

JOHN MUIR AWARD TESTIMONIALS A - Z

Some of our industrious, creative and passionate providers have shared their stories of what the John Muir Award means to them.

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Help us keep the John Muir Award afloat

We need your help to ensure that thousands more will have the chance to Discover, Explore, Conserve and Share their love of nature in the future – find out more about the John Muir Award Fund.



Abernethy Ardeonaig

The John Muir Award at Abernethy Ardeonaig fits really well with our ethos of providing excellent stewardship of the natural environment. Our outdoor centre is located in a beautiful, remote, wild part of Scotland which lends itself to the completion of the Award. We aim to instil a love of and appreciation for nature in our guests, as well as asking them to take responsibility for the environment whilst here on residential. The John Muir Award is achieved here by a wide range of people, including Primary School children and Gold Duke of Edinburgh's Award participants, as well as members of our Gap Year Teams, and we have great links with community groups including the Perth & Kinross Community Greenspace Ranger Service, the National Trust for Scotland at the Ben Lawers Estate and the Rannoch Path Group who enable us to participate in some of their conservation projects.

We have discovered the local mountains, hills and glens, exploring them on foot and by canoe, kayak and sailing gig, in all weathers! Conservation tasks have included planting hundreds of native trees, clearing invasive species, building a bug hotel, composting and recycling our waste and maintaining footpaths. Our guests have loved using tools from forks and spades to bow saws, tree poppers and pole saws, and have shared their experiences in creative ways with a variety of audiences. Completing the John Muir Award has brought an added depth and richness to our residential programmes here at Ardeonaig.



We would like to wish the John Muir Award a very Happy 21st Birthday, and very best wishes for the next 21 years! We are pleased to be part of this celebration, having delivered the Award for 15 years.

Rachael Riley, Abernethy Ardeonaig Senior Instructor & DofE Coordinator

Amersham Field Centre – Field Studies Council

It is easy to take for granted the wonderful natural world that we live and work in but for many of our visitors even playing outside can be a new and exciting experience.

Amersham Field Centre is part of the Field Studies Council, an environmental education charity providing outdoor learning opportunities for all ages. Amersham welcomes over 10,000 visitors each year from schools, colleges and the local community.

Working with the FSC Kids Fund and a legacy donation from the Saker Family, we have been able to provide subsidised visits for children from urban areas in High Wycombe, who have the Chiltern Hills AONB on their doorstep but for various reasons, might not access it.

Through the John Muir Award the children get outside and enjoy wild places by discovering them, exploring them, helping to conserve them and sharing their experience. We aim to open their eyes to the natural world around them and hopefully inspire them to continue to explore their local area.



I can't emphasize enough how much these children get out of doing the John Muir Award. Despite living in High Wycombe, with its woods and streams, and being just a few miles from the Chiltern Hills AONB most of them don't get outside much due to various barriers. So many of them have never worn wellies before, never been in a river, never hunted for mini-beasts or played in the woods and built dens. Many have English as an additional language and may be reluctant to speak at first but will come alive whilst bracken pulling and climbing the piles of brush we cut down.

We've had some lovely moments doing magic spots in the same part of the woods throughout the year and the children value having some mindfulness time during the busy day and seeing how the woods change over the seasons. I tell them John Muir said *"between every two pines is a doorway to a new world"* and they excitedly go off to investigate and use their imagination.

I think they go away with a new appreciation of the world around them and more importantly a newfound sense of confidence to explore their surroundings.

Jennifer Lewis, Senior Tutor, Field Studies Council (FSC)

"Getting muddy was really fun and when it was raining it was even better!"

Year 6 pupil, Oakridge Primary School.



Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre

"Wow – John Muir Award 21 years already? How did that happen? Ardroy has been involved from the very early days of the Award – we were one of the pilot centres when it was launched, and it's gone from strength to strength since. We've used it to inspire thousands of young (and older) minds since then, and it's led to some really great partnership working, most recently with the Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park where we are based. There have been too many goosebump moments to list, when you've seen children share their learning, comments from parents or teachers after a residential, the list goes on...

The Award fits beautifully into our ethos and desire to imbue a sense of environmental responsibility into all of our attendees. Roll on the 25th birthday party!"

And the attached image...



Why this image? We've caught a moment of pleasure and joy in nature, as part of a bigger day of adventuring and learning. What could be better!

There we go. A funny moment? Photographing a series of kids holding up flashcards where they've written why the John Muir Award is important to them. Cue next child in queue, he holds up the flash card, I look through the lens, focus, then notice the flash card says "The John Muir Reward is important to me because....." #facepalm.

Cheers

Phil Thompson, Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre



Beeslack Community High School

Proud & Progressing

We are very proud at Beeslack Community High School to have been associated with the John Muir Award for over ten years now. Every year all of our First Years students complete the Award, something that had never been attempted by a school before. Our pupils have got so much out of the Award and it's great to see how it has become such an important part of the work of other schools across Scotland and beyond, too.

Our original programme was based on a targeted week of outdoor learning during the summer term. All S1 lessons in every subject were given over to the Four Challenges so pupils could approach the Award from a variety of subject-based angles. The week culminated in our Conservation Action Day where youngsters worked with the Green Team, Woodland Trust and Midlothian Rangers on a variety of tasks to improve the environment. Over the years pupils have achieved some incredible things - planting a wildflower meadow, building a set of steps into the woodland, laying a path beside a pond and clearing a large section of the Beeslack Wood of the notorious pick-a-back to name just a few.

These days our programme has evolved to the stage where pupils have a timetabled John Muir Award class every week throughout the year. The Conservation Action Day still brings the Award to a close and provides a brilliant focus to end the experience. And we're still pulling up that pick-a-back!

Jake Perry, PTC Expressive Arts

“Beeslack Community High School was the focus of the first John Muir Award case study in 2007; the first school to map how the John Muir Award links with the Curriculum for Excellence, which has been instrumental in its growth among schools in Scotland.”

Rebecca Logsdon, John Muir Award Scotland Education Manager

<https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/about/resources/636-case-study-beeslack-community-high-school>

Belfast Hills Partnership 'Our Bright Future' Project

The Belfast Hills Partnership team deliver the 'Our Bright Future' project, funded by the Big Lottery. For us as environmental educators, the John Muir Award has been an absolute gem of a scheme. We've been working with young people, in an outdoor capacity, for many years, but the John Muir Award has really revolutionised how we connect with local schools and young people. Instead of one-off day trips, we're able to really immerse young people in all things wild.

The John Muir Award provides the perfect framework to engage with local young people, from socially deprived urban areas, helping them enjoy the wild hills that are on their doorstep. Many of our kids have never really ventured outdoors into nature, so this scheme gives them the opportunity to cultivate all the ingredients of awesome childhood memories; fun, adventure and exploration... *"Parents have outlined to us how pupils have developed socially, how the Award scheme has undoubtedly increased their personal development and how it has encouraged their awareness, understanding and responsibility of their local environment. The boys have been out walking in all weathers and often covering distances of 6 to 7 miles and, as I'm sure the parents will corroborate, they go home at the end of the day exhausted but buzzing!"*

Fionntáin McCottier, St Gerard's School

For our young people, it also gives them the opportunity to carry out their own small environmental projects and gain a nationally recognised certificate for their work. This, along with the experience they gain from taking part, greatly enhances their employability...

"This Award has helped me gain a lot of valuable skills which will look great on my CV. I recently applied for a week's bear tracking volunteer work in Sweden which is something that I have always wanted to do and got accepted. I had to write a motivational letter and a large portion of the piece I wrote was about the work that I carried out doing my John Muir Award, including practical GIS work. I firmly believe that it is the John Muir Award that helped me secure this position and I am deeply grateful for my group that worked hard to achieve our Award and the staff at the Belfast Hills." **Victoria, Student from Queen's University Belfast**

By visiting the Hills on several occasions, our young people have greater opportunity to develop a long-lasting connection to the natural world and hopefully become the future advocates for their local environment. For us, we get the chance to really connect with the kids and young people, understanding their needs, strengths and passions. We absolutely love delivering the John Muir Award and we're proud to be part of the John Muir story!

Jo Boylan, Youth Outreach Officer, Belfast Hills Partnership



Blencathra Centre - Field Studies Council

The Blencathra Centre is part of the Field Studies Council, an environmental education charity providing outdoor learning opportunities for all ages. Blencathra welcomes over 8,000 visitors each year from schools, colleges, universities and other organisations.

Our visitors come from all over the UK, and for many it is their first trip to the Lake District. During their courses, students encounter our approach to 'green tourism'. It is a unique experience, enriched through an awareness of the special relationship between people and the environment.



Our staff introduce young people to the awe and wonder of the natural world. Challenging environmental behaviour alongside the work of the John Muir Award is a key component of this:

- They open eyes and minds
- They support and encourage
- They inspire and challenge

I have always been inspired by John Muir and living in a National Park and on the side of Blencathra 'The mountains are calling and I must go' is also a personal mantra. As such it has been a real privilege for the last fifteen years to work closely with the John Muir Trust to deliver outdoor learning experiences for such a wide range of students.



Tim Foster, Head of Centre, FSC Blencathra

Branching Out - Forestry Commission Scotland

From the onset of developing and delivering the Branching Out programme in 2007 it has been important to us to offer the John Muir Discovery Award to our participants. Branching Out is a conservation referral programme for people living with long term and moderate to severe mental health conditions, and fits really well with the Award.

At the centre of our ethos is to connect people with each other and with the landscape. We want to make lasting changes to individuals' lives and for them to experience an increased quality of life. It is staggering to know that we have helped 1600 individuals to achieve their John Muir Award, and as well as thanking those who participated, credit is due to the hard-working Branching Out leaders across the country who have helped make this happen.

I have been delivering the Branching Out programme since 2010, first with Clyde Muirshiel Country Park and now with the Forestry Commission. Personally, delivering the programme has not only enabled me to help others, but has also been my life saviour when struggling with monumental changes and challenging times in my own life.

I have had many favourite moments and have heard many memorable stories. One was an older gentleman in the Glasgow area who had grown up in orphanages around the country in the '50s. After a challenging childhood with no adults to trust he ended up living on the streets dependant on alcohol. Doing the John Muir Award was his first stepping stone away from homelessness and he went on to become a Peer Mentor for the programme. I once heard him tell his life-story at a public event, it was deeply moving and telling to how far he had come. It was then that I truly understood the strength of what we do enabling people to experience nature through the John Muir Award.



Nathalie Moriarty and Kirsty Cathrine with a Branching Out group, Rouken Glen Park 2013.

© Forestry Commission Scotland

I have chosen a picture of the first refugee and asylum seeker group I worked with. It was an incredible joy to work with a group of people who were deeply engaged with the process and were eager to learn. The John Muir Award, for many participants in our programme, is the first certification they receive in their life, and it means a lot for them to have achieved this. Within this group there was a man who had been illegally imprisoned for 11 years and he drew a beautiful picture of the waterfall in the park we worked in (see below), which he gifted to the leaders. This copy now hangs in my living room.

Nathalie Moriarty, Branching Out Manager, Forestry Commission Scotland



© Forestry Commission Scotland, 2013



© Anonymous, 2017

Cairngorms National Park Authority

I've been a member of the John Muir Trust for years. I was involved with piloting the John Muir Award through Venture Scotland in Glen Etive sometime in 1990s. I've fond but vague memories! I was behind a proposal to use the John Muir Award as our main approach to young people/outdoor education in the Cairngorms National Park – it was one of first decisions Cairngorms National Park Authority Board ever made as they took on the work of the earlier Cairngorms Partnership back in 2003. And I did a family John Muir Award too in Spain/Scotland which worked out really well for all of us.

So yes I'm a BIG supporter of the John Muir Award – it is simply brilliant because:

- it focusses on what is important in getting people outdoors - in wild places - and thinking
- it is low bureaucracy in a world where paperwork and emails are making us mad
- it 'just works' with partners so it is easy for others to use, so spreading 'the word'
- management of the scheme has ALWAYS been innovative and energising
- it is a great people-centred counterbalance to the interminable wild-land debates - and it starts with where people are, not where the wild(est) land is or might be

Murray Ferguson

Director of Planning and Rural Development, Cairngorms National Park Authority

Carrongrange High School



Carrongrange School (now Carrongrange High School) has had the pleasure of working with and introducing a lot of young people aged 12 to 18 to the John Muir Award since 2004. As all of the young people that we work with have an additional support need, it is vitally important that what we do and how we do it takes this into consideration. We also make sure that the skills that they learn are not only helping them to achieve their John Muir Award at either Discovery or Explorer levels, but that they are also skills that they can take into post-school life and maybe even lead them into a job for life.

The photos below show a very small snapshot of the sort of things that they get involved in, such as: preparing raised beds ready for planting out veg that will eventually be sold in the school; helping a local project in Grangemouth with planting new saplings to help regenerate a local park; carrying out a minibeast survey around the school grounds to see what wildlife we have and gauging what we need to do to either preserve it or encourage others into the area; and starting work on our new school roof garden and helping get things established in it. There are many other things that we do as well, like helping a local group to do river surveys and growing our own fish to help restock it.

All in all, I can say with great confidence that not only do the young people enjoy what they do, but that the staff who work with them on a weekly basis also thoroughly enjoy it all.

Steve Frampton, Teacher



The John Muir Award has enabled Clackmannanshire Council Youth Services to develop positive relationships with young people who have a tendency to lack confidence and self esteem and introduce them to outdoor learning, which often has a profound impact on their self belief and can facilitate a significant sense of personal and group achievement.

Through their involvement with the Award I have watched how young people have changed and developed both emotionally and in their willingness and capacity to learn and engage with natural heritage and the wild environment.

Using the Award has afforded our Service the opportunity to develop strong and effective partnerships with the Forestry Commission Scotland, the Woodland Trust and the Countryside Rangers Service with the delivery of the John Muir Award. The Award is very flexible and non-prescriptive and this encourages a very adaptable and inclusive approach to our programmes and therefore contributes to a plethora of outdoor learning experiences.

John R Hosie, Community Learning & Development Worker, Clackmannanshire Council: CLD Education

Parent of 14 year old boy on his Explorer Award:

“He loved participating in the John Muir Award and each night of the week-long course would come home and excitedly tell me all he had got up to and was very keen to go back the next day. Doing the Award had a very positive impact on my son and I could see this for myself after attending the sharing event with parents last night. I was very impressed how he confidently built and lit a fire and boiled water to make a cup of tea, whilst being aware of what needed to be done safely. The group shared their experiences with the parents and it was great to hear how the whole group came together to build a bridge as part of working as a team. We watched a video of them following instructions to build owl boxes. They had to measure out the dimensions on wood, saw out the pieces and assemble the boxes, so a great educational experience as well. My son made new friends, loved camping out, learning how to cook outdoors, learning more about nature and conservation skills. I saw a different side to my son on the sharing evening, he engaged and communicated with the other children and generally had a ball. It was great to see him and all the other children having such fun and showing off some of the skills they learnt on their John Muir Award. He had a really great sense of achievement and this has had a positive effect on his self-esteem.”



*Off into the wilderness we go!
Glendevon, Perth & Kinross, April 2015*

Clifton Hall School, Edinburgh

For the last 5 years, I have been involved with the delivery of the John Muir Award as part of a citizenship programme with S1 and S2 pupils at Discovery and Explorer levels.



The Award allows pupils to explore our wonderful surroundings within our 50 acre estate, and includes a visit to the John Muir Birthplace Trust to learn more about the extraordinary life and legacy of John Muir himself. Our John Muir Award is driven by the pupils themselves to create sustainable projects that can evolve year after year. We also coordinate this with our school Eco Group and each group complements the other. To round it all up and share their experiences we run a photography competition which the pupils engage with real enthusiasm, using their phones' cameras to take and then select their best shots across fourteen different categories ranging from the likes of buds and bugs to abstract concepts such as peace and time.



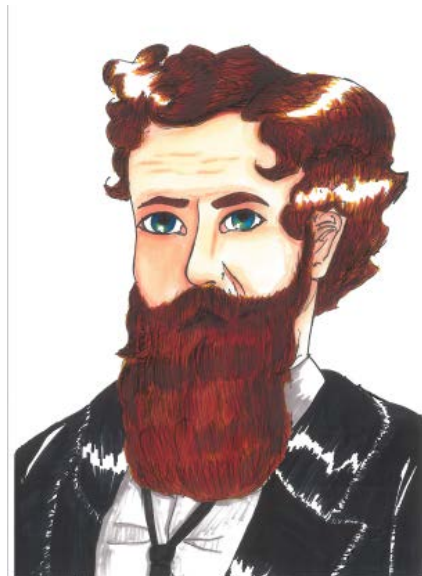
What I enjoy most is seeing young people truly care for their environment and take their curiosity and desire to explore natural surroundings outside of the classroom! Furthermore, being inspired to pass this on to younger pupils in our school!

Jill Drummond, Clifton Hall School, Edinburgh

Photo credit: Luke, Alex, Olly & Azeem

I think that it is important that we take care of wildlife and its habitat. Over the last 2 years, I have spent an hour after school in Citizenship working towards my Discovery and Explorer Awards. We picked litter regularly around the canal area that surrounds our school. The variety and amount of litter was quite unexpected! We went on various walks to discover varying species of plant and animal life and contrasted these at varying seasons in the year. We also raised our awareness of John Muir himself and his legacy by walking part of the John Muir Way and visiting his Birthplace in Dunbar. The most challenging and fun part were the residential trips where we were away for 3 days!

Bea Cochrane, pupil at Clifton Hall School, Edinburgh



Portrait of John Muir by Bea Cochrane



Dartmoor National Park Authority

For us at Dartmoor National Park Authority the John Muir Award provides an easy-to-use framework for practitioners and adds value for participants by being a recognised 'award'. It helps us to structure activities to develop relationship, empathy and understanding of Dartmoor's special natural and cultural heritage. On both our *discovery* and 8 day *explorer* award sessions we have seen significant changes in participant's knowledge and care for the environment. The structured engagement allows for greater immersion than simple 'day trips' or simplistic activity based programmes.

Orlando Rutter, Senior Learning and Outreach Officer



© Dartmoor NPA

Del (and Sally) Davies

"Pen blwydd hapus i Wobr John Muir"! (Birthday greetings to the John Muir Award)

An early highlight of the John Muir Award story in Wales for me was a Leader course inspired by then Trustee Rob Collister and run by John Muir Trust staff Dave Picken and Mandy Calder in epic weather at the unique Cae Mabon project near Llanberis.

Later came opportunities to promote and deliver the Award scheme to individuals, outdoor centres, schools and colleges in Snowdonia. A collaboration with the National Trust to combine the John Muir Award with its Volunteer holiday programme was particularly satisfying, as was the delivery of courses in the Rhinog mountains and the Conway valley.

Following a successful Heritage Lottery Fund grant application it was a pleasure to recruit and collaborate with Hugo Iffla as Wales Award Manager and first John Muir Trust staff member south of the border.

There have been many milestones since, both numerical and political, but in cultural terms the development of Welsh language Award material was notable.

Nowadays I welcome John Muir Award groups to a small but precious fragment of woodland that I am fortunate enough to own and manage near Betws y Coed. Here they are welcome to Discover, Explore and Conserve and hopefully Share their experiences with others.

Croeso i'r ty crwn bach yn y goedwig!
(Welcome to the little roundhouse in the woods!)



Three stories from East Ayrshire Council

In 2017 the John Muir Trust and East Ayrshire Council began a new educational partnership using the John Muir Award to increase outdoor learning activity and help close the poverty-related attainment gap. This new partnership is built on nearly 20 years of support for John Muir Award activity in East Ayrshire.

Andy McNamara worked as an Outdoor Instructor at Outdoor Learning East Ayrshire alongside the behaviour unit Youth Strategy from 2001 - 2010.

I first came into contact with the John Muir Award in the early 2000s whilst working with students who were not coping in mainstream education. The outdoors was a very positive place for many of these young people and we would often see positive behaviour that was not displayed in any classroom setting.

We used the Award as a framework for many of our courses with a typical one including walking parts of the River Ayr Way, canoeing the River Doon, exploring the network of cycle paths around Ayrshire and climbing the hills of Glen Afton or Loch Doon. Doing the John Muir Award helped us form great conservation partnerships with Scottish Wildlife Trust and East Ayrshire Woodlands.

Margaret Devlin was a real driving force for the John Muir Award in East Ayrshire and in the later 2000s she developed a strong partnership with Dumfries House. On one memorable occasion I recall a night walk from Auchinleck through Dumfries House to the Barony Head A-frame Pit Head. By exploring the same area they knew during the daytime, at night a whole lot of excitement was added.

I have many happy memories from my time doing the John Muir Award at East Ayrshire and now that is getting on twenty years it will soon be time to revisit the area and see if that was indeed the best time to plant a tree.

Natalie White is the Principal Teacher for the Curriculum Outdoors Attainment Challenge with East Ayrshire Council.

I first came across the John Muir Award in 2011 as a newly graduated primary teacher in New Cumnock Primary school in East Ayrshire. I had been looking at wider achievements as a way to build pupil confidence, encourage them to be active and support them to engage and develop a love of the beautiful environment that surrounded them. And when a chance conversation with some elderly locals led to a lot of pupil questions about the heritage of the village, we soon had a child-led learning project 'The Auld Kirkyard'.

On a weekly basis the children and 6 parent volunteers spent time in the Auld Kirkyard. We engaged in a wide variety of activities: bird watching, habitat building, bug surveys, weeding, planting and cleaning of gravestones. The pupils researched ten graves, we listened to talks from the local heritage group, and pieced together biographies that could be shared with other members of the community. There was never a dull moment and each Wednesday afternoon we would be out come rain or shine, it was the highlight of the week.

What amazed me most was how quickly the pupils became attached to the space. They viewed this site as their wild place, they became guardians of it, they would check on it after school, and they were visibly upset if there was evidence of antisocial behaviours. The unloved old graveyard turned into a loved greenspace.

The John Muir Award not only provided a framework to work through, it kept the vision of nature and attachment to our environment central in the lesson planning. This enhanced the curriculum learning. Writing a letter to the local council to repair the wall was an excellent writing lesson. The pupils wrote passionately, they wanted the Kirkyard to be cared for and loved. The wall was fixed!

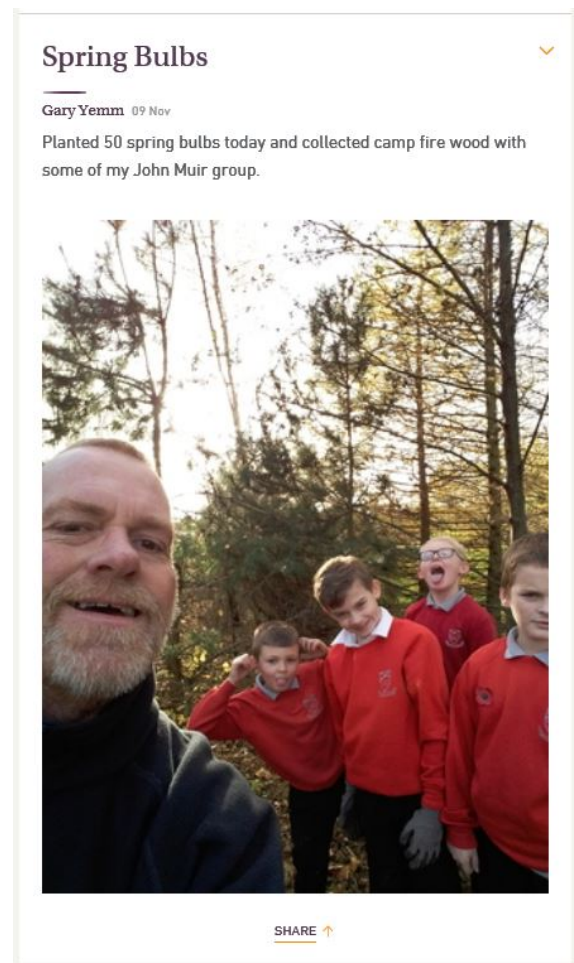
Enabling positive, meaningful experiences like these is invaluable both educationally and as we support our children to grow into responsible citizens and effective contributors. My first John Muir Award has stayed with me and I have no doubt for years to come it will be one of the experiences that the pupils remember most vividly about their schooling.

Find the East Ayrshire Council Learning Outdoors Support Team and Natalie on Twitter: @eaclost, @natsywhite

Gary Yemm is a school janitor in Kilmarnock. Gary has completed his own Discovery & Explorer Awards in 2017, and is currently working on his Conserver Award. His John Muir Award experiences inspired him to set up a lunch-time nature club for pupils at the school.

What attracted me to the John Muir Award is that it is open to all different backgrounds, groups, families and individuals. Working on my own Awards has brought about a change from me just being an outdoor person to a more nature conservation approach. I have met a lot of like-minded people that has opened up opportunities to learn new skills especially coppicing and woodland management, all of which was inspired by people attached to the John Muir Award.

I have also gained the confidence to lead a group of pupils from the primary school I am janitor at and encourage them through their own John Muir Award. Going forward I would like to think I can encourage and inspire others to take up the challenge to Discover, Explore, Conserve and Share in the spirit of John Muir.



Alison Calcott – East Ayrshire Woodlands



We have incorporated the John Muir Discovery Award into the majority of our Branching Out groups for quite a few years now. Branching Out is a GP referral, 12 week programme supporting people with varying mental health needs.

I am very lucky to have the job I have. To be outside and to be amongst trees and wildlife means everything to me, but when I started to get involved with Branching Out, it made me even more appreciative of how lucky I am compared to others whose mental health can be really very poor and can be accompanied sometimes with other physical ailments. Yet, I saw a determination and a commitment from many of them during the 12 weeks that really inspired me... Even just getting up in the morning can be a massive challenge for a lot of these people, let alone coming into a woodland for 12 weeks, come rain or shine, and putting up with my work colleague Mark's jokes.

So the John Muir Award was a great opportunity for us to be able to give them something else to inspire them further, through the legacy of a man who saw real beauty in all of the natural landscapes that he discovered during his lifetime.



The John Muir Award has been of great value to our group's participants. Through the conservation tasks people seem to gain a sense of ownership, connection & protection for their environment. It's amazing to witness how people begin to see a woodland in a totally new light as the weeks progress and how, through the Four Challenges, the inspiration gained - whether it be from drawing, writing, discussion or just being in and around nature - translates into people's everyday lives out with the group.

Once we had a gentleman in our group who had served in the armed forces. Because of the nature of the group and because it was small in size we allowed our ex-serviceman to bring in his dog during each session. The dog was his world and went everywhere with him. Toby the dog actually was a great asset to the group and gathered sticks for the fire and became our mascot during the 12 week period. When the group had finished, I contacted John Muir Trust regarding the certificate request and explained our situation and they kindly made up a 'Doggy Discovery Award' for Toby which I thought was a lovely gesture and his owner was over the moon.

I would like to thank the staff at John Muir Trust for all their help. Their patience and kindness has always made me feel confident and supported as an outdoor educator and their obvious enthusiasm has inspired me to think of new achievements that we can deliver to people through the John Muir Award.

So as we sit round our fire with a cuppa in the woods we raise our mugs to you and wish you a happy birthday John Muir Award!!!



Mark and Alison, East Ayrshire Woodlands

East Lothian Countryside Ranger Service



The East Lothian Countryside Ranger Service has been involved with delivering the John Muir Award right from the beginning. We continue to use it through many of the groups that we work with and look forward to seeing where the next 21 years will take us! Here are a few contemplations from people involved in the John Muir Award and the East Lothian Countryside Ranger Service past, present and future.

Looking back.....

Back in 1997, the East Lothian Countryside Ranger Service was an important partner in helping the John Muir Award begin its journey in East Lothian. During the next 6+ years they supported a diverse range of conservation projects with the John Muir Award East Lothian Team.

One project that I clearly remember making a real difference was a John Muir Award group in Gullane, where around 10 young people aged 12 - 16 years explored their local wild area and learnt what they could do to get practically involved.

They met up on a weekly basis in the evening and, along with the John Muir Award Manager, there was an East Lothian Ranger.

The group helped plant marram grass, did various litter picks, and helped with Sea Buckthorn management and access issues. They formed a great team. They gained their John Muir Discovery Award but they also gained a sense of responsibility for their place and a fantastic relationship with the Ranger at that time (Jo Mercer). Jo's role was crucial in this experience - she was positive, inspirational, educational, supportive, fun and most importantly, local to them - they got to know her in their space.



East Lothian Rangers have been involved since the start of the Award and they should be really proud of this connection. I hope they continue to inspire young people in the East Lothian area.

Mandy Craig (nee Calder)

East Lothian John Muir Award Manager 1997 - 2002

Happening right now.....!

A collection of thoughts from the Knox Academy Green Angels, who achieved their Discovery Award this year by working with the East Lothian Countryside Ranger Service and The Green Team.

best time ever even in the cold!

lots of laughs and making new friends

best hot chocolate EVER !!!

how to light a fire

what to do when our friends get in trouble

how quickly buckthorn grows and how jaggy it is

try it you will make new friends and learn lots about nature

we learnt about the trees and the birds

using our imagination

our outdoor McDonalds

learned how to dress for the weather

how to use hand tools

Looking forward.....



I have volunteered with the East Lothian Countryside Rangers for 3 years. During this time I have enjoyed all the experiences volunteering has brought - I have learnt about conservation skills, wildlife surveying, ringing birds and identification of species. One of the most memorable sessions was ringing birds. I am currently applying for Countryside Management and Conservation. I feel that my time with the Rangers has encouraged my passion of nature and helped me to achieve my career path.

Amelia Govan

East Lothian Junior Ranger and recipient of the Discovery and Explorer Award

Edith MacQuarrie

Now at the age of 21, the John Muir Award offers “the key of the door” to take young people - and adults - outdoors to explore wild places. This freedom to engage with the wilderness stimulates creativity and curiosity. New challenges and natural highs. Place has an impact on us all; the John Muir Award enables and encourages many from more urban settings to experience the beauty and quiet of Scotland. It has been a pleasure working with colleagues from the John Muir Trust over the years. May you go from strength to strength.

**Education Futures Trust - Shar Brown,
Lead Outdoor Learning Facilitator**



When the Education Futures Trust was founded in 2012, outdoor learning formed just a small part of our offer. We worked primarily with small groups of young people who were referred by local schools to both our conservation and Forest School courses, and found that the holistic approach that the John Muir Award promoted gave a solid foundation to the work that the young people were completing in the spaces they were exploring, as well as often being the first award and positive reinforcement that some had ever received.

When we were asked to design a well-being course for adults living with multiple and often complex health issues, setting this outside, with a focus on side-by-side team conservation tasks and creative bushcraft activities was our first choice. Using 'head, heart, hands' and 'discover, explore, conserve, share' as a clear, flexible, open framework, a scheme of work was developed and the 'Without Walls' survival project was born. We meet once a week for ten consecutive weeks, working to conserve a conservation area called Shornden Meadow in our local park. The site repays our contribution by providing a calm, safe, accessible, wild space in the middle of very urban environment; we in turn give back by developing habitats, clearing rubbish, surveying species and maintaining the streams that run through it, strengthening our connection to the place we live in. We see so much...sparrow hawks, herons, cormorants, water scorpions, fresh water shrimp, kingfisher...and then find out more. We share what we find, and build our confidence as we do so. Stories are shared, and advice exchanged. We teach each other skills, and build self-esteem. With each group we go on a journey; we start as a group of strangers, and by the end of our time together have built strong and lasting positive relationships with ourselves, with each other, and with the place we've spent time together in. We celebrate the distance travelled and what we've achieved by lighting a fire and inviting significant others to share food and witness the presentation of the John Muir Awards.

The outdoor learning offer at EFT has grown to encompass family work, under 5s and holiday clubs. We still offer the John Muir Discovery Award to young people as part of our Forest School alternative provision, and are currently running the 12th round of Without Walls. Staff have embraced the aims and principles of the Award, and participants have been inspired to move on to volunteer for other conservation teams. Everything about the Award is special, from the support so generously given by the Trust's staff to the quality of the beautiful certificates that link every recipient. Happy 21st from all at EFT!





HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND | ÀRAINNEACHD EACHDRAIDHEIL ALBA

Historic Environment Scotland Ranger Service

"The John Muir Award has been such an important motivator in my career as an environmental educator. It was actually someone introducing me to the Award when I worked at a primary school many years ago that lit my fire for learning in the outdoors and connecting young people to wild places. Now, as Learning Ranger for Historic Scotland Ranger Service at Holyrood Park, the John Muir Award is something I believe passionately in as a way to encourage young people's deeper connection to the truly stunning greenspace we have on our doorstep."

Robert May, Learning Ranger, Holyrood Park Ranger Service

"My class were involved in 4 outdoor sessions with the Holyrood Park Rangers as part of the John Muir Award during the summer term. I had never really heard of John Muir Award prior to being involved with my class but I was excited for the class to be involved in some quality outdoor learning. The John Muir Award experience was brilliant. The activities were well thought out, paced well, engaged the children in all sorts of cross-curricular thinking and really opened their eyes to what an amazing place our local environment is. It was nice, as a teacher, to be able to step back a little bit and observe the children being taught by others and watch the way that they responded to challenges and new learning experiences. Rob, Melissa and the other supporting staff were fun, patient and enthusiastic and their delivery made the experience what it was. They also provided ideas for follow up class teaching which the children really enjoyed too. This was a really worthwhile experience."

Moyra Stephen, Teacher, Abbeyhill Primary School



Joanne Cowie – the person I am today...

Joanne Cowie first got involved with the John Muir Award when her Duke of Edinburgh's Award group were introduced to conservation tasks in Strathclyde Country Park. She travelled to the Isle of Rum with the John Muir Award Activities Programme where she helped with rhododendron control, and then further afield to the Picos de Europa, in northern Spain. In 1999 Joanne was presented with the 3,000th John Muir Award by Tom Weir at a special ceremony held at the Mitchell Theatre, Glasgow.

“Since I was 14 my two heroes have been Bob Reid [Countryside Ranger at Strathclyde Country Park] and John Muir. Bob always encouraged me to experience new places and do new things. I remember building an educational nature pond at Strathclyde Country Park and now I take my 11-year-old son there and talk about the importance of amphibians and wildlife – it has definitely stayed with me. Looking back, it was the encouragement from Bob, the experiences I had in wild places, and the people I met whilst doing my John Muir Award that have helped make me the person I am today.

“Being presented with the 3,000th John Muir Award certificate at the Mitchell Theatre in Glasgow was very special too. I knew that I was doing Bob proud. I remember Tom Weir presenting me with my John Muir Award certificate – it's funny because I've recently started watching Weir's Way, following Tom all across Scotland. Today my job with Dulux paint takes me all over the country too, from Perth to Orkney, and Stornoway to Aberdeen – I often stop to enjoy the beaches and lochs. It's made me realise how important the environment is, and how we need to look after wild places.

“Today, hearing that over 300,000 John Muir Awards have now been achieved makes me feel old!! But I also can't wait for my son to have the opportunity to do his own John Muir Award too.”



Joanne Today



Picos 2000

Top award joy for teenager Joanne

TEENAGER Joanne Cowie from North Motherwell has received a prestigious award in recognition of her work in environmental and conservation issues.

The 17-year-old, who is currently working on the gold level of her Duke of Edinburgh Award, received the John Muir Award after working on a range of wildlife and conservation tasks in Northern Spain alongside other young people.

The trip was organised through the John Muir Award and funded through the Prince's Trust (Scotland).

The 3000th certificate was presented at a special ceremony held in the Mitchell Theatre, Glasgow.

As well as receiving the certificate, Joanne turned the tables, by presenting a Lifetime Achievement Award to



JOANNE Cowie with Tom Weir.

young people in the Education National Miller Homes Group. Youth Work Week The group has also Event

Tom Weir – 3,000th Award



Lake District National Park - Bob Cartwright

Congratulations on the John Muir Award's 21st Birthday

This award is all about serendipity – a happy coincidence of ambition and opportunity. It was serendipitous that at a time when we in the Lake District National Park were looking for a new partner to deliver outdoor learning, Rob Bushby was right there with the perfect package.

Over the years as the popularity of the Award has grown, countless people have fulfilled their ambitions, grasping with both hands the opportunities the Lake District offers. As we gain World Heritage Site inscription, how many more will now do the same? What an exhilarating prospect!

Bob Cartwright, Former Director Lake District National Park Authority

Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park

Our relationship with the John Muir Trust has flourished since 2013 when we started working together more closely through joint delivery of the John Muir Award. The Award has helped us to encourage and support people from all backgrounds to come and experience the National Park, get to know it better and help to look after it through undertaking their own Award.

It was a natural fit for us, so we also started to do the Award as a staff team, to increase the opportunities for us to have shared experiences together in the natural environment. We started, hoping for an increased understanding of species, reduction of litter, broadening of our knowledge about the National Park. However as we got out and about and increased our time together in the outdoors and on our own patch, we became aware that it has given us this, and so much more.

It is no understatement to say that undertaking our John Muir Award together has been transformational. It has not just connected us to each other, as a team, but reconnected each of us



to our very special place, Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park. Appreciating the beauty, healing and inspiration of our natural environment is something that we will all use in every part of our lives.

Charlotte Wallace - Volunteering, Engagement and Programme Manager

“The day walking through the water, being stung by nettles, getting wet and dirty provided an opportunity for me to think about how much I have become disconnected with, and miss the earth... I have always known that spending time outside offers an undefinable benefit to our being, but I had lost the understanding of how true this really is. The day has allowed me to refocus on what is really important both personally and professionally and reawakened an enthusiasm and energy I will endeavour to weave into every part of my life again.” **Graeme Archibald**

[Case Study - Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park Volunteering, Engagement and Programme Staff Team](#)

Mandy Craig - Let's start at the very beginning....

As the Trust's first ever employee for the John Muir Award, my mission was to develop, promote and deliver the Award to the young people of East Lothian. Between 1997 and 2002, the John Muir Award was a hive of activity all over East Lothian.

The post was made possible with a partnership formed between The John Muir Trust, East Lothian Council and The Rank Foundation. As well as developing the Award, I also had to develop myself and along with five years amazing work experience, I left the post with a Youth Work qualification and a Master's Degree in Human Ecology. It was quite a journey!

After a period of introduction, promotion and making connections, the John Muir Award was up and running. We worked with primary schools, high schools, Brownie groups, Guides, Cubs, Scouts, youth clubs, and community groups and centres throughout East Lothian. We formed an American Exchange programme (JACE 99), created John Muir Award holiday activity programmes, hosted gappers (Mikey, Becki & Leigh), worked in partnership with five teacher secondments to develop curriculum links, supported Tall Ship Bursaries for young people and created partnerships with various organizations in East Lothian (Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), Pishwanton Woods, Sea Bird Centre, East Lothian Outdoor Centre and Stepping Out). We delivered weekend residentials and day projects, supported and worked with adult volunteer leaders, delivered teacher training and John Muir Award Leader Training.

Thinking back, my recollections are of the amazing wild places in East Lothian and beyond. Young people of all ages from all over East Lothian, connecting with nature, having fun and learning about themselves as well as wild places. People and places, making connections. It was a wonderful project.

The John Muir Award continued to have dedicated support in East Lothian for a few years after 2002, then the East Lothian post was expanded to become the Scotland-wide Education role.

A Recollection by Mandy Craig (née Calder) John Muir Award East Lothian Manager (1997 – 2002)



David Picken, Nigel Hawkins, Mandy Craig, Rob Bushby and Angus Miller at the John Muir Award 21st birthday celebration in Dunbar, 26th February 2018

National Trust High Wray Basecamp

At High Wray Basecamp, the National Trust's full time volunteer centre in the Lake District, we work with a very broad variety of groups from all walks of life. They're all bound by one thing: they come out to work with us on practical conservation work, helping to look after the Lake District's beautiful landscapes and leave with a feeling of having made a difference, learnt something and had some fun.



We are ideally set up to meet the Conserve challenge of the John Muir Award and the Discover challenge is also easily met by working with us, but where the Award particularly helps us is with the Explore and Share challenges. We've always encouraged volunteer groups to make sure they appreciate the place they've come to help look after, but 'explore' adds extra weight to this message and we find groups participating in the John Muir Award more likely to ask us about that interesting fungus or weird beetle...



On top of this, 'share' means when they leave us they have extra reason to continue talking about their experience and let others know about it - great for both the John Muir Trust and for the National Trust too.

It's these added extras that help to enrich a volunteer group's time with us and enforce the message that it's about more than just working, something that we hope will build a stronger connection with nature and wild places and perhaps be the beginnings of a life-long interest.

Rob Clarke, Basecamp Community Ranger, National Trust

You can watch a short film with Rob talking about using the John Muir Award with [Littledale Hall Community Centre at High Wray Basecamp](#).



New Forest National Park

The John Muir Award and me - my greatest memories

Surly. Awkward. Indifferent.

That's how many would describe them You
know, those NEET kids

The ones who 'apparently' smoke, swear and are hard to work with The
ones who 'apparently' break things and set fire to things

The ones who are 'apparently' glued to their phones and dis-engaged

I used to see them like that as well. Before I
spent time with them.

Before I listened to them

Before I started to see them as individuals

I used to worry about working with them

Before I saw their fear and anxiety for the unknown

Before I encouraged them to smell the earth, blindfold each other and feel the soft moss

Before I felt their smile, heard them laugh and saw them share

Not anymore

Now I love spending time with them Laughing and

sharing the forest with them Seeing them relax

and chat and play

Allowing each of them to enjoy the forest in their own way Seeing
things how they want to

Spending time exploring their own thoughts Giving
them a voice and allowing others to listen

It's what John Muir told us to do

'The Grand show is eternal...' he teased 'Between

every two pines...' he encouraged

'There is a love of wild nature in everybody' he said

Spending time with these NEETS

Discovering and exploring the world around them And

the world within them

Are my greatest memories

Craig Daters, Ranger, New Forest National Park Authority

A Countryside Ranger perspective...



Bob Reid, a Countryside Ranger in North Lanarkshire, first got involved in 1996 following an approach from the Trust to deliver a John Muir Award workshop at the Scottish Countryside Rangers Association AGM. He subsequently contributed towards early steering group meetings, joined a developmental residential trip to Rum, and championed the Award at Strathclyde Country Park and across Scotland, presented Awards at a European Junior Ranger Summer Camp, and even helped name a new road in Motherwell after John Muir. After 34 years 'behind the badge' as a Countryside Ranger, Bob retired in 2009.

"Being a Countryside Ranger is all about helping people connect with nature – what drives us is the magic when you see the key turn and the engine switch on with someone. It's all about creating opportunities for memories which stay with people – whether that's learning to swim in the river at the end of your street, or glimpsing an eagle from heights of the Rum mountains. Muir's passion was to help inspire people to nature – therefore it's not surprising that many of us recognise John Muir as the Patron Saint of Rangers.

"So when I met Dave Picken from the John Muir Trust I could see that the John Muir Award could not only be a good structure to help Countryside Rangers engage with different communities and share Muir's ethos in a modern-age, but also, crucially, fill a gap in opportunities available for young people in deprived areas. Dave's big smiley face and positivity rubbed off on me instantly. We began to use the John Muir Award with Boys Brigade and Duke of Edinburgh's Award groups, and then onto primary schools local to the Country Park – we even had a group of children and adults planting trees through their Scramble & Quad Bike Club, probably the only carbon neutral motorbike club in the country!

In 2007, our local councillor Bill Martin noticed how closely we were working across the community, and he offered for us to consider naming a new housing street in North Motherwell – well it was obvious we should call the new street John Muir Way.

"I'm not surprised to see that the John Muir Award hasn't changed much over the years because it was well thought through. It has helped many young people from North Lanarkshire and beyond to switch on to nature, and for a few this has been life-changing. In summary, I leaved towards the John Muir Award because of its simplicity in helping to connect people with nature, and it chimed with my favourite John Muir quote – 'Within five minutes' walk from my place of habitation I arrive at the inexhaustible pages of nature.'"

Bob Reid, North Lanarkshire Council



John Muir Way, North Motherwell 2007 (Bob Reid front far left)

North Wales Wildlife Trust

Why the John Muir Award is important to us

Being a Provider of the John Muir Award shows people that, as well as being an organisation which is actively involved in the practical conservation of natural habitats, we also exist to provide experiences which allow local people of all ages to re-connect with the beautiful wild places that exist right on their doorstep.

Its simple structure, and the breadth of activities which can be counted towards its attainment, has meant that we've been able to offer it to a wide range of young people through the 'Our Wild Coast' project (supported by Our Bright Future) over the past year.

Being able to offer people a meaningful, credible achievement award which acknowledges the effort they've put into to understanding, protecting and promoting the health of the natural world is very valuable to us as an organisation.

Favourite memory

Taking a group of Year 8 pupils from Ysgol Syr Thomas Jones in Amlwch (Anglesey) out to our Cemlyn Bay Nature Reserve for the day. Some of the pupils had already visited the reserve as part of an educational session and had learnt about the ecology of the area. This second session was intended to fulfil the 'Share' element of their John Muir Award, and would involve several pupils interpreting the reserve for the benefit of some of their peers who had not visited before.

We had expected that we may need to prompt them and encourage them a little bit, so we were astonished when one of the pupils, Bethany, stood up of her own accord and began detailing the natural history of the bay to the rest of her form group. Her passion for the subject shone through and once finished, she proceeded to lead the rest of her class to the nearby rock pools where she pointed out some of the common marine species which could be found there.

It was a great example of seeing the John Muir Award in action.

Chris Baker - Lead for Our Bright Future 'Our Wild Coast' project





North York Moors National Park

The John Muir Award provides a wonderful framework for our work, mainly with young people and families in the North York Moors National Park.

We run a 6 month programme with families, meeting to connect with and learning about our stunning national park, taking responsibility and giving something back to help conserve and protect this special landscape.

They visit new places and do fun activities to discover more about them. Activities have included footpath repairs, beach cleans and stile building. Those who graduate the Explorer Club love receiving a John Muir Award and learning about the man who is the father of all National Parks. Our work with young people from Middlesbrough, at risk from exclusion, also uses the John Muir Award, and over the weeks these young people are with us, doing practical tasks in the outdoors, you can see them gaining in confidence. Completing their own John Muir Award gives them a real sense of achievement.

Daniel Moncrieff



© North York Moors National Park

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority

The John Muir Award has been really important to me over the years as it has such close synergies with my work in trying to encourage and support people; some with significant barriers to make more regular and deeper use of the benefits offered by wild places.

The Award has often proved to be a very useful tool in achieving it - providing a powerful focus for people's experiences and a great framework for them in planning and reflecting on their time in nature. It also great fun and I love wearing the beard!

One of my favourite experiences has been with Elliots Hill Care Ltd – the photo below was on a sunny day towards the end of a block of sessions that paired Customers with Health and Social Care Students from Pembrokeshire College. This sticks out as each of the 10 sessions was well attended, both groups had a great time and bonded strongly through their shared experiences outdoors. The finale was an amazing Share event where people who would not previously have done so, stood in front of 50 people in quite a formal setting and whooped with joy at getting their John Muir Award. For some it was one of the first times they had achieved anything, even at the age of 50 or more. Elliots Hill has gone on to be one of the organisations who have embraced using the outdoors the most and I think the John Muir Award was instrumental in that outcome.

Tom Moses



Phoenix Futures - Jon Hall & Phil Claydon

“The John Muir Trust has helped hundreds of people with drug and alcohol problems reconnect with nature and open their eyes to a whole new world around them. Phoenix Futures is proud to work with and support the John Muir Award. We have seen first-hand the inspiring change it can make to people’s lives. We will continue to work with their dedicated team in our Recovery through Nature projects in the future.”

Jon Hall, Commissioning and Development Manager, Phoenix Futures

“The Recovery through Nature programme, which heavily involves the John Muir Award, has been a large cornerstone in my recovery. I have always had a keen interest in nature but this was constantly suppressed by my addiction. John Muir and Recovery through Nature gave me the opportunity to reawaken my interest and curiosity around nature. Because of this my recovery took a huge leap forward. I wanted to know more about the environment, its flora and fauna. Reading about John Muir gave me inspiration and confidence to go outside and explore. John himself was a very eccentric individual. Before his life as an ecologist he was an inventor. Besides the usual such as clocks he invented a desk that would choose a book and hold it in place while read, then return it and choose another. Also a bed that would wake him and position him upright while lighting his oil lamp. It took this kind of man, who thought outside of the box, to realise how important the wilds were and that they needed conserving.

Most of our Recovery through Nature sessions were directed towards conservation and local projects. This could involve preservation of woodlands by controlling growth of certain plants, tree planting or simply counting and registering wildlife. These days are creative and productive. Especially in our area which was dominated by coal mining. Unattractive slag heaps are now woodland public parks. Creating and maintaining them gives a real feeling of achievement, self-worth and fulfilment. Also the results are visible, appreciated and used by the general public which gives a huge sense of camaraderie and pride. Personally, being blind, the change in my confidence and positivity is immeasurable. Some of the finest days were a simple walk, around a lake or through woodland. This allowed you to free your mind, appreciate and realise what was around you. Creating a sense of freedom and perspective, giving you the highest incentive for recovery. All of this has been achieved through hard work, determination and a will to change. This would not be possible without John Muir Awards and the Recovery through Nature programme.”

Phil Claydon



© Phoenix Futures

Phoenix Futures - Adrian Moran

Over my time working with the Phoenix Futures 'Recovery Through Nature' programme I have witnessed hundreds of people who had reached a troubled point within themselves, felt isolated and sometimes even ostracised from society going to the polar opposite by seeking support and then engaging in the John Muir Award!

People who felt trapped in a negative cycle of destructive behaviours and at times felt too anxious to venture outdoors by themselves were able to feel that real connection that nature provides, and through discovery, exploration, conservation and sharing personal experiences with others they created a sense of wellbeing, enjoying their life again. People experienced personal and external discovery, wanting to find out more about nature and the world we live in, not only now wanting to preserve their own life and become healthier in all aspects but to also care and be proactive in protecting our world.

My Fondest Memory

During my time working in partnership with the National Trust at Marsden Moor, Rob Henry and I took the group out each December for a ramble on the moors discussing points of interest, enjoying the harsh conditions. Little did the group know there was a hidden agenda! After a few miles of exploration over rough terrain we discovered a lone Christmas tree on the open expanse and at this point we revealed the true purpose to our expedition as we unpacked the well concealed decorations to dress the tree as we shared the mince pies from our back packs. Christmas often brings up different emotions for those in recovery, and on this day whether people had a positive opinion of Christmas or not, I can safely say we shared a special experience together and conserved our tradition.

Adrian Moran



© Adrian Moran

Richard Bonington Primary School

At Richard Bonington Primary and Nursery we have regular forest school sessions which are embedded into the curriculum for all year groups. By introducing the John Muir Award to our older KS2 children it has enabled us to give our children credit for the great work they do to support the natural world. It was good to find an award that fitted in so well with the activities we were doing and at no extra cost. The quality of the certificates gives each child something to treasure and be proud of achieving. By engaging in the John Muir Award children make connections with their local environment and take responsibility for conserving it. The John Muir Award has supported and enhanced our forest school sessions at Richard Bonington in Arnold, Nottingham.

Jill Gaunt, Forest School Teacher



Roddy McKee – ‘in good stead’

Nearly 18 years ago whilst on a Scottish Wildlife Trust volunteering and training development scheme I got a great opportunity to go to Handa Island off the north-west coast of Scotland. As part of the conservation work there we did our John Muir Award.

The whole experience was a very positive one and we were very fortunate to do our Award in such a beautiful setting. The landscape is stunning and staying in the bothy next to the warden’s hut with basic amenities brought us closer to the land. We had to collect our firewood, and all the provisions we needed we had to carry across on the small ferry. Even the water came from a heavily peated supply on the island.

We were also fortunate to be there at the same time as the sea birds; specifically the fledgling razorbills and guillemots. This, and being surrounded by the pulsing sea, brought us closer to the rhythms of nature, and gave us a greater understanding and appreciation of wild places. One of the lasting memories I have from my visit there is that of the snipe at dusk making an incredible whirring sound with their tail feathers above the meadow we were sitting in. No other noise to be heard other than the gentle crash of the waves on the beach below us.

I then went on to study Ecology, and now I work in the outdoors doing countryside maintenance. I feel the knowledge and experience I gained from volunteering with the Scottish Wildlife Trust and having this recognised through my John Muir Award certificate helped put me in good stead. It’s helped me to appreciate the joy that can be had from practical work in the outdoor environment.

Roddy McKee, Play and Maintenance Operative, with Stirling Council



Roddy’s bench – upcycled drift wood on Handa Island (2000)



Handa Island (above) and the long drive from Grangemouth (2000)

Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



In a nutshell, to me the John Muir Award is:

Joyful
Meaningful
Amazing

Our John Muir Award has been full of fun and thrills
and we've discovered and explored our beautiful Shropshire Hills

From hill-tops and valley bottoms and forests to farm
we've been wild and energetic, mindful and calm

We've cut down trees to help the heather
and been outdoors in all sorts of weather

We've made homes for dormice, bird and bat
and even worn John Muir's beard and hat!

We've had fun and adventure and never got bored
So thank you and Happy 21st Birthday to the John Muir Award

Cath Landles



© Shropshire Hills AONB

Tullochan

The John Muir Award has given Tullochan the opportunity to engage with young people to help build their confidence, become responsible citizens and help build fundamental and positive relationships through outdoor informal learning.

Why the John Muir Award is Important to us:

The John Muir Award has been important to the delivery of Tullochan activities as it has helped us engage young people who lack confidence, self-esteem, who struggle to engage with their peers, and have trust issues through informal, outdoor education. This has allowed us to engage with young people of all ages who have equally enjoyed taking part in the award. Through this award we have been able to give our young people the opportunity to take part in activities that are not always available to them. It has allowed us to create amazing activities specific to the needs of the group while supporting them to achieve an award. The young people have created amazing memories, make new friends to gain a knowledge of the outdoors and learn the importance of the environment and conservation and in turn spark an interest in a career within the outdoors.

Best Memory

Tullochan has many great memories from delivering the John Muir Award and it is hard to pick only one. One of our best moments was last year when delivering the Explore award over summer 2016 where we worked alongside the Loch Lomond fisheries Trust. The young people had the opportunity to take part in Electro fishing which was an activity most had never even heard of before let alone take part in. The young people learned about the importance of aquatic biodiversity. By doing this activity they helped collect data to monitor the fish population which would help contribute to scientific research completed by the Loch Lomond fisheries Trust. The young people enjoyed this activity and learned a lot about their local environment and gained an understanding of conservation.







Venture Scotland

On 26th February our Edinburgh Team Leader, Robin Jeffrey, represented Venture Scotland at the John Muir Award's 21st anniversary celebration in Dunbar in East Lothian, the birthplace of John Muir. The Award was set up by the John Muir Trust 21 years ago to "promote educational, social and personal development through engagement with wild places and involvement in conservation."

Venture Scotland has a long established relationship with the Award, covering its 21 year history. We were one of the organisations chosen in the summer of 1995 by the John Muir Trust to pilot the Award due to Venture Scotland recognising the benefits to an individual's health and wellbeing of spending time in nature. In fact, Venture Scotland's Environmental Education Handbook published in 1998 (supported by Scottish Natural Heritage and the John Muir Award) set out Venture Scotland's approach as "enabling young people to understand the environment and empower them with the knowledge, skills and confidence to take positive action for change at a level of commitment which they decide."

Venture Scotland has also passed a significant milestone, with over 1000 participants having received a John Muir Award at Discovery, Explorer or Conserver level. By completing a John Muir Award these participants have discovered greater connections with nature, increased understanding of biodiversity, helped to conserve wildlife and been able to share their experiences and stories with others in their communities.

Over the last 21 years Venture Scotland has been delivering the John Muir Award in a variety of beautiful wild places. Activities include planting native trees in the majestic Glen Etive which surrounds our Kinlocheteive Bothy, discovering nature on the doorsteps of our largest cities such as the Water of Leith in Edinburgh (a haven of wildlife) and exploring beautiful local parks such as Pollok Park in Glasgow with its extensive mature woodlands.

We hope that the John Muir Award continues to blossom for another 21 years and that John Muir's message on the benefits of connecting with nature will continue to inspire Venture Scotland's participants, volunteers and staff for years to come.

"Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their freshness into you and the storms their energy while cares will drop off like autumn leaves." **John Muir**



© Venture Scotland

West Lancashire Ranger Service

I participated in John Muir Award leader training while working for Plantlife and running the 'We're in the Wild' project, helping children and young people discover their local outdoor spaces and connect with nature. I found it to be a brilliant avenue for teaching and developing young people to gain a better understanding of their outdoor space. Often working with groups with SEN/D, I found the John Muir Award to be particularly fruitful for them as they not only learned to appreciate and explore a place that was often alien to them, it also increased their confidence to go outdoors. Working toward a recognised achievement made it all the more special to them.

I now work for West Lancashire Ranger Service and have continued to work with schools that I made connections with during Plantlife and have introduced the John Muir Award here through several avenues, including summer Junior Rangers and after school clubs. The word is now spreading and numerous schools are starting to contact me for the Award. I am now guiding trainee teachers from Edge Hill University to the award so they can develop it with their schools as they take on their teaching career in the future. Hopefully in the future we can change the 'nature deficit' forever.

Anne Faulkner, Parks and Countryside Ranger



Westonbirt, The National Arboretum

As part of the community engagement project at Westonbirt Arboretum, we have been able to present over 250 John Muir Awards to participants, group leaders, volunteers and members of staff, from Discovery to Conserver level.

The John Muir Award has enabled us to offer a form of recognition to a wide variety of groups, including 'at risk' pupils, young people on the autistic spectrum, mental health support groups and drug & alcohol rehabilitation programmes. The flexibility of the Award means we have been able to assess each individual's achievement and personal development rather than needing to reach a 'one size fits all' standard.

The ability to develop a creative programme of activities has enabled participants to explore the arboretum through arts, green woodworking, photography, practical conservation, cooking and sensory activities to name a few, and connect more closely with our tree collection, in particular our redwoods. For some participants, the John Muir Award has also been recognition for regular attendance, something that can be difficult for people with a mental health illness, or taking on leadership responsibilities with their peers.

Karen Price



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Will Carey – Challenge and Adventure

I first came across the John Muir Award in the late 1990s early 2000s and initially used it as part of a joint project between Grantown Grammar School and Kingussie High School with Robbie Nicol and Tom Prescott.

Once I started work at the Highland Wildlife Park I used the Award as part of the Kingussie HS Rural Skills Project. We created a demonstration moorland at the Wildlife Park that was opened by Dick Balharry (conservationist and former John Muir Trust Chairman) and featured the grouse from the Famous Grouse adverts! The pupils on this programme were very challenging but the Award worked really well for them, allowing them to achieve something worthwhile.

For me that's the main strength of the John Muir Award - that it can include anyone and they can achieve something worthwhile in the outdoors that hasn't happened in school. It allows kids to be challenged and have adventure, there's a lot of room in the Award for adventure and challenge and kids really need that. You see really fed up kids having fun and experiencing success!

Some early memories of the John Muir Award:

- driving around the wildlife park and being charged by a European Bison!
- The stroppiest Kingussie HS pupil helping another pupil who was really struggling on a mountain biking trip, it really brought the best out in him.

More recently I have run the first John Muir Award in Zambia! Highlights from this are the 3 boys sharing their experiences at a whole school assembly, singing local songs and the whole school singing 'The Lovely River Spey'!



Will Carey and Deidre Falconer of Kingussie High School

Wiltshire Wildlife Trust

The John Muir Award is important to Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and those with whom we work as it provides a focus and structure to our practical, hands-on engagement style. There is a sense of purpose and progression available that suits students' needs.

Being able to recognise a participant's individual progress and achievements with a John Muir Award is incredibly important; for some it may well be the only Certificate they will leave school with. It's a valued incentive to both students and schools alike in taking the John Muir Award to heart.

One of the highlights of my six years delivering the John Muir Award has been working with the Local Authority's Youth Inclusion Programme on long term programmes with the same vulnerable young people who are at risk of school exclusion. To see the change from "I don't want to be here" to "I'd like to carry on and do all three levels of the John Muir Award" is truly inspiring and attests to the power of learning in the wild.

Dean Sherwin – Our Bright Future Milestones Project



© Dean Sherwin

Wirral Country Park Rangers and the John Muir Award



We have been offering the John Muir Award at Wirral Country Park for around 8 years now.

I first came across it when my 14 year old son returned from an Outward Bound week proudly showing off his certificate. I'd never heard of the Award before, so I decided to check it out. I quickly realised how valuable it would be to help recognise the work our Thursday Task Force volunteers accomplish in the park. They're a fantastic bunch, who give up their time every Thursday to tackle some big projects with cracking results. They're certainly not workshy!



All the volunteers chose to do the Conserver Level Award which took them around a year to complete. During this time they've built fences, laid paths, restored fresh water habitats, litter picked, planted wildflowers and trees, improved grassland and built steps. Participating in the Award makes you more aware of the beautiful countryside that you're working in. We often stop to watch a circling buzzard over the grassland, a little wood mouse collecting seeds from the ground we've disturbed, or a hovering kestrel over the cliff. Sometimes we come across newts and toads which we then make a habitat pile for, as we feel guilty for disturbing them. It's lovely to hear the animated chatter at lunchtime about what we've seen or accomplished that day. The Award has really brought the group together. In April we chose to celebrate John Muir Day with a cook out followed by painting treasure stones with a John Muir theme, to place around the park for people to find and re-hide.



"The John Muir Award is fantastic for us because it has an open framework and encourages participants to really enjoy the countryside around them. Just being outside lifts your spirit and improves your mood."



**Cathy Oldfield - Countryside Ranger
Wirral Country Park Ranger**

The John Muir Award at Wirral Country Park has gone from strength to strength. We have now opened up the Award to all our school and college work placements and recently saw 187 National Citizen Service participants complete the Award whilst camping in the park. Our next step is to look at how we can offer the Award to park users and families.

