



FRIENDS of JOHN MUIR'S BIRTHPLACE

Newsletter No. 35, December 2016

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Notice of Annual General Meeting

Wednesday 1st February 2017 at 7:00pm

Community Room, Dunbar Town House, High Street, Dunbar

**Non-members will be warmly welcomed and after the AGM
business Jo Moulin will give a talk on *John Muir's Legacy in
Scotland Today***

John Muir's Birthplace – News

Permanent Exhibition Renewals

The permanent exhibition at John Muir's Birthplace has been a credit to the design by David Campbell & Co and the hard work of the John Muir Birthplace Trust trustees and ELC staff who worked on the original design on the run up to opening in August 2003. We have had to make very few repairs and are still receiving positive feedback, particularly from our American visitors who are very moved by their visit to John's boyhood home, while also seeing first hand the harbour, castle, craggy shoreline and countryside that inspired Muir's passion for wild places.

Thirteen years on and the technology available to help us share Muir's life and legacy is astounding. The film presentation on the first floor is in need of new equipment and this should be in place early in the New Year and will offer us greater flexibility allowing visitors a choice of film on demand.

The John Muir Birthplace Trust is considering updates to the current interactive exhibits and how best to refresh the top floor which celebrates Muir's continuing legacy. We currently have a visitor survey in place to help us evaluate the interactive elements of the exhibition. Please pop in and have a chat with staff and volunteers about your likes, dislikes and maybe examples of other visitor attractions that you have enjoyed in the past year.

Going Online

John Muir's Birthplace staff are increasingly turning to social media and other online opportunities to promote our exhibitions and events. The key to our online promotion will be a new website for the John Muir Birthplace Trust. JMBT have agreed the funding and work on this project starts early in 2017.

If you would like to keep in touch with us through social media please follow John Muir's Birthplace on Facebook¹ or @JM_Birthplace on Twitter² using #JohnMuirDunbar #EastLothian hashtags.

Shop Local

The JMB will once again take part in Shop Local scheme between 1 November and 24 December. Anyone who spends £20 or more will receive an entry card for a prize draw to win a share of a £2000 prize fund.

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/JMBirthplace>

² https://twitter.com/JM_Birthplace



FRIENDS of
JOHN MUIR'S
BIRTHPLACE

Notice of Annual General Meeting

Wednesday 1st February 2017 at 6:45pm for 7:00pm

Community Room, Dunbar Town House, High Street, Dunbar

Agenda

- (i) Report of year's activities
- (ii) Filling any vacancies on Council³
- (iii) Other competent business³

**Non-members will be warmly welcomed and after the AGM business
Jo Moulin will give a talk on *John Muir's Legacy in Scotland Today***

Change of Financial Examiner

Friends annual accounts are submitted to OSCR, the Office of the Scottish Charities Regulator. Compliance with current charities legislation is essential for us to retain our charitable status (Scottish Charity number SC022857). One such requirement is to keep financial accounts and to have them checked by a 'financial examiner'. A charity's annual income determines the minimum qualifications the financial examiner must have. Although our level does not require someone with professional accountancy qualifications, our two most recent financial examiners have both been chartered accountants. The one re-appointed at our last AGM moved south recently and is no longer available to us. However we have been very fortunate in enlisting the help of another CA, Dunbar resident Walter Cowan.

Walter will be well known to many local members of Friends. He is a graduate of Edinburgh University and spent his working life in the finance department of Edinburgh City Council. Since retiring, he has been treasurer of Dunbar Parish Church and is treasurer of Dunbar and District History Society. He 'checks the books' for a number of local organizations including Dunbar Probus Club and Dunbar Parish Church Guild.

Friends Council recently agreed unanimously to appoint Walter, with his agreement, as Friends' financial examiner for 2015-16 and we will ask for this to be agreed retrospectively at our forthcoming AGM.

³ 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 23rd January 2017.

John Muir and America's Best Idea



As reported in the last Newsletter, Friends could not let the US National Park Service centenary pass without celebrating John Muir's involvement.

The Friends' exhibition, '*John Muir and America's Best Idea*', ran in the Birthplace from August to November. Twelve panels told the story of a number of NPS sites and of Muir's involvement with them.

These photographs outline the scale of the exhibition and, although they are no longer on display, the panels, as well as pull-up versions, are now available for loan to other museums, etc., so that the story of *John Muir and America's Best Idea* can be promoted further afield.



Emma Westwater of Dunbar-based Source Design turned Will Collin's text and collection of images into 12 eye-catching and colourful panels. The exhibition opened on 5 August and initially was intended to run until the end of September by which time more than 3,000 people had visited the Birthplace. The exhibition run was subsequently extended by several months.

The centre-piece of items in the display case was the US Mint's special issue of three commemorative coins⁴ – a silver dollar, a half dollar and a gold five dollar piece. The last features images of President Theodore Roosevelt and our own John Muir, a measure of his huge importance in the creation firstly of a number of individual parks and then the NPS itself.



Friends' council member Fiona Johnston also created a couple of activities that captured the interest of junior visitors. An 'A4 trail' that invited them to find the answers to a series of questions from the exhibition's display panels. Younger visitors had the opportunity to create their own national park by 'colouring in' animals and trees, cutting them out and glueing them in front of a background to create a pop up scene of one of the national parks on display.

Friends are particularly indebted to the trustees of JMBT and Dunbar Community Council for their financial support; to Emma for her imaginative design work (and her forbearance); to a growing circle of friends at the NPS sites included in the exhibition and particularly to George Turnbull at the NPS Pacific West Regional Office; and to ELC Museum Service.

John Muir and America's Best Idea On Tour!

The JMBT trustees asked that a set of free-standing copies of the panels be produced and made available to organisations to display. So far they have been booked by the John Muir Trust for members' meetings in Edinburgh and the Borders; by trustee and ELC councillor John McMillan for use in ELC's John Muir House, Haddington; and by Ross Anderson, Chairman of the Scottish Campaign for National Parks, for display in Holyrood. The only cost to users is delivery. Jo Moulin, Promotions Officer, ELC Museums Service, at Dunbar Town House, tel: 01620 820698 or 07813 315402 can advise further.

Stop Press

Tom Leatherman, NPS Superintendent of the John Muir National Historic Site, has requested digital copies of the exhibition panels with a view to putting them on display in John Muir's former home. The 'big house', built by Muir's father-in-law in 1883, sits in 345 acres on the outskirts of Martinez, Contra Costa County, CA, and attracted nearly 43,000 visitors in 2015. The request has been dealt with and there is the possibility that the exhibition might find its way to other NPS sites in America.

⁴ <http://catalog.usmint.gov/commemorative-coins/national-park-service.html>

Yosemite's LeConte Memorial Lodge Renamed

Professor Joseph LeConte was the first professor of geology and natural history at the University of California at Berkeley and a close friend of John Muir. They first met in Yosemite in 1870 and LeConte was one of the first professional geologists to support Muir's glaciation theory for the creation of Yosemite Valley. LeConte was a founder member of the Sierra Club in 1892, serving as a director from then until 1898. He often visited the Sierra Nevada, rambling, botanising and climbing. He died, aged 76, on the eve of the Sierra Club's first High Trip in 1901.

In 1904, the Sierra Club dedicated the LeConte Memorial Lodge, built at the foot of Glacier Point by volunteers. It served as a visitor centre before the creation of the NPS in 1914 and as an education centre ever since. In 1905 a young Ansel Adams began a four-year spell as summer custodian. In 1987 it was named a National Historic Landmark. Its present curator is Bonnie Gisel who is in her 15th summer in the post. Bonnie is the author of *'Nature's Beloved Son'* on Muir's botanical legacy and curator of an exhibition of the same name which visited Dunbar's Town House and the Birthplace in 2014.

LeConte was born in 1823 and raised in pre-Civil War Georgia where his family were slave owners. Disenchanted in the aftermath of the defeat of the Confederacy, he followed his older brother to California in 1869. Although there is no doubting LeConte's ability as a geologist/scientist, recently there have been questions about his support for the discredited science of eugenics and particularly his belief in racial inferiority. This side of LeConte has brought criticism of his place in Sierra Club history. Bruce Hamilton, the Club's Deputy Executive Director, recently wrote, "While Joseph LeConte will remain an important part of the history of Yosemite, we feel it is unacceptable to continue to have a public education centre in the park named in honour of a man who advocated for theories about the inferiority of nonwhite races. To do so would be counter both to our values and to our desire to promote inclusivity in our parks." For this reason, at the request of the Sierra Club, the National Park Service has taken the unusual step of renaming the LeConte Lodge as the **Yosemite Conservation Heritage Center**. Hamilton continued, "The Sierra Club will also be updating the content of the lodge exhibits to more accurately reflect the full legacy of Joseph LeConte, in addition to promoting conservation history and the current issues facing Yosemite, the Sierra Nevada, and beyond."

Will Collin



Annual Report for 2015-16

[The following article is a condensed extract from the JMBT Annual Report presented at its AGM on Thursday 3rd November 2016. Ed.]

The objects of the Trust shall be to advance the education of the public concerning the life and works of John Muir and particularly concerning the ideals of environmental conservation propounded by him. The Trust shall seek to pursue the stated objects by any appropriate means including :

- i. The conservation and interpretation of his birthplace at 126 High St. Dunbar and other places or objects associated with him,
- ii. The promotion of the ideals of holistic conservation through the use of his birthplace and related places and objects,
- iii. The encouragement of public participation in environmental conservation projects,
- iv. The promotion of research into, and the interpretation of the life and work of John Muir and environmental conservation, generally,
- v. The participation in projects for promoting the causes and ideals of environmental conservation.

During the past year the Birthplace has flourished and its excellent team of staff, volunteers and Friends have continued to promote and extend public awareness about John Muir and the Birthplace both at home and abroad as well as mounting the following new exhibitions and events in Dunbar :-

- *John Muir in Lego & Minecraft*: a popular event with children & parents.
- *An Ingenious Whittler – John Muir the Inventor*, March to July 2016. Part of Visit Scotland's 'Year of Innovation, Architecture and Design'.
- Father's Day Fun, 17th - 19th June. Create your own Innovative Invention
- *John Muir the Inventor* exhibition was on display over the summer and featured at Dunbar Sci Fest.
- John Muir Birthday Biodiversity Family Fun Day. 24th April 2016.
- Festival of Museums, *Adventures with John Muir* 13th - 15th May 2016.

In May, thanks for help with funding from the Festival of Museums, we were privileged to host a visit from Lee Stetson, the Yosemite actor who enacts the Life of John Muir in the valley. Lee was welcomed to Dunbar at the end of 6 days walking the John Muir Way and was delighted to be shown round the

Birthplace and visit many of places associated with John Muir in Dunbar. Lee went on to give a public performance in his role as Muir at the Brunton Theatre in Musselburgh before an enthusiastic audience.

Visitor numbers over the year showed little change from previous years at 12,978 total for the year but there was a noticeable increase in the number of visitors from America which was very welcome. Notable among them were: in May 2016 – two geology professors, one from University of Illinois and the other from University of the Pacific; and Mike Wurtz curator of the Holt-Atherton Special Collections at the University of the Pacific. July 2016 Jay Goldsmith, Chief of Resources, Pacific West Region, US National Park Service; and the Negraeff Family from Canada who had just finished walking and cycling the John Muir Way. John Muir's Birthplace presents over 300 certificates a year to completers of the John Muir Way.

Inspectors from Visit Scotland made an unannounced visit to the Birthplace as part of the regulatory process for awarding recognition to a visitor attraction. We were pleased to be awarded a 5 star visitor attraction grading maintaining the same level of recognition as in previous years. The Birthplace was also visited by the Green Business Tourism Scheme and maintained the existing Gold standard.

Membership News

Online Delivery of Newsletters

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 (e-)mailing.

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