



DUNBAR'S JOHN MUIR ASSOCIATION – NEWSLETTER No. 21

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council members, so please don't be shy and come forward.

Our new booklet, John Muir's Clifftop Trail is selling well at £2.50. It seems to have engendered fresh interest in our first venture, John Muir's Dunbar. Both are available at various outlets in Dunbar or by post from John Muir Birthplace, 126 High Street, Dunbar EH42 1JJ (although closed, we have arranged redirection of mail) at additional p&p 50p (UK), £1 (ex UK) per booklet We have made contact with a new group, Wisconsin Friends of John Muir and maintaining contact with Haines, Alaska and Meaford, Canada as well as Martinez and Yosemite.

See you at the AGM

Jim Thompson

The following two items were found in the columns of the John Muir Global Network web pages. This is a marvellous source of information on John Muir and with links to the various organisations and groups associated with his name, vision and message. There were so many sides to John Muir and these give another insight into the character of the man.

An Ingenious Whittler

The first published account about John Muir (*from the Wisconsin State Journal, 23rd September, 1860*)

While at the fairground this morning we saw some very ingenious specimens of mechanism, in the form of clocks, made by Mr. JOHN MUIR, of Buffalo, Marquette County. They were without cases, and were whittled out of pine wood. The wheels moved

Dear Friends,

It's that time again. Time to renew membership for those who do not pay by standing order and time to come along to the AGM. Now that the controversy over the Birthplace has been resolved – and for those concerned it was traumatic – we can start to plan activities that our members and their families can participate in. Joan Baillie who has served the council well over the past four years is standing down We are grateful to Joan for her contribution and she has said she will continue to support our activities. However, we are now looking for a new

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Included with this newsletter is a notice calling the annual general meeting which will be held on Thursday 26th September, 2002 at 7.30pm in the staff room at Dunbar Grammar School.

All members are urged to attend.

At the conclusion of the meeting, tea/coffee will be served and then there will be a talk and slideshow on Old Dunbar by Mr Tom Anderson

Non-members are welcomed

with beautiful evenness. One registered not only hours but minutes, seconds, and days of the month. The other was in the shape of a scythe, the wheels being arranged along the part representing the blade. It was hung in a dwarf burr oak very tastefully ornamented with moss about its roots. We will venture to predict that few articles will attract as much attention as these products of Mr. Muir's ingenuity.

Muir's Mechanical Marvels

(*source Outlook, November 28th, 1903.*
Reprinted from The John Muir Newsletter,
V4, No.3 Summer 1994)

To the Editor of the *OUTLOOK!*

The very appreciative article by Ray Stannard Baker, in your June 6 number, on the great California naturalist, John Muir, reminds me so vividly of my own short acquaintance with the unique character that I am tempted to share with your readers the reminiscence. We were fellow students at the University of Wisconsin in the spring of 1861, and our rooms in the old North Dormitory were in neighborly proximity. Among the furnishings of his room were the two wooden clocks to which Mr. Baker alludes. The one which had been shown at the State Fair I had seen at that exhibition the previous fall. It was a mere oblong wooden rack filled with wheels at one end of which a pendulum swung, and almost the whole of it had been fashioned with no other tool than a jackknife. It would record the seconds minutes, hours, day of the week and day of the month; and it had an apparatus attached by a light cord to a delicate set of levers at the foot of his bed. The frame of the bed was hung on trunnions; and, at a desired hour the clock would release a catch and the sleeper be tilted to nearly a standing posture. The other clock, also fashioned with no other tools than a jackknife and a hammer, was a wonderful revelation of rustic ingenuity and poetic instinct. It was wholly emblematic of old Father Time, being a combination of scythes, wheels and arrows. A rough bough of burr oak was set upon a base incrustated with moss. In one of the branches hung a miniature scythe with a regularly fashioned snathe and

handles. At the place of union were attached two wooden scythes, swelling slightly from each other, but united at the points. Filling the space between the scythes from heels to points was a succession of wooden cog-wheels and small wooden dials. Depending from the scythe points was a wooden pendulum in the shape of an arrow, hanging point down. At its lower end forming the ball of the pendulum, was a cluster of six copper arrows, crossed. These had been hammered out of the large copper cents in use at that day. To the upper end of the arrow pendulum was attached two tin copper scythes (also formed out of coins) which, as the pendulum swung, would move as in mowing, the points of the scythes at each swing catching a cog in the little wheel placed there, thus setting in motion the whole machinery. In addition to the records of the larger clock, this one told also the month and the year, and could be attached to the bed alarm.

Muir told us that, at one boarding place, he had connected with the clock a device that would throw the cap off a fluid lamp, strike a match, and light the lamp at the same moment that the bed fell so that he need not rise in the dark. One day he came in and announced to my roommates and myself that he had fixed his alarm so that it would waken him on pleasant, sunshiny mornings, but would allow him to sleep if it should be rainy or cloudy. Of course we were eager to see the phenomenon, and followed him to his room for the disclosure. He had detached the little cord from the clock, and carried it through staples in the floor and up over the sill of the window, which faced the east. Where it crossed the stone sill outside it was replaced by a thread, under which at a convenient spot, he had rubbed powdered charcoal. Above this he had fixed a hand magnifier, or sun glass at such an angle and focus that when the sun rose it would burn the thread in two, and thus trip his bed and awaken him!. If the morning were cloudy no such event would occur, and he could finish his morning nap in peace. Financial stringency and then war service prevented my return to the University, and I never say my young Scotch classmate after that term closed. During the years which have elapsed the query often crossed my mind,

"what ever became of John Muir?" I expected to hear of him as a great inventor or mechanical expert and although the similarity in name of the Western scientist who discovered the Muir Glacier attracted my attention, I never really suspected the identity until I ran across a biographical hint in a magazine article, three years ago, which I now find absolutely confirmed in Mr. Baker's article.

HARVEY REID
Maquoketa, Iowa.

Writers' Museum

Most of you will be aware of The Writers' Museum situated in Lady Stair's Close in The Lawnmarket, Edinburgh. The museum houses a permanent exhibition on Burns, Scott and Stevenson and from time to time temporary exhibitions on selected Scottish writers. I am delighted to inform you that there will be a John Muir exhibition running from April to September, 2003. That this is happening is due to the hard work of Alison McGatchy of the John Muir Trust (and a DJMA council member), Katie Jackson also from the John Muir Trust and our treasurer Will Collin. Will is compiling a list of Muir quotations from which a selection will be made to adorn the walls.

We have found that a paving stone with John Muir's name inscribed on it can be placed in Lady Stair's Close as a permanent reminder of the exhibition. The estimated cost is we believe around £750+ being £200 for the stone and £15 per character. We would expect to have the name and dates and a quotation. We will be raising a subscription list nearer to the date of the exhibition.

You may be interested to know that one of our own members, Don Ledingham, head teacher at the Grammar School and a renowned poet had some of his work exhibited in the museum quite recently.

The new Scottish Parliament Building is due to open sometime in 2003 (we hope). Our local MSP John Home Robertson is chairing a committee which will select various Scottish quotations and sayings to adorn the walls. It is

our intention to submit Muir Quotations for consideration.

Dunbar Community Woodland Group

In Newsletter 20 some information was given on this very worthwhile group.

They have given us an update on their activities. Particularly pleasing is the involvement of young people from the local school.

Dunbar Community Woodland Group was founded two years ago with the aim of taking on the management of Lochend Wood as a community-woodland for the benefit of everyone in Dunbar. We hope to manage these woods so as to maximise their potential for education and recreation and their value for wildlife.

We had hoped that, by now, Lochend Wood would have been transferred into community ownership and we could have started to implement a proper long-term management plan and to develop a programme of events and activities. However, we are now in negotiation with the current owners, Hallhill Developments Ltd., to agree the terms on which we can take responsibility for the woodland and they have at last started carrying out some of the work which they are obliged to do under the terms of their planning consent for the new housing and which must be completed before ownership can be transferred. The felling of dangerous trees (which we marked last Autumn) is now almost complete. Some of the usable timber has been removed but a large amount has been left where it is, to decay and provide wildlife habitat. The main path which runs north-south through the woodland on the old driveway to, the long since disappeared, Lochend House has been surfaced with whindust and a network of secondary paths allowing circular walks and providing access to various points in the new housing is now nearing completion. They are also in the process of creating an informal play area in a clearing in the trees, across Kellie Road from the old ruin.

We are in the process of finalising a Woodland Management Plan which draws on the results of the community consultation

process which took place last March. The woodland was originally planted in the late 18th Century but most of the present trees date from the period immediately following the Second World War. With no management in recent years, large parts of the woodland are very dense and very dominated by Sycamore. With some judicious thinning, we hope to slowly diversify the age and species structure, creating more variety, enhancing the biodiversity and encouraging more wildlife. The vast majority of those who took part in the consultation would like the woodland to be as wild and natural as possible and one of the challenges will be how to achieve this whilst also enabling an increasing number of people to use and enjoy them.

In June, a group of members and friends made a start on clearing out the old lily-pond in the south of the woodland, near the A1. A considerable amount of debris was removed, including a television, a wheelbarrow numerous pallets and assorted builders rubbish.

We are delighted that the Biology Dept. at the Grammar School have agreed to carry out an annual species audit of the pond, as part of their Advanced Higher course and we hope that some sensitive management will see an annual increase in its wildlife value. The Biology Dept. will also be making use of other parts of the woodland for survey work as part of the Standard Grade course. It is great that the Grammar School is already getting involved like this; it is part of what the 'community-woodland' idea is all about. A special thanks must also go to Richard Woof (the Head of Biology) for organising a litter pick in the woods as part of the S1-3 Activity Week in May. A huge number of black bags were filled and a couple of old fridges were removed, along with a quantity of old carpet, by fifty or so students over three mornings. They showed remarkable enthusiasm for the task. Sadly a considerable amount of rubbish, mainly from the surrounding building sites, is continuing to accumulate in certain parts of the wood.

We are hopeful that ownership will be transferred before the end of this year. If you would like to get involved or would just like to show your support then please do join the

group. Membership of Dunbar Community Woodland Group costs just £2 per year (£4 for a household). For more information, visit our website at www.dcwg.org.uk or email: convenor@dcwg.org.uk, or 'phone Philip Revell on 01368-863211.

(for those DJMA members living in or near Dunbar, a membership application form is attached)

Yearning For The Land

In newsletter 18 we included an excerpt from this book by Professor John Simpson telling of the Muirs' journey from Dunbar to the U.S.A.

The book has now been published by Pantheon Books, (Amazon have it price £15.64).

An editorial review in The Publisher's Weekly comments:- The book tells of John Muir's childhood immigration to the U.S. and coming of age on his father's Wisconsin farm providing for Professor Simpson's investigation of what land means to us now. Drawn by a sense that he is missing a critical link to where he lives, a suburb in Ohio, Professor Simpson reverses Muir's journey, visiting first the marsh that gave the 19th-century conservationist much of his early pleasure and then Muir's homeland in Scotland. Along the way he visits the people who currently live on the land that was the Muir farm, members of the displaced Ho-Chunk tribe and Scottish tenants and landlords whose lives echo the land use that shaped their culture. In Scotland, he finds his sense of home, an affinity to the land and culture that he soon fears he cannot engender in his own Ohio. Throughout, Muir acts as a touchstone for him, reflecting on trails of Muir's thought from time to time and finding avid lovers of Muir's legacy at each landing. The narrative is best when he relates history or allows the many intriguing people he interviews to tell their own story. Professor Simpson articulates keen insights into the tenuous ties we have to the places we live and the pleasure of giving in to a sense of belonging.

Professor Donald Worster author of *The Wealth of Nature* says of the book:- A fresh

and unusual book—part biography of John Muir, part personal travels, part meditation on what it means to belong to a place. Exceptionally readable and thought-provoking.”

T. M. Devine, author of *A Scottish Nation*—“An eloquent and evocative insight into the power of landscape and place in the human experience. Simpson skillfully links the story of people and the land in Scotland and the U.S.A. by following the journey of John Muir, the father of the modern conservation movement, from the Old World to the New. A fascinating read.”

John Muir Birthplace

A copy of the project update was sent to every member (if you didn't receive one or want additional copies, let us know).

It is a legal requirement that an archaeological investigation is made at the site and this has now been done

Work to develop the Birthplace into an Interpretation Centre moves forward albeit more slowly than hoped. June saw the appointed archaeologists, Headland, begin their survey work on site both within the house and in the rear courtyard. This was required as part of the Planning Consent and is a fairly usual condition of any development in Dunbar's historic centre. This involved removing all of the modern pine and plasterboard linings on the inside face of the external walls to record their construction and locate any detail of historic interest. It is fair to say that nothing of significance was found. Moreover, the existing walls were found to have been extensively altered with the brick infill panels and structural steel stanchions and joists inserted to carry new walls and floors. Exposed stone rubble walls were also found to be in poor condition. It is unlikely, as had been hoped, that it will be possible to leave areas of the existing 'original' walls exposed in the new centre. Moreover, more extensive work will be required that originally envisaged, in order to repair the existing fabric of the building. Headland completed the standing building survey and recorded all walls in drawn and written format.

Three trial excavation pits were dug below the ground floor within the house to establish whether there might be anything of archaeological interest likely to be affected by the development work. Nothing was found. Three trial trenches were also dug in the rear courtyard, where it is intended to construct the Education room. Here the findings were more interesting. A number of archaeological features were uncovered. These included a cobbled surface and the remains of a substantial stone wall and a ditch which contained some small sherds of 12C to 15 C medieval pottery. A quantity of animal bone and marrow was also present. A ditch is thought to be a medieval burgage plot boundary. The exact date of the wall is not known but it is thought that the site may have been a close and the cobbles represent the surface of the close. Alternatively it may have been the yard behind the house.

The archaeological features uncovered are significant and well preserved. It is now intended that before any ground breaking works, a full excavation is carried out and the results analysed and published.

Meanwhile, the interpretation plans are progressing in parallel. In June, David Campbell and Corrie Cheyne met with a number of local people who will contribute to the development of the exhibition. The meeting was held at the grammar school and involved local historians and archivists, DJMA members among others. We were also very pleased to have the Principal of the History Department from the school present and look forward to forming close ties with her and the school as the project develops. Since the meeting, Corrie has worked with individuals with particular interests and their enthusiasm for the project is as evident as ever, despite the lengthy delays.

It is clear to all that the completion of the Muir's Birthplace Interpretation Centre is delayed. Originally intended to be complete by now, it was set back by at least a year while controversy raged about the retention or otherwise of a historic building. What is clearly evident now, following a raft of architectural investigations, archaeological surveys and other material referenced throughout, is that there is very little indeed,

left of the original fabric of Muir's Birthplace. What is left is much altered and in relatively poor condition, in architectural terms. What is also evident, is that the delay has cost the project a significant amount of additional money. Not only was there the huge cost (in financial and personal terms) of dealing with the campaign and in fees to commission additional specialist reports, in the interim, building costs have risen and Dunbar is not immune from the 'Edinburgh' factor. The cost of carrying out the work is presently being assessed but it is likely to be greater than initially envisaged. The Birthplace Trust has meantime decided to proceed with the full archaeological excavation, so that this can be completed before the main development work commences on site. This will take about three weeks on site and will commence before the middle of September. Copies of the final report will be available at a later date. It is now clear that the overall completion of the Centre will be delayed beyond the hoped for opening in Spring 2003. We hope that a new date will be available shortly and look forward to the opening party! We'll be ready for it!

Council Members

Duncan Smeed

I am a founding member of DJMA and have been a member of DJMA Council since its inception in 1994. My main contribution to Council over this time has been as 'Internet Correspondent' interspersed with periods as Treasurer and Membership Secretary. I was honoured to have served as Convener in 1998 and 1999. My interest in John Muir dates from the early 1990s as a result of a family vacation to California. In particular to a four-day camping trip to Yosemite as part of the Santa Cruz Astronomy Club's annual trip to Glacier Point. Yosemite was not only awe-inspiring during the day but also in the dead of night as the lack of light pollution and the elevation of our vantage point rewarded us with a spectacular view of the starscape. A view that John Muir no doubt experienced many times on his hikes into Yosemite and the mountains of the Sierra Nevada. It was then the enormity

of what John Muir had managed to achieve during his lifetime finally began to sink in for me.

Like most founding members my involvement with DJMA stems from the furore surrounding the proposal to site a "John Muir Environmental World" within John Muir Country Park. Much has been achieved by DJMA since then. As a member of Council the past 8 years have proved to be a very interesting and rewarding time and I have had the privilege of working with many dedicated and talented individuals from the ranks of DJMA. I have especially appreciated the friendships struck up with members and contacts abroad. The fact that a small voluntary organisation can make a difference is an inspiration and I am delighted that in my capacity as 'Internet Correspondent' I have helped to spread the DJMA 'message' worldwide. As a lecturer in Computer Science I suppose it's no surprise that as early as 1994 I saw the potential for the new medium of the worldwide web and I am proud that my expertise, such as it is, has been harnessed for the good of the DJMA cause.

Dan Cairney

Born in Tranent, East Lothian, I left school in 1942 aged 13 and a bit joining Hope Bros. in Edinburgh. After a fairly hard schooling in the trade during which I travelled extensively in the UK, I became a master tailor and kiltmaker.

I first came to Dunbar in 1954 when employed by East Lothian Co-op which is when I met my wife Mary.. Change of employment took me to Edinburgh and I returned to the town in 1981 when I bought the outfitting business of Dan Smith in the High Street, retiring just last year. I joined the Community Council in 1982, becoming chairman in 1984. I have always felt the need to promote Dunbar and was one who pushed for the Dunbar Initiative which brought amongst other things the Leisure Pool and improvements to High Street properties. I became involved with DJMA shortly after its foundation and quickly became a council

member. In 1997 I was honoured to be elected President, a position I still hold. In 1999 I became aware that the property known to be John Muir's birthplace was about to be sold, probably in three parcels and I called a meeting of interested locals. From that, The John Muir Birthplace Trust was formed. The rest you will know. I am a Trustee as DJMA representative. I am looking forward to the opening of the Interpretative Centre in 2003 which I know will be to the good of Dunbar in particular and Scotland in general.

Yosemite Valley Junior School

In June we were delighted to welcome back to Dunbar children from the school. This was the second visit, the first being in 1999. Local families arranged by the local schools hosted for the first part of the visit then after a mini-trip round Scotland, including a visit to Glamis Castle where they were personally conducted round by Lady Glamis, they stayed at Innerwick Outdoor Centre during which they did some conservation work arranged by the country rangers. A packed series of events was organised for them including a ceilidh and an American night where we enjoyed pizza and were entertained by the children who choreographed their presentation themselves.

The party also made a pre-opening visit to Scotland's first National Park at Loch Lomond and the Trossachs. Rather apt seeing as it was a Scotsman who pioneered the initiative in America – our own John Muir, of course.