



# FRIENDS of JOHN MUIR'S BIRTHPLACE

Newsletter No. 37, Summer 2017

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Explore Muir's Passion for geology  
and the role this played in his  
own adventures  
and discoveries

*John Muir*  
Geology

30th July to 5th October 2017  
John Muir's Birthplace, 126 High St, Dunbar, EH42 1JJ

# Friends' Exhibition: 125 Years of the Sierra Club



The Friends' exhibition, '*125 Years of the Sierra Club*', ran in the Birthplace from April 21<sup>st</sup> until July 26<sup>th</sup> (having been extended beyond the end of June). Six panels gave an overview of the history of the Sierra Club with an emphasis on John Muir's involvement in the founding, and ethos, of the organisation.



The introductory panel contained the following text:

“Founded by legendary conservationist John Muir in 1892, the Sierra Club is now the USA’s largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization -- with more than two million members and supporters. Its successes range from protecting millions of acres of wilderness to helping pass the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, and Endangered Species Act. More recently, the Club has made history by leading the charge to move away from the dirty fossil fuels that cause climate disruption and toward a clean energy economy.

The Mission Statement of the Sierra Club is:

- To explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the earth;
- To practice and promote the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems and resources;
- To educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment; and to use all lawful means to carry out these objectives.

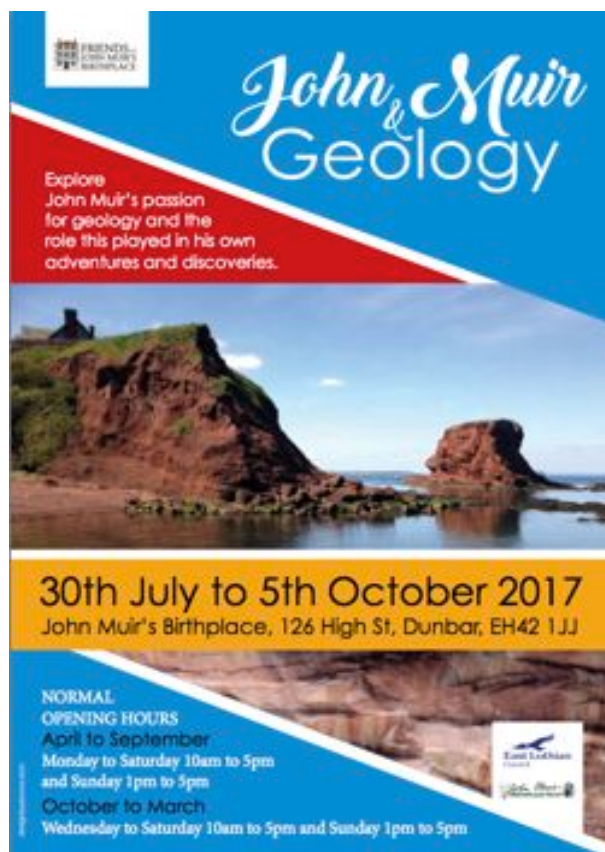
Nature has come under siege as never before. Species are disappearing, climate change accelerating and our natural resources diminishing. As a result, Muir’s ideas and philosophy look even more relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the writings of this pioneering conservationist, still fresh and vibrant, are becoming ever more popular. “*When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe*” he wrote, in an early insight into the global ecosystem.

This exhibition gives an overview of how the words and deeds of Muir provide the inspiration for the Sierra Club’s fundamental message to ***Explore, enjoy and protect the planet***, and how the Club is rising to the environmental challenges that face us all.”

In addition to the above text a footnote on the first panel acknowledged the assistance of the individuals and organisations that contributed to the production of the exhibit. Namely:

- Duncan Smeed and Will Colin
- Emma Westwater of Source Design;
- Jamie Hinrichs, Sierra Club member;
- Harold Wood, Volunteer Webmaster, Sierra Club John Muir Exhibit; and
- Libby Lee-Egan and Peter Walbridge, Sierra Club staff.
- Organisations: Sierra Club; John Muir Birthplace Trust; East Lothian Council

# Friends' Exhibition: John Muir & Geology



The second Friends' exhibition of 2017, '*John Muir & Geology*', runs in the Birthplace from July 30<sup>th</sup> until October 5<sup>th</sup> and explores John Muir's passion for geology and the role this played in his own adventures and discoveries.



In addition to the 8 panels and the display case contents, Ross Combe has also commissioned a 3D print of Yosemite Valley which illustrates the glacial action of its formation. Ross has also installed interactive buttons below each panel that, when pressed, give additional audio commentary.

# The Artistic Expressions of John Muir

A key figure in the continuing John Muir story, Michael Wurtz, paid a fleeting visit to Dunbar on 13-14 May. Mike is Head of Special Collections at the University of the Pacific, Stockton, CA., and one of his principal roles is as curator of the John Muir Papers and over a dozen Muir related collections. Today, approximately 75% of the surviving Muir papers of Muir are preserved at UoP.

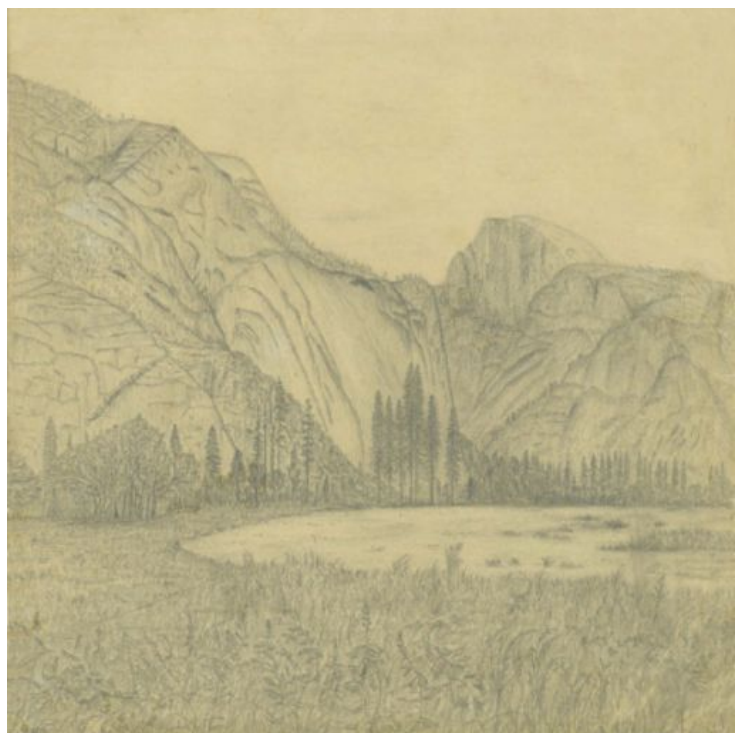
Mike offered to give a presentation on Dunbar's most famous son. From his list of topics, Friends of John Muir's Birthplace chose *'The Artistic Expressions of John Muir'*.

This event was promoted by posters around Dunbar [main text below]; via the FoJMB website<sup>1</sup> and on its Facebook page<sup>2</sup>; and also on the Dunbar Events Facebook page<sup>3</sup>. Mike's talk was very well attended and his delivery and content was excellent.



“Muir the artist is not a title that many would give him but, using artistic images from Muir's journals, manuscripts, letters & drawings, Mike will examine how Muir used his masterful observational skills to study, promote, and protect our natural places. He will also use others to share some of Muir's gripping near-death adventures – such as the time he experienced a Yosemite Valley earthquake.”

[Right: Muir's sketch of Royal Arches and Half Dome, Yosemite Valley]



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

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/fojmb/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/497808383660101/>

# Dunbar Rowing Club first to row the John Muir Way

[The following article has been contributed by long-standing FoJMB member and founding member of Dunbar Rowing Club, Alistair Mackie. Ed.]

Members of the Dunbar Coastal Rowing Club have just completed the John Muir Way – by boat!

This interesting variant on the conventional route was first mooted in the dark months of winter to set a challenge to club members and offer a variation from their traditional Regatta outings for the summer.

So it was that on Monday 17th July the club's rowing skiff, "*Black Agnes*", named after the 14<sup>th</sup> century heroine who held Dunbar castle secure against English invaders, was towed to Helensburgh, the official start of the JMW.



Launched at the Helensburgh slipway after a photoshoot of club members before the John Muir Way commemorative signboard, tide and current helped speed 'Black Agnes' in beautiful weather conditions up the Clyde to a panorama of distant hills and sea that would have warmed the cockles of John Muir's heart.

Entering the Forth and Clyde canal at Bowling, the tow path of which forms the core of the John Muir Way, the boat was nursed through the thirty nine locks, up and down the Falkirk wheel to visit the Union canal, past the Kelpies, then

out into the Forth at Grangemouth and under the Bridges back to Dunbar.

The trip was not without challenge, with winds funnelling along the canal tiring the rowers, and a rudder and oar breaking on the sea legs of the journey.





The adventurous team of 23 were aged from 14 to 76 and, after completing the John Muir Way, members of the team were awarded their John Muir Way completion certificates at the John Muir Birthplace Museum.

The club has two racing skiffs, built six years ago by the enthusiasm of club members. They owe their design to traditional Faroese skiffs, open boats rowed by fearless fishermen up to fifty miles from shore to catch fish. Today's boats have the same shapely profile and offer the same seaworthiness as their predecessors, but are built of marine plywood rather than solid wood and are therefore much lighter and easier to row.



The club welcomes new members to participate in its social and sporting activities and those interested should visit the Dunbar Rowing Club's website<sup>4</sup> and/or Facebook page<sup>5</sup>.

[The new John Muir's Birthplace website also has a report of this intrepid adventure<sup>6</sup> which includes a 10-minute video of highlights of the trip. Ed.]

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.dunbarcoastalrowing.org.uk>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/109751702394808/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.jmbt.org.uk/2017/07/28/row-row-row-boat-along-john-muir-way/>

# New John Muir's Birthplace Website



“ When I was a boy in Scotland I was fond of everything that was wild, and all my life I've been growing fonder and fonder of wild places and wild creatures.

John Muir, The Story of my Boyhood and Youth

The John Muir's Birthplace website<sup>7</sup> has been revamped recently to make it more adaptable to smartphone and tablet devices and, therefore, more accessible. In addition to the improvements in the technology, the John Muir Birthplace Charitable Trust has also commissioned updates to the user interface, navigation and content to make the website more attractive and useful for visitors.

A newsletter article really can't do justice to the improvements that have been made so please do check out the new features. Enhancements of particular note in comparison to the old website include the News section and the ease with which news items can be posted and then shared on social media outlets like Facebook and Twitter. Similarly, the What's On section has announcements of events and activities at the Birthplace; the ability to search by date and/or keyword; and also to get 'reminders' in Google Calendar or export formats.

## Tripadvisor Certificate of Excellence



One item of news that deserves to be celebrated is that JMB has been awarded a TripAdvisor Certificate of Excellence for the 2nd year running<sup>8</sup>. Jo Moulin, Museums Officer East said *'Thank you to all our visitors who take the time to leave TripAdvisor comments following their visit. Our staff are extremely enthusiastic about John Muir and his legacy and enjoy talking to our visitors, and we appreciate this recognition.'*

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.jmbt.org.uk>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.jmbt.org.uk/2017/06/27/tripadvisor-certificate-excellence/>



## Visitor Book Comments

In addition to the Tripadvisor online comments, many more visitors have given feedback in the Visitor Books. Here are some typical, recent, examples taken from the current book:

- *Very good, lots of information, enjoyable for all ages.*
- *Truly loved your representation of his life and the link to current time and life tasks. Thank you so much!*
- *Thank you for a wonderful and inspiring visit! ☺*
- *Excellent museum in all ways. Will be back !!*
- *A delight.*
- *We learned about him and it was fun. ☺*
- *Lovely surprise.*
- *Great museum. Loved the quotations and conservation messages.*
- *I was born in California and spent many family vacations in Yosemite National Park. It felt full circle to be here today.*
- *Such an appropriate ‘gift’ at the end of our John Muir Way walk across Scotland.*
- *What an unexpected bonus. Full of surprises.*
- *Amazing man! Friendly staff!*
- *Awesome!*
- *Thank you! Excellent exhibits and promotion of ‘God’s Cathedral’ (The Wilderness).*

## New Interactive Touchscreen

As the result of a successful partnership between the John Muir Birthplace Charitable Trust and Sheena Irving AV, a new touchscreen media display has been installed. The display replaces a (broken) DVD system that only played the *John Muir’s Yosemite* film on a loop. The current film choices are:

- **John Muir in Yosemite**
- **Wilderness by Alastair Humphreys** – one of National Geographic’s Adventurers of the Year, an accomplished speaker, and a best-selling author. This short film is based on the writings of John Muir. It is an ode to wilderness, and was filmed in the Scottish Highlands.
- **The Wild Along the Way (preview) by Zeki Basan.** A film about the John Muir Way in Scotland. Supported by Central Scotland Green Network Trust and the Bill Wallace Grant (John Muir Trust). With special thanks to Lee Stetson. The full 22-minute film can be seen on Vimeo<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://vimeo.com/193034427>

## Local Museums - What's On

The following events and activities are taking place in the Dunbar museums this summer. Both museums have free admission and lots of drop-in crafts and activities that are perfect for a last-minute day trip. For more details see the [www.eastlothian.go.uk/museums](http://www.eastlothian.go.uk/museums) web page.

### Activities & Events – John Muir's Birthplace

#### Fun & Crafty Weekend Drop-in Activities

Friday lunchtime to Sunday afternoon (1pm-4pm). Join us for fun drop-in crafts and activities! Suggested donation £1

### Exhibitions – John Muir's Birthplace

#### John Muir & Geology

30<sup>th</sup> July – 5<sup>th</sup> October

Explore John Muir's passion for geology and the role this played in his own adventures and discoveries.

#### This is Earth

8<sup>th</sup> October – 18<sup>th</sup> November (closed Mon and Tue)

An art exhibition on the theme of Earth/Conservation/Poverty.

### Exhibitions – Dunbar Town House Museum & Gallery

#### Digging Up Dunbar

5<sup>th</sup> July – 30<sup>th</sup> September

Over ten thousand years of history in this exhibition of archaeological discovery. Ancient objects and sites as well as more recent evidence piece together a picture of life in Dunbar and its surrounding parish. There will be plenty of free activities for families.

#### E-Scapes

9<sup>th</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> September

An exhibition by East Lothian Embroiderers and Textile Artists.

#### Demonstration Day "Take-a-stitch"

Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> September

A small group East Lothian Embroiderers and Textile Artists will be on hand to demonstrate a variety of textile techniques. All visitors to the exhibition of any age and ability are very welcome to try any of the activities.

#### A Historic Walk Around Dunbar

Until Spring 2018

This summer Dunbar & District History Society published a 4<sup>th</sup> edition of Stephen Bunyan's '*A Historic Walk Around Dunbar*'. The walk covers the wider history of Dunbar and includes many areas associated with John Muir's childhood, beginning at Dunbar Town House and finishing at John Muir's Birthplace. The book is available at both Dunbar Town House and the Birthplace, at a cost of £3.50. A supporting exhibition, highlighting the book's main themes, features in the local history room.

## **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>10</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.

### **Online News**

Due to the fact that this ‘paper’ newsletter is only produced four times a year some announcements and news items are past their ‘use-by date’ by the time of production. Many of these news items are published/announced on the Friends’ website and/or the Friends’ Facebook page<sup>11</sup> and, for local events, on the Dunbar Events Facebook page<sup>12</sup>. The revamped John Muir’s Birthplace website (already featured on page 8) now makes it much easier to post news items and is now an excellent resource for being kept up to date with developments there. There are, of course, many other online outlets for Muir-related news and Friends’ also use these for promoting events, etc.

### **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](mailto:info@muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk)**

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

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<sup>10</sup> <http://muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk/newsletters/current/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/fojmb/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/497808383660101/>