



# FRIENDS of JOHN MUIR'S BIRTHPLACE

Newsletter No. 40, Spring 2018

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Date for the diary:

**Friends' Photo Sharing Evening  
Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> May 2018 at 7:00pm**

John Muir Birthplace Museum, High Street, Dunbar

[See page 6 for details]

## Jim Thompson, President of Friends, Retires

[This article is adapted from the notes the then Secretary of Friends - the greatly missed Susan Panton - compiled for the presentation of Honorary Life Membership to Jim in recognition of his contribution to Friends of John Muir's Birthplace. Ed.]

Our President, Jim Thompson, is a Glaswegian who moved to Edinburgh with his brand new wife in 1960, being transferred by his employers, a major general insurance firm. Jim eventually became regional manager for his company, but domestically was gradually moving eastwards. He came to Dunbar in 1989 when given the opportunity to take early retirement. At that time, like the majority of his fellow countrymen, he was completely unaware of John Muir.

A visit to the house corrected that, but an intense love of Scottish history and a notice in the local library seeking 'Volunteers to train as guides to John Muir's Dunbar' first involved him with DJMA. DJMA, now Friends, know a good thing when they see one and Jim was grabbed with both hands and pulled into the body of the Council. He was initially co-opted, where he took on the responsibility of membership secretary and when the job of producing and editing the newsletter became vacant, he took that on as well. Jim is a prime example of the old adage... 'if you want something done, ask a busy person' and in 2000 Jim became convener, a position he held until his first attempt to retire in 2011!



When Jim stepped down as Convener at the 2011 AGM he was 'persuaded' to follow Dan Cairney as President. As Jim wrote in the January 2012 newsletter: *"Dan will be a hard act to follow. He has been involved with Friends and DJMA since inception in many capacities and, of course, it was Dan's foresight and inspiration that led to the formation of the John Muir Birthplace Trust and the subsequent purchase of the property."*

[This photograph was taken on April 21<sup>st</sup> 2009 with Dan as John Muir and Jim as Teddy Roosevelt. See the next article for the explanation of this!]

Over the years Jim has forged important links with Muir scholars and enthusiasts in the States e.g. Harold Wood of the Sierra Club; Garret Burke [photo right], designer of the Californian Quarter that features Muir; and historians and authors John Simpson and Prof Donald Worcester, to mention but a few. Jim and Dan Cairney masterminded the donation of mint Californian Quarters to every school child in the Dunbar cluster. He has also been involved in the visits of Catherine Soria, the (then) head teacher of Yosemite Junior School to Dunbar and sightseeing tours of Scotland.



Jim and Will Collin have provided a very valuable double act on a Thursday when they work as Birthplace volunteers. Essentially they welcome and introduce visitors to John Muir. Their knowledge of Muir and Dunbar local history means that visitors often leave with far more than they bargained for! Jim's last stint as a volunteer guide is due to be the afternoon of Thursday, 26<sup>th</sup> April so if you're reading this before then please do drop into the Birthplace to wish him all the very best for this next phase of his retirement.

## **A visit to Dunbar in 2009 By President Teddy Roosevelt**

[This article is a tongue-in-cheek contribution by Jim Thompson and was first published in the June 2009 Newsletter<sup>1</sup>. It helps explain why Jim and Dan Cairney appeared as Muir and Roosevelt on several occasions! Ed.]

It is the year 1909 and the day is 21<sup>st</sup> April. I am visiting with my good friend John Muir to wish him a happy 71<sup>st</sup> birthday and I have taken along with me another mutual friend, Mr H G Wells. Mr Wells had with him a huge contraption which he told us was a time machine.

Now John and I are nothing if not adventurers of the first order and nothing would do but that we persuaded Mr Wells to allow us to try out his machine. We decided that we would go one hundred years into the future and by tweaking the latitude and longitude, land in the town of John's birth, Dunbar

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.scribd.com/document/52953797/FoJMB-Newsletter-2009-06>



in Scotland. Wonder of wonders, we arrived just before lunchtime on the Glebe in the little town.

On leaving our time machine, we saw that it had changed shape into a little car to blend into its surroundings. We found a little group of children having a picnic and they told us that they were celebrating the birthday of the great conservationist, John Muir. John and I thought that this was quite a hoot. I told them that the gentleman with me was in fact Mr Muir, but I'm not sure that they believed me.



Now, John had returned to Dunbar and Scotland for a short visit in 1893 and one of the adults with the children, a Mr Will Collin, told us he had just had published a book chronicling that visit. So John and I shared the picnic with the

children and John read excerpts of the book to them. Mr Collin also told me that this was not my first visit to the town, which I found strange as I could not remember doing so.

He then told me that in 2003, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the camping trip that John and I shared in Yosemite Valley, our spirits had been seen in the town, John showing me the sights of his boyhood and in fact a photograph of us had been taken. This photograph seemingly can be seen on something called the internet. All too soon it was time to return to the time machine. And in a twinkling we were back in Mr Muir's house in 1909 with Mr Wells waiting for us.

I am arranging for this little tale that I have just written to be kept safely for 100 years and then sent to Dunbar to confirm that our time travel really did happen.



## Friends' Current Birthplace Exhibition: *William Keith and John Muir: Kindred Souls*

As reported in the last newsletter<sup>2</sup> the latest temporary exhibition in the Birthplace is about the life of artist William Keith and his friendship with John Muir. Entitled '*William Keith and John Muir: Kindred Souls*', the exhibition has been researched and written by Will Collin with design input from Emma Westwater of Source Design and funded by Friends. It opened on Good Friday – several days ahead of schedule - and runs to the end of June or beyond.

The exhibition traces Keith's life from his birth on 21 November 1838 in Oldmeldrum, Aberdeenshire, until he and Muir first met in Yosemite Valley in October 1872. The two instantly became friends bound together by similar interests in, and attitudes towards, nature and of course their Scottishness. The exhibition continues to trace their togetherness until Keith's death on 13 April 1911. As a measure of how close the two Scots were, John Muir was the leading pallbearer at his friend's funeral.



<sup>2</sup> [https://muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk/files/2018/02/FoJMB\\_Newsletter\\_2017\\_Winter.pdf](https://muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk/files/2018/02/FoJMB_Newsletter_2017_Winter.pdf)

Since opening two new exhibits have been added. The first is a folder (black) containing copies of 25 of Keith's works. The first piece is a pen and ink, brush and wash 'Wooded Landscape' he produced in 1865, early in his career when he was in his early thirties. The last piece is an oil on canvas 'Klamath Lake with Pelicans . . .', painted in 1908, three years before his death. The folder also contains a few watercolours, a couple of portraits but mainly the landscapes for which he was justly famous.

This folder also has an essay entitled 'William Keith – California's Poet-Painter' (a title given to Keith by Muir) and poems inspired by Keith and his paintings by three of his contemporaries.

The second (blue) folder starts with articles written by Keith and Muir, describing Keith's first journeys into the Sierra Nevada in 1872 (when he met Muir) and 1875. Other articles analyse Keith's contribution to California's flourishing art scene in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

**Friends' Photo Sharing Evening  
on: Wednesday May 30<sup>th</sup> 2018 at 7pm  
in: John Muir's Birthplace**

A photo sharing evening has been a regular feature of Friends' social events over the years. Last year's was on the theme of John Muir and Geology. This year the theme is inspired by 2018 being the Year of Young People<sup>3</sup>.

To participate please e-mail three photographs that you think capture the essence of YoYP and if there's a Muir connection so much the better. Submitted photographs will be incorporated into a powerpoint slide show and participants will be invited to make a short – several minutes – presentation and explanation of why the photographs have been chosen.

As usual, refreshments and nibbles will be served during the evening.

Please e-mail the photographs to [duncan.smeed@gmail.com](mailto:duncan.smeed@gmail.com) of a sufficient resolution and quality for a powerpoint slideshow and I will collate all submissions into a presentation.

I look forward to welcoming you to the Birthplace for this social event.

Duncan Smeed

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<sup>3</sup> <http://yoyp2018.scot>



# John Muir Trust Celebrates John Muir Award 21<sup>st</sup> Birthday



Over 100 people from across the United Kingdom gathered in Dunbar on 26th February to celebrate the 21st anniversary of the formal launch of the Trust's main engagement initiative, the John Muir Award.



With beach activities and litter picks, tours of John Muir's birthplace, exhibitions and archive displays, the event captured many elements of the evolution of the John Muir Award from a small project to a core part of the Trust's work, from its youthful years to a coming of age.

Having been the venue for the official ceremony in 1997, Dunbar Leisure Centre again hosted the celebration. And with many of the



guests – including former staff and Trustees, early Award recipients, funders and supporters - having had attended the launch 21 years ago, the sports hall resonated to the sounds of reminiscences and reflections.

# Celebrate John Muir Day 2018

[This article is a summary of the news and events that the John Muir Trust is promoting to mark the 180<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Muir's birth on 21<sup>st</sup> April 1838. Ed.]



A series of events and activities, combining exhibitions, education, exploration and conservation will take place across the UK as part of the annual John Muir Day celebrations. From 14 to 22 April, there are plenty of different ways to get involved. For instance: visit a national park; walk/cycle on the John Muir Way; read about John Muir's life

in a graphic novel; visit Muir's birthplace; etc., and share what you do using the hashtag [#JohnMuirDay](#)<sup>4</sup>. The John Muir Day celebrations are an opportunity to mark the birthday of the Scots-born conservation pioneer as well as recognise his legacy and relevance today. On 21 April it's 180 years since his birth in 1838.

There's a handy web page with [10 ways to celebrate](#)<sup>5</sup>, including free book downloads, a survey, a quiz and a prize draw. And for information about John Muir, and ideas on how you, and your family and friends can get involved, visit [Discover John Muir](#)<sup>6</sup>.

“Every year the John Muir Trust helps to co-ordinate John Muir Day celebrations,” commented Rob Bushby, the Trust's John Muir Award Manager. “And each year more people are taking the opportunity to explore and share Muir's life and legacy, stories and adventures - in their studies, work and leisure time. We're delighted that already there's a real buzz about Muir's 180<sup>th</sup> birthday.”

As part of the John Muir Day Celebrations online applicants to become members of John Muir Trust by 22 April 2018 can use the promo code 'CELEBRATE' to receive [a year's membership for half price](#)<sup>7</sup>. That means that for a limited time you can join for £18 as an individual, or £24 as a couple or family.

<sup>4</sup> <https://twitter.com/hashtag/JohnMuirDay?src=hash>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/celebrate-john-muir-day-2018>

<sup>6</sup> <https://discoverjohnmuir.com/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/celebrate>



# Celebrate John Muir Day the John Muir Way

[This article is a summary of some of the news and events that the John Muir Way is promoting to mark John Muir Day. Ed.]



Saturday 21 April marks the fourth anniversary of the opening of the John Muir Way, one of Scotland's Great Trails that stretches 134 miles across central Scotland. Running between Dunbar to Helensburgh.

A host of activities<sup>8</sup> have also been arranged across Scotland to mark John Muir Day including a 'Paddle Pickup' on the John Muir Way. This water based litter pick up on the Union Canal in Edinburgh will be held on Friday 20 April. Young people can apply to take part through the Young Scot Active Rewards programme<sup>9</sup> that is encouraging young people to be more active more often in the outdoors during the 2018 Year of Young People. As part of Young Scot's partnership with Historic Environment Scotland, cardholders can also celebrate with £1 entry to many of the historic sites along the John Muir Way including; Tantallon Castle, Dirleton Castle, Seton Collegiate Church, Blackness Castle and Linlithgow Palace.

The full list of events<sup>10</sup> that can be enjoyed as part of a walk or cycle along the John Muir Way also includes art exhibitions and talks, education tours, 2 for 1 offers at cafes, bike and Segway hire deals.

Keith Geddes, Chair of the Central Scotland Green Network Trust, comments: "We are proud that the John Muir Way is helping to interest more people in the life and legacy of John Muir. It is also encouraging to see his work inspiring people – both young and old - to think about conservation and how they can make their own individual or collective contribution to improving the environment while getting closer to nature. There's a great line-up of activities for all the family and we hope everyone enjoys celebrating the special day."

For further information about the events and the John Muir Way, please visit [www.johnmuirway.org/getinvolved](http://www.johnmuirway.org/getinvolved) – a dedicated website on the 134 mile route with key information to help people plan their trip.

<sup>8</sup> <http://johnmuirway.org/news/celebrate-john-muir-day-john-muir-way>

<sup>9</sup> <https://rewards.youngscot.org/rewards/1520-apply-join-in-the-paddle-pick-up-active>

<sup>10</sup> <https://discoverjohnmuir.com/muir-events/>

# Tern Fence - John Muir County Park

[The following article has been contributed by Laura Douglas, Countryside Ranger. Ed]



An annual event in the Ranger Service calendar<sup>11</sup> is the erection of the tern fence at the tip of Spike Island at John Muir Country Park. This has been happening for over 25 years now and the idea behind it is to protect this area to allow terns and other waders to nest without disturbance.

The fence itself is a simple design of plastic pipes and string tied on with a clove hitch meeting permanent telegraph poles in the sand. Dunbar Conservation Volunteers, led by East Lothian Ranger Service, quickly got the fence out in less than three hours at the start of April 2018, and will have the task of bringing it back in at the end of the summer! We ask that visitors adhere to the notices and follow the short diversion, whilst also keeping any dogs on a lead when close to the fence.



In years gone by there used to be hundreds of terns nesting on the East Lothian coast, which is why East Lothian Ranger Service was given an arctic tern as its logo in its creation in 1978. However, with an increase in population and visitors, the increased pressure on our coast means numbers have dropped dramatically to only a handful of pairs, so it is the least we can do to help them out. If you are interested in volunteering with the Ranger Service then please e-mail Laura or Tara at [dcv@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:dcv@eastlothian.gov.uk) or visit its facebook page<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/rangerservice>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/East-Lothian-Countryside-Ranger-Service-139367542929212/>

## John Muir's Birthplace – News Online Presence

As reported in previous newsletters John Muir's Birthplace staff are increasingly turning to social media and other online opportunities to promote exhibitions and events. The new version of the website<sup>13</sup> for the John Muir Birthplace Trust has undoubtedly improved the online presence of John Muir's Birthplace. If you would like to keep in touch through social media please follow John Muir's Birthplace on Facebook<sup>14</sup> or @JM\_Birthplace on Twitter<sup>15</sup> using #JohnMuirDunbar #EastLothian hashtags. Feedback via social media is always appreciated.

In addition to these direct means to maintain online contact with (potential) visitors other outlets, such as Tripadvisor, provide a valuable resource. Since the last newsletter several new Tripadvisor reviews for John Muir's Birthplace<sup>16</sup> has been submitted and include:

*5/5 Well worth visiting: I'd vaguely heard of John Muir and as we were walking part of the John Muir Way over a very wet Easter we decided to visit the museum. It was excellent and ticked all the boxes - enjoyable, interesting and educational. The staff and trustees are to be congratulated*

*4/5 A Great wee Musueum: Well we visited this place and will certainly visit it again in the Summer - why; because its informative, friendly and is great for the children. To be honest I am not the sort of guy to be interested in John Muir but as I have small children and was in the area: I discovered how wonderful a small museum could actually be. What a lovely place and somewhere I can recommend to tired parents looking for somewhere to go with their children as well as for those interested in learning more about the man and the area in general. Cant wait to visit the place again in a few months!!!*

*4/5 Interesting and great stop: My husband is a huge John Muir fan, so needless to say, this was a must-see during our travels to Scotland and he wasn't disappointed. The staff was friendly, welcoming, and knowledgeable. Our children enjoyed it as well. If you are near, I definitely would recommend stopping.*

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.jmbt.org.uk>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/JMBirthplace>

<sup>15</sup> [https://twitter.com/JM\\_Birthplace](https://twitter.com/JM_Birthplace)

<sup>16</sup> <http://tinyurl.com/yc28xfv3>



## **Weekend Family Fun**

### **Happy Birthday John Muir: Friday, April 20 - Sunday, April 22**

Celebrate John's 180th Birthday by making your very own John Muir Beard! Don't forget to take a selfie and share it with us on our facebook page! £1 each Join us at 11am and 2.30pm on Saturday for some favourite John Muir stories!

### **Be a Deer: Friday, April 27 - Sunday, April 29**

Drop in anytime to make your own stag antlers to take home, and find out more about these magnificent beasts while you are here. Join us at 11am and 2.30pm on Saturday for some deer stories! £1 each

Follow us on Facebook at East Lothian Council Museums Service or John Muir's Birthplace<sup>17</sup> to find out more.

## **Membership News 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>18</sup> and, for local events, on the Dunbar Events Facebook page<sup>19</sup>. 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](mailto:info@muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk)**

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

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.jmbt.org.uk/whats-on/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/fojmb/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/497808383660101/>