



## The 50-Mile Trek That Prepared Lerwick Boys for Meeting the Duke of Edinburgh

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In 1955 experimental and secretive steps were taken in the development of a new and innovative Award Scheme for young people in Britain. The idea was formed by Prince Philip and received support from Sir John Hunt, leader of the successful British Expedition of Mount Everest in 1953. The programme – The Duke of Edinburgh's Award – was a mixture of outdoor training and mountaineering and, following the success of an 'Adventurous Training' course for Senior Boys in August 1955, The Boys' Brigade Training Committee was convinced of the need for such a scheme and the programme was taken up with enthusiasm.<sup>1</sup> Since the late 1950s, the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme has been an integral part of the programme of work for older Boys in Companies throughout the Brigade, with thousands receiving Gold, Silver, or Bronze Awards in recognition of their efforts.

The first Awards were presented to members of The Boys' Brigade by the Duke on a visit to Scotland on 22 May, 1958. The tour by helicopter first saw the Prince stop in at the Headquarters of the 8th Leeds Company where a variety of exercises demonstrated how the regular activities of a Company could cover most of the requirements necessary to achieve the award bearing his name.<sup>2</sup> The helicopter then took the Duke north to Paisley, where members of the 22nd and 27th Companies from the town were presented awards. It was here that a 15 year old Alex Lynn of the 22nd Paisley Company had the honour of being the first Boy in Scotland to receive the award from the hands of the Duke, who later joked with another Boy on the time it must take to clean and maintain all his badges.<sup>3</sup> Following this stop, the tour continued on to Glasgow, where awards and certificates were presented to Boys from the 39th, 177th, and 257th Glasgow Companies.<sup>4</sup> However, it was in Dundee – the final stop of the Scottish tour – where evidence of the BBs growing interest in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme was particularly evident.

The visit of H.R.H The Duke of Edinburgh to Dundee was "the outstanding event" of the session 1957-58 for the Dundee Battalion, where a further five awards were presented to Scottish Boys.<sup>5</sup> Arriving by helicopter and landing at Riverside Park, the Duke was greeted by the Lord Provost and went on to visit the MacRae Boys' Club and the Y.M.C.A before heading to the headquarters of the Dundee Battalion in Long Wynd.<sup>6</sup> At 'B.B. House' the Duke inspected the multiple displays of activities carried out by Companies in the Battalion and showed a "keen interest in all that he saw".<sup>7</sup> It was at this meeting where His Royal Highness presented the first of two Gold Standard awards to members of The Boys' Brigade, with Sergeants Ronald Gray and Lindsay Smith of the 1st Lerwick the proud recipients.<sup>8</sup> These two Boys, who were also the first to gain the Silver award some months previous, had to endure a 50-mile trek over the peat bogs of Shetland in order to meet the requirements of their latest award.<sup>9</sup> This trek stood them in good stead for their journey from Shetland to Dundee, with the Boys undertaking an 18 hour sea and rail journey in order to receive their awards directly from the Prince.<sup>10</sup> In addition to the two Gold Standard Awards, the Duke of Edinburgh presented one Silver (Corporal Alex Davidson, 50th Dundee) and two Bronze Awards (Lance-Corporal Graeme Fairweather and Private Douglas Anderson, both 9th Dundee). Throughout the brief tour the Duke of Edinburgh displayed an acute curiosity in the activities presented to him with "his informal contacts with Boys – and Officers too – in the ceremonies... a source of great delight to all" <sup>11</sup>

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme changed the course and structure of awards in The Boys' Brigade at a time when the movement was transforming following internal reviews and reforms. The Prince was an influential external voice for The BB at this time and his Award Scheme gave increased visibility and importance to the outdoor pursuits popular with Boys during the 1950s and 1960s. As has been the case several times throughout the history of The Boys' Brigade, the involvement of members of the Royal family provided an additional level of prestige to events. The visit by Prince Philip to Companies in Leeds, Paisley, Glasgow, and Dundee in May 1958 was no different, and was a tour that brought His Royal Highness closer to the day-to-day experience of Brigade life at a Company level.

#### References:

- 1 John Springhall, Brian Fraser, and Michael Hoare, *Sure and Stedfast. A History of the Boys' Brigade, 1883 - 1983*, (London: Collins, 1983), p.190.
- 2 Michael Peck and Robert Peck, "Just Before Going to Scotland... The Duke Visited a BB Company Headquarters", *Stedfast Magazine*, No. 58, July 1958, p.2; "The Duke of Edinburgh and The Boys", *The Boys' Brigade Gazette*, Vol. 66, No. 6, August 1958, p.112.
- 3 "Duke of Edinburgh Presents His Award", *Stedfast Magazine*, No. 58, July 1958, p.1.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 W. K. Fitzgerald, *The Boys' Brigade Dundee Battalion*, (Dundee: Geo F. Findlay & Co, 1991), p.21.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 "Duke of Edinburgh's Award", *The Boys' Brigade Gazette*, Vol. 66, No. 5, June 1958, p.88.
- 9 "Duke of Edinburgh Presents", p.1.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 "The Duke", p.112.