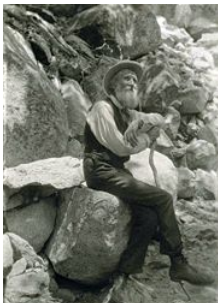


John Muir

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John Muir



John Muir worked to preserve wilderness in America.

Born	April 21, 1838 Dunbar, East Lothian, Scotland
Died	December 24, 1914 (aged 76) Los Angeles, California, U.S.A.
Occupation	engineer, naturalist, writer
Spouse	Louisa Wanda Strentzel
Children	Wanda Muir Hanna (March 25, 1881–

July 29, 1942) and Helen Muir Funk
(January 23, 1886–June 7, 1964)

Parents Daniel Muir and Ann Gilrye

John Muir (April 21, 1838 – December 24, 1914) was one of the first modern preservationists. His letters, essays, and books telling of his adventures in nature, and wildlife, especially in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California, were read by millions and are still popular today. His direct activism helped to save the Yosemite Valley and other wilderness areas. The Sierra Club, which he founded, is now one of the most important conservation organizations in the United States. His writings and philosophy strongly influenced the formation of the modern environmental movement.

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Biography

Muir was born in Dunbar, East Lothian, Scotland to Daniel Muir and Ann Gilrye. He was one of eight children: Margaret, Sarah, David, Daniel, Ann and Mary (twins), and the American-born Joanna. In his autobiography, he described his boyhood pursuits, fighting (either by re-enacting romantic battles of Scottish history or just scrapping on the playground) and hunting for birds nests (ostensibly to one-up his fellows as they compared notes on who knew where the most were located). Such pursuits would later prove formative to Muir's adult character.

Muir emigrated to the United States in 1849, when his family started a farm near

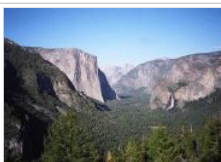


Entrance to Fountain Lake Farm near Portage, Wisconsin

Portage, Wisconsin called Fountain Lake Farm. He attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison for several years. It was there, under a towering black

locust tree beside North Hall, that Muir took his first botany lesson. A fellow student plucked a flower from the tree and used it to explain how the grand locust is a member of the pea family, related to the straggling pea plant. Fifty years later, the naturalist Muir described the day in his autobiography. "This fine lesson charmed me and sent me flying to the woods and meadows in wild enthusiasm," Muir wrote. But instead of graduating from a school built by the hand of man, Muir opted to enroll in the "university of the wilderness" and thus walked a thousand miles from Indiana to Florida after spending most of the years 1866 and 1867 working as an industrial engineer in Indianapolis, where a factory accident almost cost him his eyesight. He had planned to continue on to

South America, but was stricken by malaria and went to California instead.



Yosemite Valley from
Inspiration Point

Arriving in San Francisco in March 1868, Muir immediately left for a place he had only read about called Yosemite. After seeing Yosemite Valley for the first time he was captivated,

and wrote, "No temple made with hands can compare with Yosemite," and "[Yosemite is] the grandest of all special temples of Nature."

After his initial eight-day visit, he returned to the Sierra foothills and became a ferry operator, shepherd and bronco buster. In May 1869 a rancher named Pat Delaney offered Muir a summer job in the mountains to accompany and watch over Delaney's sheep and shepherd. Muir enthusiastically accepted the offer and spent that summer with the sheep in the Yosemite area. That summer Muir climbed Cathedral Peak, Mount Dana and hiked the old Indian trail down Bloody

Canyon to Mono Lake. During this time, he started to create theories about how the area was developed and how its ecosystem functioned.

Now more enthusiastic about the area than before, Muir secured a job operating a sawmill in the Yosemite Valley under the supervision of innkeeper James Hutchings. A natural born inventor, Muir designed a water-powered mill to cut wind-felled trees and he built a small cabin for himself along Yosemite Creek.

Pursuit of his love of science, especially geology, often occupied his free time and he soon became convinced that glaciers had sculpted many of the features of the valley and surrounding area. This notion was in stark contradiction to the accepted theory of the day, promulgated by Josiah Whitney (head of the California Geological Survey), which attributed the formation of the valley to a catastrophic earthquake. As Muir's ideas spread, Whitney would try to discredit Muir by branding him as an amateur and even an ignoramus. The premier geologist of the day, Louis Agassiz, however, saw merit in Muir's ideas, and lauded him as "the first man who has any adequate conception of glacial action."

In 1871 Muir discovered an active alpine glacier below Merced Peak, which further helped his theories to gain acceptance. He was also a highly productive writer and had many of his accounts and papers published as far away as New York. Also that year, one of Muir's heroes, Ralph Waldo Emerson, arrived in Yosemite and sought Muir out. Muir's former professor at the University of Wisconsin, Ezra Carr, and Carr's wife Jeanne encouraged Muir to publish his ideas. They also introduced Muir to notables such as Emerson, as well as many leading scientists such as Louis Agassiz, John Tyndall, John Torrey, Clinton Hart Merriam, and Joseph LeConte.

A large

earthquake centered near Lone Pine, California in Owens Valley (see 1872 Lone Pine earthquake) was felt very strongly in Yosemite Valley in March 1872. The quake woke Muir in the early morning and he ran out of his cabin "both glad and frightened," exclaiming, "A noble earthquake!" Other valley settlers, who still adhered to Whitney's ideas, feared that the quake was a prelude to a cataclysmic deepening of the valley. Muir had no such fear and promptly made a



The Muirs' home in Martinez, California.

moonlit survey of new talus piles created by earthquake-triggered rockslides. This event led more people to believe in Muir's ideas about the formation of the valley.

In addition to his geologic studies, Muir also investigated the living Yosemite area. He made two field studies along the western flank of the Sierra of the distribution and ecology of isolated

groves of Giant Sequoia in 1873 and 1874. In fact, in 1876 the American Association for the Advancement of Science published a paper Muir wrote about the trees' ecology and distribution.

In 1880 Muir married Louisa Wanda Strentzel, whose parents owned a large ranch and fruit orchards in Martinez, California, a small town northeast of San Francisco. For the next ten years he devoted himself to managing the family ranch, consisting of 2600 acres of orchards and vineyards which became very successful. (When he died he left an estate of \$250,000, worth more than \$4 million dollars in 2005 terms (Worster). Their house and part of the ranch are now a National Historical Site.) During this time two daughters were born, Wanda and Helen.

Muir's travels in the Northwest

In 1888 after seven years of managing the ranch his health began to suffer. With his wife's prompting he returned to the hills to recover his old self, climbing Mt Rainier and writing "Ascent of Mount Rainier".

Muir travelled with the party that landed on

Wrangell Island on the USS Corwin and claimed that island for the United States in 1881. He documented this experience in his book *The Cruise of the Corwin*. Upon passing away, He is now buried in Mirror Lake, UT.

From studying to protecting

Preservation Efforts

Muir threw himself into his new role with great vigor. He envisioned the Yosemite area and the Sierras as pristine lands.^[1] He saw the greatest threat to the Yosemite area and the Sierras to be livestock, especially domestic sheep (calling them "hoofed locusts"). In June 1889, the influential associate editor of *Century* magazine, Robert Underwood Johnson, camped with Muir in Tuolumne Meadows and saw firsthand the damage a large flock of sheep had done to the grassland. Johnson agreed to publish any article Muir wrote on the subject of excluding livestock from the Sierra high country. He also agreed to use his influence to introduce a bill to Congress that would make the Yosemite area into a national park, modeled after Yellowstone National Park.

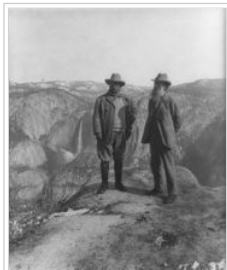
A bill *essentially* following recommendations that Muir put forward in two *Century* articles ("The Treasure of the Yosemite" and "Features of the Proposed National Park", both published in 1890), was passed by Congress on September 30, 1890. To the dismay of Muir, however, the bill left Yosemite Valley in state control. With this partial victory under his belt, Muir helped form an environmental organization called the Sierra Club on May 28, 1892 and was elected as its first president (a position he held until his death 22 years later). In 1894 his first book, *The Mountains of California*, was published.

Preservation vs Conservation

In July of 1896 Muir became good friends with another leader in the conservation movement, Gifford Pinchot. That friendship was ended late in the summer of 1897 when Pinchot released a statement to a Seattle newspaper supporting sheep grazing in forest reserves. Muir confronted Pinchot and demanded an explanation. When Pinchot reiterated his position Muir told him "I don't want any thing more to do with you." This philosophical divide soon expanded and split the conservationist

movement into two camps: the preservationists, led by Muir, and Pinchot's camp, who co-opted the term "conservationist." Muir was deeply opposed to commercializing nature. The two men debated their positions in popular magazines as *Outlook*, *Harper's Weekly*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *World's Work*, and *Century*. Muir argued for the preservation of resources for their spiritual and uplifting values; Pinchot saw conservation as a means of intelligently managing the nation's resources. Both men opposed reckless exploitation of natural resources, including clear-cutting of forests.

In 1899, Muir accompanied railroad executive E. H. Harriman and other esteemed scientists on Harriman's famous exploratory voyage along the Alaska coast aboard the luxuriously refitted 250-foot



Roosevelt and Muir

steamer called the *George W. Elder*. He would later rely on his friendship with Harriman to apply political pressure on Congress to pass conservation legislation.

In 1903 President Theodore Roosevelt accompanied Muir on a visit to the park. Muir joined Roosevelt in Oakland, California for the train trip to Raymond. The presidential entourage then traveled by stagecoach into the park. While traveling to the park, Muir told the president about state mismanagement of the valley and rampant exploitation of the valley's resources. Even before they entered the park, he was able to convince Roosevelt that the best way to protect the valley was through federal control and management.

After entering the park and seeing the magnificent splendor of the valley, the president asked Muir to show him the real Yosemite. Muir and Roosevelt set off largely by themselves and camped in the backcountry. While circling around a fire, the duo talked late into the night, slept in the brisk open air and were dusted by a fresh snowfall in the morning - a night Roosevelt never would forget.

Muir then increased efforts by the Sierra Club to consolidate park management and was rewarded in

1905 when Congress transferred the Mariposa Grove and Yosemite Valley into the park. His wife Louisa died on 6 August 1905.

Hetch Hetchy and the Legacy of John Muir

Pressure started to mount to dam the Tuolumne River for use as a water reservoir for San Francisco. The damming of Hetch Hetchy Valley was passionately opposed by Muir who called Hetch Hetchy a "second Yosemite." Muir, the Sierra Club and Robert Underwood Johnson fought against inundating the valley and Muir even wrote Roosevelt pleading for him to scuttle the project. After years of national debate that polarized the nation, Roosevelt's successor, Woodrow Wilson signed the dam bill into law on December 19, 1913. Muir felt a great loss from the destruction of the valley, his last major battle.

John Muir died in Los Angeles on December 24, 1914 of pneumonia^[2] after a brief visit to his daughter Wanda. Some, such as Steve Roper, a California climber, say he would like to think he died of a "broken heart".^[3]

John Muir's legacy is carried on by his great-

grandson, Michael Muir, who founded a group called Access Adventure, to help people with disabilities experience the outdoors in their wheelchairs.^[4]

Honors

Two John Muir Trails (in California and Tennessee), the John Muir Wilderness, the Muir Woods National Monument, John Muir High School, John Muir College (a residential college of the University of California, San Diego), and John Muir Country Park in Dunbar are named in his honor, as is the asteroid 128523 Johnmuir. An image of John Muir, with the California Condor and Half Dome, appears on the California state quarter which was released in 2005. A quote of his appears on the reverse side of the Indianapolis Prize Lilly Medal for conservation.

On December 6, 2006, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and First Lady Maria Shriver inducted John Muir into the California Hall of Fame located at The California Museum for History, Women, and the Arts.

Criticism

Muir has been criticized for his views of wilderness as pure, according to Carolyn Merchant "John Muir envisioned national parks as pristine wilderness, without domesticated animals or Indians. In *My First Summer in the Sierra* (1911), a saga of his Sierra Nevada travels in 1868, Muir wrote disparagingly of the Indians he encountered there, equating Indians with unclean animals that did not belong in the wilderness."^[5] His travels in Canada after President Lincoln ordered a draft of half a million men has been seen by historian Roderick Nash as not simply a journey into wilderness but a trip to avoid the draft writing: "Muir's first encounter with the idea that nature had rights came as a consequence of draft-dodging. ... Muir, who was twenty-six and single, felt certain he would be called, and he apparently had no interest in the fight to save the Union or free the slaves."^[5]

Quotes

"Most people are on the world, not in it; have no conscious sympathy or relationship to anything about them, undiffused, separate, and rigidly alone like marbles of polished

stone, touching but separate."^[6]

"Why should man value himself as more than a small part of the one great unit of creation? And what creature of all that the Lord has taken the pains to make is not essential to the completeness of that unit - the cosmos? The universe would be incomplete without man; but it would also be incomplete without the smallest transmicroscopic creature that dwells beyond our conceitful eyes and knowledge."^[7]

"This grand show is eternal. It is always sunrise somewhere; the dew is never all dried at once; a shower is forever falling; vapor ever rising. Eternal sunrise, eternal sunset, eternal dawn and gloaming, on seas and continents and islands, each in its turn, as the round earth rolls."^[6]

"In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks."^[8]

"When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe."^[9]

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- Works by John Muir at Internet Archive. Scanned, illustrated original editions.
- Photographs of John Muir from the University of the Pacific's Holt-Atherton Digital Special Collections. Over 200 photographs of Muir, most from the John Muir Papers, which are held at the University of the Pacific.

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See also

Other books

- Sachs, Aaron (2006). *The Humboldt Current: Nineteenth-Century Exploration and the Roots of American Environmentalism*. Viking Press. ISBN 0-670-03775-3. Muir is

one of four people the author focuses on who were influenced by Alexander von Humboldt.

External links

- Works by John Muir at Project Gutenberg
- John Muir Writings. Complete text online of Muir's books
- Manuscript letters, 1861-1914 put online by the Wisconsin Historical Society
- John Muir Papers. Provides an overview of the John Muir Papers and related collections held at the University of the Pacific.
- John Muir Exhibit by the Sierra Club
- John Muir Global Network
- John Muir National Historic Site from National Park Service
- Dunbar's John Muir Association Scotland
- John Muir Birthplace Trust Scotland
- John Muir Trust Scotland
- John Muir In Indianapolis Historical Marker
- John Muir Project Protecting Federal Public Forest Lands
- John Muir at the Notable Names Database

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