary film student Sandor Lau, 27, is on a two-month trek through Northland filming the habits of "Gore-tex vagabonds".

The documentary *Behaviours of the Backpacker* is his thesis project for the new Master of Creative and Performing Arts degree in

Film and TV at the University of Auckland.

Mr Lau came to New Zealand on a Fullbright scholarship from his native Colorado and decided to stay and finish his degree.

No stranger to the itinerant lifestyle himself, he has backpacked in Spain, France, America and Taiwan.

"One of the things I've found most in common is people dissatisfied with their jobs, refugees from networking, dot-coms and multi-tasking looking for some kind of adventure."

With funding support from Creative New Zealand he is walking up to 35km a day, filming

footage of the trip from Auckland to Cape Reinga.

On the way he is interviewing and mingling with the characters "who feel most at home when they're anywhere but".

His filming schedule is as spontaneous and unpredictable as his subject matter.

"I have no idea what I'm going to do from one day to the next, I do not know who I'll meet."

So far he has had to swim across a river after getting caught at high tide travelling from Pakiri to Mangawhai, nearly fallen off a cliff, and had to walk through a forest in the dark.

He'd just reached Whangarei

when he dropped his camera and lost a week of filming, returning to Auckland to get it fixed.

However, he still rates Northland as one of his favourite places to backpack.

"There's something about going to the Cape (Reinga), a spiritual thing about it I don't fully understand but I hope to understand it better by the end."

Mr Lau hopes to have the documentary in the can by December, and will try to sell it to international film festivals and to television stations in New Zealand and overseas.