



Sutherland Schools Pipe Band in Cochrane, Alberta, with members of the Cochrane Pipe Band and the Mackay family.

By Louise Mackay

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SUTHERLAND Schools Pipe Band was thrilled to be awarded a third place in the prestigious Calgary Stampede's annual parade, on 3rd July.

Against stiff competition from adult military bands, the Sutherland youngsters narrowly missed out on second place.

George Stewart, musical director, and all the band members were delighted with the favourable comments made by the judges.

Twenty-seven members of the band - pupils from Golspie High School and Dornoch Academy aged between 12 and 18 - travelled to Canada to take part in the parade.

Despite the blistering temperatures on the day, every band member completed the gruelling one-and-a-half hour march in front of thousands of spectators lining city streets.

As part from Calgary Stampede's own marching bands, the group had the busiest schedule of any visiting band throughout the week-long event. They played for six breakfast events and also twice on the Stampede grounds.

The band was invited to the finals of the Marching Band competitions in the McMahon Stadium. As well as playing for the audience before the winners were announced, they also had the honour of leading all the competitors onto the field for the finale and results.

A visit was fitted in to Cochrane, a small town on the outskirts of Calgary, where the band joined forces with Cochrane Pipe Band and entertained shoppers and visitors.

Special guests in the audience were the Mackay family, who own the famous Mackay's Ice Cream Parlour in Cochrane. Their mother, Christina Mackay, left Rogart in 1946 and made her home in Cochrane, setting up the family business.

Sadly Mrs Mackay passed away in January of this year, but to mark her kindness to the pipe band on previous visits to Canada, Lee Bain, pipe major, presented her family with a commemorative plaque.



Marching through downtown Calgary for the Stampede Opening Parade.

The band also delighted the family by playing Mrs Mackay's favourite, *Amazing Grace*.

A delicious Mackay's ice cream was enjoyed by everyone before the band were treated to lunch by the Cochrane band.

The band was invited to an afternoon of clay pigeon shooting at Carstairs by the Day family who also have Sutherland connections through the Goskirk family in Lairg.

The band then played for a charity event the family hosted to raise funds for a teenage drop-in centre in the town.

Although the schedule was very packed, the band did manage to fit in two rest days. The first one was spent the day after arrival at the Calgary Heritage Park which was just what was needed after the long journey.

A day trip to Banff and Sulphur Mountain was a highlight of the visit. The band went on a horse drawn wagon ride through the

countryside to a cowboy cookout lunch, complete with singing cowboy. The band members also got to try their hand at lassoing. The day was completed with a trip to the top of Sulphur Mountain by gondola.

On the last Friday the band was invited back to Sundance Lake by the Ridd family, whom they met on the trip in 2012, for an afternoon of swimming, games and a barbecue.

The band was well looked after during their stay by the Calgary Stampede hosts, Ray and Nafilia, and the ever helpful and cheery bus drivers, Vic and Clayton.

An invitation has been extended to return to Alberta for the 2017 Calgary Stampede which coincides with the 150th birthday of Canada, a testament to how well behaved, talented and highly thought of the band are.

■ Louise Mackay is Sutherland Schools Pipe Band secretary