

Sisters achieve highest Duke of Edinburgh awards – 2013

Sisters Katie and Claire Thomas received their Duke of Edinburgh gold awards together when they went to St James's Palace in London last week.

Katie, 20, and Claire, 18, from Bath Road, Devizes, have spent the past three years undertaking the many challenges that qualified them to receive their cherished award.

Katie, who is in her final year of a ocean sciences course at Plymouth University, said: "We both got involved through St Augustine's College in Trowbridge, where we were pupils. "I did the bronze award then the silver before going on to do the gold challenge. Claire skipped the silver and went straight to gold."

The girls were required to complete challenges in four disciplines: residential, service, skill and sport. Katie worked with the Royal National Lifeboat Institution at Sandbanks, near Poole in Dorset, assisting beach lifeguards on distributing beach and sea safety advice as well as going out on the offshore lifeboats. She had to raise money to cover the cost of the week, which she did by organising cream teas and an Easter raffle. She worked as a young leader with the 4th Devizes Guides and as a sailing instructor with the West Wilts Youth Sailing Association at Westbury. Claire spent a weekend in Devon with the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers and both sisters took part in an expedition across Snowdonia.

Accompanying them to St James's Palace last week were their mother Pippa, who got her DofE gold award in 1978, and their cousin Jess Fletcher. After a speech by Arctic explorer Justin Miles, the attendees received their gold award certificates and then chatted to Prince Edward, the Earl of Wessex, who was standing in for his father. Katie said: "He was very friendly and joked with everyone. He spent a long time talking with our mother about her Duke of Edinburgh award."

Katie has already discovered the benefits of her gold award. She said: "Because I am in my final year at university, I am now going for job interviews and when they hear I have a Duke of Edinburgh gold award they are so impressed. I hadn't realised it would have that effect."

Report made by the "Devizes Gazette and Herald"