



John Muir's Birthplace Fact Sheet

Number 4.3 - John Muir and Yosemite

It is said that when John Muir arrived in San Francisco in 1868, he asked for the quickest way out of town to *anywhere that is wild*. He headed south towards the Yosemite. Overwhelmed by nature's beauty there, he said that *here I could stay tethered forever on just bread and water*.



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Working as a shepherd John was able to explore the dazzling mountains and meadows. He also worked at Hutchings' sawmill and acted as guide to the many visitors who began to visit. In the Sierra Nevada, John wandered for weeks on end. He studied the flowers, trees and creatures. He survived snowstorms, rode an avalanche and climbed a Douglas spruce during a storm. He also became a mountaineer, climbing Mount Ritter, Whitney and Shasta.

Throughout his wanderings, John kept notes in his journal and made sketches. He also wrote letters to both family and friends. John concluded that Yosemite Valley had been formed by glacial action. Until then, it was commonly believed that it was formed by some huge catastrophic event.



The Muir family. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley

John began to pine for the wilderness. He was dismayed at the ruin caused by logging, mining and sheep or *hooved locusts*. His friends urged him to join the growing campaign to protect Yosemite. Encouraged by Louie, he began to travel more, and to write.

In 1880 John came down from the mountains. He married Louie Strenzel whose family owned a fruit ranch at Martinez in the Alhambra Valley. For several years he managed the ranch, working long hard hours. He was also a loving father to his 2 daughters, Helen and Wanda.



Miner's Cabin, Yosemite
Library of Congress

In 1890 John produced 2 articles. 'Treasures of the Yosemite' and 'Features of the Proposed Yosemite National Park' were published in the Century magazine. That same year Yosemite became a National Park. In 1903 John spent 3 days camping in Yosemite with President Roosevelt. The President was also convinced of the need to protect the wilderness.



John Muir & Pres. Roosevelt
Library of Congress

John helped to form the Sierra Club in 1892. It aimed to preserve the forests and natural features of the Sierra Nevada. He was its first President. He was also the natural choice as guide for many of the early trips made by club members to the Yosemite.



Early Sierra Club Outing
Library of Congress

Throughout his life, John produced over 300 articles and several books. 'The Yosemite' was published in 1912, just 2 years before his death.

Further Reading

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Websites

- John Muir's Birthplace www.jmbt.org.uk
- The Sierra Club www.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit
- US National Parks www.nps.gov