

25 year old message in a bottle reunited with its owner

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As an eleven year old boy in 1985, Donald Wylie tossed a bottle into the Orkney sea, with a message asking its finder to track him down. Almost a quarter of a century later, Donald will be reunited with the bottle which eventually washed up hundreds of miles away on the West Sands in St Andrews

The message in a bottle was the star find among debris collected by a team of keen eco-volunteers taking part in a community beach clean over the summer. The group, which included students and staff from the University of St Andrews, were startled to find a message despatched to sea twenty-three years ago.

Organisers from the University and Fairmont St Andrews Hotel launched a search to find the sender and were delighted to track him down - still living in Orkney and a house builder. When Donald confirmed the story, the organisers invited him to St Andrews to collect the bottle and see for himself where it eventually surfaced.

Donald threw his message in a bottle into the sea at the Sandside beach in Deerness on Orkney. Written inside was a note asking the finder to pass it on to a boy of a similar age.

Today 33 year old Donald recalls regularly going down to the beach as a young boy with his mum, who encouraged him to throw hundreds of bottles into the sea over the years - even now, she continues the tradition at the same beach with her grandchildren. When contacted by the

organisers, Donald said, "Over the years I've had a few replies, usually from Norway or Denmark, but never one from St Andrews and never one that's taken this long to wash up."

Almost sixty volunteers took part in the beach cleanup which filled 77 black bags of debris including nine pieces of wood, five litres of diesel in a plastic bottle, two fish crates, one barrel and a single Wellington boot. The bottle was found by Mary Stevens (pictured with Donald above), a mature student at the University and member of staff at ELT (English Language Teaching). It is hoped that the beach clean will become a bi-annual event, with another planned in October.

Roddy Yarr, Environment and Energy Manager for the University of St Andrews said, "The summer event was the first in a series that we hope will be part of a long-term effort to promote the importance of keeping the town's beaches clean. By involving local business, we hope that in the future local groups will be given their own slice of beach to look after.

"The message in a bottle was really quite a find and surprised us all, and we're delighted to be able to reunite the owner with this piece of history. It really is quite remarkable that the bottle should be found after all this time - who knows where it has travelled to in the last quarter of a decade."

Source: University of St Andrews

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