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Abramovich helps put walker back on track

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MOSCOW | Thu Mar 15, 2007 2:37pm GMT

(Reuters) - A helping hand from billionaire Roman Abramovich has put British long-distance walker Karl Bushby back on the road after his arrest in Russia's remote Chukotka region nearly a year ago.

Former paratrooper Bushby will resume his trek this weekend where he left off, after being detained for entering Russia illegally midway through his attempt to walk around the world.

He was arrested in the vast unpopulated north-east Chukotka region where Abramovich -- the owner of Chelsea soccer club -- serves as governor.

Bushby reached Chukotka after he walked across the frozen Bering Strait separating the U.S. state of Alaska from Russia's Far East.

Bushby's father on Thursday praised the role of Abramovich and his staff in getting the walk restarted after 11 months of delays.

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"They've been very good to us. They're supportive and sympathetic to Karl's record attempt," said Keith Bushby from his home in Britain where he provides logistical back-up.

"They've given us a lot of aid, they've hastened and got a grip of the permit situation. They fixed that up for us.

"I think we owe that to them, they sorted out a bit of bureaucracy and we're in the position to talk to people on the ground," he said, singling out some of the billionaire's aides based in Moscow.

Officials working with Abramovich confirmed the governor's support and said the local administration would do all it could to assist the expedition on its second attempt to cross Russia en route to Western Europe.

In 1998, Karl Bushby started out from the bottom tip of South America in a bid to walk 36,000 miles (57,600 km) around the world with unbroken footsteps.

Now, he must backtrack from the point where he was detained and briefly held along with his current travelling companion, American Dimitri Kieffer.

Although they had at one point faced a five-year ban from the country for carrying a handgun and entering Russia through an unrecognised border point, this was struck down to a small fine.

Abramovich is serving his second four-year term as governor of Chukotka. He attempted to resign late last year but this was rejected by the Kremlin.

Only 55,000 people live in the area, about the size of [France](#). Karl Bushby hopes to make it back to his original hometown of Hull in 2009.

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