

A group of Year 9 Sydney Grammar School boys are wading through a river. They are wearing blue t-shirts, dark shorts, and carrying large blue backpacks. Some are holding their shoes. The background is a dense forest.

The Duke of Ed marches on

After six decades Down Under,
this adventure program continues to rise.

STORY BY MICHAEL DILLON

A group of Year 9 Sydney Grammar School boys forget about computer screens as they take to the bush in an adventure for their Duke of Ed. Ryan Chong is at the lead.



The first Australian recipient of the Duke of Ed Gold Award, Michael Dillon, received the accolade (left) from the Duke of Edinburgh on board the Royal Yacht *Britannia*; Sir Adrian Curlewis looks on. Michael revisited the yacht, now a tourist attraction in Scotland, last year (below).



THIS YEAR MARKS THE 60TH anniversary in Australia of The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award. Adventure filmmaker and Australia's first Gold Awardee **Michael Dillon** reflects on its personal and national impact.

Delayed by storms and flooding rivers, we reached the hilltop, exhausted, soaked and shivering and needed to phone our parents to say we were okay. A lady our mother's age opened the door at the first house we came to. The sight of half-drowned boys affected her greatly and tears welled in her eyes. Weeping quietly, she ushered us in, went to a room, and emerged with warm clothes our size. We guessed she must have a son our age and he must be away. She treated us tenderly, as if we were her sons. But why were there still tears in her eyes? We later learnt she had indeed had a son our age, but he'd drowned in the river the year before.

Of all my schoolboy memories, this one burns brightest, closely followed by many others amassed while doing The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award.

When Everest was first climbed, Prince Philip, patron of that expedition, got together with the expedition leader, John Hunt, and the headmaster from his own schooldays, Kurt Hahn. Together they contrived a program to round off the education of teenagers. School, they agreed, was useful but it didn't expose students to outdoor adventure, nor give them a taste of service to others.

The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award was born. At Bronze, Silver and Gold levels, participants would undertake physical challenges, develop new skills, provide service to others and go adventuring. Anyone aged 14–24 was eligible.

ANTIPODEAN BEGINNINGS

When it launched in Australia, a scouting qualification let me start at Silver Level, and by March 1963 I was the first Australian to qualify for the Gold Award. Perfect timing: the Royal Yacht *Britannia* was steaming into Sydney Harbour and word came that Prince Philip himself would present me with my Award.

Groomed to within an inch of our lives, my parents, sister and I walked up the royal gang—

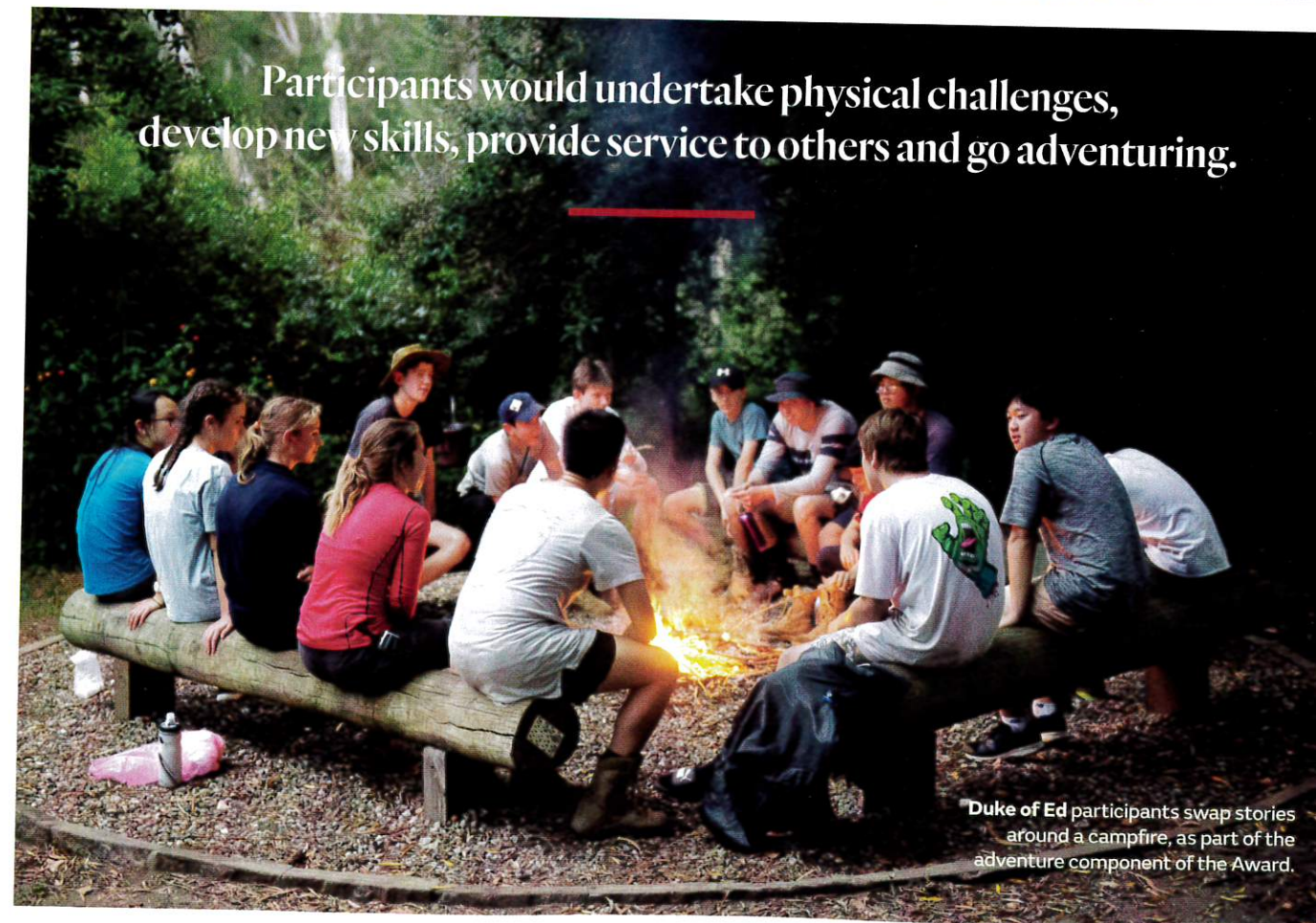
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Michael Dillon has been an adventure cameraman for 50 years. He has made five documentaries with Sir Edmund Hillary and filmed three Everest expeditions. He now prefers flatter terrain and has crossed the Simpson Desert three times on foot.

Sydney Grammar School students Hamish Crawford (at left) and Luke Levison paddle the Colo River on a Somerset Outdoor Learning camp as part of their Duke of Ed.



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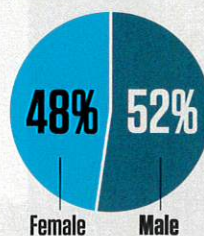


Duke of Ed participants swap stories around a campfire, as part of the adventure component of the Award.

PHOTO CREDITS, PREVIOUS PAGE: MICHAEL DILLON. THIS PAGE: MICHAEL DILLON
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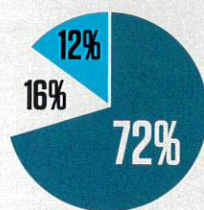
The Duke of Ed by the numbers

Gender comparison



New participants & continuations by level

Gold Silver Bronze



2017-18 registrations of new and continuing participants by Award level



OVER 60,000

adult volunteers support the Award in Australia each year

FUNDED OVER 4000

young Australians experiencing disadvantage

OVER 26,600

young Australians begin the Award each year

OVER 1200

Award units delivering the Award in Australia

OVER 850,000

hours of volunteering contributed by the Award participants in Australia each year

OVER 40,000

young Australians are participating in the Award each year

OVER 775,000

young people have participated in the Award since its inception in Australia (1959).

Key international statistics

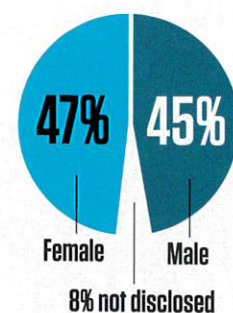
The Award operates in **more than 130** countries and territories



Total Awards achieved 2017-18 **328,550**



There are more than 1.3 million young people participating in the Award.



150,000+ participants from at-risk or marginalised backgrounds

As a result of doing the Award **93%** encouraged to try something new



over 6.6 million hours devoted to volunteering by participants who took part in the Award during 2017

24 1800+ participants start the Award daily. Almost 1000 achieve an Award daily.

Duke of Ed participants from Stella Maris College in the Sydney suburb of Manly watch their steps to achieve the Award.

The Award, you see, was started here as an experiment to see if it would catch on. Catch on? It's thriving!

way, saluted by everyone in sight, and had a wonderful 20 minutes of family time with Prince Philip. He put us instantly at ease with a private recital of his latest one-liners. The Sydney Opera House was being built nearby and he said he hoped they'd got the engineering right, or else, at the first puff of wind, it might sail away.

When Prince Philip asked what my favourite part of The Duke of Ed had been, I said the expeditions. My mates and I would take our bikes by train to Cooma and ride all over the Snowy Mountains, rucksacks on our back. Prince Philip encouraged me to do more such things and I did. I became an adventure filmmaker.

Years later I applied for a job with Sir Edmund Hillary, a hero of the expedition that had inspired the scheme. Saying I had my Gold Award might have helped, or simply having done it may have been enough; either way I got the job and remained Sir Edmund's filmmaker for more than 25 years.

Duke of Ed taught us to invent our own adventures, and this helped me think up the idea of climbing Everest from sea level. The Australian Geographic Society backed the 1990 expedition that led to Tim Macartney-Snape

making the first and never-yet-repeated climb of the entire 8848m of Everest.

LOOKING FORWARD

Two years after I received my Award, Patricia Jeffreys, from Perth, became the first Australian girl to attain it. We were the first, but would we be the last? The Award, you see, was started here as an experiment to see if it would catch on.

Catch on? It's thriving!

At my old school, Sydney Grammar, 320 students are currently doing it, along with 40,000 Australia-wide every year. And although it might have started in private schools it is now spread evenly between private and state schools and embraced as well by the armed services, prisons and youth detention centres, disability organisations, refugee support programs, sporting associations, surf life-saving clubs, Police Citizens Youth Clubs, universities and Indigenous organisations. It's also operated online for unaffiliated individuals.

Almost 800,000 Australians, an equal spread of males and females, now have Duke of

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Ellie Burnett joined a group of Duke of Ed participants on a multi-day hike in the Snowy Mountains.

Profile

Wednesdays with Dr Retter

ISABELLA (ELLIE) BURNETT started her Duke of Ed while at boarding school in Sydney. She cites the Voluntary Service Section of her Bronze Award as rewarding and life-changing. Each Wednesday she caught a bus to St Luke's Aged Care to spend time with an elderly resident called Dr Retter. Born in Czechoslovakia in 1915, he lived through WWII and had trained as a medical doctor until war closed his university. His passion for helping others, however, led him to sign up as a doctor during the war.

"He shared many experiences and memories with me," Ellie says. "His life was fascinating and I felt so privileged to be able to hear his stories directly. At the time, I was in Year 9 studying history and learning about the World Wars so it was unreal listening to his real-life stories." Studying history gave her knowledge to connect with what he told her, letting her engage on a deeper level and ask questions, which helped uncover more stories he'd forgotten.

At first she was hesitant about volunteering and doubted her ability to sustain a competent conversation with an elderly person. But, in hindsight, "I really misjudged the impact this experience would have on both Dr Retter and me," Ellie says.

At 99, Dr Retter's health was diminishing. He'd lost his eyesight, was unable to walk. Yet he was mentally agile and he'd remembered things in great detail. "At this stage in his life, living each day became less enjoyable and often at the beginning of our times together, I would feel pain knowing his lack of love for life. However, as the time we spent together went on, it was as I left in the afternoons that I felt



Ellie developed a firm friendship with World War II survivor Dr Paul Retter that extended beyond her Duke of Ed volunteering.

the most reward: rather than the gloomy look I'd receive as I entered, Dr Retter would be smiling and his spirits heightened," Ellie says.

"Without the opportunities The Duke of Ed has provided me, I doubt I would've ever had the opportunity to experience so many life-changing experiences. But the highlight of my three Awards [Bronze, Silver and Gold] was definitely the time I spent, and the friendship I built, with Dr Retter." After completing her Bronze award Ellie continued to visit Dr Retter simply because she enjoyed his company and the feeling of making someone else's day brighter.

"On 17 December 2015 I was lucky enough to visit Dr Retter on his 100th birthday with my grandmother. On 26 October 2017, the same day as my group's Gold Presentation dinner, Dr Retter passed away," Ellie says.

"The message in the paper well described Dr Paul Retter, the selfless man I was so very lucky to know: 'No Funeral, No Fuss, No Flowers.'"

LIZ GINIS

Owen Taylor-Williams completed the Voluntary Service Section of his Award as a crew member on the STS *Leeuwin II* tall ship.

Profile

Making it count

OWEN TAYLOR-WILLIAMS completed his Gold Award in 2017, the experience exposing him to life-changing opportunities that uncovered passions for sailing, environmental research and leadership. For the Voluntary Service Section he sailed as a Leeuwin Ocean Adventure Foundation volunteer on the tall ship STS *Leeuwin II*, with a crew of 15, including volunteers, and up to 40 trainees. Owen says it was "an experience of a lifetime", a chance to meet new people and work on his leadership skills by teaching them to sail.

The foundation builds leadership skills through adventure programs on a sail-training tall ship. On week-long voyages, it gives young people opportunities unavailable elsewhere. Volunteer crew can progress through increasing responsibility to eventually lead a team of trainees to run the ship.

"I learnt a lot about teamwork because setting the sails requires a dozen crew and volunteers to climb the masts and unfurl the sails, 33m above deck, in all kinds of weather," Owen says. "I quickly learnt I could do much more than I initially thought possible." Owen also researched the health of Moreton Bay, off Brisbane, as a Science Under Sail Australia (SUSA) volunteer,

Owen completed his Gold Residential Project studying the health of Moreton Bay, Queensland.



on a project that investigated environmental changes due to human causes, such as urban development and global warming. Along with other SUSA volunteers and researchers, he worked out of a University of Queensland research facility on North Stradbroke Island. They collected information on seagrass meadows and the animals using them by using baited remote videos for smaller fauna while recording visual sightings of sea turtles and dugongs. The information was passed to the local regional body to improve environmental management and community understanding.

"I was left with great memories of living on the bay and its magnificent creatures," Owen says. "It was great to learn about the uniqueness of Australia's marine ecosystem [but sometimes] overwhelming to see the damage done. I promised myself I wouldn't ignore the environment in the future and speak up when I could."

The Duke of Ed has helped Owen pursue his dreams. He is now at the University of Western Australia studying medical science and physics, volunteers as a team leader on STS *Leeuwin II* and has been inspired to work with St John Ambulance.

"The Duke of Ed encouraged me to learn new skills and seek new experiences," Owen says. "It also helped me gain a more global perspective and find things inside myself that were waiting to be discovered. I'll be forever grateful."

LIZ GINIS

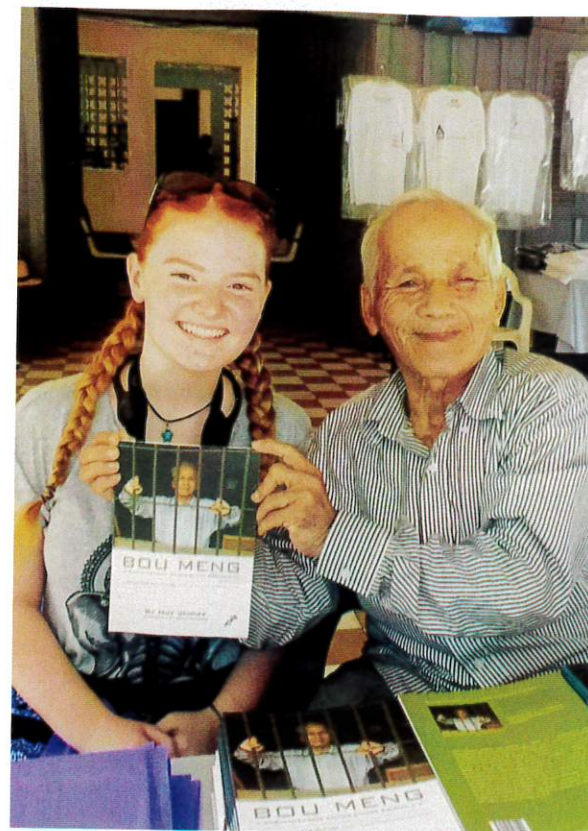


Christopher Harris, who at 15 chose to attempt Mt Everest for his Bronze Adventurous Journey, rests at its North Col at 7000m.



These students at Barker College, NSW, completed three tough challenges for their Adventurous Journey – canyoning, abseiling and hiking.

PHOTO CREDITS, BOTTOM: COURTESY DUKE OF ED. TOP: MICHAEL DILLON
PHOTO CREDITS, FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY DUKE OF ED. RIGHT: MICHAEL DILLON



Gold Duke of Ed awardee Jessica Myers-Denton with Bou Meng, a survivor of Khmer Rouge imprisonment in Cambodia.

Duke of Ed participants were joined by locals to hike Papua New Guinea's notoriously gruelling Kokoda Track.



Many so love their volunteering that they keep doing it far beyond what's needed for their Duke of Ed.

Edinburgh Awards on their CVs. Employers increasingly take notice, for they know it makes a difference.

To me, the life of Sir Edmund Hillary seems to best embody the aims of The Duke of Ed. Put into the 'hopeless squad' in physical education at school, he took a school trip to the mountains, fell in love with the outdoors and blossomed.

After Everest, imbued with the notion of service, Sir Edmund asked his Sherpa friends what he could do for them, and they asked for a school. He built them one, and then built another 30. He built hospitals and bridges too, and found this more rewarding than his famous footprint on their mountain.

While Hillary's ongoing impact on the people of the Everest region has been immense, the Award's impact on Australia continues to be even more so. Many millions of hours of volunteering have been done – almost a million per year: in nursing homes, hospitals, soup kitchens, childcare centres and animal shelters; for night patrols, St John Ambulance, rural fire services, state emergency services; and in support of countless other fields including wildlife preservation and conservation projects.

Many so love their volunteering that they keep doing it far beyond what's needed for their Duke of Ed, and the same goes for new sports and skills first tried through doing the Award's program. There are many, like me, where loves acquired along the way have fostered lifelong passions and careers.

Essentially, I guess, we keep on doing the Duke of Ed all our lives. I stayed enthused by the service side of the Award, spending time with Sir Edmund Hillary

building schools, and seeing their impact. When friends and I felt it was time Australia helped carry on his work, we began the Australian Himalayan Foundation.

As for my favourite part of the Award, the expeditions (now called Adventurous Journeys), my filming has kept me involved. I've seen the Kokoda Track work its magic on groups of Aboriginal Australians doing their Duke of Ed, and filmed Christopher Harris, who amazed his supervisor by wanting to climb the highest peak on each continent by age 16.

He did climb many of them but failed, just 1500m short on Everest, due to illness. Our hardest day was summiting Europe's highest mountain, Mt Elbrus in Russia. We were totally exhausted when we got back down, and just before he fell into an exhausted sleep, I heard Christopher say, "I wish every day was just like today." He'd learnt that the hardest of days are also the best of days.

I recall Christopher's words, and my heart gladdens when I see young people challenging themselves on Duke of Ed hikes – out in the bush where otherwise they may never have ventured, relishing one another's company, phones nowhere in sight, getting fit, soaking up the natural world, being nurtured by it and learning to love and protect it.

We are all part of a huge international community, for the Duke of Ed has spread to more than 130 countries and territories. Eight million young people have done it, with 1800-plus new ones starting daily. All will, like me, have treasured tales of it enriching their younger years and how it enriched entire lives.