

# Andrew sets off on his Australian Adventure



Edinburgh cyclist Andrew Dickson will leave the capital's miserable weather behind him today on his journey to sunny Australia, although he is unlikely to have time to enjoy the change in weather.

Last month, the Edinburgh Reporter told of his planned 4,000 mile charity bike ride across Australia to raise money for the Craig Gowans' Memorial Fund and Radio Lollipop, now after an extensive training schedule, and detailed research on the internet, the time has finally arrived for the 60 year old to test himself against the elements.

Andrew flies to London today and is due to arrive in Perth on Sunday from where he will then 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, and plans to visit his son in Japan.

The ex-cop is no stranger to the saddle, having cycled across America from the Pacific to the Atlantic, in memory of his wife Aileen who passed away in 2006, and also to raise awareness of dementia, especially in younger people. The trip raised £7000 for his chosen charity, Alzheimer Scotland.

This time however, he has the added burden of travelling across the Nullarbor Plain which is the longest flattest road in the world and is over 1000 miles long. Towns and villages are few and far between, so Andrew will need to carry at least

eight litres of liquid for emergencies. The climate is typical of a desert, with daytime temperatures reaching up to 48.5 °C (119.3 °F), although at night time it can drop to freezing point.



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. The seventeen year old was only two weeks into his professional contract with the Bairns when the tragedy occurred.

As well as being a talented footballer, Craig was a straight As pupil and talented artist at Stewart's Melville College, where he won the School's Athletic Championship. He also had an unconditional offer to study Architecture at Edinburgh College of Art, but chose a career in football.

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.

Andrew also knows several volunteers at Radio Lollipop, the international organisation founded over 25 years ago to provide care, comfort, play and entertainment for children and young people, primarily in hospitals, and decided to share any money raised between the two worthy causes. He is paying for the trip and all expenses from his own pocket so that anyone who sponsors him can be sure that every penny will go to the charities.

Speaking outside the hospital where Andrew was presented with a banner prepared by ten year old Bailey Lothian from Bonnyrigg which read 'Good Luck in Oz from the Sick Kids,'

Andrew said: "I know Craig's dad and was deeply touched by his story and I wanted to do whatever I could to help support the memorial fund. I decided to help Radio Lollipop as well because John Macaulay, a police connection of mine is very involved with the charity and key member of the volunteer team.

"I am looking forward to spending my nights camping under the stars in the company of lots of big and small creepy crawlies. I'll try to remember to empty my shoes each morning. I hope my 60 year old legs, lungs and eyesight are up for it. I haven't told them about it yet. It's to be a surprise.

"Whilst this trip will be an adventure for me, I also hope others benefit and for this reason 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."

Andrew did his final training ride earlier this week when he visited friends in the Borders, travelling 120 miles. Since then he has spent his time ensuring cleaning his bike thoroughly to ensure it is completely free of any type of soil and the Australian Customs officers are very strict regarding the possible importation of soil.



SKFF Chief Executive Maureen Harrison said: "We are delighted to wave Andrew off on his adventure. The children have made a banner to wish him the best of luck. This is a very unique challenge and we feel privileged to be a part of it. Andrew is a shining example of the kind hearted fundraisers we have supporting charities in Edinburgh. Without people like him, we would not be able to afford the research, equipment and extras to help children with illness."

The Craig Gowans' Memorial Fund supports the work of the Sick Kids Friends Foundation and to date has raised over £30,000. It has funded projects such as fully adapted minibuses that

can take children with complex disabilities on trips.

Earlier this week, the fund handed over a cheque for £6,421 to the Sick Kids Friends Foundation which will see a medically equipped minibus vehicle on the road in a matter of weeks. The money was raised from the proceeds of the charity football match between Hutchison Vale and a Hibs-Hearts select at Saughton Enclosure in June and also from friends who completed the Edinburgh Marathon. This will be the second minibus purchased on behalf of Craig's fund, and any money raised by Andrew will contribute to future ventures.

Radio Lollipop provides an invaluable service to children during their stay in hospital, giving them a voice and offering care, comfort and entertainment.

Anyone wishing to contribute can do so at [virginmoneygiving.com/bikingacrossaustralia](http://virginmoneygiving.com/bikingacrossaustralia)

Anyone can follow this remarkable man's progress at <http://bikingacrossaustralia.blogspot.co.uk/>