

# Remembering two outdoors giants

The Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant is an adventure fund managed by the Trust for people seeking out life-changing experiences in wild places.

**Toby Clark** reflects on where it has come from and where it is going



**IT STARTED WITH** a sad ending. In February 2006, Bill Wallace – 73 years of age and with two artificial hips – had just completed one last sweeping, elegant turn on the snow after a week’s ski-mountaineering in the Swiss Alps. He then died instantly of heart failure, his companions by his side. Bill’s obituary in the *Scotsman* reflected that this “was a culmination he would have wished for himself” – yet for “his friends and family it was a tragedy”.

Bill was respected for his many exploits. Most notable was the first British ascent of the second-highest mountain in the Americas, the 6,768m Huascarán, in Peru, and the man-hauling of a sledge across the Greenland ice-cap. This was just the second crossing following in the footsteps of Nansen.

As past president, treasurer and secretary of the Scottish Mountaineering Club, and, at various stages, a trustee, secretary and treasurer of the John Muir Trust, he was also an organiser and a leader.

The Bill Wallace Grant was launched in 2007, triggered by donations to the John Muir Trust made at his funeral. The Grant was quickly supported by additional funds from the Scottish

Mountaineering Trust, the John Muir Trust, the Tiso family and many of Bill’s climbing friends.

The John Muir Trust manages the annual grant, which helps people from all walks of life take part in life-changing adventures in wild places that are of educational or scientific value. The sums awarded – ranging from £200 to £2,000 – aim to encourage practical action to conserve our natural environment.

So far, 33 people have benefited. They’ve come from all walks of life, from students to scientists, from grandmothers to gardeners. They’ve visited places all around the world, from Uganda to Uist, from the Andes to the Arctic. They’ve dived beneath the sea, biked, hiked, skied, climbed, ran, kayaked, surveyed and sailed – all to benefit people, nature and place.

This year, the grant is embracing a new legacy – again sadly rooted in tragedy. Des Rubens, another distinguished and much admired Scottish mountaineer, was killed aged 63 in an Alpine climbing accident in June 2016.

Last year, the families of both Bill and Des supported a proposal from the John Muir Trust to widen the grant into a joint memorial to both men. The Scottish Mountaineering Trust immediately

## Yosemite

Steve Bate used his grant to help him become the first partially-sighted person to solo climb El Capitan, Yosemite. He wanted to inspire everyone, but especially those perceived as less able, to seek and embrace adventure.

Mountaineer, author, motivational speaker and comedian Andy Kirkpatrick, who helped mentor Steve, says of him: “He is a stubborn ginger-haired Kiwi with skills, character, drive and vision. What he learnt, understood and refined on El Capitan, he then applied to pro cycling.

“I know from experience that grants can offer not only financial support but also confidence, belief and credibility – especially where there are already additional challenges in the mix.”



## The fund’s global reach

**North America**  
California, Canadian  
Rockies, Newfoundland

**South America**  
Argentina, Bolivia,  
Brazil, Ecuador,  
Trinidad, Venezuela

**Antarctica**  
Heard Island



PHOTOGRAPH: BERTIE GREGORY

### Vancouver Island

The Bill Wallace Grant helped Bertie Gregory camp for four months on a remote island off the west coast of Vancouver Island, British Columbia, where he filmed and shared the incredible story of coastal wolves.

Before his adventure on the Pacific coast, Bertie had honed his talents photographing urban wildlife – including

peregrine falcons in the heart of London – as a Young Champion with 2020VISION, the multimedia initiative that aims to communicate the link between human wellbeing and habitat restoration.

Bertie, who is still in his early 20s, is now one of the country’s foremost young professional wildlife photographers, filmmakers and presenters.

donated a further £12,000, and generous donations from Des’s friends and peers flooded in.

A popular teacher at Craigmoynton High School in Edinburgh, Des was a passionate believer in making the great outdoors accessible to all – and especially to young people.

His obituary in the *Scotsman* spoke warmly of how he “enthused young people through his love of the outdoors and was a caring, patient and devoted teacher”.

A former president of the Scottish Mountaineering Club, Des brought his passion and expert knowledge of the mountain environment to his work in outdoor education.

Although his first love was the Scottish hills in winter, he made

some 20 expeditions beyond Europe, to India, Pakistan, Peru, China and other parts of the world.

The passion of both men for remote and inspiring environments galvanised them into standing up for the protection of wild places.

It is fitting that the Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant now offers others an opportunity to follow in their footsteps. □

#### About the author

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#### Europe

Bulgaria, Cairngorms, Central Scotland, Greenland, Norway, Sutherland, Svalbard, Western Isles

#### Asia

Borneo, Himalaya, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan

#### Africa

Cameroon, Kenya, Madagascar, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda



### Kenya

Grant aid helped Emma Vicary join the Bee Elephant Enterprise Project, which aims to reduce conflict between farmers and elephants over crop damage in the Tsavo National Park.

Taking advantage of elephants’ innate fear of bees, the team build beehive fences around small farms to

deter the animals. It helps conserve the threatened elephant population, and provides income from honey production to impoverished farmers.

Emma Vicary said: “We’re really proud that as well as protecting elephants we also helped one local girl to attend school and improve her future prospects.”