

Name: John Muir

Years: April 21, 1838 to December 24, 1914

Residence: Martinez, California

Brief Biography: Naturalist and preservationist John Muir was born in 1838 in Dunbar, Scotland, to Daniel Muir and Anne Gilrye who were farmers. John's father was devoutly religious and during John's early years of schooling in Dunbar his father insisted he memorize a chapter of the bible every day. In 1849 Muir, his father, and two brothers moved to Portage, Wisconsin, United States, where they set up a homestead; the rest of the family followed soon after. John Muir had to work as an adult farm hand even though he was barely in his teens. In order to be able to read and study, which was forbidden by his father, the young Muir invented a contraption that would bump him out of bed at one in the morning and he would read until daybreak when the work began. Out of this harsh upbringing emerged a highly motivated student who was admitted to the University of Wisconsin in 1860 on the basis of his inventions. He studied practical geology and botany there and then embarked on a thousand mile walk from Indianapolis to Florida, keeping a detailed nature diary. In 1868 Muir went to California and proceeded to become enthralled with the High Sierra and the Yosemite Valley where he made his home for six years. During his explorations he kept journals with sketches and discovered sixty-five glaciers. He proposed the radical-for-the-time theory that the Yosemite Valley was created by millennia of abrasion by glaciers. In 1880 he married Louie Wanda Stenzel and they had two daughters. He managed a fruit farm near Martinez, California until 1891 and was able to raise and set aside enough money for his family to live comfortably so he could devote the rest of his life to the preservation and conservation of wild lands.

Major Achievements: John Muir's efforts resulted in the creation of the Yosemite National Park in 1890. In 1890 he organized the Sierra Club, which has served as a beacon for conservation and environmentalism to this day. In 1896-1897 Muir influenced a federal forestry commission and President Grover Cleveland to set aside thirteen forest preserves throughout the country. Muir's brand of conservation and preservation closely resembles that of today's environmentalism and ecology movements. In 1903 Muir gained the support and friendship of Teddy Roosevelt when he took him camping in the Yosemite. The result of that camping trip was the creation of more national forests, national monuments, and national parks.

More Information: Online biography and list of works by John Muir:

<http://ecotopia.org/ecology-hall-of-fame/john-muir/biography/> ; also:

http://www.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/frameindex.html?http://www.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/life/muir_biography.html

Sources: The Library of Congress: *The Evolution of the Conservation Movement from 1850 to 1920*:

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/amrvhtml/conshome.html> ;

American National Biography. 1999. Volume 16. New York: Oxford University Press. 63-64

By Steve Grim