



FRIENDS of JOHN MUIR'S BIRTHPLACE

Newsletter No. 31, July 2015

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**Upcoming: Annual Sand Sculpture Competition, 23rd
August**



FRIENDS of
JOHN MUIR'S
BIRTHPLACE

Annual Sand Sculpture Competition Sunday, 23rd August, 13:00 to 15:00, East Beach¹



Following on from very successful competitions in the past, we plan to do the same again! Get out your buckets and spades and put your thinking caps on! The Sand Sculpture Competition will take place this year on Sunday 23rd August from 1pm – 3pm at the East Beach, Dunbar. Come along and make a sea creature ... a mermaid ... a boat ... historic landmark etc. Let your imagination run wild!

‘Community’ judging and award of prizes will take place at 3pm. There will be adult, child and family/group categories and prizes will be awarded for the best sculpture in each category. Entry will be £2 per adult, £1 per child and £5 per family. If the weather is poor on the day, please phone John Muir’s Birthplace - 01368 865899 – before 1pm to find out if the event has been postponed

Launch of ‘Walking the East Lothian John Muir Way’

As reported in the last newsletter a revised edition of the “*Walking the John Muir Way*” wee book has been produced. This new edition is titled “*Walking the East Lothian John Muir Way*” and still includes the Dunbar to Dunglass section of the original JMW. Various minor revisions and corrections have been made, and some photographs changed, but in essence the contents of the book are much the same.



¹ Depending on sand conditions the beach used may be the one just along from East Beach.



Author Robert Russel (photo left) gave the following 'Foreword' and words of thanks at the launch of this latest 'wee book' at the John Muir Birthplace Museum on 16th June.

"I walked the John Muir Way in 2007, resulting in a 'wee book' about it published in spring 2010. It was financed by Scottish Natural Heritage, East Lothian Council, and several Community Councils along the route, and by 2014 almost all the 2,500 copies printed had been sold, the money going to FoJMB. With a new edition in view, I walked and cycled the 73 km long route in autumn of last year and revised the text and title - since "*The John Muir Way*", opened in April 2014 by Alex Salmond, now extended from Helensburgh to Dunbar. Thus the 2nd edition is re-named "*Walking the East Lothian John Muir Way*" but still covers Musselburgh to Dunglass, the section east of Dunbar being known now as "*The John Muir Link*". Sales of the first edition have funded production of the second, so many

thanks to FoJMB for this. The price remains the same at £3.50, and monies as before go to support the work of FoJMB.

I would especially like to thank Will Collin for proofreading the text and giving his time to organise this launch, to my friend John Hardy for checking the transport details page, and Emma Westwater for making text changes, re-designing the book, and adding new photos, including the cover."

[Photo: Emma Westwater, Will Collin, Robert Russel and Jim Thompson]



Historic Scotland Commemorative Plaque Unveiling

A small but ‘select’ crowd assembled outside John Muir’s Birthplace on 21 April intent on unveiling another tribute to Dunbar’s most famous son. On the wall to the right of the entrance was a rectangle of cloth which some would recognize as being the John Muir Way tartan. The day was of course his birthday 177 years ago, the reason the event was being held there and then. That it was something important was evidenced by a number of founder and life members of Friends of John Muir’s Birthplace – Winifred Sillito, Stephany Hawryluk-Chisholm, Dan Cairney among them. But there was a class of primary 5 pupils from Kings Meadow PS in Haddington. Did they just happen to be there? Perhaps not for five of them were in Victorian school clothes, and another five, similarly dressed, came from primary 7 in Dunbar PS.



Then Friends’ treasurer Will Collin invited another life member of Friends’, Professor Aubrey Manning, to speak to the company. Prof Manning is Emeritus Professor of Natural History at Edinburgh University where he occupied the chair from 1971-97. Like John Muir he is a natural communicator, a storyteller, and has presented numerous programmes on radio

and TV. Prof Manning directed his remarks mainly at the younger members of his audience, charging them to strive to achieve their best at all times, to love nature and to work to protect it for future generations, just as John Muir had done. He then invited a few of them to help him remove the tartan cloth revealing a brass plaque² that carries the



message “John Muir (1838-1914), ‘Nature’s Apostle’, Father of America’s National Parks, Champion of World Conservation & forever a Scot.”

² This was the latest of Historic Scotland’s commemorative plaques, acknowledging the link between a building and a famous Scot. Muir and his birthplace were a fitting choice.

‘John Muir: A Colourful Life’



‘John Muir: a Colourful Life’

by the Pupils of
Dunbar Primary School, 2014

Our last newsletter gave the story of the production of Friends’ seventh ‘wee book’ – primary parent Eden Blair’s idea of telling the story of John Muir through a series of 1-metre square canvas collages; the inventiveness of the 34 nursery and primary classes in Dunbar PS; the resulting stunning exhibition first shown on 21 April 2014. Then came the idea of a book to make the images more widely available and provide a more manageable record, although truth to tell the panels themselves are much more awe-inspiring.

At our AGM on 21 January, Friends pledged the funds needed for the book’s design and a print run of 2,000 copies. 1,000 of them were to be gifted to DPS. Selling at a bargain £5 per copy, they would raise sufficient money for the panels’ preservation. Sponsorship from JMBT, Dunbar Community Council and Dunbar Rotary Club also brought in sufficient funds to provide a class set for all 36 East Lothian primary schools i.e. 35 copies for the 23 larger schools and 25 for the smaller ones.

The books, all 3,500 of them weighing in at over a ton, were delivered to DPS’s Lochend Campus on 17 April in time for the planned launch on the 20th although the school asked that this be delayed until Monday 27th. Then, with primary head-teacher Helen Gillanders directing proceedings, the new addition to Friends’



‘catalogue’ was revealed to selected pupils and others. Complimentary copies of the book were presented by the pupils to the book’s designer Emma Westwater, photographer Rob McDougall, proof readers Orla Pearson (of P5) and Pauline Smeed, and representatives of the sponsors.

The class sets have been despatched courtesy of East Lothian Council's delivery service and the remainder divided between DPS and Friends'. Copies are now on sale at Dunbar Primary School and John Muir's Birthplace. We urge you to buy at least one copy. You will not be disappointed. The text that accompanies each image expands on the story of that part of Muir's life. It is written for young folk and the book would make an ideal present for primary age members of your or friends' families. At £5 per copy they are great value.

Will Collin

John Muir Association, Martinez, Dunbar 21-22 May

A full programme of meetings and events was arranged for the visit by six JMA board members (President JoAnne Dunec, VP Mary Ann Gaebe, Sec. George Turnbull, Treas. Raj Hajela, Cathy Ivers and Mark Thomson), and three partners, to Dunbar on 21-22 May. They had made their way separately from Martinez to Edinburgh and had already visited the Scottish Parliament building at Holyrood on the 19th. There they had a conducted tour and an hour-long session with East Lothian MSP Iain Gray, an account of which appears later in this newsletter.

The 9.08 morning train from Waverley was met at Dunbar station by John Muir Birthplace Trust chairman John Thomas and Friends' Will Collin who guided the group along the route followed by John Muir when he arrived in July 1893. Their destination was not the St George Hotel where Muir checked in but the Council Chambers in Dunbar's Town House. There they were

officially welcomed by Community Council chairman Stephen Bunyan who presented JMA president JoAnne Dunec with a heraldic shield bearing Dunbar's coat of arms [photo].



Then John chaired a plenary session which included presentations on the development of the JMA and Dunbar's growing awareness of her most famous son; the use of technology to bridge the 5,000 mile gap between Dunbar and Martinez; community relations; and partnerships. Topics covered were as diverse as staff exchanges (Pauline Smeed) and the John Muir Award (JMT trustee Jo Moulin,

Pam Clark from Dunbar Primary School). Invited guests included Tom Shearer, East Lothian Council's head of Communities and Partnerships; officials from ELC's community learning, museums, countryside and economic development departments; representatives from Dunbar Trades Association, the Community Council, the John Muir Trust, Dunbar Primary School, Dunbar Grammar School and, of course, Friends'.

The scene was set for a working lunch in the community room with small group and one-to-one discussions on a wide range of topics. Contacts were made, addresses exchanged and possible connections were explored. The outcome has been a list of suggestions which will be explored, developed, adopted or rejected over the coming months. Here are just a few of the topics: staff exchanges (museums, parks, etc); a broader exchange of tourism information; implementing the Scottish John Muir award in Martinez; developing a JMA/Dunbar web trip planner page; establishing and maintaining school links. The list is now out to participants for their comments.

The visit by the JMA board members and others was not all work. After lunch Friends' Jim Thompson took the group around the Town House before they walked to the John Muir campus of Dunbar Primary School to view the John



Muir collage panels, currently on display in the school hall. There was a further walk to the Lochend campus for a brief visit to a P5 class that is currently working towards the John Muir Award. Next, it was back to the High Street for a visit to where it all started, John Muir's Birthplace.

Plans to return to Edinburgh by the 17.02 train were ditched in favour of an early dinner at The Rocks. To build up an appetite – you've guessed it – there was yet another walk, or more like a gentle saunter. It took the group round part of Dunbar's 'cliff-top trail'. Its views are stunning – Dunbar Castle and out over the Firth of Forth towards the Bass and the May, the ones that John Muir recalled on his '1,000 mile walk to the Gulf', revived when he smelled the sea. The meal at the Rocks was declared first class and the restaurant's

minibus ensured the visitors were at the station in time for the 19.45 train to Edinburgh.

Friday brought another early start and the 9.08 train back to Dunbar. The group were collected by Jo Moulin, Jim Thompson and Will Collin who transported them to join the final part of the new John Muir Way. The meeting point was the ford over the River Tyne near the Knowe's Farm, five miles to the west. There they were met by Robert Russel, author of 'Walking the East Lothian John Muir Way' and their guide back along the Way to Dunbar. Appropriately Robert was wearing his John Muir Way tartan kilt. As a special bonus the group was accompanied by Keith Geddes, chairman of the Central Scotland Green Network and largely responsible for the creation of the cross Scotland John Muir Way. Its 134 miles from Dunbar to Helensburgh was opened, you will remember, on 21 April 2014 by then First Minister Alex Salmond.

More was yet to come for there was a detour to take in more of the John Muir Country Park and an opportunity for a chat with Neil Clark, ELC's Principal Countryside Officer. Ideas were swapped about potential staff exchanges. Then the group completed the remaining miles of the new Way, finishing at the Birthplace.

Lunch was an opportunity to try local 'delicacies' such as Scotch pies! Then there was a saunter to see the Victoria Harbour, the Castle where Muir honed his boyhood climbing skills, Lauderdale House, the Battery and Cromwell Harbour before a return through the 'backlands' to the Town House. The final event was a performance 'in the round' (nearly) of Andrew Dallmeyer's 'Thank God for John Muir' in Dunbar Council Chambers. Set in Muir's life just after he was temporarily blinded in an industrial accident at age 27, the atmospheric performance by the actor playing Muir held the small audience spellbound. His monologue expressed the gamut of emotions Muir must have gone through from despair to frustration to hope and finally elation when his sight returned and the audience expressed their appreciation.

There was still time to have a brief 'debrief' when ideas, like staff swaps, were tossed around before farewells were exchanged and Robert and Will walked the group back to Dunbar station for the 17.02 train to Edinburgh.

If anyone would like more information or would like to be involved, please contact Will Collin at willnval@btinternet.com

JMA visit prompts Questions in Parliament

Before the JMA delegation reached Dunbar they had already visited the Scottish Parliament building at Holyrood. Friends helped the group from Martinez to contact East Lothian MSP Iain Gray who organised an hour-long guided tour followed by what was to be a 30-minute meeting with himself. In the event that extended to over an hour with a free exchange of ideas on, among other things, improving links and promoting tourism. Mr Gray later told East Lothian Courier that: *“Tourism is a vital and growing part of East Lothian’s economy... However, there is certainly scope for building on the progress that has been made here on celebrating Muir’s life and achievements.”*

During a recent Portfolio Question Time, Mr Gray asked Tourism Minister Fergus Ewing what could be done to try to forge stronger links with Muir-related organisations in the US. Mr Ewing answered that there already was contact between VisitScotland and groups such as the Sierra Club. He has asked VisitScotland to bring him up to date with recent developments. Mr Gray welcomed the positive response and hopes that the VisitScotland report, due by the end of June, will open the door for *“significant benefits for Dunbar, East Lothian and other parts of Scotland”*.

Will Collin

John Muir’s Birthplace Museum – News

Our Best Playgrounds – John Muir for wee ones

Mon - Sat: 10am - 5pm. Sun: 1pm - 5pm



Play, explore and find out together about John Muir’s animal stories and outdoor adventures in this fun exhibition for under-5s and families.

Other News...

National Park Service commemorative \$5 coin³



The Citizens Coinage Advisory Committee reviewed designs for the National Park Service 100th anniversary commemorative coin lineup as part of its June 16 agenda.

The 2016 NPS program is set to offer a gold \$5 coin, a silver dollar, and a copper-nickel clad half dollar, with surcharges on each coin sold benefiting the National Park Foundation.

For the gold coin, the CCAC recommended an obverse featuring jugate portraits facing right of President Theodore Roosevelt, founder of the National Park Service, and naturalist John Muir. The reverse picked by the CCAC depicts a rendition of the NPS's arrowhead logo.

Picturing Dunbar

Saturday 4th July to Wednesday 30th September

Daily: 1pm – 5pm

Dunbar Town House Museum and Gallery

This fascinating display of oil paintings, watercolours and engravings explores Dunbar's vibrant history as a holiday hotspot, bustling herring port and powerful Royal Burgh. The exhibition has been put together by East Lothian Council Museum Service⁴ with support from Dunbar and District History Society.



**Dunbar Castle and Castle Haven
by J. Carson**

³ <https://www.coinworld.com/news/check-out-the-designs-for-the-national-park-service-commemorative.html>

⁴ www.eastlothian.gov.uk/museums

Meaford, Ontario - Update

As reported in the last newsletter, an e-mail was received from Meaford journalist and photographer Helen Solmes announcing that she would be in Edinburgh 15-18 May and “*would like to travel to Dunbar to learn more about this legendary man, to carry greetings from Meaford, and round out the articles that I will be publishing in the Meaford weekly newspaper.*”

Well, Helen Solmes did visit and her articles are now available online. The introductory article is titled ***Meaford resident visits Dunbar, Scotland: John Muir’s birthplace***⁵. Also available Solmes’ five-part series of articles that commemorate that “[O]ne hundred and fifty years have passed since a young botanist by the name of John Muir took up residence in a cabin in Trout Hollow south of Meaford.” The articles in this series are:

1. John Muir lived in Meaford 150 years ago⁶
2. John Muir in Meaford: happenstance discovery⁷
3. John Muir in Meaford: Beginning of a Dialogue⁸
4. John Muir in Meaford - 'unknown nobody' finds his voice⁹
5. John Muir in Meaford: letters reveal evolving consciousness¹⁰

⁵ <http://www.simcoe.com/news-story/5695795-meaford-resident-visits-dunbar-scotland-john-muir-s-birthplace/>

⁶ <http://www.simcoe.com/news-story/5557272-john-muir-lived-in-meaford-150-years-ago/>

⁷ <http://www.simcoe.com/news-story/5568359-part-2-john-muir-in-meaford-happenstance-discovery/>

⁸ <http://www.simcoe.com/news-story/5594824-part-3-john-muir-in-meaford-beginning-of-a-dialogue/>

⁹ <http://www.simcoe.com/news-story/5602455-part-4-john-muir-in-meaford-unknown-nobody-finds-his-voice/>

¹⁰ <http://www.simcoe.com/news-story/5613710-part-5-john-muir-in-meaford-letters-reveal-evolving-consciousness/>

Membership News

Online Delivery of Newsletters

A significant number of Friends have opted out of receiving paper copies of the Newsletter and now read the online version¹¹ instead. This is a significant saving since the production and delivery cost of the Newsletter is now a substantial proportion of the membership subscription. 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.

Membership Renewal Reminders

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

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

¹¹ <http://muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk/newsletters/current/>