

After years battling mental health issues and addiction problems, renowned artist Peter Howson found the best cure was the great outdoors. Now, he is walking across Scotland to help raise awareness of autism.

## Artist Peter Howson walks with surprising energy and determination.

He chats animatedly, smiling and laughing frequently as we stride out along the beautiful Aberdeenshire Coastal Path.

He tells me about his new fiancée, being deeply in love and an "exciting" work commission.

Yet this is the Glasgow painter who is famous for his black moods, alcoholism and drug addictions.

Peter has attempted suicide more times than he can recall and spent years being treated in psychiatric units.

He has struggled since the age of four with Asperger syndrome, a condition on the autistic spectrum.

Today, he is also nursing a niggling injury to his Achilles tendon.

Somehow reading my mind, Howson, OBE, said: "It's remarkable isn't it?"

"It's amazing how walking and being outdoors can make people so happy.

"How it can make me happier and more content than I have been in many, many years."

Clearly, there has been a big change in the 56-year-old artist's life.

He reveals that he has discovered the curing powers of walking.

Howson said: "Walking has helped me more than anti-depressants, hospitals and therapy.

"It keeps me sane and calm. Walking daily, even just for a couple of miles, de-stresses me and gives me better energy and focus."

Now Howson, whose celebrity client list includes Madonna, Bill Gates and David Bowie, is spreading the word about the overall health benefits of the exercise.

I joined him on Wednesday at the start of a 300-mile hike across Scotland, from Aberdeen to Ayr, to raise funds and awareness for the Scottish Autism charity.

The prolific and world-renowned artist will spend three weeks walking from the east to the west coast.

He will walk with fiancée Lorraine King, family, friends and David Jenkins, his sports injury therapist who will help treat his tendon problem.

On the Edinburgh to Glasgow stretch, he will also be joined by his daughter from his second marriage, Lucie, who is autistic.

As we passed Aberdeen's impressive harbour and followed the coast-

**LANDSCAPE**  
Peter Howson on the Aberdeenshire Coastal Path at the start of his hike



# WALKING BACK TO

“Walking has helped me more than tablets, hospitals or therapy”



**FIONA RUSSELL**

hugging path towards picturesque Cove Bay, Howson walked and talked even more. He said: "For as long as I can remember I have battled with mental ill-health and had to deal with Asperger's. I get easily stressed and anxious and for too long, I turned to alcohol and drugs as a release.

"Doctors have said I shouldn't be alive because of how badly I have abused my body.

"So many times I have ended up in various hospitals, being treated with concoctions of strong drugs that just left me exhausted and hopeless.

"But it's been the walking, introduced to me by a nurse last year, that has helped me the most."

Just two years ago, Howson could hardly sit up in his hospital bed let alone walk.

His road to recent recovery has been a step at a time.

Howson, a Glasgow School of Art graduate, who grew up in Ayr, said: "To start with, I could walk only 100 metres. Then 200. Then I began to feel my mood

lift, I found new energy and I could walk even further.

"On most days now, I walk in Glasgow, circling around the streets and parks of the city.

"I walk up to 16 miles on some days and when I can, I walk further afield.

"To have this opportunity to spend three weeks amid Scotland's fantastic landscapes, and for the benefit of Scottish Autism, seems so amazing to me."

At the end of the walk, on April 25 at The McLaurin Gallery in Ayr, Howson will auction the sketches he plans to do during the walk.

His ambitious goal is eight to 10 of his instantly recognisable figurative drawings each day.

He will sketch each morning before walking, at lunchtime and in the evenings too.

Lorraine, who met Peter during a stay in a mental health hospital, is familiar with his frenetic work patterns.

She said: "Even if he is physically

