

Remembering Wojtek the Bear

Later this month there will be a commemoration of Wojtek the Bear and the soldiers who fought in the Battle of Monte Cassino 80 years ago. The event will take place at the statue of Wojtek in Princes Street Gardens on 18 May.

The organisation Wojtek Scotland and author, Aileen Orr will lead the event on Wojtek Day, and everyone present will also be invited to observe the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Monte Cassino, Italy in 1944. There will be speeches from the Polish Consul, Aileen Orr (author of "Wojtek the Bear Polish War Hero") and others. The occasion will be a celebration of Polish and Scottish links and common history as a universal symbol of unity between different cultures, backgrounds and ethnicities.

Wojtek was a Brown Bear adopted by a contingent of Polish men, women and children in April 1942 in the highlands of Iran from a hungry boy who traded the bear cub for some local currency and some food. The bear then joined what would become the 2nd Polish Corps (later 22nd Company, Polish Army Service Corps (Artillery)). He travelled with them through Palestine and Italy (where they took part in the Battle of Monte Cassino) eventually reaching his new home in Scotland.

Wojtek was awarded the honorary rank of Private to get around restrictions on a transport ship taking the soldiers from Egypt to Italy. For his work during the Battle of Monte

Cassino, carrying shells for the artillery guns, he was promoted to Corporal and was incorporated into the badge of the Company.

On arrival in Scotland, Wojtek stayed with the soldiers on a farm in Berwickshire but was later moved to Edinburgh Zoo. Wojtek's statues have been erected in a number of places in different countries, one of which is in Edinburgh in Princes Street Gardens. The Polish School in Edinburgh is also named after him.



