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A walk in the woods can prompt career-changing conversations. *Photo: Harré*

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The surprising reason why you might want to take a pencil and notebook on your next tramp.

Walking in nature can get you thinking about your work in surprising and helpful ways. Allowing your mind to wander while walking can spark creative ideas – even a new career direction.

On the Lake Waikaremoana Track we met a preoccupied trumper.

He told us he was good with numbers and his parents wanted him to become an accountant. He wasn't too happy about the idea.

We asked what he wanted to do.

“Walking out here, I'm constantly thinking about carving. I guess I really want to be a carver,” he replied.

“What about an accountant who carves?” Fran suggested.

He hadn't thought of it before. He brightened, and seemed to have renewed energy as he continued on his way.

Tramping offers opportunities to learn about the variety of work people do and how one job might segue into another. This can broaden our thinking about what's possible for ourselves.

Increasingly, traditional career patterns are being transformed by technology, environmental changes and new working styles, challenging us to reassemble our skills and experience and sometimes to question our assumptions about what's even possible.

Last summer we met a group hiking in the Waitākere Ranges. We asked what they did for a living.

“I work in IT in Italy,” one woman said. “I left my job to travel, to think about where to next with my career. The other day I thought of becoming a journalist, and now I have lots of questions about the next steps to take this seriously.”

Sometimes a work path can overlap with a personal interest and lead to a different career altogether. We once met a woman at Morgan Hut in Nelson Lakes. She loved her work as an archaeologist, and we asked how she had gotten into it.

She had trained as a medical radiologist but soon realised that working in a clinic was the opposite of one of her passions: being in nature. While tramping one day, she began to wonder how her radiology skills could be used in the natural environment. She later discovered that X-ray technology is used in archaeological digs to 'see' below the surface. This led to a career that has taken her all over the world.

The trouble with getting insights while tramping is that we often forget them when we return home. We need to notice those insights and conserve them long enough to take action.

That is why it's a good idea to always carry a pencil and notebook when hiking.

Max and Fran Harré are career development practitioners who have hiked throughout NZ.

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