



FRIENDS of JOHN MUIR'S BIRTHPLACE

Newsletter No. 22, September 2012

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Annual General Meeting

Wednesday 10th October, 7:00pm

Dunbar Town House



FRIENDS of
JOHN MUIR'S
BIRTHPLACE

Notice of Annual General Meeting

Wednesday 10th October 2012 at 6.45pm for 7.00pm
Dunbar Town House, High Street, Dunbar

Agenda

- (i) Report on year's activities
- (ii) Filling any vacancies on Council*
- (iii) Other competent business*

Non-members will be warmly welcomed

* Please note that nominations for Council accompanied with the nominee's agreement in writing and items for consideration under other competent business should be lodged with the Secretary, c/o 126 High Street, Dunbar, EH42 1JJ by Monday 8th October 2012

Following the AGM at 7:30pm there will be the Dunbar premiere showing of the American PBS film

John Muir in the New World

John Muir in the New World¹ first aired nationally in the USA on Monday, April 18, 2011 in honour of Earth Day (4/22) and John Muir Day (4/21). Explaining his impact then and now, this 90-minute documentary delves into Muir's life and influences with re-enactments filmed in high definition throughout the majestic landscapes he visited: Wisconsin, Yosemite and the Sierra Nevada, the Alhambra Valley of California, and the glaciers of Alaska. Placing our nation's most important natural assets in a cultural and social context, John Muir in the New World is a timely reminder of America's unique and, ultimately, threatened eco-systems.

Please note: due to the limitations on the sized of the audience that can be accommodated in Dunbar Town House please contact the Birthplace – by phone [01368 865899] or e-mail [info@jmbt.org.uk] or in person – to check the availability of places.

¹ <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/episodes/john-muir-in-the-new-world/watch-the-full-documentary-film/1823/>

Bleachingfield Community Centre – Open Day

Saturday 6th October 2012, 1-4pm

Friends will be taking part in the Open Day at the Bleachingfield Community Centre. This event will give the wider community a chance to look at the new centre and find out more about what is going on there and across town. Members are warmly invited to drop by the Friends stall, say hello, and discover more about this excellent community resource.

The day will feature demonstrations, market stalls, children's activities, music, performances and more.

Dunbar and John Muir – A Conversation

Wednesday 24th October 2012 at 7.00pm
Bleachingfield Community Centre, Dunbar

This event has been inspired by the *Conversations* that have been held over the past couple of years in Dunbar Library. The idea for these *Conversations* came from Friends member Steve Tossell and they have been instrumental in engaging the public with various topics of interest to the Dunbar community – and beyond.

The intention of the *Dunbar and John Muir* 'conversation' is to encourage a discussion about John Muir's connection to Dunbar and to generate ideas that Friends, and others, can incorporate into future plans that support, and promote, Muir's legacy.

Members of Friends are encouraged to participate, and to invite others to come along as this is a public event open to non-members and the more the merrier. It will be an opportunity for everyone to have their say on the future of Friends and to contribute to the aims and objectives of the charity.

The *Conversation* will be chaired by Kilvert Croft and contributions will be made by Robert Russel (Friends), Heather Hackett (Dunbar Primary School), Richard Woof (or A N Other, Dunbar Grammar School), A N Other (John Muir Birthplace) plus, of course, audience participation.

Visit by Harold & Janet Wood

Harold Wood, renowned webmaster for the Sierra Club's John Muir Exhibit², is a long standing life member of Friends. Among his many roles Harold is also chair of the Sierra Club's Education Committee and an expert on all things regarding John Muir. 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, Harold took time out from a recent tour of the UK to visit Muir's birthplace.



A two night stopover in Edinburgh proved too tempting and on Thursday 6 September Harold and Janet took a morning train to Dunbar station where they were met by Will Collin. From there they sauntered on to the High Street, stopping off at Kirk Close, the site of the Erskine Memorial attended by Daniel Muir and his family, and the St George Hotel which Muir booked into at the start of his 1893 return visit to Dunbar. Then it was on to the Birthplace where they were met by Jim Thompson and Jo Moulin.

Harold had seen the building before it was acquired by the Birthplace Trust. On that visit there was a top floor reconstruction of what the Muir home might have looked like back in the 1840s. But Harold wasn't ready for the new interior. Fair to say both Janet and he were hugely impressed by what they found. They spent over two hours exploring every nook and cranny, finding Muir quotations in places they didn't expect and being impressed by the amount of information to discover in so small a space.

After lunch the programme was a walk round part of 'John Muir's Dunbar' and a visit to the revamped Town House. Fortunately the weather was fairly kind, no rain but blustery, typically Dunbar. Then a walk back to the station for the 5 pm train back to Edinburgh brought the visit to a close. Harold and Janet have promised to write up an account of their visit and we await it with interest.

² http://www.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/

Sand Sculpture Competition 2012

Our popular Friends of John Muir's Birthplace Sand Sculpture Competition took place this year on Saturday 11th August from 2pm – 4pm at the East Beach, Dunbar. Almost 100 'sand sculptors' took part and produced several dozen sculptures in adult, child, family/group categories and the special category in memory of Susan Panton. Here are some of the photographs of the event.



All 50 US State Quarters At Once

In 1997, the US Mint invited all 50 of the US states to submit a design for a series of quarter dollars to be issued from 1999 to 2008 at 10-weekly intervals. The series started with Delaware in January 1999 and ended with Hawaii in November 2008. Most members of Friends are aware that California paid John Muir a huge compliment for the design chosen for the 'California quarter' featured Dunbar's most famous son looking out towards Yosemite Valley's most famous landmark, Half Dome. It was released in January 2005 and 500 million went into circulation.

Imagine the surprise caused in the Birthplace when a lady and gentleman from Haddington recently came in to the Birthplace and presented a boxed set of state quarters, all 50 of them. Friends have expressed their gratitude to the couple, Richard and Estelle Morton.

Interestingly only seven states chose to have a person on their quarter. As well as New Jersey's George Washington and Illinois' Abraham Lincoln, Delaware has Caesar Rodney, who cast the deciding vote in favour of US independence. Hawaii's coin shows King Kamehameha the Great who established the Kingdom of Hawaii in 1810. Alabama is represented by Helen Keller (1880-1968), the deaf-blind author and political activist. North Carolina chose the first fliers, Orville and Wilbur Wright.



Then, of course, there is California and John Muir, the boy born in Dunbar who changed the world.

Will Collin

Making Sense of Climate Change, Home, Community Engagement, and a Sensory Approach

Earlier this year Dr Michelle Duffy, a senior lecturer in the school of Applied Media and Social Science at Monash University, Victoria, Australia came to Dunbar as the leader of a research team aiming to learn something about how individuals feel connected to the place and the community in which they live and how this shapes notions of what sustainability means in their everyday lives with particular emphasis on emotional connection.

Two regions had been selected, Dunbar and South Gippsland in south-eastern Victoria. While the two areas present particular sets of historical, economic, social and ecological challenges, both are grappling with the development and use of alternative energy sources in response to climate change and sustainability. Dunbar Community Council were asked to name individuals who might take part from the various community groups in the town and Will Collin, Pauline Smeed and Jim Thompson from Friends agreed to participate

There were 4 parts to the project.

The first activity was a semi-structured interview, to talk about the places in our everyday life that had significance for us.

Activity 2 was to draw a (very) rough touring map of our everyday places.

Activity 3 involved nominating a particular place of particular significance to us, expanding on Activity 1

In Activity 4 we visited that place and further expounded on its relevance to our life in the town.

Will chose the John Muir Birthplace, Pauline chose Dunbar Town House and Jim chose the two harbours.

The researchers will publish their findings in academic journals and also present them to Dunbar Community Council.

Jim Thompson

Companion

Dunbar's local residents and visitors enjoyed a summer of art, photography, music, walks and other events, organised for the season's North Light Festival which took place throughout July and August. Events were organised in and around the town, including John Muir Country Park and aimed to highlight the unique environment of Dunbar and the John Muir Way.

'Companion' is a soundscape reflecting on and connecting to the life and work of John Muir, and was performed, recorded and produced by artist Thomas Newell, with contributions from several local people. At the Birthplace, Jim Thompson, Will Collin and Pauline Smeed contributed by reading excerpts from John Muir's writings, and discussing quotations that were close to their hearts.

The finished piece can be freely downloaded³, loaded onto MP3 players or smart phones and enjoyed whilst out and about in nature, as a friend, guide, or 'companion'.

Pauline Smeed

Michael Muir - Challenging the Limits of Disability

[The following extracts are from an interview with Michael Muir⁴, Champion Horseman & Founding Director of Access Adventure. Ed.]

MICHAEL MUIR, born in 1952, is the great-grandson of conservationist, philosopher, and Sierra Club Founder John Muir. At age 15, Michael learned he had Multiple Sclerosis, or MS, a disease that causes degeneration of the nervous system. Instead of being defeated by the diagnosis, he was emboldened to set out on new adventures, and to help people of limited mobility to explore new terrain, both out in nature and within themselves. At the center of Michael's extraordinary story is the horse. Or rather, horses. Lots of them.

Interviewer: in 2003, you and "Cindy Goff, a paraplegic horsewoman from Kentucky, drove a carriage, powered by Michael's horse Domino, from

³ <http://soundcloud.com/shambolica/companion>

⁴ <http://tinyurl.com/MMuirInterview>

Indiana to the Gulf of Mexico along the same route John Muir traveled in 1867.” Did you sense a special connection to your great-grandfather, John Muir, as you and Cindy Goff made this trip? Did you gain any surprising insights into him while following his footsteps in your carriage?

Michael Muir: *We used the diary of John Muir’s first great wilderness adventure, “The Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf” to map our route. Following my great-grandfather’s footsteps and reading about his experiences along the way created a special bond of kinship. We often felt close to him as we enjoyed our own adventure.*

Interviewer: The life and writings of your great-grandfather John Muir have had an immeasurable influence on the American landscape, and even on the way people view the natural world. How would you describe his influence on your own experience of nature?

Michael Muir: *John Muir was raised by a dour and incredibly strict Scottish father. My great-grandfather raised his own children with a much gentler hand. His influence is felt through the generations of my family. We were never discouraged from finding our own way in the world, however far off the beaten path that may take us. He instilled in his family a great love of the natural world that carries on through the generations today.*

Interviewer: If you could share John Muir’s company on a horse-drawn journey today, where would you most love to travel with him? Would it be to a place he knew well?

Michael Muir: *It would be a grand adventure to share his great love of Alaska (preferably not when it is snowing!)*

For a wonderful, short video presentation of Michael Muir’s work with Access Adventure, see the YouTube video⁵ which is introduced as follows: *“When John Muir first arrived in California by ship, he was bewildered and overwhelmed by the raucous energy of San Francisco in 1869. He asked a passerby the quickest way out of the city. “Well, where do you want to go?” the stranger inquired. “Anywhere Wild!, said Muir. John Muir’s great-grandson, Michael Muir, is blazing a new trail into the wilderness, opening a path to be traveled by people with disabilities. Michael has lived with MS since he was fifteen, and understands the challenges people face.”*

⁵ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTX3Kk1ltk4>

Following in the footsteps of John Muir [I]

[The following news was recently announced on the JMT website⁶. Ed.]

A new long distance trail will be opened in memory of John Muir. The John Muir Coast to Coast Trail will run 100 miles from his birthplace in Dunbar on the North Sea coast to Helensburgh on the Firth of Clyde, via the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park. The trail – an extension of the current John Muir Way - was formally launched on 13 September at a reception in the Scottish Parliament hosted by Colin Beattie, MSP, and the Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN) Partnership Board, and supported by the John Muir Trust.

The event was addressed by Keith Geddes of CSGN, Colin Beattie, MSP, DereK Mackay, MSP, Minister for Local Government and Planning, John Hutchison, Chair of the John Muir Trust, and mountaineering author and broadcaster Cameron McNeish who told the gathering *“the name John Muir inspires and encourages new generations of Scots to explore the fantastic diversity of landscapes available to them, and to follow in his footsteps.”*

Following in John Muir’s Footsteps [II]

Students and teachers from Dunbar Grammar School recently visited California. They have documented their adventures in a blog specially created for the occasion⁷:



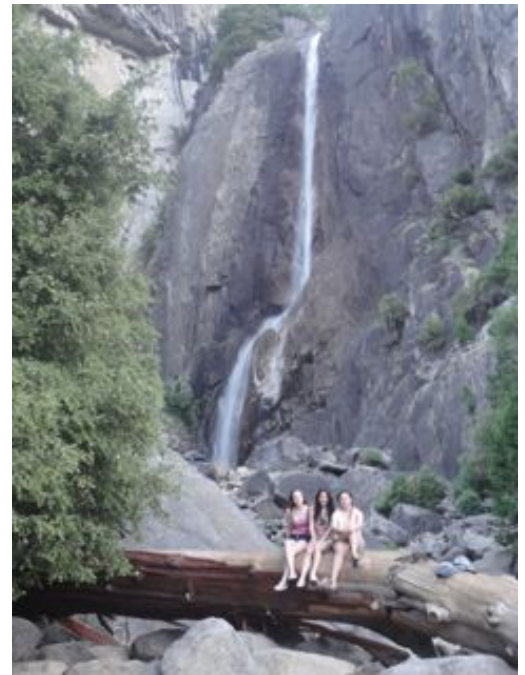
“We are a group of students and teachers following in the steps of John Muir from Dunbar in Scotland, John Muir's Birthplace to Yosemite Valley, Sequoia National Park, the John Muir Trail and beyond. Follow us on our exploits and join us as we live, learn and experience the journey in John Muir's footsteps.”

⁶ <http://www.jmt.org/news.asp?s=2&nid=JMT-N10711>

⁷ <http://www.followinginjohnmuir footsteps.co.uk/>

The articles and photographs are inspiring and a visit to the blog is highly recommended. Here's but one extract of their adventures:

At 5.30am this morning, we were awoken (voluntarily) from a deep slumber by Mr Burns to embark on a walk to the Lower Falls. The sun had not yet reached the valley and there was not a person in sight, except for a deer nibbling at the grass. Everything was still and it was such a contrast to the noise and bustle of the tourists during the day. As we walked, the sun appeared slowly over the tops of the mountains. With our cameras in hand, we could hear the echoing roar of the waterfall as we drew nearer. Though, due to the drought, it was about a third of its normal size, the falls were still breathtaking. After several poses below the Lower Fall, we decided to walk up the zig-zag trail to the Upper Falls. We walked for about an hour and stopped along the way to take photos of the stunning valley views. By this point, the sun was catching up with us and showing the meadows and mountains in full glory. Words cannot describe the serenity of the scenery. Although we never reached the top of the Upper Fall trail (it was a 6-8 hour walk) it was completely worth the early start.



The students and teachers also visited John Muir's house in Martinez at the start of their Californian adventure. Whilst at Muir's house students were filmed and the video uploaded to the blog. Another video⁸ also includes footage of their Yosemite trip.

An extract from the final post of the blog is a fitting end to this article: *We're all very sad to be leaving gorgeous Yosemite. We've had a truly wonderful time in the village and trekking out in the Back Country. John Muir was quite right when he said "the mountains are calling and I must go".*

[photographs courtesy of Sarah Parker. Ed]

⁸ <http://www.followingjohnmuir footsteps.co.uk/2012/07/martinez-and-yosemite-video.html>

Membership News

Membership Renewal Reminders

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

Online Delivery of Newsletters

Following a January e-mailed 'mailshot' to all members that had supplied their e-mail address, a significant number of Friends have opted out of receiving paper copies of the Newsletter and now read the online version⁹ 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.

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

⁹ <http://muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk/newsletters/current/>