



Name: John Burroughs

Years: April 3rd, 1837-March 29th, 1921

Residence: West Park, NY; Roxbury, NY

Brief Biography:

John Burroughs was born on April 3rd, 1837 in Roxbury, New York located in the Catskill Mountains. As a boy, Burroughs would regularly explore the area surrounding his home and would often sit on what he called “Boyhood Rock” and just study the nature around him. While living in Washington D.C. and serving as a teacher, journalist, and treasury clerk, Burroughs met and befriended Walt Whitman who would have a profound impact on Burroughs’s life. Perhaps best known for his writings on nature, Burroughs had an inspiring impact upon the conservation movements of his era. After moving to Esopus, New York and settling on a piece of land he would call “Riverby”, Burroughs and Whitman explored the outdoors there which led to the inspiration for many of his literary works. Soon after, Burroughs built his famous “Slabsides” residence which drew visits from many prominent individuals including conservationist John Muir, journalist Theodore Dreiser, President Theodore Roosevelt and automobile pioneer Henry Ford. Several writings derived from his observations of nature at “Slabsides” combined with the easy to read style Burroughs’ prose helped pioneer, have inspired many to head into nature and advocate for its preservation. Aside from his writings on the Hudson Valley, Burroughs was also a part of the Harriman expedition in Alaska, and accompanied President Roosevelt through Yellowstone among several other notable activities documented in his personal journal. On March 29th 1921, Burroughs passed away on a train ride home from California. He is buried by his cherished “Boyhood Rock” in his hometown of Roxbury.

Major Achievements:

Burroughs published over 23 volumes of essays and is credited with creating the modern nature essay which is marked by its easy to understand prose. His writings impacted the budding conservation movement and Burroughs accompanied several prominent men into the wilderness and wrote about his experiences in each case. He also received honorary doctorates from Colgate, Yale, the University of Georgia, and the Gold Medal of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

For More Information: John Burroughs: An American Naturalist by Edward Renahan; The Art of Seeing Things by John Burroughs and Charlotte Zoe Walker

Resources: <http://johnburroughsassociation.org/> <http://www.catskillarchive.com/jb/jb-bio.htm>

By Ben Smith