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## Adventure grant supports ice climbing training for DeafBlind individual.

28 February 2024

**Karolina Pakenaite will complete a winter skills course in Scotland with her guide to prepare for mountaineering trips globally.**

Karolina will complete this essential part of her training with the goal of hiking and climbing amongst some of the worlds highest mountains. Her condition, Usher Syndrome, is causing her vision and hearing to deteriorate and she is keen to experience as many wild and remote places as possible while representing the DeafBlind community in this typically inaccessible world.

Karolina and her guide, Sammar, will both attend the training at Glenmore Lodge to learn skills and communication techniques that will be essential in building trust and protocols for their further exploration of the mountains. As well as hiking, Karolina is a keen runner and plans to complete a marathon and the 3 peaks challenge this year.

On receiving the news of the grant offer Karolina said: "I am tremendously grateful to have been selected as a recipient of the Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant! This grant holds significant importance for me as it will contribute towards the expenses associated with my upcoming ice climbing course in Scotland this March. Accompanied by my sighted guide, Sammar Gurung from Nepal, this course presents an invaluable opportunity to enhance our communication skills and foster a stronger rapport, essential for our future mountaineering endeavours on Himalayan mountains. Moreover, I am excited to be joined by my research colleague, Mike Richardson, who will be exploring potential assistive tools that could further enhance my climbing experience as a deafblind individual. This investigation will undoubtedly pave the way for innovations aimed at optimising my capabilities as a climber.

In essence, receiving this grant not only provides financial support but also reaffirms my commitment to pushing boundaries and overcoming challenges in pursuit of my passion for mountaineering. I am truly grateful for this opportunity and eager to make the most of it."

Sophie Mackaness of the John Muir Trust, who administers the Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant said: "The grant panel were excited to support a project that has the potential to enable Karolina to summit the peaks she desires. This part of her project is just the first stepping stone in her adventure

and we wish her the best in her further travels as she pushes boundaries and inspires others in the deafblind community.”

Karolina’s project is one of six successful applicants to the Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant in 2024. This grant was established to give people the opportunity to seek out life-changing experiences in wild places in ways which will benefit both the person, and the wild places themselves.

## **Editor’s Notes**

### **About**

The John Muir Trust is a leading voice for the UK's wild places. Its stewardship of some of Britain's most iconic wild places, including Ben Nevis and Helvellyn, is guided by three freedoms; ensuring nature has the freedom to repair itself, people have the freedom to enjoy the benefits, and communities have the freedom to thrive. For 40 years, the Trust has advocated for the protection of wild places by evidencing their benefit to society. Driven by the belief that wild places are for everyone – it also provides opportunities for people from all walks of life to engage with nature through its UK-wide environmental award scheme, the John Muir Award.

### **About the Des Rubens and Bill Wallace Grant**

The grant commemorates two former Presidents of the Scottish Mountaineering Club, who each led inspiring and adventurous lives. It was set up to give others an opportunity to follow in their adventurous footsteps and experience wild places. Projects should have an educational or scientific component and benefit wild places.

Bill Wallace, died of heart failure in February 2007 while skiing in the Alps at the age of 73 with two artificial hips.

Des Rubens, was a popular teacher at Craigroyston High School in Edinburgh was killed in June 2016 in an Alpine climbing accident at the age of 63.

Grants are for £200 to £2,000 and open to UK applicants of all ages. Closing date for applications is 15 January each year. Further details on how to apply: <https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/whats-new/grants/des-rubens-and-bill-wallace-grant>

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