



FRIENDS of JOHN MUIR'S BIRTHPLACE

Newsletter No. 29, December 2014

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Annual General Meeting

Wednesday 21st January, 7:00pm

Community Room, Dunbar Town House Museum



Notice of Annual General Meeting

**Wednesday 21st January 2013
at 6.45pm for 7.00pm
Dunbar Town House Museum,
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

Following the AGM there will be showing of the video

High Sierra: A Journey on the John Muir Trail

High Sierra: A Journey on the John Muir Trail is a first-hand experience along the John Muir Trail, through the tallest mountain range in the contiguous United States. It follows a group of students as they make the 220 mile trek in the wake of John Muir's own footsteps. The film captures the visual splendor of the Range of Light as well as the range of emotions and physical challenges that accompany such an epic adventure.

* 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 John Muir's Birthplace Museum, 126 High Street, Dunbar, EH42 1JJ by Monday 19th January 2015.



FRIENDS of
JOHN MUIR'S
BIRTHPLACE

President's Message

Dear Friends,

Welcome to a very important issue of our newsletter as the time of its publication coincides with the 100th anniversary of the passing of John Muir.

It has also been an eventful year with the celebration of the opening of the John Muir Way in April by the First Minister. 3000 people in the High Street, all enjoying the various events. We have welcomed quite a number of walkers and cyclists who have completed the 134 mile trail from the Firth of Clyde in the west to Dunbar. Later that month John Muir became the 38th person to be honoured in the Makars' Court on the Royal Mile in Edinburgh by the unveiling of a flagstone with the inscription

John Muir (1838 –1914)

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

This is the 20th anniversary of our parent organisation, Dunbar's John Muir Association, and currently in the Birthplace, there is an excellent exhibition put together by Duncan Smeed, telling of the highlights of the 20 years. Well worth a visit.

For various reasons the AGM had to be postponed and will now be held in January. Details elsewhere in the newsletter.

Finally, if you are looking for that little special something to put in a Christmas stocking, do not forget the gifts available from the Birthplace shop, particularly the Friends six books. A 10% discount is available to members of Friends on all purchases

To all Friends and your families, have a happy Christmas and a peaceful and prosperous 2015

Sincerely,

Jim Thompson
President

John Muir's last Years: 1913 and 1914

For John Muir, 1913 had begun well despite one of the coldest winters on record. *'The Story of My Boyhood and Youth'* was published in March and the book sold steadily. Muir saw it as the first of perhaps six volumes of his autobiography. But in the same month, US president Woodrow Wilson appointed Californian Democrat Franklin Lane, an advocate for the damming of Hetch Hetchy Valley, as Secretary of the Interior. On 19 December 2013, Wilson signed the Raker Act giving the city of San Francisco the right to dam Hetch Hetchy. Muir and his supporters had lost a fight that had lasted since 1901.

In some ways Muir was relieved. He wrote to friend Robert Underwood Johnson of *'Century Magazine'*, on 1 January 1914, "... *the long drawn out battle work for nature's gardens has not been thrown away. The conscience of the whole country has been aroused from sleep; and from outrageous evil compensating good in some form must surely come.*" And it did for in 1916 Secretary Lane set up the National Parks Service and the following year Sierra Club director Stephen Mather, a friend and admirer of Muir and a dedicated conservationist, was appointed its first director. The war against major subsequent encroachment had been won.

In June John and close friend John Swett were awarded honorary degrees by the University of California but Swett died only weeks later on 22 August. Another good friend, writer, editor and poet Francis Fisher Browne, had died in May. In recent years Muir had coped with the deaths of railway magnate E H Harriman (1909), Yosemite pioneer Galen Clark (1910), British scientist Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker and fellow-Scot and artist Willie Keith (1911).

The winter of 1913-14 was "*one of the stormiest and foggiest I have ever experienced, and unfortunately I caught the grippe,*" Muir wrote to C Hart Merriam. He was to suffer from 'the grippe' [influenza] and its after effects through spring and even into summer. Muir maintained a wide circle of correspondents and his 1914 letters reveal an optimism not at all like the post Hetch Hetchy despondency reported by many of his biographers. The problems were with his physical health.

In March, Robert Underwood Johnson (R.U.J) was writing that he was "*rejoicing*" that Muir was "*getting happily over your long siege of the grippe.*" He continued, "*I beg of you to devote yourself to building up your health so that you may go on with your most important literary work. I hope*

you will not take too much to heart the apparent victory of the San Franciscans in the Rape of the Hetch Hetchy.”

There had been some respite in early May for Muir spent a weekend at friend William Herrin’s summer lodge at Shasta Springs on the slopes of Mount Shasta but the double blow of cool, drizzly weather and the death on 22 May of friend Edward Taylor Parsons undid much of the good. He wrote to Herrin on 24 May, *“As soon as these trouble clouds lift a little I’ll gladly spend another reviving night with you and go to your blessed, healing, cheering, Wildwood pines.”* He was to return to Shasta Springs in August and September.

In July Muir gives the *“after effects of Grippe”* as the reason for turning down an invitation from Mrs Mary Harriman to visit her Island Park Ranch in Idaho. He wrote to R.U.J. at the same time, *“I’m afraid I shall not be able to be with at the great November meeting [of the American Academy of Arts and Letters] – for I have not yet fully recovered from last winter’s grippe ... Am now at work on old Alaska notes trying to make something like a book out of them. And besides many others are calling for pen work & my years are flying very fast.”*

Muir was clearly still looking to the future, an inference supported by a sentence in a letter to him from Herrin following Muir’s September visit to Shasta: *“I am glad to know you will visit me some time soon and will await hearing from you as to the time.”* By now Muir was focusing on his “Alaska book”, assisted by Parson’s widow, Marion Randall Parsons.

Muir had been promising his daughter Helen that he would visit her in Daggett, over 400 miles south of Martinez, to see his new grandson, John, born on 28 June. In November he wrote that he would travel south as soon as he had the Alaska book manuscript ready to correct. Ever the perfectionist in writing his books, he was still not finished by the middle of December but decided to go to be with Helen, husband Buel Funk and their four boys in time for Christmas. The cold and wet weather took its toll for he arrived clearly unwell. A doctor was sent for and he advised hospitalisation. His son-in-law Buel Funk took him to the California Hospital in Los Angeles where he was diagnosed as suffering from pneumonia and admitted and assigned a private room. Around 10 a.m. on the morning of Christmas, alone and with the manuscript of his Alaska book scattered around him John Muir passed away.

Will Collin

JOHN MUIR
Born Dunbar, Scotland, April 21 - 1838
Died Dec. 24 - 1914

Muir Laid to Rest Across the Bay
Nature Smiles as the Famous Naturalist is Gathered to Her Bosom
Remains Placed Beside Those of His Wife in Beauty Spot Near Home

The headlines above are from the ‘*San Francisco Chronicle*’ of December 28 1914, the day after John Muir’s funeral. Before then on Christmas Day newspapers across the USA from the New York ‘*Times*’ to its namesake in Los Angeles told Americans of their country’s loss. The Los Angeles ‘*Record*’ even managed an announcement with a photograph on the day Muir passed away.

Muir’s remains were taken back by train to Martinez and his friend, and Sierra Club secretary, William E Colby, assisted by Muir’s brother David, by then living in Pacific Grove, CA, attended to funeral arrangements. They included a special train on 27 Dec to bring mourners including members of the Wisconsin Society, more than 100 members of the Sierra Club and other friends from far and near.

That train pulled into Muir Station a little before 2 pm and the invited guests made their way to the Muir home where neighbours and other friends had already gathered. There a simple service was conducted by close friend William F Badè, professor at what is now the ecumenical Pacific School of Religion, who read the Episcopal rights. “*As long as daisies shall continue to star the fields of Scotland men will see them through the eyes of Burns,*” said Badè in his short eulogy. “*New music is in the song of the nightingale since Keats listened to the notes from the thicket on the hill ... and for generations to come men and women who visit the mountains, streams and forests of California will choose to see them through the eyes of John Muir.*”

Badè recounted part of the last conversation he had held with Muir. ‘*Longest is the life that contains the largest amount of time-effacing enjoyment; of work that is a steady delight,*’ Muir had said. “*Such a life may really comprise an eternity upon the earth.*’ The secret of Muir’s eternity said Badè, “*was in his soul - the soul of a child, of a poet and of a strong man, all blended in one.*”



The cortege then wended its way across the fields to the small private cemetery where already lay, among others, Muir's wife Louie, her parents John and Louisiana Strentzel and Muir's oldest sister Maggie Reid. There the remains of John Muir were placed alongside those of Louie, with boughs of *Sequoia gigantea* lining the grave.

More tributes were paid by the Sierra Club of which Muir had been president for 22 years, the Wisconsin Society family and friends. Among the floral tributes were a large laurel wreath, from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and a wreath of red roses, from the National Institute of Arts and Letters.

The San Francisco Chronicle report on John Muir's funeral can be found online¹ and one paragraph near the end is particularly poignant:

“Nearby, his hat in his hand, and sad-faced, waited Wong [Chinese cook Ah Fong!], for twenty-five years the faithful servant of Muir. He stood a little apart from the others. He was motionless, but there was that in his eyes that made you turn away from the sight of him with a strange something gripping at your throat. When the ceremonies were over and the mourners moved away, Wong started off through the fields, a pathetic little figure, walking slowly alone with his grief. Came then the shades of evening and the shadows of John Muir's pet trees crept fondly toward his grave.”

¹ http://vault.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/life/muir_laid_to_rest_sf_chron.aspx



John Muir Birthplace Trust AGM – Report

The John Muir Birthplace Trust² AGM was held in the Birthplace on Thursday 13 November.

The meeting learned that JMBT company secretary Margaret O'Connor was leaving her post at East Lothian Council and had tendered her resignation as JMBT company secretary. She had been in that post since 1998 and had also served as a trustee for a number of years. Chairman John Thomas thanked Margaret and wished her well for the future, sentiments echoed by those present. The meeting re-elected John Thomas as chairman and Will Collin as treasurer with the secretary's post vacant meantime. John gave his Chairman's Report for 2014-15 and parts of it follow for your interest:

There will probably not be another year like 2014 for the Birthplace for a very long time. The Birthplace was at the heart of the John Muir Festival, commemorating the centenary of Muir's death in 1914. On the 21st of April a large crowd gathered for the launch of the extended John Muir Way by the First Minister, Alex Salmond, as the opening event of the 2014 Homecoming followed by a series of events across Scotland. [During his visit to Dunbar, Mr Salmond spent time in the Birthplace and showed considerable interest in the work being done to promote knowledge of John Muir and his conservation message, particularly with young people.]

The Festival received excellent publicity across all the media with pieces on radio, television and in the papers about the John Muir Way from Dunbar to Helensburgh. We welcomed³ two American outdoor journalists at the Birthplace who had come over to walk sections of the Way courtesy of Visit Scotland and one of the trustees accompanied each of them to North Berwick.

² JMBT was set up in 1998 to purchase the building at 126/8 High Street, Dunbar, in which John Muir was born on 21 April 1838. JMBT is a partnership involving East Lothian Council (which nominates 2 trustees), the John Muir Trust (2), Dunbar Community Council (1) and FoJMB (1).

³ See the **Connections** article later in the newsletter for more details.

I would like to thank all the staff, volunteers, Friends and supporters of the Birthplace and all the businesses and other folk in Dunbar for contributing in so many different ways to make the Festival week such a success in the town.

There has been a wide range of exhibitions and events in the Birthplace. Here is a flavour of some of them:

- Childrens workshops running through the year with visits by children from local schools and beyond East Lothian;
- ‘Belhaven Journey’, local photos by Friends member Gordon Jenkinson;
- A Friends reading event around ‘The Story of My Boyhood and Youth’;
- A celebration of the 10th anniversary of the opening of the Birthplace on 23 August

A little later in the year the Birthplace celebrated the completion of a project to permanently record both the Birthplace and the John Muir National Historic Site at Martinez using detailed digital mapping. This provides a precise, permanent, record of both properties and their surroundings as well as being open to anyone to view through the website of digital scanning specialists CYArk⁴. The digital maps can be viewed at the Birthplace.

At the end of May, the John Muir Trust held its AGM in Dunbar in recognition of this being the centenary of Muir’s death. Many of of the JMT members attending from the length and breadth of Britain visited the Birthplace.



At the end of June East Lothian Museum’s Service* and the Birthplace hosted the opening of an exhibition of John Muir’s beautiful botanical drawings and landscape sketches called ‘*Nature’s Beloved Son*’⁵.

John Thomas
JMBT Chairperson

[* Dunbar Town House Museum hosted part of the exhibition (above). Ed.]

⁴ <http://www.cyark.org/>

⁵ This exhibition was relocated to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh in November and runs there until January 25th. Further details at <http://www.rbge.org.uk/whats-on/event-details/3655>

Friends' 20th Anniversary



An exhibition that celebrates the 20th anniversary of the Friends of John Muir's Birthplace charity is currently on display in the Birthplace. The photographs, text and exhibits on display invite visitors to share the memories of just some of the milestones and achievements of the charity.

Hearing about John Muir

November was a busy month for Friends' speakers visiting groups near and not so near telling of John Muir's life and legacy. The furthest and largest was Perth U3A for their November open meeting. Perth U3A was established in 1985 and now has over 400 members and 60 interest groups. 165 attended the Muir talk, close to a record turnout and a £50 donation was received for Friends' funds.

Another U3A visit was made to the East Lothian group's open meeting on 19 November where the talk *'Never too old'* concentrated on the last 25 years of

Muir's life. EL U3A was founded in 1999 and boasts the second highest membership of Scotland's 31 U3A groups. 85 attended and again a £50 donation was made to Friends' funds.

On 8 November, the venue was in the John Hope Gateway at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh. The exhibition '*Nature's Beloved Son*', telling of John Muir, the plant collector, opened at the Botanics on 1 November having spent the summer in Dunbar. The stunning display of images of Muir's botanical specimens, photographed by Stephen Joseph, with text by Bonnie Gisell, will be in Edinburgh until the end of January. This time the Friends' presentation, 'John Muir: Nature's Apostle' focused on Muir's development from a 'travel writer' to a 'conservation campaigner' culminating in the fight to save Hetch Hetchy Valley in Yosemite National Park. Attendance was a more modest 32.

To complete the nap hand, there were presentations on the life of John Muir to the Probus Clubs of North Berwick and Portobello No.2. Attendance at the two totalled 102 (and N Berwick donated £25). So the combined 'outreach' number was a very healthy 384.

Historic Scotland Plaque for Birthplace

The Historic Scotland Commemorative Plaque Scheme was introduced in 2013. It is designed to celebrate the life and achievements of significant historic figures, through the placing of a plaque on the home where they lived, or a building particularly connected with them. The scheme this year celebrates the Year of Natural Scotland. The closing date for names was 15 January 2014 and a nomination was submitted on behalf of John Muir and his birthplace. We then waited for the selection of the final 11 from the "independent panel of experts".

The list was made public on 21 August when Scottish Government culture secretary Fiona Hyslop unveiled a plaque at Tynecastle High School in Edinburgh to commemorate WWI poet Wilfred Owen who taught English in 1917 while being treated for shell shock at nearby Craiglockhart War Hospital.

Among the 11 were pioneering town planner Sir Patrick Geddes, climber Sir Hugh Munro, Enlightenment philosopher and historian Adam Ferguson, ornithologist Alexander Wilson – and John Muir. We await with eager expectation the Birthplace plaque's unveiling on his next birthday!

A new edition of ‘Walking the John Muir Way’

The first edition of this ‘wee book’ was launched April 21st 2010, and by now over 2,000 copies have been sold, for the benefit of FoJMB. As the content is different in nature to the Rucksack Readers book about the Helensburgh - Dunbar John Muir Way published earlier this year, a new edition is being prepared. This has involved walking or cycling in October and November from Musselburgh to Dunglass to check for changes along the route, and to take some new photographs for the book.

The title will be changed from the 2010 edition, possibly to ‘*Walking the East Lothian John Muir Way and Link*’, to avoid confusion. The ‘Link’ covers the section from Dunbar to Dunglass, which in my view has some of the most striking coastal features of East Lothian’s original JMW, not least the sandstone arches, waterfall and bridges of the final kilometres.

The new edition should be ready for spring, and will retail at £3.50 as before, with a discount for members.

Robert Russel

Visitors to the Birthplace

As we near the end of 2014, thought is given to visitor numbers for what has been in many ways a special year. We had the John Muir Festival back in April when, amongst others, Scotland’s First Minister paid us a visit and, as expected, numbers ‘through the Birthplace door’ during April and May reached a high of 3,730 compared to last year’s 2,611 and 2,721 year before that. The increase was maintained during June that brought over 400 more visitors than June 2013. By the end of October the total exceeded the 12-month total for 2013 by nearly 500.

Numbers for November 2014 received a boost as Dunbar Primary School (John Muir’s ‘Dunbar Grammar School’) had chosen to bring their primary 5 pupils that month instead of in the spring. DPS is the largest state primary school in the UK and it has over 130 p5 pupils. Each class of 30 spent a morning in the Birthplace and are following that up in school with history, art and drama activities. Generally primary 5 pupils from across East Lothian and beyond visit the Birthplace as part of their curriculum contributing around 30% of the 3,000+ young folk who visit annually.

Since the Birthplace opened on 23 August 2003, we have kept a visitor's book at the front desk and on 22 July 2014 the eighth volume was started. That means well over 5,000 folk have left their name and usually their country of origin and comments. They serve as a survey of a sort and a measure of the positive impact the vast majority of visitors experience is the fact that in the eight books there are fewer than ten negative comments out of the thousands that compliment the museum and its staff!

Although the majority writing in the books are from the UK there have been visitors from all of the world's continents bar Antarctica, the only one John Muir did not visit. To give a flavour, for the first four weeks of the new book there were entries by visitors from Finland, Germany, Netherlands, Austria, Singapore, France, Canada, Australia, Eire, Denmark and the USA. US states represented are Alaska, New Jersey, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Texas, Alaska, Rhode Island, Louisiana, Tennessee, Colorado, Wisconsin, Virginia, and of course California (no fewer than 11 times). Here are some of the comments written in the new book:

- Lochwinnoch, Scotland – *“Really loved learning more about John Muir. Brilliant museum.”*
- Lebanon, Tennessee – the understated *“More than I expected.”*
- Singapore – *“A big fan of Muir. Have discovered a lot about his childhood and works at this place. Thank you.”*
- France – *“It is always a pleasure to discover things that I do not know. I am grateful for making me a bit less ignorant. Looking forward to reading the books.”*
- San Francisco, CA – *“Fantastic exhibit.”*
- Alberta, Canada – *“Terrific museum. We were engaged in the John Muir Cabin, Tongass National Forest, Alaska. So this visit was special.”*
[The JM Cabin was built in 1980 to commemorate the centenary of his visit to the area. The Tongass National Forest, at 17 million acres is the largest in the USA.]
- Lake District, England – *“A bit of a pilgrimage to come here. A wonderfully informative and inspiring place.”*
- And to finish, from a local on his first visit – *“Eye opening and informative.”*

Surprise Visits!



In May, staff at the Birthplace were delighted to welcome Tom and Debbie Zamaria, from Martinez. In 2011, Dunbar & District History Society exchanged historical photographs with Martinez Historical Society to mark the 30th anniversary of the twinning arrangement between the ‘sister cities’; It was Tom who kindly sent the Martinez images to Dunbar. Although a short visit, Tom and Debbie were given a quick tour of John Muir’s Dunbar by History Society Secretary and Birthplace staff member Pauline Smeed. They were also fortunate to see the baton for this summer’s Commonwealth Games being carried through the High Street, complete with police, motorcade and balloons!

A walk around John Muir’s Dunbar was also enjoyed by Roberta Brashear Kaulfers [photo: left] who visited in October. Roberta, who is the current Chair of the Hawaii chapter of the Sierra Club and was staying in the area with friends, was thrilled to see the harbour and castle area, the places where John played and went to school. The walk was followed by a tour of Dunbar Town House and the Birthplace.

‘John Muir, Rhapsody in Green’

A Review by Friends council member Ross Combe

Amid the hustle and bustle of the Edinburgh International Festival and Fringe in August, a highly engaging one-man performance enthralled audiences from the back rooms of a Leith Walk delicatessen and reanimated John Muir’s legacy as that of explorer, raconteur and eccentric.

Playing the Alaska-based Presbyterian missionary friend of Muir, the Reverend Samuel Hall Young, writer and actor Mike Maran gave a monologue

account of their relationship in the context of a shared exploration of the glacier wilderness of North-West America. Maran insightfully juxtaposed Muir's reverie for God's majestic work in nature with Hall Young's love of God's word and in so doing referenced the wider philosophical discourse of American Transcendentalism during the period of the late nineteenth century.

Utilising an ingeniously simple stage installation and soundscape which, could be adapted to great affect to be at once domestic and landscape, an atmosphere of the pioneering spirit of both men was conjured. In particular, the evocation of a pack of huskies through recorded performance created a humorous counterweight to the historical account.

The story of Muir and his trusty companion 'Stickeen' made so famous through its marketing as a children's book, is one of the central elements of the narrative but is placed in a wider context of his passion for journeying into this icy landscape.

With an obvious passion for the subject matter – demonstrated in their detailed research – Maran and his director Patrick Sandford have generated a fantastic play in which one is immersed in the period and can conceive of Muir on a very human level as well as that of the man as myth.

Friends of John Muir's Birthplace are currently in dialogue with Maran and his director and hope to arrange for a performance of the play in 2015. We will communicate this as soon as any details are confirmed.

Connections

Josh Sens is a freelance writer living in Oakland, California who is a frequent contributor to VIA - the magazine of the American Automobile Association covering the eight western states of CA, NV, UT, OR, ID, MT, WY and AK. Josh has also written for the San Francisco Magazine, the San Francisco Chronicle, the Los Angeles Times and Golf Magazine. He had been commissioned by VIA Magazine to write a Scottish travel article with a young John Muir flavour. In November he contacted both the Birthplace and the John Muir Association in Martinez. Both passed him on to Friends and he has been in contact a number of times by e-mail and on 17 November had an hour long telephone chat with Friends' Will Collin. We await Josh's article with interest.

John Flinn is a freelance travel writer and the former editor of the San Francisco Chronicle's Travel section. He went one better and visited Dunbar back in July accompanied by Keith Geddes of the Central Scotland Green Network and one of the architects of Scotland's new John Muir Way. They were met at Dunbar station by Friends and birthplace trustees John Thomas and Will Collin who took them on a tour round John Muir's Dunbar including, of course, a visit to the Birthplace. John Thomas then led the way on the first leg of the 124 mile walk to Helensburgh. John Flinn's account appeared as the main article in the Chronicle's Travel section on 13 July under the double header *'The other John Muir Trail: Dazzling coast-to-coast route honors conservationist in his native land'*. It began: *"It's a wee bit of a stretch to say that America's national park system owes its grandeur to the foamy little Scottish tide pool I'm walking beside - but there's some truth to it."*

Membership News

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.

Online Delivery of Newsletters

A significant number of Friends have opted out of receiving paper copies of the Newsletter and now read the online version⁶ 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

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Friends Email: info@muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk

Friends Website: www.muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk

⁶ <http://muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk/newsletters/current/>