



# FRIENDS of JOHN MUIR'S BIRTHPLACE

Newsletter No. 33, March 2016

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Exhibition  
March 5<sup>th</sup> to July 31<sup>st</sup>



## **Annual General Meeting of 13 January 2016 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.
- Publishing regular newsletters containing items regarding John Muir, environmental issues and the work of JMB; circulated to members, available at the Birthplace and online on the Friends website<sup>1</sup>.
- Liaising with people and organisations of influence both locally and nationally. Including: John Muir Birthplace Trust; John Muir Trust; VisitScotland; Historic Scotland.
- Being involved in local environmental initiatives such as the Dunbar Woodland Group and Sustaining Dunbar.
- Providing volunteers on a regular and ad hoc basis to support JMB staff and to promote JMB both locally and further afield.

Full details of the highlights over the past year have been given in the newsletters published during 2015 and the archive of all past issues is available via the FoJMB website<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk>

<sup>2</sup> <http://muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk/newsletters/past/>

The events that FoJMB have helped to organise and deliver include:

- Will Collin's invited talks about Muir throughout the year. The recipients of these talks included:
  - Dunbar Primary School (Assembly) [400+]
  - Leith History Society [30]
  - University of the Third Age (U3A) Groups [225]
  - Probus Clubs of North Berwick [50] and Portobello [45]

So, over 750 people attended the above events, an increase of 50% over last year's outreach numbers.

- April 21<sup>st</sup> the unveiling of the most recent of Historic Scotland's commemorative plaques, acknowledging the link between a building and a famous Scot. Muir and his birthplace were a fitting choice.
- April 27<sup>th</sup>: launch of *John Muir: A Colourful Life*.
- June 26<sup>th</sup>: launch of *Walking the East Lothian John Muir Way*.
- Welcoming visitors...
  - E.g. 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> May visit by John Muir Association, Martinez.
- Celebrating the 21<sup>st</sup> Anniversary of the foundation of Dunbar's John Muir Association, the original name of the Friends of John Muir's Birthplace, on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2015.
- August 23<sup>rd</sup>: Annual Sand Sculpture Competition.
- Celebrating the 21<sup>st</sup> Anniversary of the public launch of Dunbar's John Muir Association on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2015.
- October 23<sup>rd</sup>: *John Muir Concert* by the andante Chamber Choir.
- Stop press: the opening of the Friends of John Muir's Birthplace *Yosemite 125* exhibition in the John Muir Birthplace Museum on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2016.

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.

I'd like to thank all my fellow Council members - past and present - for their tireless efforts in promoting Friends and the Birthplace.

Best wishes for 2016.

Duncan Smeed

# Celebrating 125 Years of Yosemite National Park

## A Friends Temporary Exhibition

Following intense campaigning and as a direct result of John Muir's essays specially written for *'Century Magazine'*, *'The Treasures of the Yosemite'* (August 1890) and *'Features of the Proposed Yosemite National Park'* (Sept. 1890), the legislation creating Yosemite National Park was passed in Washington on 1 October 1890. It had followed the first US National Park, Yellowstone, established on 1 March 1872. By a quirk of fate, legislation establishing Yosemite's near neighbour Sequoia National Park was passed on 25 September 1890, beating Yosemite into third place by a mere six days.



Friends decided to put together an exhibition marking the 125th anniversary of creation of Yosemite National Park and it opened on 6 January. It looked at the geological history of the Yosemite area and its settlement, post glaciation, by Native Americans as early as 8,000 BC. It recorded some of the first white settlers such as James Mason Hutchings who organized the first tourist visits to

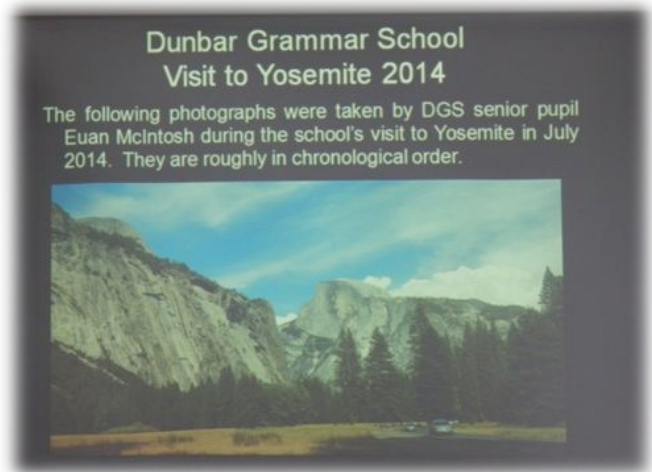
Yosemite Valley in 1855; 'mountain man' Galen Clark, the first 'protector' of the Valley after it was ceded to California by President Lincoln in 1864 "*for public use, resort and recreation*"; Scotsman George Anderson, in 1875 the first person to reach the top of Half Dome; and Bridget and John Degnan whose bakery, first established in the 1890s, became the Valley's premier store and restaurant and which still operates today.



There were sections on early painters such as Albert Bierstadt (1830-1902), Thomas Hill (1829-1908), Thomas Moran (1837-1926) and William Keith (1838-1911); and on photographers including C L Weed (1824-1903), Carleton Watkins (1829-1916), Eadweard Muybridge (1830-1904) and Harry Cassie Best (Ansel Adams' father-in-law). It was through the

works of these and others that the grandeur of the Yosemite area, and the need for its protection, became known throughout the USA, attracting a slowly growing flow of tourists which now brings over 4 million annually to visit Yosemite National Park.

Included is the huge part played by John Muir to the creation of Yosemite National Park in 1890, the incorporation of Yosemite Valley into the Park in 1906 and the formation of the National Parks Service in 1916. Muir's contribution from his first visit in 1868, through his years as a Valley resident in the 1870s and his meeting there with President Roosevelt in 1903, to his death in 1914 formed one of a number of 'time lines' in the exhibition tracing out the Park's 125 years.



In recognition of the ongoing link between Dunbar Grammar School and Yosemite, a PowerPoint slide show took visitors into the heart of the Park. It used 35 of the amazing images captured by former DGS student Euan McIntosh during the last visit by a group of senior students and staff in 2014.

## Dunbar Grammar School's Next California Visit

Back in 2004, Dunbar Grammar School's head teacher Don Ledingham proposed a summer visit by senior students and staff to California. The group would follow in some of John Muir's footsteps and include visits to Martinez and Yosemite Valley, as well as spending time in San Francisco. The visit to Martinez would include a stay with local families and a day at the John Muir National Historic Site, Muir's family home. In Yosemite, the group would be accommodated in the Yosemite Valley Elementary School, sleeping 'en masse' in the assembly hall! (Groups from the Valley school had already been visiting Dunbar although sadly these visits have seemingly come to an end.) While in Yosemite, it was planned for the group to make a high level hike, sleeping under the stars as John Muir often did.

That first trip was hugely successful and provided the blueprint for subsequent biennial visits. The main change has been to reduce the time spent in San Francisco with more spent in Yosemite. Visiting every two years ensures that all senior students have the opportunity to take part and there is a growing number of staff who have accompanied the groups.



This year brings the seventh visit, scheduled for 23 June to 8 July. There are 22 students taking part, with 15 from fifth year and 7 from sixth year, accompanied by five members of staff. 22 of the 27 visited the Birthplace on 11 February when Pauline Smeed and Will

Collin spoke about the formation of the Valley, its topography and history, and John Muir's contribution towards its conservation. Friends' Council at its February meeting agreed that each of the group should be given copies of our 'wee books' *'Close to Nature's Beating Heart'* and *'Still Walking the World'*, funded by part of the proceeds from the October choral concert. The books were presented to the visitors at the end of the afternoon by our President Jim Thompson. The possibility of the group putting on an exhibition in the Birthplace after their return to give visitors a glimpse of the group's experiences was discussed. It is hoped that this will take place sometime in the autumn. We will keep you informed.

## John Muir Birthplace Welcomes 150,000<sup>th</sup> Visitor

Another milestone was reached on 18 February with the 150,000th visitor to the Birthplace coming through the door at lunchtime. Staff were on the lookout and when the ten visitors from the Musselburgh based CHANGES arrived the magic number was passed. CHANGES is a Community Health Project, founded in 1996, which promotes the positive wellbeing of people living in East Lothian.



150,000 since 23 August 2003 averages out to around 12,000 per year but the numbers are steadily increasing. We reported the arrival of the 100,000th in February 2012 when a primary 5 class from East Linton Primary School took us past that milestone. The pupils were involved in a citizenship project as part of their school curriculum.

This time the group consisted of adults working towards the John Muir Award as part of the Edinburgh & Lothians Greenspace Trust's (ELGT) 'Branching Out' programme. This innovative twelve-week outdoor activity programme is run by Forestry Commission Scotland. It involves organised activities in woodland settings, in this case including conservation activities at Dalkeith Country Park and a visit to the 18th century Redhall Walled Garden, on the banks of the Water of Leith, in Colinton, on the west side of Edinburgh. On successful completion of the course participants receive the John Muir Award.

Founded in 1991, ELGT is dedicated to improving the quality of life for our communities by re-connecting people with their local green spaces. Its staff often brings small groups to the Birthplace that, they have said, inspires those setting out on one of Greenspace's many ventures. ELGT's programme of environmental and community projects is very much in the spirit of John Muir, helping to create and improve local greenspaces across Edinburgh and the Lothians. ELGT provide a comprehensive range of environmental project development, management and fundraising services, helping to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to enjoy their natural environment.

# Ohio Rotary Team To Visit John Muir's Birthplace

A Rotary Group Study Exchange (GSE) team from Ohio will be visiting Dunbar Rotary Club from Tuesday 22 to Tuesday 29 March as part of a five-weeks visit to Scotland. Rotary's GSE programme is a cultural and vocational exchange opportunity for young business and professional men and women in their initial years of professional life. Each group consists of a Rotary team leader and four non-Rotarians between the ages of 25 and 40. The leader is Dr. Julie McIntosh a native of Findlay, Ohio. She received her Doctor of Education degree from Bowling Green State University, has worked for The Ohio Environmental Protection Agency and currently serves as the Dean of the University of Findlay's College of Education. The team members are Sarah Jackson (Marketing), Emily Sanlow (Lawyer), Emily Goetschoius (Field Archaeologist) and Joy Walk (Librarian).

A full timetable of vocational and cultural events has been organized by the Dunbar club and on Good Friday the visitors along with local Rotarians will be shown around John Muir's Dunbar and Dunbar Town House by Friends' Jim Thompson and Will Collin before finishing with a visit to the Birthplace. There does not seem to be any connection between Ohio and John Muir although Parma, a 80,000-inhabitant suburb of Cleveland, on the shores of Lake Erie, has a John Muir Elementary School.

## An Ingenious Whittler John Muir the Inventor



The latest exhibition at John Muir's Birthplace is *An Ingenious Whittler - John Muir the Inventor*. It opened on Saturday, 5<sup>th</sup> March and will run until July 31<sup>st</sup>. The exhibition highlights some of Muir's wonderful inventions including clocks, barometers, chairs and an 'early rising machine'!

Come along, be inspired, and take away your own blueprint for an ingenious invention.



# **John Muir Coast Festival**

Based around John Muir's many quotes praising an active outdoor lifestyle, the John Muir Festival has been created around East Lothian's outdoor sports offering. The festival takes place on Saturday 23rd April & Sunday 24th April and features a range of events. More details of the following are available at the <http://www.johnmuirfestival.co.uk> website.

## **Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> April**

### **John Muir Ultra Marathon, Foxlake Adventures, Dunbar**

Not for the faint hearted! Get your running shoes on and break the challenge of 30 miles along the stunning John Muir Way.

### **Foxlake Adventure Festival, Foxlake Adventures, Dunbar**

Family fun day with world class wakeboarding, local food & drink and a fantastic line-up of tribute acts and the opportunity to come and have a go at wakeboarding and segway. Fun for all the family!

### **John Muir Music and Rock Stacking Event**

Join us for a beach site concert, interactive art installations and Scotland's first ever rock stacking competition.

### **Nike Performance Centre Open Day, Archerfield Golf Club, Dirleton**

Come along to the world's only Nike Performance Fitting Centre and grab your opportunity to get into golf or brush of those skills.

## **Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> April & Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> April**

### **The John Muir Surf Competition, John Muir Country Park, Dunbar**

Hosted by Coast to Coast Surf School, an exhibition of Scotland's best surfing, longboard and paddleboard talent.

### **Coast 2 Coast Watersports Taster, John Muir Country Park, Dunbar**

Your opportunity to come along and try your hand at surfing and paddleboarding and enjoy the beauty of East Lothian from the Firth of Forth.

## **Muir Is Back and Walking His Way!**

Lee Stetson (see [www.johnmuirlive.com](http://www.johnmuirlive.com)) is Walking the John Muir Way from April 27<sup>th</sup> until May 15<sup>th</sup>, with his finale appearances in Dunbar for Festival of Museums weekend.

The John Muir Way is a coast-to-coast route stretching 134 miles across Scotland's heartland, from the Firth of Clyde at Helensburgh in the west through to John Muir's birthplace on the North Sea at Dunbar.

Along the Way, Mr. Stetson, as Muir, will perform at a variety of venues, relating stories of his earliest years in Dunbar, his boyhood in the wilderness of Wisconsin, his truly astonishing adventures in the American West, and of his heroic battles to preserve wild lands.

## **Festival of Museums 2016**

### **Adventures with John Muir - an exciting weekend of Minecraft, Lego and Living History!**

Celebrating the centenary of the creation of the US National Parks we will be exploring the connections between John Muir's formative years growing up in Dunbar, his epic adventures as an adult and his legacy that lives on today through National Parks worldwide and campaigns to protect wild places. Information about ticket sales, etc., will be available from early April.

**Friday 13th May. John Muir Minecraft** - SE Scotland ComputerXplorers will lead a workshop using MinecraftEdu. Children will work together offline in our own Minecraft world hosted on a local server to explore John Muir's Dunbar. Suitable for Primary 4-7. Ticketed event.

**Saturday 14th May. John Muir's Dunbar in Lego!** Join us on a walk around John Muir's Dunbar as we record John's scootchers and daring adventures with the help of Lego! We will take you to the places where John had some of his most epic childhood adventures. Come to Dunbar Town House Museum & Gallery after your walk for our big Lego build session. We will have historic images and quotes from Muir's book *'The Story of My Boyhood and Youth'* to inspire our Lego version of John Muir's Dunbar. Don't forget a camera so that you can share your Lego John Muir adventures with friends through social media. Suggested donation £2 person or £5 family. Booking essential.

**Sunday 15th May. Spirit of John Muir performance by acclaimed Yosemite National Park performer Lee Stetson.** Dunbar Parish Church. 3pm. The finale to Stetson's (<http://www.johnmuirlive.com/>) walk along the John Muir Way. The show is a fun romp through some of the very best of Muir's greatest adventures in his beloved wilderness, while exploring Muir's boyhood in Dunbar and his contribution to today's environmental awareness and the need for responsible stewardship. Muir's greatest adventures included dancing the highland fling while caught in a blizzard on top of a mountain, ridding an avalanche down a Yosemite Valley canyon wall, encounters with a mighty earthquake and a bear, dangerous Alaskan ice crevasses, snow blindness, and much more - all liberally salted with Muir's wilderness philosophy. It will certainly have a few outrageous adventures, a good deal of humour, and a bit of righteous indignation but will be suitable for adults and children from 5 years. Ticketed event.

## **Coastword's Dunbar Literary Festival 2016**

CoastWord is a Dunbar-based writers' group, run by a group of enthusiastic volunteers. They held their first Dunbar Literary Festival in 2013 and have gone on from strength to strength. This year's festival is from Friday 27 May to Sunday 29 May and tucked away in their programme is the following:

### **John Muir's *'The Story of My Boyhood and Youth'***

**Saturday 28th May<sup>3</sup>, 11am to 12pm at The Dunmuir Hotel. Tickets\*: £3**

Will Collin, a Trustee of the John Muir Birthplace Trust, will introduce Dunbar's most famous son, and his memoir, *'The Story of My Boyhood and Youth'*. He will follow the reading with reflections on Muir's legacy. "*Muir is a role model for people of all ages, demonstrating that increasing age is not a barrier, but presents another series of opportunities.*"

\* CoastWord say that to purchase tickets for any of this year's events online go to their website [www.coastword.co.uk](http://www.coastword.co.uk). Tickets can also be purchased directly at their 'Pop-Up Box Offices'. They advise keeping an eye on the their website or Facebook page<sup>4</sup> for details of where and when these box offices will pop up! The CoastWord website also has links for all this years artists.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.coastword.co.uk/saturday>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/coastwordfest>

# **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 version<sup>5</sup> 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](mailto:info@muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk)

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

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<sup>5</sup> <http://muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk/newsletters/current/>