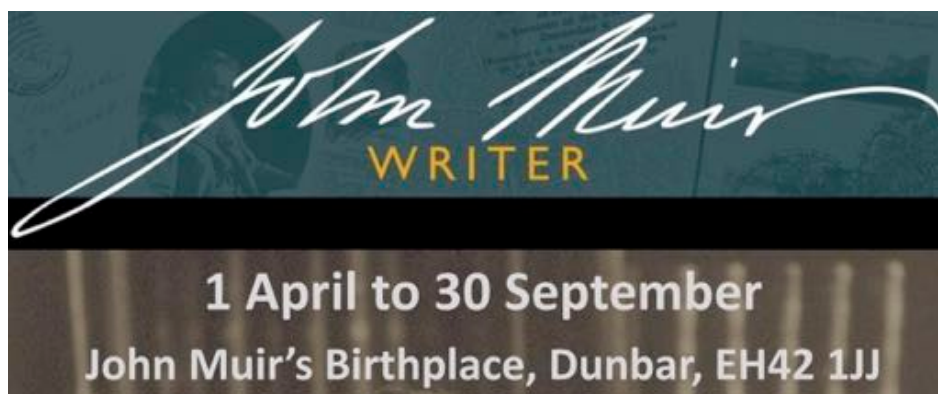




Newsletter No. 44, Spring 2019

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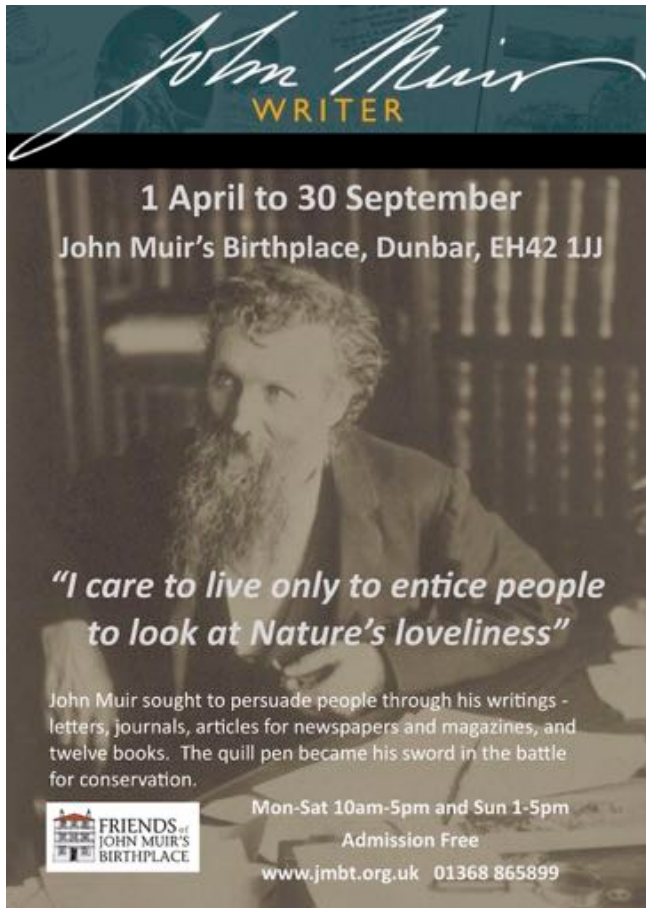




FRIENDS of
JOHN MUIR'S
BIRTHPLACE

Current Birthplace Exhibition: *John Muir, Writer*

April 1st – September 30th, 2019



In 2014 Dunbar-born John Muir, botanist, geologist, explorer, mountaineer and conservationist, became the 38th Scot to be commemorated in Writers' Court in Edinburgh. His flagstone carries the words: *"I care to live only to entice people to look at Nature's loveliness."* Muir was convinced that only then would folk protect the environment.

So, he sought to persuade them through his writings - letters, journals, articles for newspapers and magazines, and twelve books. The quill pen became his sword in the battle for conservation. The exhibition, *John Muir, Writer*, tells the story of how it came about.

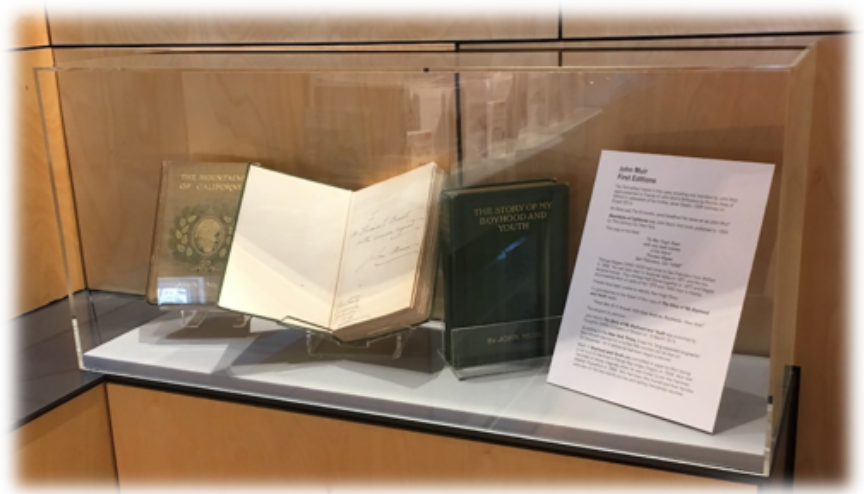
The exhibition will be on display until September 30th.



John Muir First Editions On Permanent Display

Three ‘first edition’ books, including one inscribed by John Muir, were presented to Friends of John Muir’s Birthplace by Ronnie Skea of Gifford in celebration of his mother Janet Skea’s 100th birthday on 8 April 2014.

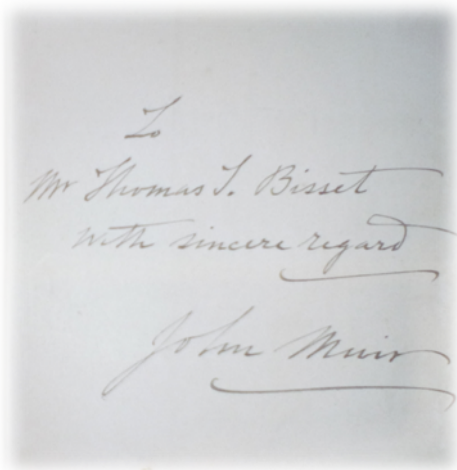
Throughout 2018 these books were on display in the case in the temporary exhibition space on the ground floor of the Birthplace. To do justice to this donation a grant application was made by ELC Museums Service to Museums Galleries Scotland for partial (75%) funding of the ‘John Muir, Writer’ project. The remaining 25% was the contribution of the exhibition by FoJMB. Some of the grant went towards the purchase and installation of a case for the permanent display of these three first edition books by John Muir, including one with his signature. This photo shows this new case now installed on the top floor of the Birthplace. The caption for the exhibit includes this dedication by Mr Skea: “*For 8 months Janet breathed the same air as John Muir.*”



The Winter 2017 Newsletter¹ contains more details of the donation, including the following information: One book is a copy of Muir’s *Mountains of California*, published by Century in 1894. Inscribed on its flyleaf is “*To Rev Hugh Ross with very best wishes from his friend Thomas Magee, San Francisco, Oct 14/96*”. Magee was a climbing friend of Muir and had accompanied him on parts of his first two visits to Alaska.

A second is a copy of *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth*, published by Houghton Mifflin in 1913, containing a card which reads “*From Mrs W H Averell, 325 East Avenue, Rochester, New York*”. The recipient is unknown. Mrs Mary Blossom Averell was the sister-in-law of E H Harriman who organized and financed the Harriman Expedition to Alaska in 1899 on which Muir and Mrs Averell first met. They remained friends until Muir’s death.

¹ https://muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk/files/2018/02/FoJMB_Newsletter_2017_Winter.pdf



The third, another copy of *'Boyhood and Youth'*, is especially interesting as Muir's inscription on it reads "To Mr Thomas T Bisset, with sincere regard, John Muir, Martinez, California, January 1914". Bisset was a Dunbar photographer who had sent Muir a parcel of his photographs and a copy of his letter to the author explains the circumstances. Muir and Bisset kept up a sporadic exchange of letters until the end of August 1914.

Celebration of John Muir's Birthday; the John Muir, Writer Exhibition; and the Permanent Display of the John Muir First Editions

In addition to being Easter Sunday, 21st April is the anniversary of John Muir's birthday in 1838 so at 2:30pm Friends of John Muir's Birthplace will celebrate this with an official opening of our new exhibition John Muir, Writer and the unveiling of the new permanent display. The celebrations will include refreshments and cake although probably not quite as fancy as the cake served at an anniversary of Dunbar's John Muir Association – our original name – some time ago!



John Muir Way Concordat Signing in Dunbar



At 2pm on April 21st John Muir's Birthplace will also host the signing of a Concordat agreement between the John Muir Way Partnership Group and the John Muir Birthplace Charitable Trust. In addition to celebrating Muir's birthday, this event marks the 5th anniversary of the official opening of the John Muir Way in 2014. The signatories are Duncan Smeed, Chair of JMBCT and Keith Geddes from the Central Scotland Green Network Trust (CSGNT) in his capacity as Chair of JMWPG.

Since the creation of the John Muir Way, Keith has been meeting council leaders and chief executives to sign agreements that will benefit the outstanding coast to coast walking and cycling route that stretches 134 miles between Helensburgh and Dunbar. The signing of the Concordat in Dunbar recognises the role that the John Muir Birthplace Charitable Trust has in terms of promoting the life and legacy of the man that the route commemorates.

At previous signings Keith has commented: *“The John Muir Way takes in the diverse landscapes and rich heritage of central Scotland and we are committed to working with councils along the route to ensure that it is easily accessible and attractive to local people, businesses and visitors, providing opportunities for all to increase the understanding of John Muir’s legacy and philosophy through getting closer to nature.”*

By encouraging people to get out and about on the route, their wellbeing, health and quality of life is improved due to the benefits of spending time outdoors in the fresh air. Suitable for all ages and levels of experience, the John Muir Way can be enjoyed in short sections, day trips or as a complete coast to coast challenge. The route takes in many great places across the central Scotland including: the Union Canal and Falkirk Wheel, the Antonine Wall, the Forth bridges, Holyrood Park and the John Muir Birthplace museum. The path has been recognised as one of Scotland’s Great Trails showcasing some of the country’s most iconic landmarks and coastlines. The John Muir Way also has an important role to play in providing opportunities to drive economic development and enhancement for businesses and communities along the route.

Dunbar Community Woodland Group: Celebrating John Muir’s Birthday

Another of the Muir-related events taking place on April 21st is a celebration by Dunbar Community Woodland Group that takes place from 1pm to 4pm at the Gathering Area, corner of Kellie and Middlemass Roads (EH42 1GJ). The celebrations include:

- An Easter Egg Hunt
- A fresco lunch
- John Muir portrait – on a boiled egg! – competition

DUNBAR COMMUNITY WOODLAND GROUP
EASTER SUNDAY 2019 is **John Muir's Birthday!**
21st April 2019, 1-4pm
In the Gathering Area, corner of Kellie and Middlemass Roads.

EASTER EGG HUNT
For the wee ones

Have your lunch al fresco!
At our **Burger/Fried Egg roll Stall**
All funds raised for DCWG

Prizes!.. Prizes!.. Prizes!..
For
The best **PAINTED** or **drawn**
John Muir Face
On a boiled egg....
Age categories –
Under 8
8 - 10,
11 - 13,
14 – adult...

DCWG Members' Annual General Meeting is on Wednesday, **17th April, 7.30** in the **Royal Mac Hotel**.
Not a member yet? Come along & join on the night! **ONLY £5 !!!**

John Muir Day Celebrations

20-28 April 2019

[This article is an updated version of the one in the Winter 2018 newsletter². Ed.]

“It is not enough for people to be in sympathy with the plight of the natural world, they must become ‘active conservationists’, as campaigners, as practical project workers, as scientists, as artists, as writers.” *John Muir*



John Muir Day Celebrations offer an annual opportunity to mark John Muir’s birthday, 21st April 1838. Events, resources and activities are set up and promoted that help connect people with Muir’s legacy and relevance today. It’s an opportunity to share and celebrate how people are engaging with Muir’s ethos, stories and adventures in their studies, work and leisure time.

The John Muir Trust hosts details of relevant activity and resources on the Discover John Muir website³. Mentioned in the list is, of course, the Friends’ new exhibition *John Muir, Writer*⁴ (see earlier article) and also the **Easter Holiday Fun! – Make Your Own Graphic Novel**⁵ event (until Mon 22nd April 2019) that celebrates the new exhibition: *John Muir, Writer*, and where children and families of all ages are invited to drop in and draw their own graphic novel telling the story of John Muir and Stickeen’s adventures in Alaska! This free activity is available throughout the opening times, and participants are encouraged to share their work on the John Muir’s Birthplace Facebook page⁶ and the @JM_Birthplace twitter feed⁷.

The John Muir Trust has also announced **Ten 10 ways to celebrate John Muir Day**⁸ that includes details of a half price membership offer for new members and, at #2 on the list, encouragement to visit John Muir’s Birthplace (and the new exhibition)! The hashtag #JohnMuirDay can be used to share what you get up to and to discover relevant resources/news on social media.

² https://muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk/files/2019/02/FoJMB_Newsletter_2018_Winter.pdf

³ <https://discoverjohnmuir.com/muir-events/>

⁴ <https://www.jmbt.org.uk/2019/03/27/new-exhibition-john-muir-writer/>

⁵ <https://www.jmbt.org.uk/event/easter-holiday-fun-make-youre-own-graphic-novel/>

⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/JMBirthplace/>

⁷ https://twitter.com/JM_Birthplace

⁸ <https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/celebrate-john-muir-day-2019>

John Muir's Birthplace – News

Online Presence

John Muir's Birthplace staff often use social media and other online opportunities to promote exhibitions and events. The website⁹ for the John Muir Birthplace Trust is the cornerstone of the online presence of John Muir's Birthplace. If you would also like to keep in touch through social media please follow John Muir's Birthplace on Facebook¹⁰ or @JM_Birthplace on Twitter¹¹ 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 and, as of April 2019, the 174 Tripadvisor reviews for John Muir's Birthplace¹² yield an average score of over 4.5 out of 5. This means that a Certificate of Excellence has been achieved for the fourth year in a row.



FREE Activities with EAST LOTHIAN COUNCIL MUSEUMS

All our museums have FREE ADMISSION and lots of drop-in crafts and activities. For details please see www.eastlothian.gov.uk/museums and/or follow us on Facebook at East Lothian Council Museums Service¹³.

Fun & Crafty Weekend Drop-in Activities in April

From Friday lunchtime to Sunday afternoon and during school holidays, please join us in John Muir's Birthplace for fun drop-in crafts and activities!

Easter Holiday Fun! – Make Your Own Graphic Novel¹⁴: Monday, April 1, 2019 - Monday, April 22, 2019.

Exhibition for the Summer Season

John Muir, Writer¹⁵: Monday, April 1, 2019 - Monday, September 30, 2019.

⁹ <https://www.jmbt.org.uk>

¹⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/JMBirthplace>

¹¹ https://twitter.com/JM_Birthplace

¹² <https://tinyurl.com/yc28xfv3>

¹³ <https://www.facebook.com/EastLothianCouncilMuseumsService/>

¹⁴ <https://www.jmbt.org.uk/event/easter-holiday-fun-make-youre-own-graphic-novel/>

¹⁵ <https://www.jmbt.org.uk/event/john-muir-writer/>

Visitor Book Comments

In addition to Tripadvisor online comments, many more visitors have given feedback in the Visitor Books. Here is a small sample of comments written in the current book over the past couple of months:

- *Wonderful info and great story!! Thanks!*
- *Absolutely amazing. Thank you all so much.*
- *Excellent – informative & inspiring.*
- *Inspiring & beautiful.*
- *Very interesting/inspiring on many levels. I'll check out his books.*
- *Excellent, very inspiring.*
- *Very interesting, a great museum.*
- *Fabulous display and building!*
- *A great insight into John's wonderful legacy.*
- *A lovely & informative place – discovered a new hero!*
- *What a lovely inspiring museum! Many thanks!*
- *Wonderful display. I learnt such a lot.*
- *Great to visit the birthplace of my hero.*
- *Fantastic museum linking Scotland & the U.S.*
- *Lovely museum and lots to learn and inspire us!*

As there are far too many comments to include in the above list, here is a word cloud generated from the text of the dozens of comments of the past two months. It is obvious from this that visitors are inspired by their experience.



JMB Retains 5-Star VisitScotland Status

Once again, staff at JMB were delighted to receive their 5-star award from the VisitScotland Inspector who visited at the beginning of March. As in the previous inspection, the Inspector scored the staff very highly and commented on the very warm welcome received by visitors. The improved signage throughout the building also had a positive impact on the scoring. These factors, along with improvements in the majority of the other factors considered, resulted in a final score which sits comfortably in the range that defines this highest level of award.



Stop Press: Robert Burcher's Visit to Dunbar

In the second week of March an enquiry was made via the contact web form on the jmbt.org.uk website. The enquirer was a Robert Burcher, a Muir enthusiast from Meaford, Canada, who has been researching Muir's time in Canada - including the discovery of the Calypso orchid. Robert has written a book based on his research and it should be published this summer. He is also planning to come to Dunbar to visit his birthplace in September. This will be his second visit - the first was in 2001. In his enquiry Robert asked if there would be interest in a public presentation about the "Canadian John Muir".

This enquiry was passed on to Friends of John Muir's Birthplace due to our liaison with Muir enthusiasts from Meaford in the past. In subsequent e-mail exchanges we have arranged that, during his visit to Dunbar, Robert will give that presentation. Further details of this will be given in a future newsletter.

The reason for the Stop Press moniker is that just a few hours before this



newsletter was due to be published Robert sent an e-mail expressing best wishes for our celebrations of John Muir's birthday. He also wrote *"I too will be celebrating the day by hiking into his cabin site in Trout Hollow near Meaford Canada. I thought I would send along a few photos to show you that we too honour the man... The last photo of me with the Muir plaque is the first*

indication for me that there was a Dunbar in this world! I was in the process of having the plaque rehabilitated and it now sits proudly in a local Conservation Area."

The text of the plaque reads:

JOHN MUIR 1838 – 1914

Born in Dunbar, Scotland, this famous naturalist, whose books and articles played a significant role in the early development of the United States National Park Service, emigrated with his family to Wisconsin in 1849. Intensely interested in botany and geology, Muir set out in 1864 on a walking tour of Canada West during which he travelled much of what is known in Ontario today as the “Bruce Trail”. His brother Daniel, employed since the previous year at the rake factory of William Trout and Charles Jay, near Meaford, induced him to take employment there also. In 1866 Muir returned to the United States, where in later years he became a leading champion of conservation.

Muir News:

University of the Pacific celebrates Muir-Hanna family's gift of John Muir Papers

[Michael Wurtz, the head of the Holt-Atherton Special Collections at University of the Pacific, has been very supportive of Friends and visited Dunbar in May 2017 and gave a talk to members entitled *The Artistic Expressions of John Muir* [16]. We are delighted to share this great news about the donation of the John Muir Papers to UoP. Ed.]

On April 13th, 2019, the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California, celebrated¹⁷ receiving official ownership of the largest collection of letters, journals and other materials written or owned by famed naturalist, author and environmental philosopher John Muir.

"This is simply a wonderful collection, and we are so very grateful to the Muir-Hanna family for their generous gift," said Pacific President Pamela A. Eibeck. *"This celebration is to show our deep appreciation of the family's donation and to share with the community this extraordinary news."*

The university has curated the collection since 1970, when John Muir descendants, several of whom are Pacific alumni, brought the collection to the Stockton campus. Since then, the collection in the university's Holt-Atherton Special Collections and Archives has grown to include 7,000 correspondences, 100 journals and notebooks, 400 drawings, thousands of photographs, and hundreds of his manuscripts for books and articles. Much of the materials are made available online, and the public is welcome to help transcribe his writings.

¹⁶ https://muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk/files/2017/09/FoJMB_Newsletter_2017_Summer.pdf

¹⁷ <https://www.pacific.edu/john-muir.html>

Mike Wurtz has been interviewed about the donation of the John Muir Papers and this is now available as an online video.¹⁸ Mike has also written a short article¹⁹ about John Muir's Stockton Legacy and he introduces this with these inspiring words: "The most recognized quote of famed naturalist John Muir (1838-1914) is, *"The mountains are calling and I must go and I will work on while I can, studying incessantly."* It's OK if the second half of the quote isn't familiar - it's frequently left off T-shirts and souvenir items. When we go to the mountains, we don't want to "work" or "study," right? But this is what the most influential conservationist of our time meant and did throughout his life, and we should take it as a call to action to be much more aware of - and concerned for - the environment around us."



FRIENDS of
JOHN MUIR'S
BIRTHPLACE

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 version²⁰ 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 page²¹ and, for local events, on the Dunbar Events Facebook page²². The revamped John Muir's Birthplace website 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.

¹⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fBysYJfCGBs>

¹⁹ <https://www.pacific.edu/john-muir's-stockton-legacy.html>

²⁰ <https://muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk/newsletters/current/>

²¹ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/fojmb/>

²² <https://www.facebook.com/groups/497808383660101/>

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.~~

Early Notice of Extraordinary General Meeting

There has been discussion at several, recent, Friends' Council Meetings about the question of membership dues and whether or not these should be waived as the number of members has been in steady decline. The income generated by membership dues is now a relatively minor proportion of our income in comparison to funds raised from the sales of Wee Books, donations, etc., so the Council has considered various options to mitigate the amount of effort, and cost, incurred in maintaining membership accounts and the production of paper copies of the newsletter. One possible option being considered is to do away with membership fees and, instead, to concentrate on building up the numbers of supporters (Friends) and to then approach them when a specific project – such as an exhibition – needs donations to help fund it.

Given the importance of this issue and the potential departure from existing practice the Council is likely to announce an EGM to take place at a date that is close to the 25th anniversary of Friends of John Muir's Birthplace (Dunbar's John Muir Association) – towards the end of July or beginning of August.

On behalf of the Council I would like to encourage everyone to reflect on what our charity has achieved in the past 25 years and how best to meet future challenges. More details about an EGM will be announced in the next newsletter – a special 25th anniversary edition.

Duncan Smeed, FoJMB Convener

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