

Cyclist sets his sights on raising thousands of pounds for a mental health charity as he takes on a poignant marathon ride from New Zealand back to Scotland in memory of a dear friend who took her own life.

Nick Tracey is planning to cycle 11,200 miles home to Scotland in memory of a friend who sadly took her own life.

During his six-month self-supported ride, he hopes to raise more than £5000 for the Scottish Association for Mental Health.

Nick, who grew up in Helensburgh, Dunbartonshire, will set off on his challenging Homeward Bound cycle from New Zealand on April 4.

He will cycle the lengths of New Zealand, Australia, the US, Canada and Ireland before ending his epic ride with the Land's End to John o' Groats route.

Nick, who will camp or stay with family, friends and supporters, has a fast-paced schedule to stick to so that he doesn't miss his connecting flights.

And when he arrives back in his home country after 10 years living and working abroad, he plans to stay put.

The 31-year-old said: "My charity bike ride is part poignant, part hopeful, part adventure and partly a homecoming. It will be gruelling and it will bring back many memories of my lost friend. But it is also a once-in-a-lifetime adventure that will return me to home, to my family and old friends who I have missed these past years."

"One of my aims is to promote exercise as a way to fight mental illness"

When Nick left Scotland to travel across Europe and Australia, he had no set plans.

After backpacking and cycling across many countries, he ended up finding work in corporate travel in New Zealand, where he has spent the last year.

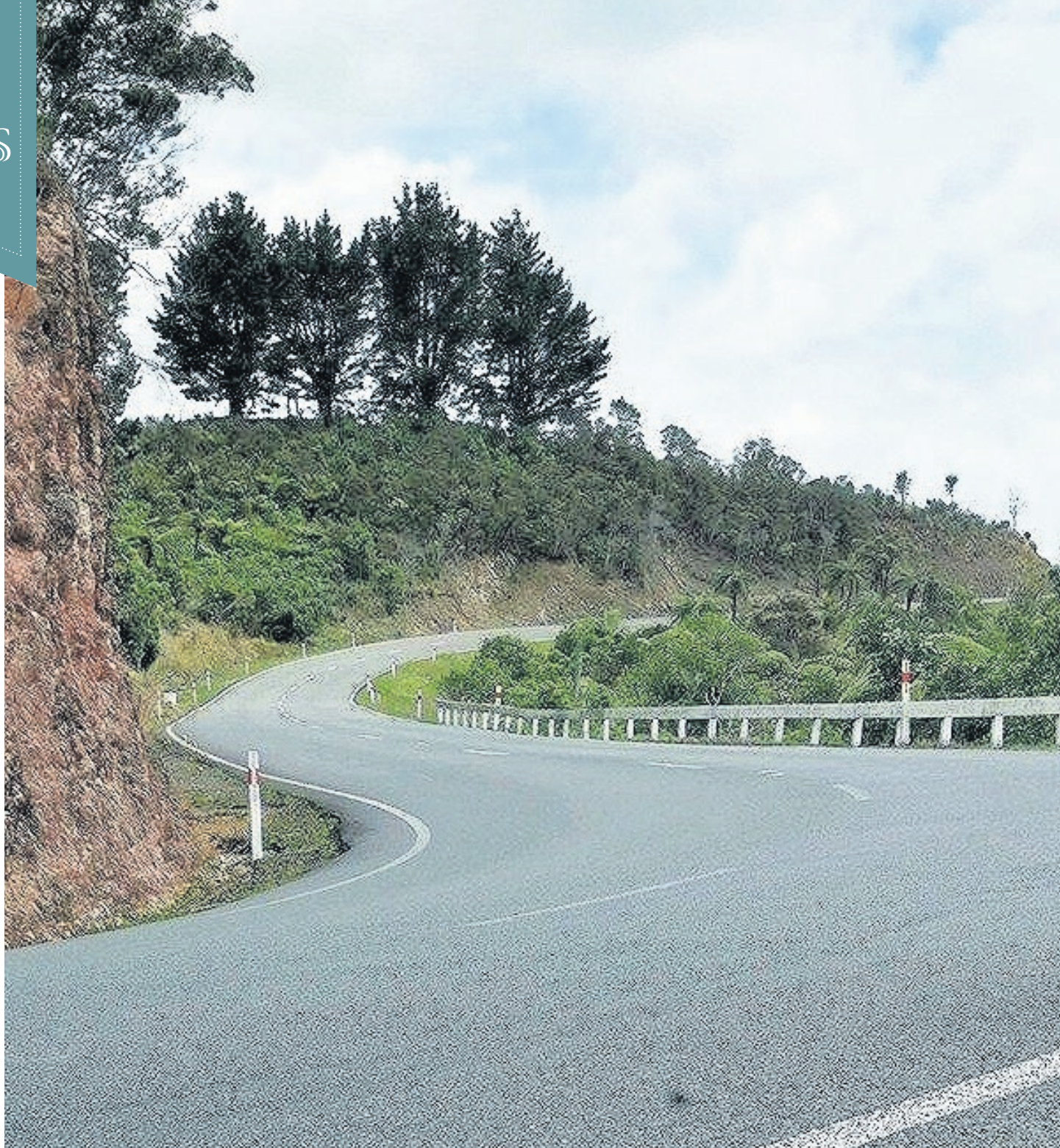
When his friend Helen Garrity, of Erskine, Renfrewshire, suddenly died in 2012, he was inspired to become involved with the Scottish Association for Mental Health.

Nick said: "The loss of Helen hit her group of friends hard and we were all affected in some way.

"I chose to try to help other people through raising funds and awareness for SAMH.

"In 2013, for example, I did a ride around Asia, raising £500 for SAMH.

"The stark facts are that one in four Scots are affected by mental health



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problems at some point in their lifetime, whether it be directly or through a friend or family member.

"In addition, two Scots on average take their life each day.

"SAMH do a lot of great work to try to reverse these statistics."

Nick's latest fundraiser will start three years to the day after Helen's death.

He said: "As a mark of respect, I will set off on my charity ride on the same day Helen passed away.

"I'm also starting from a poignant location – Cape Reinga lighthouse, in the north of New Zealand.

"One of Helen's most memorable quotes was, 'There is a light that never goes out'. A beacon that stays on 24-7 brings an emotional and meaningful start to my journey home."

Nick is also driven to raise awareness of how exercise can help fight mental illness.

He said: "One of my aims is to promote cycling, walking and getting out into the countryside as a way to combat mental illness.

"I have a lot of followers on social media and my website and I've



WELL-EARNED BREAK But Nick faces tough schedule during his challenge

received messages from some of them to let me know that they have been inspired by my plans.

"One person in particular let me know how I had helped to put his life back on track by inspiring him to get on the bike and rack up a small number of miles every week.

"To know that people, even just a few people, are being inspired by what I do is very humbling and rewarding."

As part of his Cycle NZ to UK

fundraiser, Nick will also sign up to the Scotland-based 5x50 Challenge.

It motivates people to pledge to do 5k of exercise every day for 50 days.

Nick said: "As part of the 5x50, I've pledged to cycle 50 miles every day for 50 days, and this coincides with the first two legs through New Zealand to Australia."

But his whole trip will be a race against the clock.

Nick added: "My focus for each leg