



# FRIENDS of JOHN MUIR'S BIRTHPLACE

Newsletter No. 20, April 2012

## Contents

<b>Honorary Life Membership Presentation to Dan Cairney ...</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Donation of John Muir books to Dunbar Primary School ..</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>100,000 Visitors at John Muir's Birthplace .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>A Gude Fechter - John Muir the Campaigner .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>John Muir Draft Dodger? .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Forthcoming Friends Events - Details .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Membership News .....</b>	<b>8</b>

### ***John Muir in the New World***

Dunbar premiere showing of this American PBS film  
Friday 20th April, 7:15 for 7:30pm  
Community Room, Dunbar Town House

### **Friends members' evening boat trip around Bass Rock**

Late May. Date to be confirmed.

### **Kittiwake Trail Workshop**

A family drop-in event to make a few kittiwake sculptures from recycled materials for display in John Muir's Birthplace.

Saturday 23rd June, 2:00-4:00pm  
Community Room, Dunbar Town House

### **Annual Sandcastle Competition**

Saturday 11th August, 2:00-4:00pm



## FRIENDS of JOHN MUIR'S BIRTHPLACE

### Honorary Life Membership Presentation to Dan Cairney

On Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> January, Susan Panton, on behalf of Friends Council, presented past President Dan Cairney with a certificate that marked the award of Honorary Life Membership in recognition of Dan's contribution to Friends. There is no doubt that the purchase of the Birthplace and the development of its Museum were amongst the highlights of Dan's Presidency and during his 'term of office' DJMA/Friends have achieved a very great deal and Friends are extremely grateful for the time and effort Dan has committed to raising the profile of Muir in his birthplace of Dunbar and beyond. We all wish Dan the very best in his 'retirement'.



Dan, in return, made a presentation to Jim Thompson, the current President of Friends. The plaque that was presented by Dan was a beautifully embroidered Dunbar clan Coat of Arms.

The Dunbar clan motto is "In promptu" which means "In readiness". [A wholly appropriate motto for Friends of John Muir's Birthplace too! Ed.]



## Donation of John Muir books to Dunbar Primary School

John Muir's old school, Dunbar Burgh, some years ago split into a grammar and a primary. Dunbar Primary School is now the biggest in Scotland in terms of pupil numbers. As a result it has been divided into 2 campuses. The John Muir Campus takes the younger children from nursery to P3 and the Lochend Campus has P4 to P7. Friends of JMB decided to present both campuses with a selection of John Muir themed books for their libraries and in March past President Dan Cairney and current president Jim Thompson reprised their Muir and Roosevelt act to present the books. Four pupils, Kayley Bamburgh, Rhian Dowding, Ewan Ramage and McKenzie Lawler, introduced 'Muir and Roosevelt'. Their unedited introduction was as follows:-



*We are very lucky because we live in the great town of Dunbar. Although lots of people from Dunbar go out into the world and do very well the most famous person from Dunbar has to be John Muir. He was born just up the road on the High Street in 1838, in fact you can visit John Muir's Birthplace most days free of charge. But who was John Muir? Here are some facts. John was the oldest brother in a family of 5 girls and 3 boys. He started school at the age of three and went to the Grammar when he was seven. He was very adventurous, always climbing, exploring and being daring and he stayed like this when he grew up. In 1849 when he was 10 his father came in and told John and his brother Daniel not to bother with their homework because they were going to America the next morning. When they arrived in America the boys had to help build a house for the family and dig a well. John nearly died while digging. John Muir was a writer, a farmer, an inventor – we like the noisy seat he invented. All through his time in Dunbar and America he had a special love of nature. In 1867 he had an accident with a machine which blinded him and while he was in hospital he vowed that if he recovered his sight he would*

*dedicate his life to looking after nature. Luckily his sight returned and in 1867 he set off on a long walk- one thousand miles. He then discovered his very favourite place – Yosemite. He travelled far and wide throughout the world and had many adventures. When he returned to Yosemite years later he was shocked to find his wild place was being spoiled by farming. In 1903 he invited President Roosevelt to visit with him and they went on the most important camping trip in history. Three nights in Yosemite. Can I now introduce 2 very special guests John Muir and President Roosevelt.*

*We're going to finish our assembly by celebrating John Muir's 1000 mile walk by singing "I would walk 500 miles and I would walk 500 more, just to be the man who walked a 1000 miles to fall down at your door."*

## **100,000 Visitors at John Muir's Birthplace**



When East Linton Primary School's P5's visited John Muir's Birthplace on February 1<sup>st</sup> 2012 they were thrilled to discover that amongst them was our 100,000th visitor! The children were taking part in their annual Citizenship project and had spent a busy morning exploring the Birthplace and finding out new facts about John Muir's life story and his legacy. When their session finished they were surprised to find that they

would not be going straight back to the bus, but that they would be taking part in the celebration! To mark the occasion the class were presented with a set of children's books, as a gift for their school library. Each child also received a Birthplace notebook as a personal souvenir. The books were presented by Dan Cairney, past President of the Friends of John Muir's Birthplace, and Jim Thompson, the current President of 'Friends'. Councillor Ruth Currie and past JMB Trustee and a current member of FoJMB council Robert Russell also joined in the celebrations. Reporters from both STV and the East Lothian News arrived and there was great excitement as the children were filmed and interviewed as they looked around the museum. The STV news item, which

appeared on the 6 o'clock news, is still available online<sup>1</sup>. Well done boys and girls and we look forward to welcoming the next 100,000!

Ruth Currie, Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing, said:

*“The team at the Birthplace are justifiably proud of the achievement, which is testament to their commitment and hard work in communicating the story and legacy of John Muir. It is wonderful to know that more than 100,000 people have now enjoyed visiting this attraction. I am delighted that the pupils of East Linton Primary school have been able to share the occasion with us.”*

Jill Wareham, Headteacher at East Linton Primary School, said:

*“John Muir is well established as a regular topic in school and is part of our culture of outdoor learning so we are very pleased to be here today.”*

## **A Gude Fechter - John Muir the Campaigner**

*A Gude Fechter – John Muir the Campaigner* is the Birthplace’s main temporary exhibition. It opened in April and runs throughout the summer. The exhibition explores the campaigns of Muir’s boyhood in Dunbar, as an adult and in Dunbar today and will link into a campaigning theme for Festival of Museums events in East Lothian over the weekend of 18-20 May.

## **John Muir Draft Dodger?**

[Recently I discovered that many of John Muir’s letters were on Calisphere, the University of California's free public gateway to primary sources. Calisphere's content comes from the libraries and museums of the UC campuses, and from a variety of cultural heritage organisations in California. The list includes the University of the Pacific. The John Muir Papers is part of UoP’s contribution but the Calisphere letters seem easier to access. I was searching the source of a Scottish quote used by Muir and found that he had used the quote in an 1863 letter to brother Daniel. Towards the end of its six pages Scotland is mentioned. Read on!]

A six-page letter from John Muir from Old Fountain Lake on 20 Dec 1863 to brother Daniel, then in Canada, gives an insight into John’s mental turmoil at the time. The United States was embroiled in its bitter Civil War and he had seen fellow students from the University of Wisconsin heading off to fight for

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://news.stv.tv/scotland/east-central/295877-john-muir-museum-receives-100000th-visitor/>

the Union, and some return severely injured. He had left the University that year and returned home to await being drafted. Relationships with his father had not improved and at the time of writing to Daniel he was living with his sister Margaret and her husband John Reid while his mother lived in Portage.

The following year he left for Canada. Many commentators have concluded that this was to escape the draft. However his name did not appear on any list of draftees and while in Canada he asked in his letters home to be told if it did. Another theory is that this was the first step on a journey back to Scotland. The letter would appear to put an end to the 'draft dodger' hypothesis and provide proof that John was intending to return to Scotland but only if he was not drafted in the meantime.

At the foot of the fifth page and on to the sixth page, John writes, *"I have worked hard in harvest this summer and built John Reid's house over the hill from fathers, also I plowed for John about two weeks, I am splitting cordwood and rails for stove [Dave] this winter and studying French Latin and Anatomy also Scottish history and manners, as I intend if not drafted to go to Scotland in the spring, I would have gone last fall but gold was fifty per cent, How much is gold in Canada payable in greenbacks. If I can get British currency cheaper by going to Canada and taking ship there I may see you. I wish Dan that you [and] I had money enough to go together. I did not go to Michigan because I thought it would cost a good deal to get a start there and I might be drafted almost as soon as I went. You speak of home. I know exactly how you feel Dan, but if you were here you would soon wish yourself away again even though there was no war. You are much better where you are if you can only make out to go to school most of the time. Father and I cannot agree at all I could not live at Hickory Hill a single week hardly My advise is to rest as contentedly as possible where you are prepare yourself for future usefulness by the culture and discipline of your mind, and rest assured of the hearty sympathy and love of all your friends.*

Will Collin

[Harold Wood, curator of the John Muir Exhibit and Chair of the Sierra Club John Muir Education Committee, was most interested to hear of Will's research and Harold has said he will update the appropriate John Muir Exhibit web page<sup>2</sup> with this new information. Ed.]

---

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.sierraclub.org/john\\_muir\\_exhibit/life/was\\_john\\_muir\\_a\\_draft\\_dodger.aspx](http://www.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/life/was_john_muir_a_draft_dodger.aspx)

## **Forthcoming Friends Events – Details**

### ***John Muir in the New World***

Dunbar premiere showing of this American PBS film  
Friday 20th April, 7:15 for 7:30pm  
Community Room, Dunbar Town House

*John Muir in the New World*<sup>3</sup> first aired nationally in the USA on Monday, April 18, 2011 in honour of Earth Day (4/22) and John Muir Day (4/21). Explaining his impact then and now, this 90-minute documentary delves into Muir's life and influences with reenactments filmed in high definition throughout the majestic landscapes he visited: Wisconsin, Yosemite and the Sierra Nevada, the Alhambra Valley of California, and the glaciers of Alaska. Placing our nation's most important natural assets in a cultural and social context, *John Muir in the New World* is a timely reminder of America's unique and, ultimately, threatened eco-systems.

### **Friends of JMB members' evening boat trip around Bass Rock**

Late May. Date to be confirmed.

Friends of JMB members evening boat trip around Bass Rock - £20 per person. Late May. Date to be confirmed. If interested please email [susanpanton@yahoo.com](mailto:susanpanton@yahoo.com) or pass on your name and phone number to Susan at John Muir's Birthplace, 126 High Street, Dunbar EH42 1JJ. 01368 865899

### **Kittiwake Trail Workshop**

A family drop-in event to make a few kittiwake sculptures from recycled materials for display in John Muir's Birthplace.

Saturday 23rd June, 2:00-4:00pm  
Community Room, Dunbar Town House

This event is part of North Light - a season of inter-linked cross art form happenings taking place in and around Dunbar in 2012. North Light will build on the successes of *Home Thoughts From Abroad (Homecoming Scotland)* 2009, *Taking a Line... with Knitting the Harbour* in 2010, *The Herring Road Celebration (Lost Landscapes)* and *One Touch of Nature...Makes all Kin* at JMB in 2011; It is an ambitious initiative with a rolling programme which places Dunbar and the John Muir Way at the heart of creative engagements, to

---

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/episodes/john-muir-in-the-new-world/watch-the-full-documentary-film/1823/>

highlight the unique environment of the locality and it's enduring capacity to inspire. The programme will include site specific contemporary arts installations and performance, a Kittiwake Sculpture Hunt and Home Grown Celebrations, torchlight performances, music rhyme and song, workshops and art history lectures: unique happenings each developing the theme of North Light. For further info please contact Susie Goodwin [susie.goodwin@gwd.biz](mailto:susie.goodwin@gwd.biz)

### **Annual Sandcastle Competition** Saturday 11th August, 2:00-4:00pm

The 7th Annual Sandcastle Competition is scheduled to coincide with favourable low tides on Saturday, 11th August. The location is still to be finalised but is likely to be in the vicinity of the usual place – East Beach. Further details will be given in the next newsletter.

### **Membership News** **Membership Renewal Reminders**

April is one of the two months – the other is September - when membership renewals often fall due. Renewal forms are sent out with newsletters for Friends who had taken out their membership on an annual basis and whose renewals are not automatically paid by standing order. If our records show that your membership is due for renewal then a subscription form will have been included in this newsletter mailing.

### **Online Delivery of Newsletters**

Following a January e-mailed 'mailshot' to all members that had supplied their e-mail address, a significant number of Friends have opted out of receiving paper copies of the Newsletter and now read the online version instead. This is a significant saving since the production and delivery cost of the Newsletter is now a substantial proportion of the membership subscription – especially as the cost of Royal Mail delivery is due to increase soon. If you still receive paper copies of the newsletter and would like to opt out of receiving paper copies in the future then please do let us know.

### **FRIENDS CONTACTS**

**Official address: Friends of John Muir's Birthplace, John Muir's Birthplace, 126 High Street, Dunbar EH42 1JJ: tel: 01368 865899**

**Friends Email: [info@muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk](mailto:info@muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk)**

**Friends Website: [www.muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk](http://www.muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk)**