

# The Lincoln County News

Direct link: <http://lincolncountynewsonline.com/main.asp?SectionID=1&SubSectionID=75&ArticleID=66383>

10/15/2015 1:54:00 PM

## Veterans For Peace Walk for the Ocean

By Abigail W. Adams

A van topped with a dolphin led the group walking through Damariscotta, Newcastle, Edgecomb, and Wiscasset on Route 1 with handmade signs, yellow sweatshirts, and flags in the shape of whales on Thursday, Oct. 15. Passersby honked, waved, or looked on with bemusement as participants in the Maine Peace Walk slowly made their way through Lincoln County.

The Maine Peace Walk is an annual event organized by Veterans For Peace, an international organization of veterans, military families, and allies working to end military conflict.

For four years, participants have taken different routes across Maine to raise awareness and protest destructive military practices, Bruce Gagnon, secretary of the Maine Veterans For Peace chapter, said.

This year, the 175-mile trek from Ellsworth to Portsmouth, N.H. focused on the Pentagon's complicity in the destruction of the ocean, according to Gagnon. The Obama Administration's "Pivot to Asia" was one of the reasons behind the march's focus on the military's environmental impact on the ocean, participant Jeff Kunz said.

The "Pivot to Asia" is a national security policy announced in 2012, which involves rebalancing the U.S. military presence internationally and deploying 60 percent of U.S. naval forces to the Asia-Pacific region. "The navy is one of the largest polluters of our oceans," Kunz said.

"As the oceans become more acidic, the shellfish and coral dissolve," Kunz said. "The impact is very local." Noting the march's overlap with environmental issues, Kunz said, "all things really do connect."

"Maine's economy is closely related to the oceans," participant Jason Rawn said. "If we keep allowing ocean life to be destroyed, what will become of Maine?"

"I'm here because I'm angry and upset about the damage the Navy is doing to ocean life," said Russell Wray, the



Maine Peace Walk participants Russell Wray (left) and Morgana Warner-Evans stand in front of the march's support vehicle in Newcastle Thursday, Oct. 15. Wray is the artist responsible for the dolphin and banner displayed on the vehicle. (Abigail Adams photo)



Participants in the 2015 Maine Peace Walk take a break at the Sherman Lake picnic area on Route 1 in Newcastle Thursday, Oct. 15. The 175-mile march organized by Veterans For Peace focused on raising awareness about the environmental impact of the U.S. military on ocean life. (Abigail Adams photo)

artist who created the dolphin and banner on the van that led marchers down Route 1.

According to Wray, the U.S. Navy has avenues it could pursue to reduce its environmental impact, but will not do it. "We can still have national security," Wray said. "The damage that's being done to the oceans is actually detrimental to our national security."

Veterans For Peace was founded in Maine approximately 30 years ago, Gagnon said. Since then, it has grown into an international organization. The Maine chapter, based in Bath, currently has approximately 135 members, he said.

For four years, Veterans For Peace has organized the Maine Peace Walk. Themes in the past have been protests against the proliferation of unmanned aerial vehicles, the proposal to build a missile-intercept system in the mountains of Rangeley, and foreign interventions and militarization in general.

According to Gagnon, the walk was organized to gain visibility and raise awareness about the issues. "We're going to see thousands of people along this route," Gagnon said. "It's labor-intensive but we love doing it."

The group walks approximately 3 miles per hour with participants joining in for different legs of the journey, Gagnon said. The 175-mile trek will last from Oct. 9-24, with local churches and residents hosting the group overnight.

Buddhist monks and nuns from Japan's Nipponzan Myohoji order, which is devoted to peace walks, will join the group for part of their journey, Gagnon said. "There's a spiritual dimension to this," he said.