

Skier branching out for the environment

SOPHIE TRIGGER

A Blenheim-born professional skier is hoping to plant 100,000 trees this year by climbing the same distance in metres around his Queenstown home.

Beginning in June, Ski for trees has already seen more than 40,000 mangroves planted in Madagascar, a world away from the ski slopes of the South Island.

Following in the mission of their card business Little difference, which plants a tree for every card sold, Pete Oswald decided to use his ski audience to get some more trees in the ground this year.

“I’ve set it up to draw attention to how little money it costs to put a lot of trees in the ground in a place where it’s needed more than almost anywhere else in the world,” he said.

“It’s trying to show people how accessible they are to plant, so I’ve made it available to people to donate and plant as many as they would like.”

After visiting Madagascar in 2017 with his partner Sophie, Oswald saw the impact they could make to “one of the most needy places in the world”.

“Ninety per cent of their forest is gone, and the impact we could make with the sort of funds we could give them was huge,” he said.

“It’s not just the environmental impact, it’s the social impact. It’s employing impoverished people and breaking the cycle of poverty



Professional skier Pete Oswald, left, is climbing the slopes for reforestation this winter.

SEAN BEALE/ SUPPLIED

and deforestation as well.”

Oswald said people often thought offsetting their emissions was a costly exercise, but through his project donors could have 10 trees planted for just \$1.

He said the average Kiwi could offset their CO2 emissions

for 25 years for just US\$64.

As he had a three-month-old daughter, Oswald wasn’t undertaking any “bigger missions” for now, but regularly climbed the Remarkables or Coronet Peak near his Queenstown home.

“I’ve been getting up most mornings and doing what I can,

most times I’ve been doing a double lap, from the bottom to the top, just trying to get the metres up.”

Donations had already far exceeded metres climbed, which was ideal, he said.

“The trees planted are at 41,000 and I’m at just over 20,000

metres climbed but that’s the ideal situation,” he said.

“If I’m getting more trees in the ground than metres climbed, that’s my goal.”

Oswald hoped to reach 100,000 trees by the end of October, and encouraged donations through the website Ski for Trees.