



FRIENDS_{of} JOHN MUIR'S BIRTHPLACE

Newsletter No. 23, January 2013

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Friends Social Event

Wednesday 20th February, 7:15 for 7:30pm

Given the success of previous social events, we are repeating the format of that event where, in addition to the refreshments, we hope to have a selection of members' favourite photographs with a short story attached. For further details see inside this Newsletter.



Annual General Meeting 10 October 2012 Convener's Report

It is customary to begin the Convener's report by stating the aims of Friends of John Muir Birthplace (FoJMB) as given in our constitution. These aims are:

to advance the education of the public concerning John Muir, as the Dunbar-born pioneer of world nature conservation, and his belief in the unique and irreplaceable value of wild places and wild creatures;

to implement John Muir's philosophy practically by conserving, restoring and enhancing landscape and wildlife in East Lothian and Scotland and supporting the work of the staff of John Muir's Birthplace.

Over the past year we have continued to further these objectives by:

- Delivering a programme of talks and other events on John Muir and environmental topics, both within and outwith John Muir's Birthplace (JMB).
- Issuing on a regular basis our newsletter containing items regarding John Muir, environmental issues and the work of JMB, circulated to members, available at the Birthplace and online on the Friends website¹.
- Liaising with people and organisations of influence both locally and nationally. Including: John Muir Birthplace Trust; John Muir Trust; VisitScotland.
- Being involved in local environmental initiatives such as the Dunbar Woodland Group, Sustaining Dunbar and Friends of John Muir Country Park.
- Donations of John Muir themed books to the Dunbar Primary School libraries. Past President Dan Cairney and current President Jim Thompson reprised their Muir and Roosevelt act to present the books.
- Providing volunteers on a regular and ad hoc basis to support JMB staff and to promote JMB both locally and further afield.

¹ www.muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk

Since the last AGM, FoJMB has experienced a number of highs and lows. Some of the highs can be deduced from the above achievements and our involvement in the initiatives that promote the life and work of John Muir. One such high point was the visit by East Linton Primary School's P5's to John Muir's Birthplace on February 1st 2012 as amongst them was the 100,000th visitor! It's heartening to think of all of these young people on school visits and in the museum's workshops learning to love nature and wild things and places just as the young John Muir did all those years ago here in Dunbar.

Other distinguished visitors in 2012 included Californian Geoff McQuilken, Executive Director of the Mono Lake Committee – an organisation that now has 16,000 members with the aim of protecting and restoring Mono Lake and its surrounds, which were declared a State Park in 1981. Most recently the Committee's energies have been directed to ensuring that the Park was taken off California's closure list, a fight that was successful in December 2011. Significantly, a leader in this campaign was Muir's great-great-grandson Robert Hanna.

In early September, Harold Wood took time out from a recent tour of the UK to visit Muir's birthplace. Harold, the founder of the Sierra Club's John Muir Exhibit, is a long-standing life member of Friends. Harold is also chair of the Sierra Club's Education Committee and an expert on all things regarding John Muir. Harold was accompanied by his wife Janet, a professor of geology and earth science at the College of the Sequoias in Visalia, California, and a NASA Solar Systems Ambassador.

It is often the case that visitors like Geoff and Harold make initial contact through Jim Thompson, the current President of Friends. When Jim stepped down as Convener at last year's AGM he was 'persuaded' to follow Dan Cairney as President. As Jim wrote in the January 2012 newsletter: *"Dan will be a hard act to follow. He has been involved with Friends and DJMA since inception in many capacities and, of course, it was Dan's foresight and inspiration that led to the formation of the John Muir Birthplace Trust and the subsequent purchase of the property."*

So, whilst the low point of losing Dan as President and Jim as Convener has been offset by Jim maintaining an involvement with Friends as the current President, there is no doubt that our lowest point was in May when our Secretary, Susan Panton, lost her long battle with cancer. Susan was an inspiration to us all and there can surely be no better way to celebrate her life -

and her contribution to Friends – than to make sure that the Friends of John Muir’s Birthplace goes from strength to strength and is a fitting tribute to someone who gave so much to the local community and who helped tirelessly and unselfishly to promote the work and life of John Muir.

Picking up that last point of making sure that Friends continues to flourish in order to pursue its aims, I would like to encourage members to consider standing for Council and/or help to ‘recruit’ more members. Kevin Addies is stepping down from Council and on behalf of us all I’d like to express thanks to Kevin his valuable contribution to the aims and objectives of Friends. We are also losing Alison McGachy temporarily for the duration of her ‘world tour’ when she will be a volunteer for a number of children and animal welfare charities over the next year. We hope Alison will return to Friends ‘duty’ in late-2013. In the meantime she has our best wishes for the time and effort she’ll spend on such worthwhile causes.

I understand that visitor numbers at the Birthplace are slightly down on the bumper numbers that were achieved in 2011. This is not really surprising given the poor weather during the summer months. However, as already mentioned, the 100,000th visitor stepped over the Birthplace’s threshold at the beginning of February and the museum goes from strength to strength. Visitors come from all over the world and no doubt by doing so help the economy of Dunbar. Comments in the visitor’s book of the past year make for wonderful reading. For instance: *‘Most enjoyable. Come visit! [California, USA]’*; *‘Very beautiful exhibit! Your hard work shows. Thank you. [Oregon, USA]’*; *‘Glad to see this place (I grew up in Wisconsin) [Illinois, USA]’*; *‘Beautiful and evocative tribute to a great human being. Thank you [France]’*; *‘Brilliant museum. V. helpful and friendly staff’, Amazing!!! [England]’*; *‘He is a really interesting guy and I like all the interactive activities. [Yorkshire]’*; *‘Brilliant, 2nd visit [Tranent]’*. The success of the Birthplace is due, of course, to the hard work and dedication of the museum staff and, also, the Friends that help out on a voluntary basis. Their heroic efforts have maintained the museum’s Gold ‘Green Tourism’ award and the Scottish Tourist Board five star visitor attraction status.

Finally, on behalf of the membership I’d like to thank all my fellow Council members - past and present - for their tireless efforts in promoting Friends and the Birthplace.

Duncan Smeed

Premiere of *John Muir in the New World*

*John Muir in the New World*² first aired nationally in the USA on Monday, April 18, 2011 in honour of Earth Day (4/22) and John Muir Day (4/21). The first public showing of this film outside of the USA took place immediately after the business of the AGM was concluded and the community room in Dunbar Town House filled to capacity when members of the public arrived for the Scottish premiere of the film.

Explaining his impact then and now, the 90-minute documentary delved into Muir's life and influences with re-enactments filmed in high definition throughout the majestic landscapes of Wisconsin, Yosemite and the Sierra Nevada, the Alhambra Valley of California, and the glaciers of Alaska. The audience reaction to the film was very positive and everyone enjoyed this event and left knowing more about Muir's life and achievements.

John Muir in 2013 and 2014

The next two years are big dates in the John Muir calendar. This year has been designated the Year of Natural Scotland 2013 and is the latest in the Scottish Government's series of themed years. It is being led by Event Scotland and VisitScotland, with Scottish Natural Heritage as the lead national agency for its delivery. The aim is "*to promote Scotland's stunning natural beauty and biodiversity, and promote opportunities for visitors to enjoy our beautiful landscapes, wildlife and heritage responsibly*". (It surely should have included locals!) It will lead into Homecoming Scotland in 2014 which will "*extend the benefits and opportunities offered by the Commonwealth Games and Ryder Cup and build on the successes of the first year of Homecoming 2009 by presenting a year-long coordinated programme of inspirational events*."

John Muir has been named a key figure in both years' events. As well as growing recognition in Scotland of his international importance (and his ability to pull in tourist particularly from North America!), there are other reasons for his inclusion. 2013 is the centenary of the first publication of '*The Story of My Boyhood and Youth*', with its '*Dunbar bits*'. It is also the 175th anniversary of his birth and the 120th anniversary of his only return visit to Dunbar. 2014 sees the centenary of his death on 24 December but the year will be a celebration of his life.

² <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/episodes/john-muir-in-the-new-world/watch-the-full-documentary-film/1823/>

There will be national events both years, particularly the opening of a new walk, from Dunbar to Loch Lomond and presently called the John Muir Coast to Coast Trail. Within Dunbar, it is hoped there will be exhibitions and, among other things, a recreation of a Victorian classroom and for group visits, a Victorian style teacher and lessons! Clearly there will be opportunities for local schools, parents and particularly young folk to be involved, enthused by and proud of our connection with John Muir.

[A recent article in the Scotman's Lifestyle section³ has more details. Ed]

'Boyhood and Youth' Centenary

As mentioned in the previous article, 2013 brings a number of John Muir anniversaries – 175 years since his birth, 120 years since his only return visit to Dunbar among them – but the most significant is probably the centenary of the first publication of *'The Story of My Boyhood and Youth'*. Parts had been serialised in 'Atlantic Monthly' in 1912 and 1913 before Boston publishers Houghton Mifflin brought out the first book version in March 1913.

By then approaching his 75th birthday, Muir recounts the key events of the early years of his life. The first chapter is a fascinating account of life in Dunbar in early Victorian Scotland for John was born just 10 months into the young queen's reign. He tells of school life, walks to the shore and countryside with Grandfather Gilrye, shipwrecks, bird-nesting and much more.

In 1849 Daniel Muir took his wife and seven children off to the New World when John, third oldest and oldest boy, was almost 11. They settled in the new frontier state of Wisconsin where they became farmers. John tells of toiling from dawn to dusk on a frontier farm in the new state of Wisconsin, before leaving home to attend the nascent University of Wisconsin at Madison. But the titles of some of the chapters give clues to the happier side of his teenage years – *'A Paradise of Birds'*, *'Young Hunters'*, *'Knowledge and Inventions'*.

Why don't you mark the centenary by reading *'Boyhood and Youth'*, for the first time or again? Copies are available from the Birthplace (Birlinn's 2006 edition with an introduction by Dunbar's David Anderson, £6.99 less 10% for Friends members), or online from Amazon and other sellers. Or read it online at the Sierra Club's John Muir Exhibit⁴ or the Yosemite Online Library⁵.

³ <http://tinyurl.com/scotsman-080113>

⁴ www.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/writings/the_story_of_my_boyhood_and_youth/

Friends will arrange a book night, probably in March or April, when Friends and friends who are close enough to Dunbar can meet and share our favourite passages and perhaps find out why it took John Muir so long to write the first part of his autobiography. Watch out for posters at the Birthplace and Dunbar town noticeboard or information on the Friends⁶ and JMBT⁷ websites.

Will Collin

Friends' 'Boyhood and Youth' Centenary Plans

When the Muirs settled in Wisconsin in 1849, Daniel Muir chose 80 acres of wild land adjoining a lake in Marquette County. The area is still rural and the lake and 120 acres of land is now the John Muir Memorial Park. The nearest town is Montello, the county seat. The Muirs then moved to a new area, Hickory Hill, nearer Portage, which is the county seat of neighbouring Columbia County.

With the centenary of '*The Story of My Boyhood and Youth*' coming along in 2013, an exchange of e-mails between Friends and the president of the Wisconsin Friends of John Muir⁸ (WJoJM), Tiffany Lodholz, began at the beginning of November 2012. Not surprisingly, WJoJM were also intending to mark the occasion and readily agreed to an exchange of ideas. As well as exhibitions, here are some of the other ideas that were shared:

1. linking classes and schools in East Lothian, particularly the Dunbar cluster, and Marquette/Columbia Counties with strong connections with John Muir;
2. creating a Victorian classroom in Dunbar Town House and enlisting volunteers to act as teachers (MCHS already has a restored one-room school house that could be used for similar programming);
3. holding a Muir-inspired writing and/or art contest in local schools;
4. encouraging readings of '*The Story of My Boyhood and Youth*' and arranging a readers night;
5. creating a shared digital anthology or box about John Muir in Dunbar and Wisconsin;
6. encouraging relationships between the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Queen Margaret and/or Heriot-Watt Universities (or

⁵ www.yosemite.ca.us/john_muir_writings/the_story_of_my_boyhood_and_youth/

⁶ www.muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk

⁷ www.jmbt.org.uk

⁸ www.johnmuir.org/wisconsin/

appropriate departments⁹). (Others? – Edinburgh University has a John Muir Building);

7. enabling contacts between Dunbar & District History Society (DDHS) and Marquette County Historical Society (MCHS);
8. setting up a formal link between Dunbar and Montello at community council level (leading possibly to one between Dunbar and Portage at twinning level).

Other possibilities for Dunbar could be:

9. a short series (say, four) of information sessions on John Muir for parents, carers, grandparents, friends, etc, for all the cluster schools, at times which suit (each talk would stand alone e.g. John Muir's family and growing up in Dunbar (could include his return in 1893); main milestones and influences in Muir's life; Muir's literary & other achievements; Muir's legacy in the US and worldwide – what he has left for Dunbar and Scotland; bubbles to burst – some common misconceptions;
10. how to find out about John Muir for school projects – an information session and or a source sheet of what is where;
11. a book of walks in the Dunbar and East Linton area, to commemorate Muir's life, and perhaps, associated with the book, an annual photographic, art and writing competition;
12. a young person's book of John Muir's adventures – any writers or illustrators of young folks' books out there?
13. an annual display of young folk's projects, art work, etc, from John Muir in the primary and secondary curriculum.
14. as a family, or adults only, complete a John Muir Award. For more information go to www.jmt.org/jmaward-home.asp

The list is limited only by our imagination. There have already been responses from staff at the Grammar School, Dunbar Primary School and the John Muir Building at Heriot-Watt University. Have you any other suggestions? Would you like to help with any of the above? Contact Friends at John Muir's Birthplace, 126 High St, Dunbar EH42 1JJ, 01368 865899, or e-mail info@muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk

⁹ The John Muir Building at Heriot-Watt University houses the School of Life Sciences, which includes the departments of Biology, Marine Science & Environmental Management, and also it's famed International Centre for Brewing & Distilling!

John Muir & Robert Burns at the Scottish Parliament

In response to an invitation from VisitScotland, Jo Moulin in her capacity as ELC's Museums Officer (Promotions) took the exhibition *'Wherever a Scotsman Goes... John Muir and Robert Burns'* to a reception in the Scottish Parliament's Garden Lobby for the evening of 21 October. The event was aimed at MSPs and key partners from across the visitor economy with around 200 attending. Deputy Presiding Officer Elaine Smith, Minister for Tourism Fergus Ewing and VisitScotland Chairman Mike Cantlay gave short presentations on the tourism opportunities in 2013 and 2014 but the main purpose of the evening was to allow participants to make connections.

The Muir-Burns exhibition panels were put together by Friend Pauline Smeed, in her role as a member of the Birthplace staff, for Year of Homecoming 2009 when Burns was the main subject. The roles reverse in 2014 for that is the centenary of Muir's death and celebration of life will be a key focus of the year's events, which also include the Commonwealth Games, the Ryder Cup and the 700th anniversary of the Battle of Bannockburn, giving the best opportunities for Scotland's tourism industry in a generation.

Jo was accompanied by fellow Friend Will Collin and they had "good conversations" with the American Scottish Foundations, other museums, delegates from other local authorities, VisitScotland staff from across Scotland and other tourist industry representatives. They also gave out over 100 copies of *'A Scotchman Comes Home'*, Friends' account of Muir's 1893 visit to Dunbar and his subsequent tour of Scotland, which provides an excellent itinerary for anyone wishing to see the best of his native country.

John Muir's Birthplace Museum – News

Due to a boiler failure in the run up to Christmas JMB closed and its shop stock was relocated to Dunbar Town House. Thankfully this did not deter our festive shoppers. JMB is now reopened and restocked with its usual wide range of books and gifts. Don't forget that Friends are entitled to a 10% discount! Calendars and diaries are also now reduced by 25%.



‘Belhaven, a Journey’
An exhibition of photographs by Gordon Jenkinson
Saturday, 19th January until Sunday, 3rd March



I think that John Muir’s Birthplace is the perfect venue for this exhibition as it covers the area that the Young John Muir was so familiar with as a boy growing up in the town.

The exhibition will showcase a selection of panoramic photographs taken since April 2011 around Belhaven Bay. As an artist, growing up and living in Dunbar, I have always been fascinated by the ever-changing panoramic expanse of sky and sea around Belhaven Bay. I wanted to try and capture this amazing place, to convey the diverse changes and moods that occur daily, through my camera’s lens rather than with paint. I started to visit Belhaven at various times during the day and night, starting in April 2011. I watched the tide timetables daily and began to understand the changes that occur with every ebb and flow of the tide.

I have taken many thousands of photographs and have short-listed 30 photographs for this new exhibition.

Gordon Jenkinson

Stop Press: JMB Retains 5 Star VisitScotland Status

John Muir’s Birthplace has maintained 5 star VisitScotland Quality Assurance Grading for another year after their surprise ‘visitor’ dropped in at the Birthplace at lunchtime on Thursday, 10th January.



As with all previous assessments the assessor was highly complementary about the quality of customer service given by staff and volunteers and particularly commented on the personal attention and excellent knowledge of those on duty.

Our Memorable Visit to John Muir's Birthplace - September 2012

[Friends are very grateful to Harold Wood, Webmaster, Sierra Club John Muir Exhibit website, and Life Member of the Friends of John Muir's Birthplace for contributing this inspiring account of his recent visit to Dunbar. Ed.]

On September 6, 2012, my wife Janet and I had a splendid visit to Dunbar, the birthplace of my hero since childhood, John Muir. Ever since the renovations that occurred after our original visit in 1999, I had longed to see the birthplace as it was re-designed as a museum. In 1999, only the top floor featured John Muir, and the displays were primarily just examples of furniture that existed when Muir was born there in 1838. Only a slight amount of information was in evidence about who John Muir was, and very little about what a towering figure in the world-wide environmental movement he would become. Today, the Birthplace showcases Muir's life in a way that not merely informs, but inspires visitors to environmental action in the spirit of John Muir.



Janet and I were treated like royalty during our visit. We were met at Dunbar train station by Will Collin. We then sauntered up the High Street, stopping for photos at the Muir Boyhood statue. My excitement grew as we crossed the street to the Birthplace, where we were met by Jim Thompson and Jo Moulin. We began examining the displays on each of the three floors, and soon realized that the Muir Birthplace museum was a truly extraordinary presentation.

I am intimately familiar with the John Muir National Historic Site in Martinez, California, where John Muir lived and wrote his books and articles. There, it is easy to imagine John Muir working on his writings in the restored top-floor "scribble den" of the ranch house, or to visualize him walking with his children among the orchards and grape fields and the oak-covered Mt. Wanda on the ranch. I did not expect to feel the same way in Dunbar, and yet I was surprised to feel Muir's presence here just as I do in Martinez. I had thought that since nobody can remember anything of their first few years of life as a baby, which is all the time he spent in the birthplace, I would not sense Muir's

spirit here. But instead, we found that from the first, the Birthplace displays gave me a true “sense of place” that made us realize how truly formative Dunbar was to Muir’s eventual maturation to the explorer, writer, and conservationist he became. Even Muir’s home in California lacks such an exhaustive set of visually stunning museum displays.

We learned how Muir’s love of wildness clearly began here in Dunbar, as he spent hours on the seashore, gazing “in wonder at the shells and seaweeds, eels and crabs in the pools when the tide was low.” Seeing actual examples of these things in the glass displays, and later seeing the low tide as we walked on the bluffs, made me realize that Muir’s adult attention to grasshoppers and water ouzels, flowers and Sequoias, granite domes and waterfalls, all originated from these boyhood fascinations.

My vivid realization of this “sense of place” became even more pronounced when we came across the window on the second floor that had a view across the space to the house next door that the Muir family moved to when he was just an infant. The sign on the outside wall of the house read, “*John Muir lived in this house next door between 1841 and 1849.*” Although his birthplace is now a museum, and his second home in Dunbar is a bakery and cafe, it struck home that I was nonetheless following Muir’s (first) footsteps!

On the second floor, we were following Muir into the New World of America. We were delighted to see how much information and visual representations were devoted to his time in Wisconsin, the 1,000 mile walk to the Gulf, and his life in California and Alaska. The details of these displays and photographs absorbed us for along time. Examples of rocks and plants and leaves and Muir’s drawings brought Muir’s life in America to life. We learned not only about Muir’s dedication to his “gospel of nature,” but his equal dedication to family, like his long walks with his grandfather while in Dunbar, and his life-long devotion to his siblings. This is an important point that many with only a minimal acquaintance of John Muir do not realize - I was glad to see it recognized here!

We were amazed by how much information could be creatively packed into such a small space. Although every nook and cranny seemed filled, it did not appear cluttered. No space was lost - there were even Muir quotes on windows in the stairway windows! Particularly impressive was the large wall of beautiful wood cut-outs containing short stories of Muir’s life, which when flipped over revealed a quote or drawing directly from John Muir. It seemed

only a short time, but it must have taken us much longer to enjoy these things, since Will and Jim called us down to have a spot of tea and shortbread to give us a bit of respite before we tacked the third floor. These two “gentlemen and scholars” were so kind to us on our visit!

The top floor tells about Muir’s life as a fierce advocate for wilderness and conservation, his co-founding the Sierra Club, and his efforts to establish national parks and to save Hetch Hetchy. I especially appreciated the two Muir timelines - one covering his life from 1838-1914, and another depicting how Muir’s publications and achievements would continue to inspire generations of people even after his death, with illustrated examples of year after year of the 20th century showcasing Muir’s inspiration. I was hugely surprised - but delighted! - to see my own little contribution to the appreciation of John Muir’s life featured on the timeline - the 1994 establishment of the John Muir Exhibit website, with a picture of a visitor reading the old purple and white version on a computer screen. This timeline ended with the 2003 opening of the John Muir Birthplace, but I think there is room to show future environmental achievements that will be inspired by John Muir’s life. Certainly the display made it clear that while John Muir was one man who changed the world, we are all people who can contribute to making the world a better place.

We were truly impressed by the architect, the display designers, the written text, and the choice of photos, artifacts, and interactive features. The quotations used were inspiring and evocative of Muir’s spirit, conveying both his Scottish character and his eventual achievement of “global consciousness” as an advocate for Planet Earth. You couldn’t help walk away without a strong sense of Muir’s early life in Scotland and the man he became.

Janet recalled, *“Although having long known Muir’s life story, by visiting the birthplace, studying the state-of-the-art exhibits, I re-experienced a deep connection to Muir’s essence, The Birthplace museum gave me a far better understanding of who he truly was deep inside, and how his experiences as a young boy in Dunbar wove into the very fabric of his being to help make him the man he became.”*

And all this was still only half our visit to Dunbar! We greatly enjoyed chatting with museum staff as we bought our books and mementos, and then meeting up again with Friends of John Muir Birthplace and Birthplace Trust leaders as we were treated to a fine lunch (with seafood and Belhaven ale, of

course!) at “The Rocks” restaurant with a view of the seashore. We then walked along the Clifftop Trail and part of “John Muir Way,” enjoying views of the ocean and rocky shore just as John Muir had seen as a boy. We reveled in seeing the harbor again, and views of the town as a backdrop to the ever-present sights and sounds of the sea.

We wound up our visit with a tour of the old Town House with its 400 year-history. We saw the temporary exhibit gallery of Dunbar’s early 20th century heyday as a seaside resort that gave us a better understanding of the town, and we were particularly impressed by the two historic armorial panels in the council chambers.

Too soon, it seemed, Will had to make sure we didn’t miss the last train out of Dunbar back to Edinburgh. We are grateful to Will, Jim, Jo, and everyone who made our visit to Dunbar so memorable! Thank you all so much for making our visit something we will treasure the rest of our lives!

Harold Wood, Visalia, California

John Muir and the Scottish Diaspora Tapestry

Scots have migrated all over the world and have often had a profound impact on the areas where they settled. This Scottish Diaspora Tapestry project will see 25 such communities documenting their Scottish connections on a series of embroidered panels. Their combined stories will pay homage to the incredible determination and courage of Scots over the centuries. All the panels of the tapestry will be brought together in Scotland as part of Homecoming 2014.

We are looking for volunteers: to share and document their stories, keen stitchers and also for communities to display the tapestry beyond 2014. The stories will reflect historical as well as contemporary elements and will make connections between diaspora communities in Scotland and their home countries as well as between overseas communities and Scotland. The USA is one of the countries represented and an obvious choice for one of the panels is John Muir. I have had a positive response from the John Muir National Park Service in California and it would be great to involve the Dunbar as a homeland community.

Yvonne Murphy

<http://www.scottishdiasporatapestry.org>

Friends of John Muir Country Park

A small group of Friends of JMCP met at Linkfield car park at 10am on Saturday, 24 November to carry out the last task of the year - cutting out sea buckthorn which has been spreading through the dunes behind Belhaven Beach. As always the team was led by East Lothian Council's Katy Green and Tara Sykes.

Sea buckthorn has its uses - the fruit is food for certain species of small birds; its aggressive root systems help to stabilise the sand; and its dense branches provide a good windbreak. It is a favourite of some landscape gardeners and apparently grown commercially in China.

However left unchecked it is prone to run rampant. So, after a walk to one of the furthest corners, 'cutting out' began. The sun shone and a few minutes work made us glad of the cool air. A hole was dug in the sand, a fire started and two of our small team carried the piles of branches created by the loppers and whackers onto the beach. There countryside ranger Tara Sykes acted as stoker. They say time passes quickly when you are enjoying yourself and in what seemed like no time the call went up that the water was boiling. Time for tea, buns and a blether - a regular feature of Friends activities - before tidying up, gathering our gear and heading for home, three hours well spent. We left Tara behind to ensure the fire went out and to cover the pit with sand. Perhaps in some future days an archaeologist will puzzle over the charcoal pit discovered on Belhaven beach.



Friends of the John Muir Country Park meet on the last Saturday of each month, generally at 10am at Linkfield car park. Check out activities at <http://edubuzz.org/friendsofjohnmuircountrypark/> Why don't you make a New Year resolution to come along in January, if you are able and live nearby. You will be made most welcome and John Muir would be proud of you.

Will Collin

Friends Social Event with Photo Sharing Wednesday 20th February, 7.30pm at John Muir's Birthplace

Following on from similar very successful events in the past, we plan to do the same again! Members are encouraged to show and talk about three of their favourite images. 5 minutes per person! Refreshments will also be served!

If you wish to be involved, please e-mail your images to duncan.smeed@gmail.com and these will put into a presentation for ease of showing. Meet at 7.15pm for a 7.30pm start at JMB.

Membership Renewal Reminders

Renewal forms were included in the last newsletter for Friends who had taken out their membership on an annual basis and whose renewals are not automatically paid by standing order. Friends' Council hopes that the initiatives, events and publications that are produced to help promote Muir's life and work and that support John Muir's Birthplace have been of interest to the membership. If our records show that your membership is still due for renewal then a subscription form will be included in this newsletter mailing.

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

Friends Website: www.muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk

Facebook: www.facebook.com/pages/Friends-of-John-Muir's-Birthplace/108490739233583

Birthplace Email: info@jmbt.org.uk

Birthplace Website: www.jmbt.org.uk