



FRIENDS of JOHN MUIR'S BIRTHPLACE

Newsletter No. 27, April 2014

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Official Opening of the John Muir Way

Monday, 21st April 2014



Forthcoming Events

In my AGM 2013: Convener's Report I took the opportunity to highlight some of the future events that will be happening in 2014 – the Year of Homecoming¹ - that have John Muir (and/or Friends) as the major theme. These include:

- 17-26 April 2014: John Muir Festival²
- 21 April 2014: Opening of the John Muir Way³
- 27 July 2014: 20th Anniversary of the foundation of DJMA
- 29 September 2014: 20th Anniversary of the public launch of DJMA
- 24 December 2014: 100th Anniversary of Muir's death

This edition of the newsletter will concentrate mainly on the April 2014 events since there are many exciting things happening this month that I am sure Friends' will find of interest.

FoJMB will also celebrate its 20th anniversary in 2014 and it has been a highly eventful two decades and much has been achieved. These achievements will be celebrated in two forthcoming exhibitions in the Birthplace. The first of these will take place from Friday 16th May until Wednesday 11th June and will be a retrospective on the past 20 years of Friends' activities and accomplishments. It will also be a 'taster' for the second exhibition that will have an extended run from Friday 10th October to Wednesday 19th November. This second exhibition will have a focus on the next twenty years of Friends as well as content from the first exhibition.

So, this year will be a very busy time and in order for Friends to continue to flourish in order to pursue its aims, I would like to encourage our members to consider standing for Council and/or to volunteer on a 'project-by-project' basis and to help to 'recruit' more members.

Duncan Smeed

¹ <http://www.visitscotland.com/see-do/homecoming-scotland-2014/>

² <http://johnmuirfestival.com/>

³ <http://johnmuirway.org>

John Muir Festival



Thousands are expected to attend the key John Muir Festival events at Falkirk, Dunbar and Loch Lomond but there are smaller programmed events scheduled daily for ten hotspots along the John Muir Way.

With more than 70 other events taking place in association with the Festival. There is something for everyone. Full details are available on the John Muir

Festival website⁴ but here are the highlights of many of the events taking place in and around Dunbar.

5 April – 21 April

John Muir's Birthplace Mon – Sat 10am – 5pm, Sun 1pm – 5pm.

Flag Making

Drop in to John Muir's Birthplace in Dunbar to design and make your own flag to celebrate the opening of the new John Muir Way. Everyone welcome, no booking required. Children under 8 must be accompanied by an adult. John Muir's Birthplace is free to visit and is the Dunbar terminus of the new John Muir Way, officially being opened on 21 April. Come and learn more about the man who inspired the John Muir Way and the John Muir Festival.

5 April - 3 May

Dunbar Town House

In a Natural State: An exhibition at Dunbar Town House by the Scottish artist Emma Herman-Smith.

10 - 22 April

Dunbar Garden Centre are running a 'John Muir themed Easter bunny hunt'! It is FREE and open to children from all ages to enter.

19 April

Dunbar Film Society, West Barns Village Hall, 3.15pm

Grizzly Man Tickets £4 (£10 family) pay on door only. Please see www.dunbarfilm.org.uk website for information on the screening.

⁴ <http://johnmuirfestival.com/#whats-on>

20 April

Lochend Woods, Dunbar. 10am - 6pm

Celebrating the Launch of John Muir Way

Dunbar Community Woodland Group is embracing the spirit of Dunbar's most famous son on Sunday 20th April and are gearing up for a day of JM fun in the woods!

10am - Bird identification walk - with David Bates, our convenor.

11am - Easter Egg Hunt for the wee ones - with DCWG

12 - 5pm - Log Drum workshop - with Andy Penicuik.

12.30 Food/lunch, setting fire in the clay oven and the camp-fire

2.30 - 'Mad about Muir' - a promenade play in the woods, by Quids In theatre.

3.30 - planting of a sequoia tree, and wild flower.

4.30 - Woodland Barbecue - pay as you eat: venison steaks, venison burgers, wild garlic and nettle soup, baked goodies from the clay oven.

5.30pm - story telling around the camp fire.

Most events will take place at the Gathering Space near the corner of Kellie/Middlemas Road. All Welcome.

20 & 21 April

Lauderdale Park, 10am - 4pm

Wild About East Lothian [more details later in the newsletter. Ed.]

21 - 28 April

Dunbar Harbour

Emma Herman-Smith: Beach Hut Artist Residency

Emma, originally from Helensburgh, will be continuing her research into the nature of the John Muir Way and discussing her plans for her walk across Scotland in 2014.

21 April

John Muir's Birthplace & West Barns Inn

Dunbar Writers

Dunbar Writers' are preparing a dramatic presentation to celebrate John Muir as an ecologist and also an inspiring writer. Readings concerning John Muir, as he relates to Dunbar but also covering wider issues will be connected by a narrator. The first reading will take place at John Muir's Birthplace, then open air readings and, finally, a reading at the West Barns Inn.

21 April

Dunbar Harbour, 2pm

Dragon Boat Ceremony

In recognition of the inspiration that comes from connecting to the environment, artist Emma Herman-Smith will bring the Port Edgar Dragons to Dunbar during the John Muir Festival meeting with the local skiff rowing teams.

21 April

John Muir Birthplace

Wandering West

A soundscape project, by artist LesleyMay Miller and writer Elspeth Brown. Celebrating the ethos of John Muir, it explores the innovative fiction of John Muir conversing with two other great Scots, James Clerk Maxwell and Patrick Geddes. Starting point is the John Muir Birthplace Trust.

21 April - 26 April

Glebe Park, 12.30pm and Various Locations

Songline

Soulwind Songline is a community event running in parallel with the John Muir Festival. It will bring songs and communities together in song along The John Muir Way from coast to coast. The Songline is starting in the Glebe Park in Dunbar at 12.30pm to send off the walkers, cyclists and runners.

21 April

Our Lady of the Waves Church Hall 10am - 3pm

Dunbar Primary School's John Muir Tapestry

Dunbar primary school children have been working on a tapestry for the opening of the John Muir Way and it will be on display on the day of the official opening of the new pathway.

21 April

Dunbar to Helensburgh

Ramblers Scotland Relay

Ramblers Scotland groups will be staging a relay along the route. Starting in Dunbar on the 21 April, they'll be leading walks along a section of the trail each day until reaching Helensburgh on 26 April.

21 April

Fashion School, Old Library, Belhaven Road 10am - 4pm

Reflections Of Nature

An exhibition of work by home-grown international fashion designer Jacqui Burke.

21 April [East Linton]

East Linton Community Hall, High Street, 2 pm

Nature Walk

A led nature-walk (with wildlife spotting and plant identification) lasting about 1 hour, along part of the John Muir Way and past historic features such as Preston Mill, Phantassie Doocot and House, and the John Rennie Memorial.

Refreshment Pit Stop Dunpender Community Council offers hospitality in the form of tea, coffee and bacon rolls for weary walkers on the open day of the John Muir Way on April 21st. Pop into our Community Hall any time between 2-5 pm and enjoy a welcome cup of tea.

Official Opening of the John Muir Way

The new John Muir Way links Dunbar and Helensburgh on the Firth of Clyde “*sparkling awareness of the local landscapes and wild places along the route*”. The route has been developed by Scottish Natural Heritage⁵ with support from a range of partners in the Central Scotland Green Network, including East Lothian Council.

On the day of the opening of the John Muir Way there will be celebrations in Dunbar High Street 10.30am-2.30pm. First minister Alex Salmond officially opens the John Muir Way at Muir's birthplace in Dunbar at 12 noon. All are welcome to come along and enjoy the Festival atmosphere, celebratory art, music, performance and food stalls. A stylised tree will be raised in tribute to Muir's enduring love of giant sequoias and there will be a variety of other artworks.

Ramblers, runners and cyclists will lead a procession of John Muir flags at 1pm along the first section of the John Muir Way to rally at North Berwick, Seabird Centre at 4pm. Route distance: 1mile, 5miles or Dunbar to North Berwick = 15miles.

⁵ www.snh.gov.uk/johnmuir

Three Bolts from the Blue!

Following Friends' treasurer Will Collin's talk to the Gifford Society in late February, he received a phone call from a gentleman in Gifford wishing to donate some books on the history of Dunbar and three John Muir ones to Dunbar and District History Society and Friends. Will gratefully collected them on 17 March and was taken aback to find the Muir books, all first editions, were *'The Mountains of California'* and two copies of *'The Story of My Boyhood and Youth'*.

1. The copy of *'The Mountains of California'*, published in 1894 by The Century Co., is inscribed on the flyleaf "*To Rev Hugh Ross with very best wishes of his friend Thomas Magee, San Francisco, Oct 14/96.*"
2. One copy of *'The Story of My Boyhood and Youth'*, published by Houghton Mifflin in 1913, has a card attached to flyleaf reading "*From Mrs W H Averell, 325 East Avenue, Rochester, New York*"
3. The other copy of *'The Story of My Boyhood and Youth'* is inscribed on the flyleaf "*To Mr Thomas T Bisset, with sincere regard, John Muir, Martinez, California, January 1914*".

Thomas Magee and Mrs Averell were friends of Muir although so far no trace has been found of Rev Hugh Ross. Clearly, though, the most important is the one inscribed in the unmistakable hand of John Muir. It is doubly so in that the recipient was T T Bissett, a Dunbar photographer of note and publisher of the Bissett Series of postcards some of which are among the Muir Papers at the University of the Pacific. Research on all three is continuing and more details will appear in our next newsletter.

Reaching Out

Friends have given four John Muir talks during the last few weeks with Homecoming 2014 putting him in the spotlight again. Muir only made it back to Scotland once, in summer 1893, not surprising considering the distances involved. The talks to Dunbar & District History Society and the Gifford Society focussed on these few weeks. Talks to the Port Seton History Society and Dunbar Parish Church Guild were more general presentations on Muir's life and legacy. A total of nearly 150 attended the four events. The Port Seton visit resulted in the Society arranging an outing to the Birthplace.

When asked, Friends are always willing to try to give presentations on John Muir, either of a general nature or on some specific aspect of his eventful life and lasting legacy. There is no charge although a donation to Friends is always gratefully accepted. Distance is not a huge obstacle – Friends council members have taken the Muir message to such as Dollar, Dumfries, Glasgow and Grasmere in recent years although for these distances a contribution to travel costs is expected.

Requests for speakers can be made through John Muir's Birthplace (01368 865899/Email <info@jmbt.org.uk> or by contacting Will Collin at 01368 863162.

Could Muir Mak it to Makars' Court?

Initially it looked as if the answer was no! He wasn't a professional writer, only a scientist who could write a bit. Forget the LL.D.s from Yale and the Universities of California and Wisconsin and the M.A. from Harvard. Ignore his elected membership of the US National Institute of Arts and Letters and the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Muir, whose income from 1871 onwards came mainly from his magazine articles and books, wasn't a professional writer unlike J K Annand (teacher, translator and editor) John Buchan (a career diplomat), David Daiches (university professor, historian and critic), James Alan Ford (civil servant), Neil Munro (journalist and editor), Douglas Young (classicist and political activist). This is not to denigrate these worthy Makars but rather to show that some had other careers. Muir on the other hand had many other interests but his main source of income was his writing.

Thanks to the tenacity of JMBT chair and Friends member John Thomas and a host of folk who knew better, said so and backed up their opinion with copious evidence, the vetting committee agreed that John Muir was a worthy addition. His 'memorial stone' will be formally unveiled on 29 April in front of a small invited audience (there is very limited space in Makars' Court) followed by a modest reception in Edinburgh City Chambers.

Muir's flagstone will bear the inscription:

John Muir (1838 –1914)

I care to live only to entice people to look at Nature's loveliness.

John Muir on Film

There have been two John Muir films in preparation by different Dunbar Primary groups in recent weeks. The first is in collaboration with Law Primary School, North Berwick, and Musselburgh Burgh School where pupils have also been preparing sections. This film is an animated one telling of John's life and will be shown at East Lothian's Brunton Theatre in Musselburgh during the John Muir Film Festival 19-26 April. The films celebrate Muir's legacy of adventure, travel and exploration and will also be shown in partnership with several other cinemas along the new John Muir Way.

The second involves a trip back through time by two young visitors to Dunbar, played by 10-year-old Nancy Bird and Kit Savage, 9. Disappointed to find John Muir's Birthplace closed, they walk along to look at the John Muir statue and there meet the 'real thing', a young John Muir aka Matthew Pearson. John shows them some of his favourite activities such as climbing on Dunbar Castle, playing on East Beach and fighting at Lauderdale. Wherever they go another figure is watching, that of the elderly John Muir played by Dan Cairney. To find out the rest of the story try to watch the film. The footage is presently with the editors and is expected to go on general release in various Dunbar venues, including the Birthplace, for 21 April.

Ongoing Muir Education at Dunbar Primary School

As befits the only school that John Muir attended, Dunbar Primary School's most famous former features in the school curriculum every year, not just on special anniversaries. As the summer term gets underway the whole primary 5 year group, all 125 of them, will continue working towards their John Muir Award – Discovering, Exploring Conserving and Sharing. This will be the 14th year that Dunbar Primary School pupils have been taking part in the award.

Leading the way in the past has been deputy headteacher Mrs Heather Hackett who 'retired' last summer but once a teacher ! As well as having been involved in many of the John Muir activities leading up to this year's Festival Mrs Hackett is hoping to be involved with at least one of the primary five classes next term.

Dunbar Primary's Whole School Muir Project

Thanks to the efforts and enthusiasm of a small group of parents led by Mrs Eden Blair, each of the 34 classes in Scotland's largest primary school have embarked on a literally massive project. Eden, herself from the USA, has identified 34 key times or happenings in John Muir's life. Each class has been given one event to explore and will turn their ideas into a collage. The 34 panels and one carrying the title will then be combined into the final tapestry. The tapestry will be on display at Our Lady of the Waves church hall on Monday April 21 for the opening of the John Muir Way.

Mad About Muir

In August 2013, to celebrate the Year of Natural Scotland, Dunbar Community Woodland Group arranged a visit by the Quids In Theatre Company. The group is Aberdeen's only professional theatre company and they brought with them their production '*Mad about Muir*'. This 'promenade performance' involved a stroll through Lochend Woods accompanying John Muir as he met a number of people, such as President Teddy Roosevelt and environmental opponent Gifford Pinchot. The enthusiastic audience unanimously voted the performance a resounding success. Friends are delighted to team up with DCWG to arrange for Quids In Theatre to repeat the performance in Lochend Woods on Sunday 20 April at 2:30pm. Following the show at 3:30pm there will be a Sequoia planting to link Dunbar's wood with John Muir's California.

Launch of the John Muir Graphic Novel

As reported in the an earlier newsletter Education Scotland had chosen John Muir to be a nominated figure in Scottish Studies and funding found for the publication of a graphic book telling of the life of Dunbar's most famous son. The graphic novel⁶ was launched by Scottish Book Trust on April 2nd. Written by award-winning author Julia Bertagna and illustrated by Glasgow-based artist William Goldsmith, the novel is based on the key moments and life adventures of John Muir and is intended to help children develop a deeper understanding and awareness of the natural environment and the importance of protecting wild places. A class set of 24 copies will be distributed to every secondary school in Scotland this month to coincide with the opening of the John Muir Way by the First Minister on the 21 April 2014.

⁶ <http://www.scottishbooktrust.com/johnmuir>

Blowing hot and cold!

With John Muir's birthday fast approaching things are hotting up for what is proving to be a jam-packed weekend of activities in Dunbar and elsewhere on the 20th and 21st April as part of the John Muir Festival during 19-26 April. As part of its preparations, the Scottish Seabird Centre arranged a 'photo shoot' for the morning of 26 February. Needing a John Muir look-alike they contacted Dunbar Primary School (where else!) and headteacher Mrs Gillanders volunteered Matthew Pearson from p6, possibly to get him out of his teacher's hair for a few hours.

The photographer was professional, award winning Rob McDougall⁷ who has John Muir connections of his own. He is a former pupil of DPS and Dunbar Grammar School; like Muir taught for a while (including some weeks in Yosemite Valley); and has climbed Half Dome. Matthew dressed in 'period costume' and the team, which included SSC education officer Jenny McAllister as Professor Egghead, headed out on site.



That was when the cold bit in for the rocks around the SSC were exposed to the full blast of a February wind straight off the North Sea and the plan had been for Matthew to be in shirt sleeves. The other surprise was that Matthew was to be both the boyhood and adult John Muir and a full grey, stick on beard was produced. It is fair to say that much fun was had; the session seemed to meet with the approval of Rob, Jenny and the other adults; and all was over by lunchtime. Matthew and his transport manager⁸ (now also his agent) received their fee in the SSC café – cheese and ham toasties (a Matthew favourite) with chips on the side.

⁷ www.robmcdougall.com

⁸ Will Collin ;)

The Victorian Schoolroom at the Town House

During this spring, ELC's Museums Services has been offering a Victorian Schoolroom at the Town House, with help from Friends. Museum Officer Sarah Cowie arranged with adult volunteers what the format should be: a whole class arrives at the Town House, and while one half (about 15) do a tour of the building and see a video, the other half experience the classroom for about 40 minutes. After a break they change over, and finish off with a wind-down session for all, before they return to their real school. The teachers so far have been Will Collin and Robert Russel, assisted by Jackie McReady, Ross Combe, and Sarah. Anna-Marie Boyle and Heather Hackett have also volunteered, and adult helpers from the school have also attended.



The pupils are briefed beforehand after dressing in costume - waistcoats and shorts for boys, smocks for girls. Pupils sit at desks in rows of 5, hands are inspected for cleanliness, the teacher introduces himself, and explains it is now 1845, John Muir is only 7, and about Queen Victoria, the Empire, and the countries in red on a world map. They go on to practice writing with quill pen and ink then slate and chalk; chant a 2 times table and alphabet as a class; do



written and mental arithmetic; and finally read a poem individually and as a class; they also answer questions about the poem. At some point during the "lesson" an unfortunate volunteer commits a misdemeanour such as slouching/talking/dropping chalk and is taken outside the room to experience the tawse (only in play-acting). This has quite an effect on the rest of the class.

Finally the lesson ends and there is time for questions before hand-washing, collecting jackets, and having a final chat before leaving. Questions have included “*Did you really belt him?*”, “*Were you alive in Victorian times?*”, “*Were there only men teachers then?*” and comments like “*My Dad got the belt at school!*”. A show of hands at the end indicated they enjoyed their session - some asked could they come back next week!

Trust John Muir to Come Home This Year

On 2 May, John Muir Trust members will be making their way to John Muir’s birthplace and scene of his boyhood when the JMT AGM and Members’ Gathering comes to Dunbar. Friday evening sees a presentation from nature and travel photographer, John Beatty, followed by a social mingle over a finger buffet, in Dunbar Parish Church where John’s grandfather was ordained an elder in 1822.

The AGM itself takes place on Saturday morning in the kirk and this is followed by optional afternoon activities which include a walking tour of Muir’s Dunbar and a visit to John Muir’s Birthplace led by Friends’ President Jim Thompson and Will Collin.

On Saturday evening the venue moves to the Church halls for a buffet meal and an evening celebrating the impact of John Muir. Dunbar folk group Herber Mooths will perform songs by Muir’s favourite poet, Robert Burns. Then Will will consider Muir’s life and legacy with readings from his books, articles and letters by actor and director Stuart Mitchell.

Hopefully Sunny Dunny will live up to her reputation of ‘sunniest and driest in Scotland’ and not Muir’s “*awful storms thundering on the black headlands ... when the sea and the sky, the waves and the clouds, were mingled together as one.*”

WILD PLACES: John Muir Film Festival

Through a diverse programme of films focussing on themes of landscape and open spaces, The Brunton explores John Muir’s legacy of engagement with the Natural World as part of the John Muir Festival 2014 Thu 17 – Sat 26 April.

WILD PLACES is a festival of films celebrating John Muir’s legacy, presented by The Brunton working in partnership with other cinemas along the John Muir Way, the new national coast to coast pathway. The Festival reflects

Muir's passion for wild places and the environment and celebrates all of the talents of this extraordinary Scotsman – as a naturalist, writer, artist, explorer and founder of the modern conservation movement.

Screenings at The Brunton are accompanied by a series of pre screening talks with experts from nature and the arts including: Countryfile's Tom Heap, stand up comedian and mountaineer Andy Kirkpatrick, Creative Scotland's Scott Donaldson and Edinburgh Makar Ron Butlin.

The films exploring themes of the natural world include: The Last Explorers – John Muir, The Edge of the World, Baraka, Grizzly Man, Into The Wild, Chasing Ice, Over The Hedge and John Muir – The Schools Film Premiere. (Full listings below).

Films are also screened at: Lomond School Helensburgh, macrobert Stirling, Hippodrome Bo'ness, Filmhouse Edinburgh and Dunbar Film Society at West Barns Village Hall.

Lesley Smith, General Manager at The Brunton explains: *“The thinking behind Wild Places is to have a visual celebration of John Muir's legacy as part of the wider John Muir Festival. The films and speakers chosen bring together soaring landscapes and breathtaking images; spiritual experiences; edifying and humorous discussion regarding the importance of conservation and the movement started by East Lothian son, John Muir. To link this to the opening of the new coastal path we decided to draw together venues along the route to present a Festival of film: Wild Places.”*

WILD ABOUT EAST LOTHIAN

East Lothian Council's Countryside Ranger Service will be taking over Lauderdale Park in Dunbar from 10am to 4pm on the 20th and 21st April for two action-packed days of wildlife fun and games. As part of the John Muir Festival, Wild About East Lothian⁹ is coming to Dunbar this Easter with lots of FREE and fun environmental activities for all the family to get involved in.

There will be drop-in activities to try out including rockpooling, willow weaving, storytelling, bat hunts, micro world, art and many other free environmental activities for all the family. Countryside Rangers will be waiting to guide you on many different themed journeys around the local area

⁹ <http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/wildabouteastlothian>

to explore the various habitats and discover the wildlife there. Advanced booking is advisable with limited places available on the day. All events are free. Some of the events on offer include:

Rockpooling: Rocks are tough, but rockpool animals are tougher still! Come along to discover and record the fascinating marine life that frequent our rocky shores, and learn about the amazing ways they manage to survive and thrive. Wellies advisable.

Seabirds: The Firth of Forth is a summer home to over half a million seabirds. Join us as we head off in search of diving gannets, crying kittiwakes and maybe even pretty puffins on this leisurely 90-minute walk along the coast.

Tracks and trails: Join us on a quest to uncover which animal placed that print or plopped that poo. Learn about feather and fur identification and hone your skills as a nature detective!

There will also be ongoing drop-in environmental activities at the hub such as:

Fungi Fun: Drop in to find out how the mushroom got its spots, make some pictures with fungi paint and try a mushroom supermarket challenge.

Willow weaving workshop: Discover the art of natural weaving – no experience necessary! Come and have a go at making a willow and rush fish to take home.

Membership News

Online Delivery of Newsletters

Following last year's 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 version¹⁰ 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 was increased recently. 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.

¹⁰ <http://muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk/newsletters/current/>

Membership Renewal Reminders

April is one of the two months – the other is October - when membership renewals often fall due. 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 due for renewal then a subscription form will be included in this newsletter mailing.

FRIENDS CONTACTS

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