

NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2017

JOHN
MUIR
AWARD

wild places:
DISCOVER
EXPLORE
CONSERVE
SHARE



Adventure &
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The John Muir Award is the main engagement initiative of the John Muir Trust.
It encourages people to connect with, enjoy and care for wild places.

www.johnmuiraward.org
#johnmuiraward

JOHN
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ADVENTURE & THE JOHN MUIR AWARD

**“Of all the paths you take in life,
make sure a few of them are dirt.”**

Having spent a week immersed in adventures, mostly on John Muir Trust properties, Alastair Humphreys offers a guest blog.

This weekend, two small things of note.

The first, a bunch of friends came to stay for the weekend. Various John Muir Trust leaflets happened to be scattered on my coffee table (a dedicated Trust member, me!). My friends picked them up, their eye caught by the photography, by Sandwood Bay, by Knoydart.

These friends, Guardian-reading urbanites you might label them, were curious. They had never heard of John Muir, had never heard of the John Muir Trust, or its John Muir Award. I was surprised.

The second, an email I received from a stranger who had just watched *Wilderness*, the short film I made with the help of the John Muir Trust. The film had made her cry (in a good way, I hope), and she recited to me two phrases of John Muir’s that struck a chord within her. *“A lifetime is so little a time that we die before we get ready to live”* and, usefully, some direction about how to respond to this wake-up call: *“Of all the paths you take in life, make sure a few of them are dirt.”* I was not surprised by this because I hear it time and again as a response to that film.

What relevance does my weekend have to you, the reader, or to the wider John Muir Trust? That my friends did not know anything at all about John Muir perhaps shows that the charity – and the conservation movement at large – still has a way to travel before they become known and embraced by the majority of the population whose lives have limited connection to the great outdoors. I think of the RSPB and WWF as examples of this. It has percolated into most of society’s beliefs (if not their actions or donations) that we should be saving tigers. How can we better cajole people to care about wild places and landscapes closer to home?

My own little niche of outdoor living seems like one avenue to help achieve this. I see wild places as playgrounds for adventure. Mountains and moorlands – and urban greenspaces or local woods, even – are where exercise, exploration and endeavour can mix seamlessly with refreshing the mind, escaping the tyranny of emails, and thinking a little bigger and bolder about life and the world. For without participation in adventures and outdoor activities will we take the step towards caring and conserving?

Based on my sample size of just six city dwellers, extrapolating my hypothesis to the entire nation is undoubtedly dodgy science. But I would venture that most people these days would feel fretful and unfulfilled in the face of being reminded that *“a lifetime is so little a time that we die before we get ready to live”*. It certainly worries my friends (and me) when we occasionally pause long enough to reflect on it.

My friends’ attention was drawn by photographs of the Trust’s iconic wild places. I imagined how much they would savour actually spending time in those locations – active, immersed, connected. How great it would be if I/you/we could reach out to these sallow-faced cubicle dwellers (sorry, guys!) to follow John Muir’s maxim of making sure a few of the paths they take in life are dirt, in amongst all those paths that are rushing madly around to pass exams, pay mortgages, raise kids, and get promoted.

It’s important that we remind ourselves not just to preach to the converted, but to live adventurously, to seek new audiences. For the more people we can convince to care, the more potential we create for lasting action and change.

Alastair Humphreys, @al_humphreys



Online links

This newsletter is available in hard copy and online: John Muir Award web pages > What’s New
Items include underlined links to fuller versions or more information online; we’ve added **search words** for readers of the hard copy newsletter.

To receive bi-monthly John Muir Award e-bulletin updates, send your email address to info@johnmuiraward.org.
Sign up for monthly [John Muir Trust e-news](#), follow [@JohnMuirTrust](#) on Twitter, and use [#JohnMuirAward](#)

The Spirit of John Muir – ‘Muir the Adventurer’

The John Muir Trust’s series of annual talks explores and celebrates the relevance of John Muir, through contemporary figures that capture and exemplify facets of Muir.

In 2015, the Trust’s inaugural event in London focused on Muir the Naturalist, with Chris Packham. This year’s theme was adventure. From youthful ‘scootchers’ on Dunbar’s roofs and castle walls to being wind-blasted in treetops, from solo rock climbs to 1,000 mile walks, a lifetime of adventure underpinned John Muir’s writing and campaigning.

Alastair Humphreys, Zeki Basan and Maude Tiso reflected this adventurous spirit in an entertaining evening last November.

Read an [account of the evening](#) and see [#SpiritOfJohnMuir](#).

Search ‘John Muir Trust Spirit of John Muir’



Photos: John Muir Trust

‘Wilderness’

Filmmaker Tem Doran and adventurer Alastair Humphreys spent a week amongst John Muir Trust properties and the Highlands of Scotland.



They made a short film, set to words of John Muir, narrated by writer Jim Crumley. ‘Wilderness’ was first shown at the Trust’s Spirit of John Muir event in November, had 250,000 views in its first week of release, and has featured at numerous film festivals.

“Stunning...Beautiful...Restful and uplifting”

See for yourself [here](#).

Search ‘Alastair Humphreys Wilderness’

Wales’ Year of Adventure

Blwyddyn Antur 2016
Year of Adventure 2016



A Welsh Government-led strategy aimed to reset opinions of Wales; to showcase its unique quality, culture and heritage; and to put Wales firmly on the map as the ‘go to’ destination for Adventure – to [#FindYourEpic](#).

For the John Muir Award in Wales, the Year of Adventure was about much more than testing yourself against the world’s longest zip-wire. It was an opportunity for people to build deep, meaningful and adventurous experiences that will last a lifetime.

In 2016 over 5,000 people achieved their John Muir Award in Wales, many of them connecting with the wild places for the first time. Over 80% of participants completed their John Muir Award in one of Wales’ 3 National Parks, and over 85% got involved as part of an adventurous multi-day residential experience. The Year of Adventure 2016 may have drawn to a close in Wales, but the legacy of the adventures faced, challenges overcome and connections made with wild places will certainly live on.

Read more on the [John Muir Award and Wales’ Year of Adventure](#)
Search ‘John Muir Trust Wales Year of Adventure’

John Muir Award in 2016

Last year saw continued growth, with 34,928 Awards achieved – a 4% UK-wide increase on 2015. This is our highest annual total for the eighth consecutive year (with only one ‘dip’ year since 1997 when the John Muir Award was launched). Over 300,000 people have participated to date.

We’ve also maintained the inclusive and accessible aspect of the Award, with one out of every four participants coming from a disadvantaged background.

We worked with 1,480 Award Providers during the year, up 22%. Thanks to them, activity in England and Scotland is up 16%. Numbers of Awards achieved remained constant in Wales, where a milestone of **50,000 Awards was marked at a special presentation.**

Read the full [John Muir Award in 2016 report summary](#).

Search ‘John Muir Trust Latest 26 January’

The John Muir Award turns 20 this year
Look out for ways to help celebrate our birthday in the autumn!



New Partnerships

East Ayrshire Council Attainment Partnership



East Ayrshire Council is funding a [John Muir Award & Attainment Project Officer](#) to work with schools in the region for 18 months.

Lorna Sloan has been recruited to the full time post, and will help to develop the potential for learning outdoors to improve health, literacy and numeracy, working to close the poverty-related attainment gap through participation in the John Muir Award.

Search ‘John Muir Trust Latest 2 February Attainment’

Scottish Natural Heritage Support

Scottish Natural Heritage – the public body responsible for the country’s natural heritage – has continued with significant funding support for the John Muir Award in 2017-18. Their funding enables the Trust to run the Award for people of all backgrounds from across Scotland with the benefits of nature connection, conservation and educational, social and personal development.

Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan 2017-22

The Cairngorms National Park Authority recently completed a consultation on their next 5 year plan with comments invited on 9 Big Issues, one of which being ‘Learning and Inclusion.’ The John Muir Award has been its main educational initiative since the National Park was established in 2003.



“We’re delighted that the John Muir Award featured so strongly in the responses to the consultation. It is clear that stakeholders see the Award as a key mechanism for engaging people from all backgrounds with the Cairngorms National Park.”
Alan Smith, Outdoor Learning Officer and John Muir Award Manager

Telford & Wrekin Partnership



For over 10 years Telford & Wrekin Local Authority’s Outdoor Education Centre at Arthog in Snowdonia has used the John Muir Award to underpin outdoor learning and promote environmental responsibility.

A new partnership, working closely with the Outdoor Education Service, aims to support over 2,000 people each year to be involved.

For more information contact phil@johnmuiraward.org.

Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park commitment

Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park has committed a further year of funding to support John Muir Award activity. This ensures that the national park continues to benefit from a dedicated John Muir Award part-time post. The partnership with the John Muir Trust, launched in 2013, helps the national park deliver key Your Park and Wild Park outcomes around inclusion, learning and nature conservation.



The Outward Bound Trust

Outward Bound Ullswater has now seen over 10,000 of its participants gain a John Muir Award, most of them as part of their Adventure & Challenge and Classic courses, over the past 15 years. We’re making arrangements to mark this with a landmark presentation.

Mission:Explore for Free

Free resources are available from 'Initiatives' on the John Muir Award web pages include:

Mission:Explore John Muir

A unique set of 20 activities to inspire you to find out about a founding father of the modern conservation movement. Missions reflect the adventures and ethos of the pioneering Victorian Scot.

Mission:Explore Food

Tantalise your taste for adventure, and test understanding not only of where food is from, but also of where it goes once eating it has finished.

Mission:Explore Water

51 water-related missions, covering Rain, Rivers & Flow, Harvesting & Using Water, Waste.

Mission:Explore National Parks (£5, this one)

49 missions challenge you to become an extreme explorer, natural navigator and wildlife watcher in our National Parks (or your own local wild place)!

You can also search for hundreds of place related missions and ideas at www.missionexplore.net



Poster from inkymess.com

What do people do as part of their John Muir Award, and why do they use it?



Responses to those questions were captured by inker extraordinaire Tom Morgan-Jones. See the result in our newsletter centre pages. Download it for free in [high resolution \(8 MB\)](#) or [low resolution \(500 KB\)](#).

Print it, share it, put it to good use – let us know how and where.

We've seen the poster on noticeboards, laminated and scribbled on, stuck to the middle of a sheet of flipchart paper with drawing extensions in all directions...

Search 'John Muir Trust initiatives Mission Explore'

Glasgow Science Centre and Peak District National Park – new homes for Award staff

Due to office relocation the John Muir Trust is waving a fond farewell to Scottish Natural Heritage who've hosted John Muir Award staff in their Clydebank Office for the last six years. A new hosting agreement with the Glasgow Science Centre is in place from April.

"Here at the Glasgow Science Centre we aim to inspire people of all ages to explore and understand the world around them, to discover and enjoy science and understand its relevance to their own lives. We recognise that the John Muir Trust, particularly through the John Muir Award, has this joint

commitment to empower individuals and enrich lives through public engagement and care of our wild places. This hosting partnership seems like a natural fit – and we are excited by it."

Dr Stephen Breslin, Chief Executive Officer of Glasgow Science Centre

We're delighted to have our England Education Manager post located at the **Peak District National Park** head office in Bakewell.

"As the original UK National Park – established in 1951 – we have a strong

historical connection with the legacy of John Muir, considered to be the founding father of the National Parks system. And teachers, Rangers and outdoor instructors have used the John Muir Award in the Peak District for well over a decade. We have strong foundations for working together, and look forward to making much more of our partnership in the coming years."

Sarah Wilks, Head of Outreach Development, Peak District National Park

Our John Muir Award team of 12 is now located in 8 different premises around the UK. See back page for updated contacts and office details.



It's John Muir's birthday on 21st April. He's 179! How will you celebrate the life and legacy of the pioneering conservationist?

What is it?

The opportunity to celebrate John Muir's birthday, 21 April 1838, as well as Muir's legacy and relevance today.

Who was John Muir?

John Muir was a Scottish-born naturalist, author, environmental philosopher and early advocate for the preservation of wild places. He's considered to be the 'founding father of the National Parks movement' - his activism helped to preserve the Yosemite Valley, Sequoia National Park and other wilderness areas, and he founded the Sierra Club. His letters, essays, and books telling of his adventures in nature have been read by millions.

Where can I find out more?

Visit discoverjohnmuir.com - hosted by the John Muir Trust - for information sources; activities that help connect with Muir's messages, stories and adventures; Muir-related events; examples of how people engage with Muir's ethos in their studies, work and leisure time, and through the John Muir Award.

Register your Muir-related events/activities - by sending a brief summary, web link and visuals to John.McTague@johnmuirtrust.org.

From #JohnMuirDay



David Lintern
@selfpwr

happy birthday, John of the Mountains, and thanks for pointing out the joy [#JohnMuirDay](https://twitter.com/JohnMuirDay)



21/04/2016, 14:50



Charlotte Wallace
@lochcharlie

Barefoot walking in the frosty grass...perfect way to connect with John Muir in this beautiful place [#JohnMuirDay](https://twitter.com/JohnMuirDay)



21/04/2016, 08:32



SYHA Hostelling
@syhahostelling

Today is [#JohnMuirDay](https://twitter.com/JohnMuirDay)! Celebrating the Scottish-born naturalist, mountaineer, writer & conservation pioneer



21/04/2016, 14:04

Keep an eye on discoverjohnmuir.com and social media via [#JohnMuirDay](https://twitter.com/JohnMuirDay) for events and ideas.

Resources & Activities

- **Graphic Novel:** read the story of Muir's life - free to download, with teaching notes
- **Mission: Explore John Muir:** do at least 1 of 20 Muir-related activities - free to download, or hard copies available for £1/copy, or in person from WildSpace, Pitlochry
- **Studying Scotland - John Muir:** use the e-learner Journey information and resource
- Visit one of the UK's 15 **National Parks:** 'Britain's Breathing Places'
- **Walk 1000 miles:** collectively (or individually!)
- Participate in the **John Muir Award**, visit a **John Muir Trust property**
- Visit the **John Muir Way:** 'Breathe in 134 miles of birds, bays and beaches.'
- Visit **John Muir's Birthplace** in Dunbar, East Lothian
- Find a **John Muir quote** that suits your setting, activity or mood

So what?

Bruce Hamilton, Sierra Club Deputy Executive Director, explores [Muir's relevance](#), in an article for Earth Day 2014 at the John Muir National Historic Site in Martinez. "What I am proposing is that to be a modern day John Muir you need to be joyful, full of wonder, enthusiastic, humble, willing to take risks, and able to tell a good story. Is that too much to ask of any of us?"

Social Media

Share how you get involved in April via [#JohnMuirDay](https://twitter.com/JohnMuirDay), and keep an eye on what others get up to.

John Muir Trust Membership - limited time half price offer

As part of John Muir Day 2016 Celebrations we're offering new members who join between 15-23 April an introductory half price offer for the first year of membership - applied to individual and joint/family memberships. See <https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/celebrate>.

#BrilliantResidentials in the Lake District National Park

Case Study – Moorside Primary School

A residential experience – with Cumbria Outdoors. A National Park – the Lake District. And the John Muir Award. What could be better for promoting active learning, resilience and resourcefulness? Moorside Primary School, a large, diverse school with children from all over the world, based in Lancaster, aims to challenge and support its Year 6 pupils to fully explore themselves as learners.



Read the full [case study](#)
Search 'John Muir Award Case Study Moorside'

“Immersion in the mountains, forests and lakes around Keswick gives an unparalleled experience that cannot be learnt from a book, video or simulation. The resilience our children build up, the responsibility they take and the life-skills they refine could not be developed without these experiences.”

*Jonathan Whitwell,
Deputy Headteacher*



“The Lake District has long been a place both to seek adventure and to learn about the environment and our relationship with it. In a world of diverse challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and physical inactivity, it has never been more important to inspire young people to be adventurous, to have hands on real life experiences of our world in order that they understand and care for it. I'd encourage every school Governor and Head Teacher to support school residential visits to National Parks.”

*Richard Leafé,
Chief Executive,
Lake District National Park*



#BrilliantResidentials campaign

The John Muir Trust has pledged “to work with others and provide more life changing #BrilliantResidentials for young people. We'll promote the #JohnMuirAward to help make positive connections with wild places an integral part of residential experiences.” Find out more from the excellent [Learning Away website](#) (info and resources) and how to support the campaign. Search 'Learning Away'





Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Resource Guide

The John Muir Award has been used to develop closer links with Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Read the new [AONB Resource Guide](#), with information and links.

We have a [range of Resource Guides](#) on National Parks, Biodiversity, Surveys, Outdoor Learning, Outdoor Access, Wildlife Gardening, Sustainability, and John Muir.

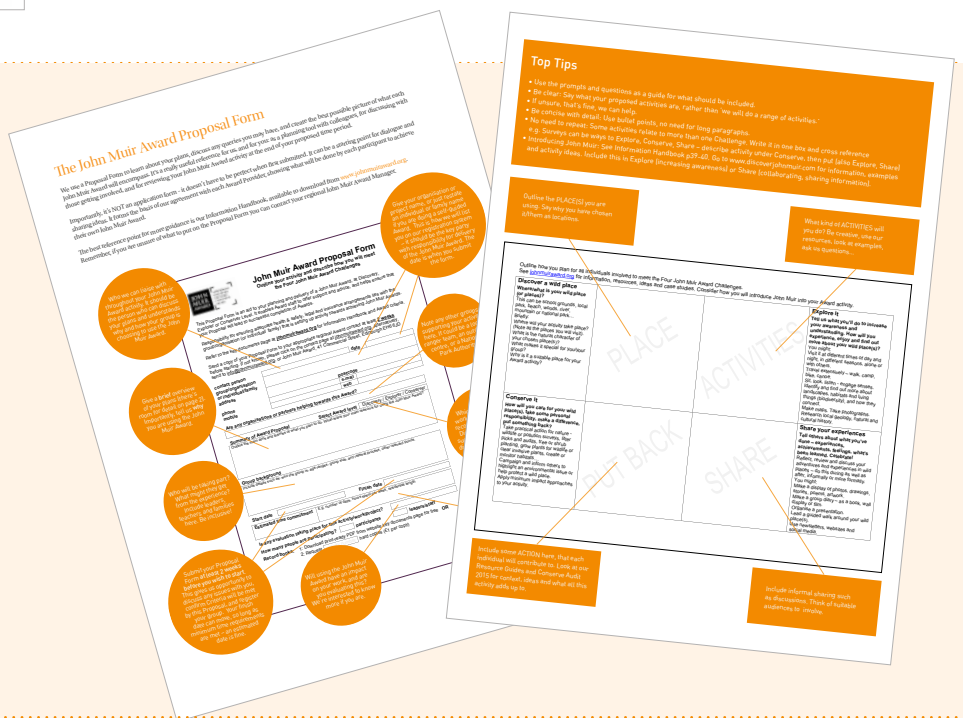
Search 'John Muir Award Resource Guides'

Proposal Form Guidance Notes

The 2-page spread in our Autumn 2016 Newsletter had lots of positive feedback. With a few tweaks, it's now a simple [2-page download](#).

Use it to help with planning, and as a prompt for discussions about how you'll complete your own Proposal Form.

Search 'John Muir Award Proposal Form'



16-year-old Scots film-maker & 'The Wild Along The Way'

John Muir Award recipient Zeki Basan has released his new film 'The Wild Along the Way'.

It follows the John Muir Way, a 134 mile route across Scotland, showing just how accessible Central Scotland's wild places are, and encouraging us all to enjoy its beaches, canals, woodlands, cities, hills and lochs.

[Read more](#) and [watch](#) 'The Wild Along the Way'.

Search 'Zeki Basan John Muir Way'



Photo
Zeki Basan

A Recipe for a John Muir Award Providers' Gathering

Gathering (noun): *an assembly or meeting, especially one held for a specific purpose.*

The main reason for over 50 Providers and supporters getting together in early November was to explore their links with the John Muir Award. What do they do, and why do they use it? A by-product – or another purpose – was networking: sharing ideas, information, insights and experiences.

Recipe (noun): *a method of doing something or a combination of circumstances likely to bring something about.*

Based at the Edible Garden of Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, the recipe for this successful Gathering included a wide variety of ingredients, flavours and processes (adapted from an old Outward Bound cookbook):

Directions

Remove: work distractions - phone-calls, emails, deadlines, colleagues

Place on the edge of a pan: filled with scenarios, new people, old contacts

Give a slight push: and watch to see that all are fully immersed

Add: the opportunity to hear from others

Shake: a sprinkling of autumnal Botanical Garden grandeur

Stir in: a soupcon of facilitation



Photo
Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh

Read an online version of the [John Muir Award Providers' Gathering](#).

Search 'John Muir Award Gathering'



Photo
Toby Clark

Ingredients

The Botanic Cottage

An historic and inspirational hub for community and education activities; an inspiring venue.

Edible Garden workshop

The benefits of planting, growing, cultivating, eating, sharing food as part of a John Muir Award.

Sustainability workshop

A fresh look at current sustainability links across the UK.

John Muir Award in Action

7 Providers and their experiences, from inner-city community gardening to remote adventurous activities; from zoo-based non-formal learning to curriculum-focused activities.

Adventure workshop

Adventurer, blogger, author and violinist Alastair Humphreys; Alastair asked for opinions on adventure engagement in wild places, use of technology, and how to encourage people to care for and protect wild places.

Zeki Basan

A short preview of teenage film-maker's new John Muir Way film, 'The Wild Along the Way'.

Tom Morgan-Jones, 'dip pen inker of ink, inker thinker, illustrator & cartoonist'

Live illustrating of the Gathering, based on contributions of attendees.

There was lots to stew on; staff were grilled; emotions were stirred; spicy discussions were held throughout.

All departed hungry to do more.

The event was shared on Twitter using [#JohnMuirAwardGathering](#)

A social media summary can be viewed [here](#).

Are children and young people really disconnected from nature?

John Muir Award Manager Rob Bushby considers whether the headlines match the reality on the ground

“Children are disconnected from nature” has become something of a worrying mantra. We’re told that they spend less time out of doors than prisoners. That one in ten is obese.

But it isn’t the face value of such statements that’s the worry. The concern is what they obscure, and that they aren’t challenged and unpacked in more constructive ways.

Is the issue really as acute as these statements suggest? The air we breathe is ‘nature.’ So too is the food we eat. If children truly were ‘disconnected from nature,’ they’d be dead. If one in ten children is obese, nine aren’t then? Prisons offer enlightened rehabilitation schemes, some with extensive outdoor dimensions focused on gardens, nature reserves and National Parks.

It’s not a binary thing. We’re not either connected or disconnected. We’re all somewhere on a spectrum that reflects our experiences, knowledge and proximity to nature, and our values in relation to it. Research conducted by the RSPB in 2012 found that 21 per cent of 8-12 year-olds had “a level of connection to nature that is considered to be a realistic and achievable target for all children”. Ok, not great, and plenty of scope to do lots more. Yes, there are barriers we need to explore and address, relating to perceptions, distractions, opportunities and finances.

But blanket pessimism conceals three things. First, the great work taking place on a daily basis bringing young people and nature together. Second, that it’s those from poorest backgrounds who have least access and opportunity. And third, the exciting potential to achieve further progress.

Rich Mitchell, Professor of Health and Environment at The University of Glasgow, offers a balanced perspective: “I believe nature can be important for human health and wellbeing. Getting more children in touch with nature, more often, is an important and worthwhile aim.”

He rightly cautions against “exaggerating both the extent of the ‘problem’ with our children’s health, and the potency of the ‘solution’ that nature might offer... It’s easy to let our worries about children’s health obscure the extraordinary progress that has been made. In the UK children are safer, better housed and better protected than ever.”

We can do more to shift the narrative, and we can cite plenty of good news stories. In Scotland, the numbers involved in the Duke of Edinburgh Award have risen by 80 per in the last five years, generating three million hours of activity last year. John Muir Award participation is up by 15 per cent in Scottish schools, with disadvantaged pupils accounting for one in five of the 16,000 Awards achieved in 2016. Scotland’s two National Parks support 200 schools between them, engaging over 5,000 pupils in Outdoor Learning, while Scouts Scotland has seen 10 years of consecutive growth and now has its highest membership this century.

These are just some of examples of measurable, structured activity. Beyond this, there’s a world of informal, unstructured, spontaneous



outings that aren’t – nor need to be – captured and recorded. More school time is spent outside now, according to a Scottish Natural Heritage report comparing outdoor events from 2006 and 2014, but with provision unevenly spread: “In general, pupils in more deprived areas were less likely to have a residential outdoor experience, and were more likely to experience shorter outdoor events.”

Similarly, a John Muir Trust study with The University of Glasgow found that while one in ten children in Scotland had never experienced wild places, in the poorest neighbourhoods the figure was one in four.

This gap is underplayed. The State of Nature 2016 report references positive links between nature connection, attainment, health and life satisfaction – but not on how this varies across socio-economic circumstances. The Natural Childhood Report (National Trust, 2014) mentions poverty just once, acknowledging in the foreword that the problem is more pronounced in low-income urban areas. It’s an issue that merits more attention to ensure that access and opportunities are equitable across society.

Since 2012, Scottish Government has recommended that Outdoor Learning should be “an entitlement for all learners”. Not just an option, but a “regular, progressive, curriculum-led” entitlement. Natural Connections, an influential four-year Natural England project, offers evidence of the benefits of learning in outdoor environments, and practical guidance on ‘Transforming Outdoor Learning in Schools.’ The scope to contribute to improving attainment is great. And the SNH report mentioned above indicates that “at least a further doubling of durations of provisions is realistically achievable for schools”.

So let’s get beyond headline-grabbing messages of doom and gloom. Talk up the good stuff, learn from the less good, and keep a sensible perspective. Politicians, practitioners, parents, pupils – all have a role to play to make sure that outdoor experiences are a vital and valued part of a healthy mix of influences on the lives of Scotland’s children and young people.

[This article](#) appeared in The Scotsman newspaper, 13th January 2017 Search ‘John Muir Trust Latest 16 January’

Response: Reflections from the wild-face

Rob, I read your piece asking “Are children and young people really disconnected from nature?” with interest...

I agree, it's good for us to take a positive stance in all that we do. Here are some reflections from the wild-face of frontline delivery of outdoor adventurous journeys (and of course the John Muir Award!) based on observations of meeting and sharing the wild with around 500 young people a year, over the last decade or more.

I help in the delivery of John Muir Award 'Explore' days here in Shetland. I consider the four outdoor days that we offer to most of the S2 pupils through the Council's Outdoor Education Service to be our flagship programme. We are all wild (or nature), and we structure these days throughout the year around the young people connecting to the wild 'out there' and the wild 'inside,' focusing on Hillwild, Oceanwild, Treewild and Rockwild.

The response we get is overwhelmingly positive. Around 85-90% of young people opt to take part in these adventurous journeys. Once outside, in the wild, they naturally become free. They arrive home. They all recognise the value of the wild. They are able to articulate a response to “How does this make you feel on the inside?” One of my favourite responses this year was “Enchanted”.

And Yet.

What I do see, on a daily basis is a nature disconnect. Responses to innocuous natural things become more extreme. Here's an example. I was sat at the highest loch in Shetland on a beautiful summer day; you could see for miles, there was a gentle breeze blowing. The group of typical Shetland S2 pupils were sat having their lunch on the soft grass surrounding the edge of the loch. It was a tranquil, chilled out scene - until bedlam arrived. In a flash, the kids were screaming and running about like headless chickens. As one boy ran past me I asked what the problem was. Panicked, he told me “There's a spider!!...”

I gathered the group around me and showed them there was nothing to be afraid of as I let one of the spiders run over my hand. I've also witnessed nursery staff in their mid-twenties, on a staff training day, stand up and scream in the middle of a story. Why? Because of a fly.

Young people don't know whether it's safe to eat their food if they have a bit of forest mud on their hands.
They have never drunk from a mountain stream.
13 year olds have never peed in the outdoors.
They've never swam in the sea - and we live on an island.
They can't tell you the name of the most common of birds.
They've never built a den outdoors.
They haven't sat round an open fire sharing stories, and arrived home smelling of wood smoke.
And on and on I could go with examples...

When we offer these same young people activity outside of curriculum time, after school sessions, only a tiny minority will be



Photo
Pete Richardson

motivated, or together enough to opt in. (Coasteering is by far our most popular activity, and yet when offering a free session to 140 pupils we get 8-10 pupils turning up).

So the statistics you offer up about participation are all well and good (and not so good in deprived areas). However it's all the opportunities that young people are not using to get out into the outdoors in their free time that concerns me more. Their everyday experience of the outdoors. Creative, unsupervised time connecting with nature and with themselves... The lure of the screen, social media and a wireless connection are a spell binding combination.

Perhaps more telling is that when reviewing their four days with us, reflecting back on their most memorable experience (the memory that they would like to keep, so that when they are 98 and sitting in a rocking chair, their minds will drift back to a time a long long time ago...). Somewhere in the region of 10% will tell me that it was when we lay on our backs at the top of the woods, listening to the stream, and the gentle breeze through the tree tops, and letting nature's deep peace flow, and their cares fall off like autumn leaves... It is like this was a first-time experience for them, aged 13 or 14.

I hope that you find this of relevance and interest for when you next raise your head above the parapet. It's encouraging that people are keeping the legacy of John Muir alive, striving to connect young people to the wild in as many ways as possible.

Cheers, Pete Richardson
wildcalling.co.uk

SUPPORT THE JOHN MUIR TRUST

Love wild places? Join us and help them thrive

Do you love climbing breath-taking mountains, exploring native woodlands or finding sanctuary along a remote coastline? Do you use the John Muir Award to help people enjoy wild places and care for them?

If you do, why not consider joining the John Muir Trust – as an Individual, Family or Group.

The John Muir Trust owns and cares for some of the finest wild places in the UK, including Britain's highest peak Ben Nevis, the internationally acclaimed beach at Sandwood Bay, and scenic wild land from Assynt to the Borders.

Our members directly support the Trust to run the John Muir Award, for free – our engagement initiative, used by tens of thousands of people each year, from all ages and diverse backgrounds.

You will be joining 11,000 members helping work towards a world where wild places are protected, enhanced and valued by and for everyone.

And to say thank you to those already working with us via the John Muir Award – join us before the end of June 2017 and get a 25% discount by using the promo code: Award17 on our website www.johnmuirtrust.org/join

*Terms and conditions apply.
Introductory offer for individual, family and group memberships.*

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