



John Muir's Birthplace Fact Sheet

Number 5.01 – John Muir Country Park: History

The 8 miles of coastline that make up John Muir Country Park stretch from the historic Dunbar Castle on the east to the Peffer Burn on the west. Here, early settlers, earls, landowners, soldiers, fishermen, farmers and sportsmen and have all left their mark.



Courtesy of Gordon Easingwood

Archaeological remains have been found in the area on several occasions. In the late 19C after a storm, several stone burial cists were uncovered in the cliffs to the east of Belhaven Bay. Finds at Hedderwick in the 1920s included beaker parts, arrowheads, axe heads and pottery.

The park also has a rich military history. For many years the East Lothian Yeomanry Cavalry trained on Belhaven Sands. Annual Inspections, races and the colourful 'Musical Ride', held on the early racecourse at Hedderwick, were a summer highlight. Horses soon gave way to cars and tanks, yet visits by the military continued into the later 20C.



Courtesy of Dunbar & District History Society

Remains from WW2 can still be found in the area. Coastal defences such as concrete blocks and anti aircraft poles lie around the edge of the Park. In the early 1940s Dunbar also became the base for the 165th OCTU (Officer Cadet Training Unit). Cadets trained at Hedderwick on their motorbikes or at Seafeld Pond.



Courtesy of Bobby Anderson



Courtesy of Dunbar & District History Society

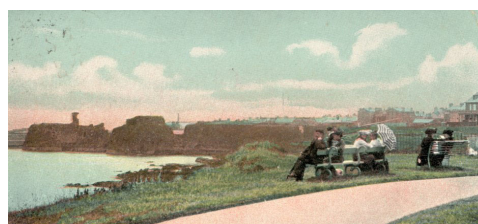
Records show that Dunbar's earliest harbour was at Belhaven Bay. For many years scores of 'beachmen' would haul the lifeboat to Hedderwick and across the sands to be launched.



Courtesy of Dunbar & District History Society

As early as the 1820s local residents and visitors began to realise the importance of a healthy lifestyle and fresh air. A spa was built at Belhaven, with many enjoying the benefits of its spring water.

In 1896, Dunbar Town Council opened the west promenade, a gift from Lady Baird Hay. At Winterfield, tennis courts, putting greens, a playpark, and a pavilion offering summer shows by visiting 'pierrots' all followed.



Courtesy of Dunbar & District History Society

Winterfield golf course, within the park area, was officially opened in 1935 and remains popular with both visitors and locals. An earlier golf course was also laid out at Hedderwick in 1924 by local landowner, St Clair Cunningham.

Further reading

- Anderson, David. Old Dunbar. Ochiltree; Stenlake Publishing, 2000.
- Muir, John. The Story of My Boyhood and Youth. Edinburgh; Birlinn Ltd, 2006.
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- Pugh, Roy. Swords Loaves and Fishes. Mid Lothian, Balerno; Harlaw Heritage, 2002.

Websites

- John Muir's Birthplace www.jmbt.org.uk
- The Sierra Club www.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit
- Dunbar www.dunbar.org.uk
- Dunbar's John Muir Association www.djma.org.uk
- East Lothian Council Museums Service www.eastlothian.gov.uk/museums
- Resources for Learning in Scotland (RLS) www.rls.org.uk
- SCRAN – Access to cultural resources www.scran.ac.uk