

Dog owner carries beloved pet George on final walk together

BY CATE McCURRY

A DEVOTED dog owner has said his final goodbye to his beloved pet by carrying him up Belfast's Cavehill.

Dave Wright from Carrickfergus took his loyal hound, George, for one last walk before he had to put him down.

The pair have been inseparable for the last 15 years and often walked the scenic Belfast route.

So last Sunday, Dave took his four-legged friend for one last time over the hill that they both know so well.

When George, who is now too old to walk, struggled with the adventure, Dave carried him for their final journey.

"We have had 15 great years together and as he is getting put down this week, I thought it only right that we take one last walk together," said Dave, as he held back tears.

George went everywhere with Dave, including trips to Newcastle in Co Down on his motorbike, when George would sit in front of Dave.

When the dog lover visited his girlfriend in Belfast, and left George with her for a while, the faithful pet waited for him to say his goodbyes, then hightailed it back to Dave's home in Thornfield, Carrickfergus.

Their final goodbye echoes that of Mark Woods from Newquay who appealed for fellow dog lovers to join him on his

last walk on a beach with Walnut, his 18-year-old whippet, who he had to put to sleep.

Hundreds of people and well-wishers joined Mark and his family on Porth beach for his final farewell.

Mark carried Walnut across the beach as he was too weak to walk because of his old age.

He explained that the beach was Walnut's favourite place to go for a walk.

The dog's story was shared thousands of times while people from all over the UK turned up at the beach to show their support.

Posting shortly after Walnut was put to sleep, Mark said that he went "very quickly" in his arms.



Carrickfergus man Dave Wright and his dog George at the Cavehill

BY CLAIRE McNEILLY

ALAN Bittles is a trailblazer in genetics and rare diseases.

He is currently employed as an adjunct professor and research leader in the Centre for Comparative Genomics at Murdoch University in Perth, Australia.

He's also an honorary professor of community genetics at the School of Medical and Health Sciences at Edith Cowan University, which is in the same city.

As if that wasn't enough, the respected academic is the author of a variety of specialist research papers and a widely-acclaimed textbook that was published by Cambridge University Press in 2012.

And, somehow, he also finds time to chair an advisory committee on rare genetic diseases (The Scientific Medical Advisory Committee of Rare Voices Australia), which is his "major current research interest".

That would be a punishing

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schedule for someone in their 30s or 40s, but Professor Bittles, who is Belfast born and bred, is gearing up to celebrate his 74th birthday next month.

And now he's going to have those incredible, age-defying endeavours recognised at the highest echelons of his adoptive country in the coming weeks by being awarded the equivalent of an OBE.

Indeed, Prof Bittles is one of a select few who have been chosen to become a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) when this year's Australian Honours list is formally announced later today.

The Northern Ireland native, who studied at Trinity College in Dublin and Queen's University in Belfast, is among just 340 people out of a population of 24 million to receive the impressive accolade.

Speaking to the Belfast Telegraph from his Western Aus-

Belfast medicine man given top Australian honour for his lifetime of work in genetics



Professor Alan Bittles with his wife Marilyn

tralian home, Prof Bittles, who is married to 68-year-old musician Marilyn, said the honour was completely unexpected.

"It came as a total surprise to me," he said.

"I hadn't a clue this was in the offing.

"I received an official letter on behalf of the Governor General in October saying I had been nominated for this award be-

cause of my work in genomics. I was flabbergasted.

"I had to look up what was happening and it seems to be associated with university work and medicine, and that's of

course what I've been doing all these years."

Although the accomplished scholar says he officially retired a decade ago, he admits that he still works every day — and has

done since he got his first job as a medical laboratory technician aged 17.

He's now a long way from that role at Belfast's Royal Victoria Hospital, but it's been a fulfilling journey for the man who left his Troubles-scarred home city in 1974 to pursue a career in England.

"Belfast wasn't really all that great in 1973 and after a year working as a principal scientific officer in bacteriology in the Royal I took a lectureship at London University and stayed there for about 20 years," he recalled.

"I gradually became a senior lecturer and reader, and concentrated on medical genetics. I was offered a chair in Perth so I came out here in 1993 and I've been here ever since."

Prof Bittles, whose Welsh wife was formerly head of music for West Australian Opera and then chorus director for West Australian Symphony Orchestra, added that it was heartwarming to have recognition for his labours.

According to the citation, he is to be recognised 'For significant service to medical education in the field of genomics, as an academic and researcher, and to professional groups'.

"It's obviously very flattering that somebody bothered to talk about me and say why don't we organise this," he said.

"It's humbling at the same time because I work pretty hard and I've been quite successful but what differentiates me from somebody else?

"The other thing is that if you're working in science or medicine you're not working on your own — you're working with a crowd of other people.

"It's in some ways at least a credit to my lecturers when I was a student, to the people I've worked with, to the students I've supervised, to the colleagues I work with.

"So, although it's given to one person, I really do think it's important to recognise that you're not the sole recipient, that it's actually a wider pool of recipients who are being honoured in this way."