

Edinburgh man's 4000 mile charity bike ride across Australia



A retired Baberton Mains man is planning to cycle 4,000 miles across Australia to raise money for The Craig Gowans Memorial Fund and Radio Lollipop.

Andrew Dickson will arrive in Perth on Sunday 19 August and travel alone and unsupported to Brisbane, via Norseman, the Nullabor Plain, Adelaide, Melbourne, Canberra and Sydney. His return flight is booked for Saturday 27 October although he hopes to complete the gruelling journey well before that deadline.

Last year Andrew cycled across America from the Pacific to the Atlantic in memory of his wife Aileen who passed away in 2006, raising awareness of dementia (especially in younger people). The trip raised £7000 for his chosen charity, Alzheimer Scotland, and left him with many fond memories of the American people.

Taking time out from his training schedule, Andrew spoke to the Edinburgh Reporter about that experience and also his forthcoming adventure.

The 60 year old former policeman said:

"My wife Aileen was diagnosed with MS with added dementia in 1998. Her condition worsened to the extent that she required 24/7 care before she passed away in 2005. After retiring from the police, I helped out at Alzheimer Scotland, working one to one with other families who had a loved one under 65 with dementia. That involved taking the patients out walking, or doing some gardening. I have always enjoyed cycling and last

year was the first time I was able to get away for the time required.

“Many people have low opinions about Americans, but I found the opposite to be true. I can honestly say that I never had one negative experience, and found lots of people would take a genuine interest in what I was doing.

“In the two months I was there, seven or eight complete strangers insisted that I stay the night with them, despite the fact that I sometimes went up to a week without showering or shaving. I probably raised about \$1000 from people I met on the journey.

“I normally pitched my tent in public parks, although American churches remain open all night and I occasionally slept in them. In one church in Sandy Level, Virginia, Pastor Kendell Smith insisted that I share a meal with him and his family and wrote a cheque for \$100 for the charity before I left.

“One day after I left Yellowstone Park, there was snow on the ground and very few places were open for food. I was directed to the Jackson Lake Resort which had bellboys, and despite my appearance, I was welcomed into the restaurant where several diners took an interest in what I was doing and chatted to me.”

This year Andrew has decided to support the Craig Gowans Memorial Fund, set up in the memory of the young Falkirk footballer who was killed when a net catcher he was instructed to move during a training session struck an overhead cable. Last month, the Edinburgh Reporter featured an [account of a Hibs / Hearts select beating Hutchison Vale in a charity match at Saughton Enclosure](#) on behalf of the fund.

Andrew chose this charity as he knew Craig's parents, John and Sheila, and was aware of the heartache they had been going through since the accident. He also knew several volunteers at Radio Lollipop, and decided to share any money raised between the two worthy causes.

“I’m hoping to raise both funds and awareness of two hard working charities connected to The Royal Hospital for Sick Children here in Edinburgh, whose fund-raisers work tirelessly for their respective organisations.”



Whilst he had been in America before his trip, this time it’s a step into the unknown as he has never visited Australia before, although he has researched the weather conditions. He continued:

“Last year I needed both summer and winter clothes. In the Rockies the weather was below freezing, whilst in Kansas it reached 103 degrees. The worst was Virginia where the humidity was through the roof.

“At least this time there won’t be any snow and the terrain will be flatter, especially through the Nullarbor Plain which is the longest, flattest road in the world and runs over 1000 miles. During this part of the journey, villages are few and far between, so I have to ensure I have an emergency supply of fluid. I had estimated that I would need to carry three litres, but checking online I see that others recommend carrying seven or eight litres which will be very heavy.

“I won’t be carrying a mobile phone, but this year I am taking a laptop with me and I intend to update my blog wherever I can find some Wi-Fi.

“At the moment I am training by cycling about 100 miles a week, although I will be increasing this as the date gets nearer. In America I aimed for about 60 miles per day although it was often more than this, and on one day when I felt good and there was a strong wind behind me I did 117.”

Craig Gowans’ sister Lyndsay paid tribute to Andrew’s efforts. She said:

“We all appreciate the superb efforts and dedication of the venture that Andrew is about to undertake. I look forward to reading his blog.”

Anyone wishing to contribute can do so at virginmoneygiving.com/bikingacrossaustralia

Andrew was keen to stress that he is treating this trip as his holiday and all expenses are met by him. Every penny donated will go to the charities, which was the same as his American adventure.

Although Andrew talks highly of the American people, there was actually one incident which still rankles. In Norfolk where the Pilgrim Fathers landed, a bedraggled Andrew used a ferry and was given a pensioners ticket by the ticket collector who did not even ask for identification. Such tickets are only for people over 60 years – and at the time Andrew was only 59!

The Edinburgh Reporter will provide regular updates on his journey, but anyone wishing to follow his progress more frequently can do so at <http://bikingacrossaustralia.blogspot.co.uk/>