

## **Couple makes cultural cross country trek**

**By Nancy Ghiotto**

### **Germans want to see America through its small towns**

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Giving his weary feet a rest, world traveler Detlev Henschel sits in the back of his RV and looks over maps that have brought him to Peotone.

Henschel and his partner, Katrin Frommhold, have been on the road since March 17 in a quest to walk across America. They stopped on Wednesday afternoon to pick up supplies that were waiting for them at the Peotone Post Office.

The couple set out on the cross-country trip to explore America and to meet its citizens.

They're surprised by how friendly and helpful Americans have been to them. He said that television has a great influence in how those who live overseas view Americans.

"The reputation of Americans is they're not good," he said. "Americans are portrayed in a very negative way."

The couple began their journey in Santa Monica, Calif., traveling along Route 66 and other historical roadways, including the Santa Fe Trail and the old Pony Express route. The couple has seen the Mojave Desert, Grand Canyon, and trekked along the roads traveled by Lewis and Clark.

Henschel walks about 23 miles a day, with Frommhold driving ahead to make sure there are no detours. Henschel plans to hike across the United States. His goal is to reach Newfoundland, Canada, by early November.

He has mapped a route that covers approximately 5,000 miles across the country in just over eight months.

This isn't his first expedition visiting another country -- Henschel has traveled extensively through Japan and Australia.

The couple wants to experience life in America through the sights of small towns. They rest at RV parks along the way to replenish their energy before the next day's adventure.

Though most of the roads traveled have been away from the big cities, the couple's favorite was Santa Fe. "It's the most beautiful town, but every place I visit has something spectacular," Henschel said.

"I've learned to expect the unexpected. Weather is something we have to always be aware of when traveling on foot. Sometimes we have to start out earlier because of inclement conditions," Henschel said.

Other delays are due to meeting residents who make every town "just a little special," he said. The rural journey has led to visits at a Native American reservation and a look at Amish towns.

One stop landed them in Galesburg, Mo., at a woman's home located near railroad tracks. "Cooking Mama" as she is called by hobos traveling through -- by hitching the rail. For years, the woman has been offering free meals to vagabonds that have come into town.

Frommhold has been documenting the trip using a video camera, a digital camera and a diary of their travels on a Web site.

Henschel plans to write a book about his experiences with positive stories and people he's met in the United States. He wants to project what he's observed through pictures, experiences and positive stories. The couple has paid their own expenses while on the road, which allows them to travel wherever they would like to visit.

After leaving Peotone, the couple headed toward the Crete and Beecher area and then on to Detroit, Mich.

Henschel advises travelers to explore the back roads. You can buy travel guides -- don't go there, but go everywhere else," he said. "The best places to go are those that aren't on the map."