

**PRESS RELEASE:**

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## **Final year student to hike remote New Zealand trails thanks to Edinburgh mountain men legacy**

A 23 year old final year student in Social Anthropology at the University of Edinburgh has received funding support from the Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant to hike New Zealand's remote trails in pursuit of gender equality.

Sophie Zych-Watson will undertake two months of research between September and October this year whilst walking New Zealand's remote trails in New Zealand's National Parks. Sophie plans to speak to people hiking the routes about their experiences as well as interview hut wardens and park workers. On return to Scotland, Sophie will write her findings into a formal journal article and a policy recommendation.

On receiving the news of the grant offer Sophie said: "I am unbelievably excited and grateful to receive this grant from the John Muir Trust. This opportunity will enable me to embark on an independent research project in New Zealand, where I will investigate the challenges and difficulties facing female hikers in remote mountain regions."

"My hope is that the findings of this research can then be used to encourage more women into the wilderness and to promote gender equality in outdoor sports, something I am really passionate about!"

Rosie Simpson of the John Muir Trust, who administers the Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant said: "We wish Sophie all the best with her expedition and hope she will be able to use her findings to make recommendations for promoting equal access to the outdoors."

"Des and Bill lived active, adventurous, outdoor lives and would be delighted to know that their legacy is now helping Sophie to undertake this research expedition."

Sophie is one of eight successful applicants to the Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant. This grant was established to give people the opportunity to seek out life-changing experiences in wild places of the world in ways which will benefit both the person, and the wild places themselves.

## **NOTES FOR EDITORS**

### **ABOUT THE DES RUBENS AND BILL WALLACE GRANT**

The John Muir Trust administers the Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant for free. The grant was set up in honour of Bill Wallace, who died of heart failure in February 2007 while skiing in the Alps at the age of 73 with two artificial hips, and Des Rubens, a popular teacher at Craigmoynton High School in Edinburgh who was killed in June 2016 in an Alpine climbing accident at the age of 63.

Since the grant was established in 2007, initially in honour of Bill Wallace, it has supported almost 60 people from all walks of life, from students to scientists, from grandmothers to gardeners, take part in life-changing adventures of educational or scientific value in some of the wildest places in the world.

The John Muir Trust looks to support projects, adventures or expeditions that reflect the ethos of both men and give others an opportunity to follow in their footsteps.

### **ABOUT THE JOHN MUIR TRUST**

The John Muir Trust is a membership based conservation charity dedicated to the experience, protection and repair of wild places. The Trust was founded in 1983 and was inspired by the life and works of John Muir (1838-1914), the Scots-born founding father of modern conservation and the inspiration behind national parks. We operate in Scotland, England and Wales and are the guardians of some of the finest wild places in the UK including Ben Nevis, Helvellyn and Schiehallion.

#### **For more info about the Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant, contact:**

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<https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/grants-and-awards/the-bill-wallace-grant>