

GOING TO THE MOUNTAIN IS GOING HOME: INTERPRETATION OF JOHN MUIR
THROUGH CULTURAL LANDSCAPES AT YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK AND JOHN
MUIR NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

by

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(Under the Direction of ERIC MACDONALD)

ABSTRACT

John Muir was a naturalist, writer, explorer, and early national parks advocate. Although known as a man of the mountains, John Muir also was a shrewd businessman, dependant on expansion of urban fruit markets to feed his family and fund his conservation advocacy. This thesis presents a model of interpretation of John Muir's life and legacy via cultural landscapes. The scope of the study concerns the two sites most directly connected with Muir: Yosemite National Park and the John Muir National Historic Site. Archival research, site visits, and interviews conclude with recommendations and a feasibility analysis.

INDEX WORDS: John Muir, National Park Service, Conservation, Cultural Landscape, Restoration, Rehabilitation, Interpretation, Authenticity

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DEDICATION

To my dad, for the opportunity. To my mom, for the passion.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Interpretation is an art that has the potential to spread knowledge. When faced with the stupefying grandeur of a sublime landscape or the site of a historic event, interpretation invites the visitor in, provides information, and explains the mystery. The practice of interpretation is defined as an informational and inspirational process, which enhances understanding and appreciation of cultural and natural resources¹. Originally viewed as education, the role of interpretation has grown theoretically and professionally in the past century. This mode of explanation is a vital tool in the management of historic sites, as well as natural landscapes and national parks.

The action of interpretation is impossible without the visitor. The individual, or group of individuals, visits a historic site intentionally to learn, to know more, and to experience the beauty of the place. Interpretation must not only explain the history or creation of the site in technical terms, but also touch the visitor personally, revealing a larger truth than the interpretive sign they stand before. Freeman Tilden, an early scholar of interpretation, positions this as one of his principles: “the chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.”² The knowledge gained by interpretation will foster a better understanding of natural and cultural resources, and furthermore, a desire to protect and preserve them.

In a journal of 1871, a man working near Yosemite Valley wrote, “I’ll interpret the rocks, learn the language of flood, storm and the avalanche. I’ll acquaint myself with the glaciers and wild gardens, and get as near to the heart of the world as I can.”³ In a context study of interpretation in the National Park Service, written in 1986, this quote is cited as the first

¹ Larry Beck and Ted Cable, *Interpretation in 21st Century: Fifteen Guiding Principles for Interpreting Nature and Culture* (Champaign: Sagamore Publishing, 1998), 1.

² Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting our Heritage* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1957), 13.

³ John Muir, *Studies in the Sierra* (Sacramento: First, 1968), 71.

mention of interpretation, and the context is a great understanding of nature. Prior to the Organic Act of 1916, which created the National Park Service, homesteaders and guides gave tours of the landscapes of Yellowstone and Yosemite, sometimes citing incorrect facts about park landscapes.⁴ With the creation of the National Park Service, interpretation took the form of lectures, informational pamphlets, and museum administration. It was not until 1925 that interpretation was institutionalized, when Stephen Mather, director of the National Park Service, placed the Education Division, along with landscape architecture and engineering, in the Service Organization⁵. Field schools of natural history taught guides how to give nature walks and interpret the landscapes around them, but a problem arose with historic site interpretation. The original appearance of historic sites often bore little resemblance to the period of significance that educators were trying to explain. This problem marked a transition point in interpretation from education to communication. The role of the interpreter and/or interpretive materials was now to recreate the past, and demonstrate its significance. Currently, entire divisions of National Park Service units are dedicated to the advancement of interpretation.

John Muir, advocate for the preservation of wilderness and creation of national parks, was the man working in Yosemite Valley who spoke those first words concerning interpretation in 1871. He made Yosemite his home for a short time, worked first as a shepherd, then built a sawmill for James Hutchings, pioneer homesteader of Yosemite, and heralded the land's glory by climbing its mountains and preaching on the regenerative power of wilderness. He went on to explore the mountains, develop a successful theory of the creation of Yosemite Valley by glaciers, and write countless articles on the beauty of natural landscapes and the need for their preservation. He helped organize the Sierra Club, one of the most successful conservation

⁴ Barry MacKintosh, *Interpretation in the National Park Service: A Historical Perspective* (Washington D.C.: National Park Service, History Division, 1986), 12.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

organizations to date, and served as its first president. In the 1920's, Sierra Club lectures and mountain climbing expeditions were appropriate settings to discuss John Muir's interests in the natural world and his writing campaigns to preserve wilderness. To fully understand the history of the National Park Service and interpretation, one must understand John Muir.

Two National Park Service sites in California tell the story of John Muir: Yosemite National Park and the John Muir National Historic Site. Yosemite sits at the heart of the Sierra Nevada mountain range, and its visitor centers, commemorative plaques, wayside exhibits, and wilderness trails interpret the area he so loved, as well as the time he called Yosemite home. As a lover of wilderness, it is hard to tell the story of this man indoors, as the museum exhibit does. A pantheist who believed in Nature's transcendental qualities, Muir claimed, "the clearest way to into the universe is through a forest wilderness"⁶. Yosemite National Park has tried to cope with the complex personal history and personality of John Muir and develop authentic modes to interpret his life. One of the most successful measures was the construction of the John Muir Trail, which begins in Yosemite Valley and terminates at Mount Whitney, the highest summit in the contiguous United States.

While John Muir is known mostly for his mountain climbing prowess and eccentric evangelical calls for conservation, he was also a successful rancher and businessman. This story is told at John Muir National Historic Site, the land in Martinez, California that was Muir's home and source of income for over twenty-five years. He married and raised a family on this land, while overseeing the production of his orchards. John Muir's life must be explored in both the wild and domestic spheres to fully comprehend the father of our National Park System.

Interpretation of John Muir at Yosemite National Park and John Muir National Historic Site covers valuable information about his life and advocacy, but does it not point

⁶ Linnie Wolfe, *John of the Mountains: The Unpublished Journals of John Muir* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1938), 12.

visitors towards both distinctive sites, each showing significant remnants of Muir's legacy. This thesis answers the question: What is lacking in the interpretation at Yosemite National Park and John Muir National Historic Site and how can it be improved to tell a balanced story of John Muir as both father of the American conservation movement and Victorian businessman? In the process of developing this thesis, subquestions also were answered to provide a foundation for the main conclusions. These subquestions are: Why interpret? What in Muir's life warrants interpretation? How does the current interpretation concerning Muir at these two sites fall short? What recommendations can be made to reconcile these sites and provide a balanced view of John Muir's life? What constraints might stand in the way of interpretative change at these two National Park Service sites?

Methods

The quest to answer the questions posed above began with biographical research about Muir and his time in California: 1868-1914. Two biographical books on John were particularly valuable: Daniel Worster's A Passion for Nature: The Life of John Muir, published by the Oxford Press in 2008, and Thurman Wilkins' John Muir: Apostle of Nature, published by the University of Oklahoma Press in 1995. These books were heavily cited in this thesis and they provided valuable information about John Muir's early life and later advocacy and writings. Articles and books by John Muir also were consulted. Literature related to the history of interpretation and cultural landscape management was researched.

Considerable time was spent in Yosemite National Park, both as an intern during the summer of 2010, and during a second visit that October. Visits to the Yosemite Archives and Research library were very helpful. Primary documents about the construction of the John Muir Trail and the Yosemite Centennial Celebration in 1990 were useful resources. Two site

visits were made to John Muir National Historic Site, in July and October of 2010.

Photographs were taken and played a vital role in documentation of site visits and remote analysis of site conditions. Staff horticulturist Keith Park walked the landscape, with cultural landscape report in hand, to show past and present management, as well as current landscape management issues.

Lastly, interviews with National Park Service managers and rangers provided valuable information about current interpretation and management goals. The Graduate School required review and approval of my interviews questions. These interviews were fifteen to thirty minutes long and were conducted during the third week of February 2011. Five interviews were conducted: Dean Shenk, Interpretative ranger at Yosemite National Park; Margaret Eissler, Interpretative ranger in Tuolumne Meadows at Yosemite National Park; Keith Park, Horticulturist at John Muir National Historic Site; Martha Lee, former Superintendent of John Muir National Historic Site; and Tom Leatherman, current Superintendent of John Muir National Historic Site. All of the interviewees were asked to offer their perceptions of interpretation at their respective sites, the strengths and weaknesses of interpretation there, and the level of partnership between Yosemite National Park and John Muir National Historic Site.

A Summary of Research Findings

The following chapters present the results of the research and analysis described above. Chapter One provides a historical context to interpretation and its role at historic sites. Chapter Two discusses John Muir's life in California and his contributions to the American conservation movement, and thus his significance. Chapter Three lays out current interpretation strategies at each of the two sites: Yosemite National Park and John Muir National Historic Site. Chapter Four analyzes the site and points out where interpretation is

unsatisfactory. Chapter Five gives recommendations for improvement to interpretation and historic landscape management, providing a more balanced view of Muir as a whole. In conclusion, chapter Six discusses feasibility constraints, which concerns partnership and funding issues in this economic climate.

CHAPTER TWO

BIOGRAPHY AND SIGNIFICANCE

Thirty years were lived by John Muir before he stepped foot into California. Not always a mountain man calling for preservation of wilderness, Muir even once thought his life's calling was an inventor. His early life was filled with movement, uncertainty, and exploration: emigrating from Europe to America with his family, working the farmlands of Wisconsin, schooldays in Madison, and then rambles to the American South in the aftermath of the Civil War. These years brought unhappiness, physical pain, and one near death experience, but they also served as the foundation for a unique individual's beliefs and desires.

Childhood

John Muir was born in Dunbar, Scotland on April 21, 1838. His mother, Anne, was warm and optimistic, in stark contrast to his father, Daniel, a Calvinist preacher. This house was devoid of pictures, music, and other adornments, due to Daniel Muir's strict adherence to the Bible's prohibition of "graven images". Muir wrote in his autobiography, *My Boyhood and Youth*, that his father had beaten him repeatedly until he could recite the entire Old Testament, and this harsh memory stayed with him his entire life, later undoubtedly securing his loving, gentle role as a father of two girls.

Not all of Muir's childhood was dreary. He spent many hours climbing and playing around the ruins of Dunbar Castle. "I must have been born a mountaineer, he wrote to his mother later in life, "and the climbs... about the old Dunbar Castle and the roof of our house made fair beginnings".⁷ While born into an urban harbor town, cobbled and walled, nature found its way into Muir's young life. He explored the beaches and the lowlands of the surrounding area, but was not impressed by the fields of wheat and barley. The backyard

⁷ Thurman Wilkins, *John Muir: Apostle of Nature* (Duncan: University of Oklahoma, 1995), 11.

garden that Daniel Muir tended was much greener than the natural areas around Dunbar, overflowing with lilies, fruits, and vegetables. Enclosed with ten-foot walls, Daniel Muir's lesson was clear: nature belonged in gardens, under man's firm control.

While in school, until age eleven, John Muir excelled in reading and mathematics and reading, and formed a love for romantic poets like Wordsworth and his travels to the English Lake District. Wordsworth's thoughts stayed with Muir all his life. Schooling was cut short for Muir, when one day his father came into his schoolroom and exclaimed, "Bairns, you needna learn your lessons the nicht, for we're gan to America the morn!"⁸ Daniel Muir had made plans to immigrate to America, without telling his wife or children, and in a whirlwind, the Muirs embarked on a forty-five day sea voyage to New York Harbor in 1849.

Upon arriving in America, Daniel Muir at once inquired about farmland, and was directed to a Scottish immigrant in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, a newly formed state. This man directed Daniel to the Fox River, where 300,000 people populated over 32 million acres of woodland and savannahs.⁹ Daniel Muir bought 160 acres, erected a cabin made of oak, and named his land Fountain Lake Farm. (Figure 2.1) Now in the midst of wilderness, with few visitors, little farming experience, and farmhands, the brunt of the farm work went to the children, most of it to John, the oldest. From this work of putting wilderness under human control, John Muir saw the forests falling and the landscape changing, all at his own hands.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁹ Donald Worster, *A Passion for Nature: The Life of John Muir* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 47.

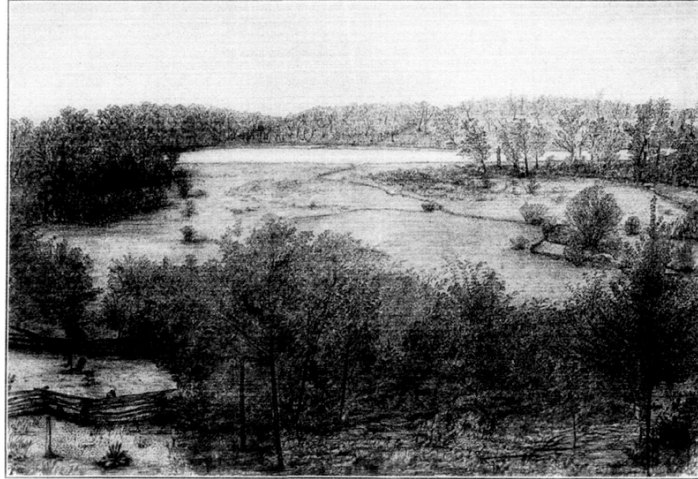


Figure 2.1: Sketch of Fountain Lake by Muir. Source: Thurman Wilkins, *John Muir: Apostle of Nature* (Duncan: University of Oklahoma, 1995), 13.

Taken by reading anything within his reach, Muir was soon drawn to scientific books -- sacrificing sleep for the chance to read by candlelight in the cellar before and after his arduous farm duties. Soon his first invention was produced, a self-setting sawmill. This invention and the others that followed, clocks, barometers, etc, expressed his will to master nature and make it work faster and smoother for the hands of men. Neighbors of Scottish origin soon noticed his inventions, and they applauded his ingenuity and pushed him to show his machines at the state fair in Madison. His mother worried about the journey, and his father reprimanded him for leaving, but in the late summer of 1860, John Muir left Fountain Lake for the city.

The state fair was a success and Muir received a special cash prize for the genius of his inventions. With no intention of going home after the fair, Muir took unpaid work as an apprentice for Mr. Folsom at a printing press in Prairie du Chien, furthering his inventions with plentiful freedom but no reward. Tiring of this life with no compensation or guidance, he applied to the newly opened University of Wisconsin in Madison, and was admitted to the university for the third term, which ran from March to late June (Figure 2.2).

University of Wisconsin and the Wilderness

Muir chose the scientific curriculum, and took trigonometry, navigation, and general history.¹⁰ One day after admiring Muir's room, which was filled with his inventions and curiosities, Milton Griswold, a fellow student, introduced John Muir to the study of botany. Griswold believed that through botanical study, one could discern the unity and harmony of nature, as well as the wisdom of the Creator; to this, Muir excitedly agreed. Muir soon began attending lectures of the natural history professor, Ezra Carr, and Muir formed a lasting relationship with both the professor and his wife.

During Muir's second year of schooling, the Civil War was looming and President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation. While pressure mounted for the Wisconsin draft, Muir's pacifism became clear to him. He made up his mind to leave school and cross the border into Canada, where his brother had traveled. He worked in Canada for the duration of the war, and then returned to the United States. John Muir resolved not to re-enroll in the University of Wisconsin, instead seeking the knowledge of the "university of the wilderness". He decided to travel to South America, to trace the steps of the German naturalist, Alexander von Humboldt's botanical adventure. With no money saved and eager to start as soon as possible, Muir decided to take a train to Kentucky, where he began his 1,000-mile walk to the Gulf.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 74.



Figure 2.2: John Muir at the University of Wisconsin. Source: Wilkins, *John Muir*, 29.

A young man of ample brainpower and strong legs, Muir began his walk with small amounts of bread and tea, and a journal to record his travels. He hoped to find new flora and fauna and, after he had walked the remainder of America, from Kentucky to Florida, catch a boat to South America. Muir began his travels at Mammoth Cave in Kentucky, which he believed to be “the greenest state I have seen... Here is the Eden, the paradise of Oaks.”¹¹ From Kentucky he walked through Tennessee, ascending into the Great Smoky Mountains, and he spoke negatively of filthy towns. In Georgia, Muir truly found the sting of defeat of the Confederate forces, passing through burned fields and towns. He rambled through Athens and down the Savannah River. While the rest of the South was struggling, Savannah was booming in the post-war era, as it was saved from the ravages of Sherman’s march.

Muir expected a money transfer from his brother, but upon arriving in Savannah, he found it had not arrived. His first night was spent at the Planters Hotel, the second at the shabbiest hotel he could find, but the worst was to come. With less than a dollar in his pocket, John Muir walked three miles east of town, looking for a campsite along the tidewater. What

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 125.

he found instead was both nerve wracking and beautiful. Bonaventure Cemetery is built on an old plantation, the site located on a tributary of the Savannah River. (Figure 2.3) This cemetery is not a quaint burial ground behind a church, but a sprawling landscape, a city of death. Laid out in the mirror image of the squares and avenues of the city three miles west, Bonaventure included hundred-year-old live oaks reaching over plantings of camellias and rosebushes.¹²



Figure 2.3: Muir camps in Bonaventure Cemetery. Source: Wilkins, *John Muir*, 45.

Muir camped at Bonaventure for five days and, while on a starvation diet, his thoughts turned morbid. Confronted with his own mortality, Muir must have thought of his father's strict lessons, and his tyrannical rule. After several lonely days among the dead, Muir had a breakthrough of consciousness--death is not punishment, but just another part of life. It was in these bleak hours that the philosophy of Muir was taking shape, the realization that life is natural and cyclical. "All is harmony divine!"¹³

With money finally received from his family, John Muir boarded a coastal steamer bound for Florida, where he marveled over the Cabbage Palmetto's height and strength. Upon reaching Gainesville, Muir found a place to stay. During this restful stay, the first elements of

¹² Worster, *A Passion for Nature: The Life of John Muir*, 132.

¹³ John Muir, *1,000-Mile Walk to the Gulf* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), 43.

his democratic language appeared in his journal--the right to land, belonging to both animals and humans alike. Hoping to board a ship for South America, Muir walked to Cedar Key, the end of the line for the railroad. Hoping to see this port full of ships bound for South America, he was surprised to hear it would be a couple of weeks before the schooner's arrival.¹⁴ Looking for work in the interim, he was directed to the mill on Way Key, where R.W. Hodgson was the proprietor. The mill was closed for repairs, but John Muir was helpful around the property cutting wood and completing odd jobs.

One morning while working at the mill, Muir broke out in a cold sweat, and collapsed on the path back to the bunkhouse. John Muir woke up days later in the Hodgson's house, with Sarah Hodgson, R.W. Hodgson's wife, pouring quinine into him. He had been stricken with a serious case of malaria. As a mother of six children, Mrs. Hodgson opened her heart to Muir, and nursed him for two months until he was stable. Given the exposure time, Muir was probably bitten by the mosquito when camping in Bonaventure Cemetery. Fearful of more diseases awaiting him in South America, John Muir changed his plan and sailed to Cuba. He spent a month on the island and recollected his recent journey through the South. "I suppose these fevers are the price of my walk", he wrote to his brother, "but I am willing to pay it."¹⁵ He saw an advertisement for cheap fares to California, and so a decision was made. To sail South through Panama, Muir had to first travel North to New York City. In February, he sailed for the largest city in the United States, and was startled by the fast pace of this civilized place.

California

From New York City, John Muir almost immediately boarded a ship bound for California by way of Panama. He landed in San Francisco on March 27, 1868, and spent less than a day in the busy and crowded city. When asked where he wanted to go, he famously

¹⁴ Worster, *A Passion for Nature: The Life of John Muir*, 139.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 145.

replied, “Anywhere that is wild”.¹⁶ Directed to the Oakland ferry, he brought along Joseph Criswell, an Englishman he had met on the ship.¹⁷ Opting not for the speedier way of ferries, coaches, and horseback, Muir and Criswell instead walked through the Coastal Range, past Panecho Pass, towards the Yosemite Valley.

While California now had its own bustling port city at San Francisco, at the time of Muir’s arrival, it was known for its vast wildness. Admitted to the Union in 1850, the size of the new state amounted to more than 150,000 square miles. While wild places were everywhere, civilization was already impacting the state; two years after gold was discovered at Coloma, California was first delivered mail by the Pony Express in 1860. The Transcontinental Railroad, built largely by Irish and Chinese laborers, was nearing completion and the first train would pull into California one year after Muir’s arrival in 1870. Farmers were claiming the natural valleys of California, and wildflowers were giving way to vegetable fields.

California is extremely diverse in its geography, filled with valleys, deserts, and mountain ranges. (Figure 2.4) Central California, the focus of this thesis, can be read from west to east as follows: the Pacific Ocean squeezes through the Golden Gate into the bay of San Francisco. After passing through Oakland on the other side of the bay, the Central Valley looms large, bound to the north by the Sacramento Valley and to the south by the San Joaquin Valley. Across the valley, the Sierra Nevada mountain range appears.

¹⁶ Wilkins, *John Muir: Apostle of Nature* 156.

¹⁷ Margaret Sanborn, *Yosemite: Its Discovery, Its Wonders, and Its People* (New York: Random House, 1981), 110.



Figure 2.4: Physical Geography of California. Source: Maps.com, *California Physical Geography Map*, <http://www.maps.com/Search.aspx?q=California>, accessed February 16, 2011.

Deep in the heart of California lies the Yosemite Valley. Inhabited by the Mono, Miwok, Yosemite, and Ahwahnechee Indian tribes for three thousand years, non-indigenous peoples first entered Yosemite Valley in 1851. In 1850, James D. Savage set up a trading post and mining camp twenty miles below the Yosemite Valley at Mariposa. In the spring, the Yosemite tribe attacked him. The reason for this attack is unknown, although there may have been tensions about his presence and multiple Indian wives. On December 17, 1850, the post was attacked again, and three men were killed.¹⁸ Under the action of the sheriff and James Savage, a volunteer military company was formed. After many indecisive skirmishes, the governor was consulted, who authorized a militia of 200 men. The Mariposa Battalion was formed; Native representatives were brought in to begin negotiations for the removal of violent tribes from the area. A brief consultation with the Ahwahnechee's Chief Teneya was held, ending in Teneya's claim that he would bring his tribe to surrender, and he was released to his people. The Ahwahnechees did not appear the next day as promised, so the Battalion set out on March 25,

¹⁸ John Bingamon. *The Ahwahnechee: A Story of the Yosemite Indians* (Lodi: End-Kian, 1966), 7.

1851. This marked the day of the “discovery of Yosemite Valley”. The Battalion did not capture any Indians this time, although Teneya was eventually found and removed from his homeland.

On June 30, 1864, United States president, Abraham Lincoln, took time from the Civil War to sign an act that granted the Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees to the state of California’s control, making it the first federally protected land, established for preservation and recreation purposes, as noted in the following proclamation:

the Cleft” or “Gorge” in the Granite Peak of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, situated in the county of Mariposa . . . and the head-waters of the Merced River, and known as the Yosemite Valley, with its branches and spurs, in estimated length fifteen miles, and in average width one mile back from the main edge of the precipice, on each side of the Valley, with the stipulation, nevertheless, that the said State shall accept this grant upon the express conditions that the premises shall be held for public use, resort, and recreation; shall be inalienable for all time. . .¹⁹

Early images circulated nationally that showed the wonders of Yosemite Valley and its surrounding area during the early and mid-1800’s. Photographs were taken by Carleton Watkins in the early 1860’s, capturing stereoviews of sublime landscapes such as Inspiration Point, the Three Brothers, and Half-Dome. Albert Bierstadt, an American artist, painted his famous “Looking Down Yosemite Valley” in 1865. With paintings and photographs available, as well as the newly established Yosemite Grant, interest in the area was certainly growing. Muir, no doubt, had seen one of these images, heard of the newly established grant, and headed toward Yosemite.

Hiking through the Central Valley, Muir commented on the vast wildflower fields that blanketed the valleys. Upon reaching the Pancho Pass, he first glimpsed the Sierra Nevada, “a scene of peerless grandeur”.²⁰ Muir was accompanied by Joseph Criswell, the Englishman he had met on the boat. They crossed the San Joaquin River at Hill’s Ferry, which soon met the

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁰ Wilkins, *John Muir: Apostle of Nature*, 53.

Merced River, flowing out of Yosemite Valley. From there they followed the Merced River until it met Coulterville Trail, which they followed into the Yosemite Valley. (Figure 2.5) Muir spent over a week in Yosemite Valley, camped under Bridalveil Fall, collecting many floral specimens, but recording little of his first visit to the valley in his journal. They left by the south, via Wawona and the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees, camping under the giant Sequoias.²¹ Anxious for another chance to glimpse the wondrous landscape, Muir lingered nearby in Twenty Hill Hollow during that year, taking odd jobs that including shearing sheep, working the Merced River ferry, and breaking stallions. “This Yosemite trip,” Muir later wrote, “only made me hungry for another far longer and farther reaching, and I determined to set out again as soon as I had earned a little money.”²²

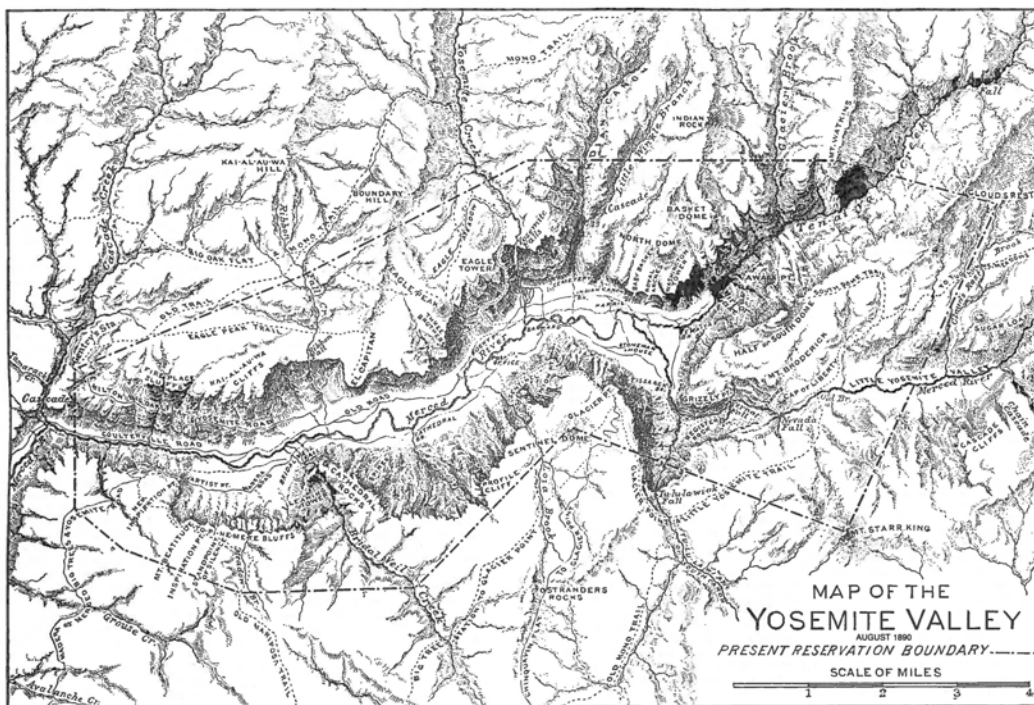


Figure 2.5: 1890 map of Yosemite Valley. Source: John Muir, “Features of the Proposed Yosemite National Park”

The Century Magazine, August 1890, 2.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 58.

²² *Ibid.*, 59.

Yosemite as Home

What purer way can one observe a landscape than through the eyes of a shepherd? Shepherds move along the mountains and valleys in search of water and grasslands, leading animals in seeming unison with few men and fewer distractions. During the summer of 1869, John Muir found employment as a shepherd's hand with Pat Delaney, who gave Muir almost absolute freedom. His only responsibility was to watch the lead shepherd, and ensure the sheep's safe voyage. On June 3, 1869, Muir, Billy the Shepherd, a Chinese man, a Miwok Indian, and two thousand sheep set out into the Sierra Nevada. With freedom, boundless energy, and a passion for the botanical knowledge of the mountains, Muir's travels in Yosemite during the summer of 1869 proved morally and spiritually enlightening.

Four months passed, and all the while Muir kept a journal of thoughts and botanical observations, an apt record of his mighty conversion. Within a week of the trip's beginning, the tone of his journal had traces of religious revelry: "I must drift about these love-monument mountains, glad to be a servant of servants in so holy a wilderness".²³ While pondering lilies, sugar pines, and incense cedars, Muir also was undergoing a strong religious conversion, away from the strict doctrines of his father, to a more harmonious relationship between man and creation. On June 6th, his journal reads:

We are now in the mountains and they are in us. Our flesh-and-bone tabernacle seems transparent as glass to the beauty about us, as if truly an inseparable part of it, thrilling with the air and trees, streams and rocks, in the waves of the sun,—a part of all nature, neither old nor young, sick not well, but immortal.²⁴

These religious and philosophical words later became a banner of the conservation movement, advocacy for the preservation of nature from man's industrial prowess, in order to preserve God's great cathedrals, and provide a sacred place to enjoy.

²³ John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra* (Dunwoody: Berg, 1972), 22.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

In July of 1868, while pushing the sheep herd into the high Sierras, Muir found erratic boulders of granite throughout the landscape. Curious of their placement, he began to hypothesize about glaciation and its effects on the land. While pondering religion and his place in the world, John Muir also was developing a theory that would change the world's perception on geology and Yosemite Valley itself. By August, the troupe had made it to Tuolumne Meadows, one of the highest elevated alpine meadows, at over 8000 feet above sea level. He explored Mono Pass, Bloody Canyon, and climbed numerous peaks including Mt. Dana and Lyell. At the end of September, Muir descended from the Yosemite and ended his journal expressively, "I have crossed the Range of Light, surely the brightest and best of all the Lord has built; and rejoicing in its glory, I gladly, gratefully, hopefully pray that I may see it again".²⁵

The last hopes of his journey to South America were gone by now, the strong pull of Yosemite Valley calling him to stay and see its winter wonders. John Muir signed on with James M. Hutchings, homesteader and publicizer of the region. Muir was paid to reconstruct a sawmill, feed livestock, build hen roosts, as well as look over Hutchings' small children. Hutchings soon left the valley for a trip to Washington, D.C., intent on extending his claim on the Yosemite Valley land he inhabited. It was rejected. Hutchings was once known as the premier tour-guide of the region; he authored *Hutchings' Illustrated California Magazine*, and other publications. Upon Hutchings return to Yosemite Valley, John Muir had become the preferred guide of the valley now, flocked to by tourists because of his intimate knowledge of the valley and worker's dedication.

Muir set out fixing the sawmill and cutting yellow pines that had fallen two winters before. Soon, Muir built his own one-room cabin at the base of Yosemite Falls. Costing only

²⁵ John Muir, *Steep Trails* (Martinez: Hanna Trust, 1916), 23.

three dollars, he called it, “the handsomest building in the valley”.²⁶ A ditch in the floor of the cabin lead a stream through the building from the waters of the fall. Ferns also grew inside the cabin, and he admired the sight and sounds from his hammock, suspended from the rafters. To celebrate his new home and the New Year of 1870, John Muir climbed to the crown of El Capitan, a 3,000-foot vertical rock wall on the north side of the valley.

Curious to learn more about the high country of Yosemite, Muir left Hutchings for the summer of 1870 and again helped Delaney with his herd. When he returned, Hutchings had given his cabin to another resident of the area. Instead of building an entirely new cabin, Muir constructed an odd space in the sawmill, which he called the “hanging nest”, an individual living space for an unrelenting individual.

A surprise awaited Muir in May of 1871. The renowned American poet and essayist, Ralph Waldo Emerson had planned a trip to Yosemite. Emerson expressed the philosophy of Transcendentalism in his 1836 essay, *Nature*, which Muir had, undoubtedly, read by this time. Muir wrote to Emerson upon his arrival in the valley, and Emerson soon arrived at the sawmill, boldly climbing up the ladder to Muir’s quarters. Muir showed Emerson his herbariums and numerous sketches, urging him to camp with him in the high country to see these things first hand. Upon leaving the valley, Emerson requested Muir accompany them to the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees, and Muir agreed under the condition that they would camp under the vast canopy.

Upon reaching Clark’s station, where Galen Clark guarded the grove and the surrounding land, Muir sat disappointed at Emerson’s companion’s remark that the aged Emerson could catch cold in the grove at night, and would sleep at the station instead. Saddened by Emerson’s departure, Muir spoke abruptly, “You are yourself a sequoia. Stop and

²⁶ Wilkins, *John Muir: Apostle of Nature*, 67.

get acquainted with your brethren.”²⁷ With lecturing commitments for Emerson to fulfill, his party rode on, the lover of nature now an old scholar, who had long left his sauntering days behind. Standing in the Sequoia grove, Muir was next in line to preach a new sort of Transcendentalism, based upon communion with Nature and its healing and spiritual powers. Now in the solitude of the woods again, John Muir began his return to his Yosemite Valley home.

Finally leaving Hutchings’ employment in the fall of 1871, Muir was invigorated by the idea of more studying in the Sierra Nevada. John Muir had met many influential California residents and other notable men of science in his tours of the Yosemite area. His connections led to a new professional opportunity, as a writer. On December 5, 1871, The New York Tribune published John Muir’s first article, entitled “Yosemite Glaciers”.²⁸ From the success of this article, he was offered a teaching position at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, but he declined the offer. Determined to expand his knowledge of glaciation, he made a trip to the high country to follow the watersheds of the Tuolumne and Merced Rivers, which drain into Yosemite Valley. Muir came upon a great canyon and climbed down into the chasm. Unknown to him at the time, John Muir was probably the first white man to set foot in the Grand Canyon of the Tuolumne. This canyon opened into the Hetch Hetchy Valley, an important landscape in Muir’s later conservation career. Only a month later Muir made another great discovery. While climbing in the southern section of Yosemite called the Clark Range, Muir stooped over to find a deposit of silt. At the top of the moraine lay a “small but well recognized glacier swooping down from the gloomy precipices of Black Mountain”.²⁹ He had found a living glacier, the first recognized in the Sierra Nevada.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 146.

²⁸ Sanborn, *Yosemite: Its Discovery, Its Wonders, and Its People*, 82.

²⁹ Wilkins, *John Muir: Apostle of Nature*, 84.

Muir spent winters in Black's hotel, surprisingly near to Hutchings' hotel. He soon moved north and built a small cabin near James Lamon's orchard; Lamon was the original white settler of Yosemite Valley. He established a farm and orchard near the Merced River, of which some apple trees still remain. For the rest of 1872 and 1873, Muir observed and recorded as much as he could about the botany, geology, and natural history of the area. These notes were immensely useful when he later returned to San Francisco to write full-time for magazines.

Mountaineer and Writer

Descending from the Sierra Nevada, Muir arrived in San Francisco in 1873 and took up residence with John Swett, an advocate for public schooling in California. His primary reason for leaving the mountains was to write and be published; his intentions of explorer and botanist were expanding to include writer. With conservation on his mind, Muir wrote: "I care to live only to entice people to look at Nature's loveliness".³⁰ By 1874, Muir had published five articles in the *Overland Monthly*, and had begun a six part series, entitled *Studies in the Sierra*. His writing was scientific in nature, yet appealed to the masses with its simple language and emotive essence. Complete with illustrations, Muir was giving Americans Yosemite in print.

While in San Francisco, Muir spent significant time with Ezra Carr and his wife Jeanne. Ezra taught Muir botany at the University of Wisconsin and Jeanne had kept a strong correspondence with Muir from his college days until her death. Jeanne soon began scoping suitable women for Muir, insisting he needed a more stable domestic life to produce his articles successfully. In July 1874, Muir accompanied the Carrs to the Strentzel Ranch, in Martinez, a few hours east of San Francisco. The man of the house, Dr. John Strentzel began his career as a doctor in Poland, then immigrated to California, where he saw the land as an eden to cultivate.

³⁰ Worster, *A Passion for Nature: The Life of John Muir*, 320.

Dr. Strentzel lived with his wife, Louisiana, and daughter, Louie. (Figure 2.6) Little documentation of Louie Strentzel exists, but she was known for her gentle and kind manner. Muir, with his shy demeanor, took brief notice of Louie on this visit, and did not disclose any impressions of her in his journal.



Figure 2.6: Louie Strentzel. Source: Sierraclub.org, *Louie Strentzel Muir: 1847-1905*, http://www.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/people/muirl.aspx, accessed November 27, 2010

Weary of city life, Muir returned to the mountains in 1875 and further explored the Sequoia forests of the Sierra, noticing the damage being done by men in the name of progress. They were cutting these mighty trees and depleting entire forest belts, using some wood for lumber and other pieces as museum exhibits; one Sequoia was sacrificed for its bark to be reassembled in Philadelphia to celebrate the United States Centennial.³¹ Angered by the behaviors of lumber companies and the lack of legislation for protection of most groves, Muir wrote a letter to the *Sacramento Record Union*, published on February 5, 1876. “God’s First Temples: How shall we preserve Them?” In his letter, he proposed legislative measures to save these trees, written in a passionate tone: “If law makers were to... lessen even in a small degree

³¹ Sanborn, *Yosemite: Its Discovery, Its Wonders, and Its People*, 17.

the destruction going on, they would thus cover a multitude of legislative sins in the eyes of every tree lover”.³² In this one letter, John Muir transformed himself from poet to politician.

During the remainder of the 1870’s, Muir wrote from San Francisco and continued his forest and mountain explorations. He turned forty in 1878, and in the same year began corresponding regularly with the Strentzels. The letters were addressed to the family, but seemingly intended for Louie. The family liked Muir from the beginning, and offered in letters for him to come and stay for months at the ranch. Muir accepted their invitation and enjoyed the distance from the city. The rural atmosphere of the Strentzel Ranch was expansive, with oak groves and domestic gardens to walk through; the Alhambra Valley surrounding the ranch which offered rolling hills for pleasant walks or hikes. During his visits, he and Louie got to know each other and eventually they began corresponding. Louie shared John’s love of botany, and cultivated a flower garden close to the house. She was well read and played the piano quite beautifully.³³ On June 17th, 1879, John Muir proposed to Louie Strentzel but on one condition: that he could travel to Alaska on an expedition before they were wed. Louie agreed.

Marriage and Ranch Life

On April 14, 1880, John Muir and Louie Strentzel were married under the apple blossoms of the Strentzel Ranch. As a wedding present, the Strentzels gave John and Louie 20 acres of land.³⁴ Honeymooning aside, Muir started work in the orchards and vineyards the next day and spent the late spring and early summer learning the techniques of large-scale farming. At the end on July, the ranching husband went to Alaska for the second time, leaving Louie in her third month of pregnancy. Louie was not distressed, wrote about the care he should take on his voyage, and always encouraged his adventuresome spirit. Although the Muirs were not a

³² John Muir. “God’s First Temples: How Shall We Preserve Them?” *Sacramento Record Union*, February 5, 1876.

³³ Worster, *A Passion for Nature: The Life of John Muir*, 239.

³⁴ Wilkins, *John Muir: Apostle of Nature*, 144.

traditional family in all respects, the family members cared and loved each other in their own ways.

By 1881, Dr. Strentzel had relinquished all control of the orchards to John Muir; he was now manager of the Strentzel-Muir Ranch. March of that year brought Annie Wanda Muir into the world, and she was soon tramping around the orchards while her father worked. Dreaming still of the ice and glaciers of the north, Muir was asked to join the Cruise of the Corwin, an Alaskan expedition, but declined because of the new birth of his daughter. Muir soon got the blessing of Louie and the Corwin left the California bay on May 4, bound for the Siberian ice fields. He would later compile his recollections of this voyage in *Stickeen*. Another account of the expedition, *Cruise of the Corwin*, a compilation of journal entries, was published posthumously.

Safely home, Muir met with members of the California Academy of Sciences, and helped draft two federal bills concerning wilderness preservation. One called for the extension of Yosemite's boundaries, and the other for a public park situated in the Southern Sierras, encompassing what would become Sequoia and King's Canyon National Park.³⁵ These bills were stopped short by the Public Lands Committee of the United States Senate, a blow that drew Muir away from conservation for seven years.

With this defeat, all focus was turned to the ranch, and Muir went to work on turning the "moderately profitable experimental orchard and vineyard to a highly lucrative enterprise".³⁶ After Dr. Strentzel moved from Texas to California, he saw the Alhambra Valley as a perfect climate for fruits; by 1861, he was producing apples, pears, peaches, plums, apricots, figs, cherries, currants, blackberries, gooseberries, strawberries, sugar beets, oranges, almonds,

³⁵ Worster, *A Passion for Nature: The Life of John Muir*, 289.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 290.

grapes, and olives.³⁷ The range of products was impressive, but Muir looked more toward produce and popularity. He grafted the Barlett Pear, the most popular variety in America, to Strentzel's 65 experimental kinds of pears, and increased sales. He also converted hayfields to orchards and vineyards. Pears, cherries, and grapes were the main crops of the newly managed Strentzel-Muir ranch; John soon became known in the area for his bargaining skills, long days of work, and national sales.

The changes Muir made to the agricultural productivity of his newly acquired landscape were hard on Muir, and he soon began to lose weight and look pale in the face, according to his wife. A positive event in this era on Muir's life was the construction of a large Italianate home on a high point of the land in 1882, which the parents occupied until Dr. Strentzel's death; John and Louie moved in after the death to care for the aging Mrs. Strentzel. In July of 1884, Louie called for a vacation and Yosemite was the destination. She appreciated the scenery, but was no match to Muir's mountaineering skills. They returned home before schedule, due to worry about young Wanda who was sickly in childhood.

Always sensitive to premonitions, one day in 1885 Muir felt a call to return to the east, to see his family, after a twenty-year absence. Urged by Louie to visit Mount Shasta and Yellowstone National Park, Muir first went north before turning east to Portage, Wisconsin, where his sisters and mother lived. They told him his father was not well, and all four Muirs traveled to Kansas City, Missouri, where Daniel Muir now lived with one of his daughters. In August of 1885, Daniel Muir died with John by his bedside. He brought three of his sisters home to California with him, Margaret and Sarah, partial invalids, and Annie, who suffered

³⁷ Wilkins, *John Muir: Apostle of Nature*, 19.

from tuberculosis.³⁸ Louie welcomed them emphatically, and the sisters grew to love the mansion on the hill.

1886 brought the birth of a second daughter to John Muir, Helen Lilian, born on January 23rd. Concentrating on farming and raising his two young daughters, Muir put his writing on hold. He had given lectures in Oregon in 1880, published an article on bees in 1882, and wrote about his trip to Yellowstone. By 1887, publisher/editor Robert Johnson Underwood had asked: “Has the ink in your fountain-pen entirely dried up?”³⁹ This comment seemed enough to get John Muir back into a writing mode, and by spring he had an editorial position in a two-volume anthology highlighting western American natural beauty. He also contributed some of his own writings to the anthology, which included “Yosemite Valley” and “Peaks and Glaciers of the High Sierra”. Muir was gaining momentum for writing again, balancing dual careers of ranch manager and wilderness journalist with grace.

Although Louie was happy to have Muir around the house, doting on his daughters and teaching them about nature, she noticed his declining health, characterized by a bronchial cough and nervous indigestion. While Muir was in Washington, climbing the 14,410 feet Mount Rainer, he received a letter from Louie. It concerned his health and happiness and poignantly explained:

A ranch that needs and takes the sacrifice of a noble life, ought to be flung away beyond all reach and power for harm...the Yosemite book, dear John, must be written, and you need to be your own self, well and strong, to make them worthy of you. There is nothing that has a right to be considered beside this except the welfare of our children.⁴⁰

Elated at his wife’s understanding, Muir and Louie soon sold some land, leased other parcels, and by the early 1890’s he had his brother-in-law managing the land he had worked so hard to

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 164.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 168.

develop over the past decade. John Muir was free to write and advocate Nature; most of his best writings would soon flow from his pen.

In 1889, Muir was in the High Sierra again, camping in Tuolumne Meadows at the mouth of a spring, with Robert Johnson Underwood. The pair visited Yosemite Valley before heading to the higher elevations, and they were appalled by the mass timbering, grazing, and unchecked tourism that they observed. As editor of the *Century Magazine*, Underwood had significant readership and had lobbied in Washington on several issues. While sitting around the fire, Muir and Underwood discussed the absence of the alpine meadows that Muir loved and had written about. They were gone due to herds of sheep, which Muir called “hooved locusts”. As they spoke the stars rose, and a plan became clear: Muir would write two articles calling for a Yosemite National Park, and Underwood will publish them and spread the word through the magazine’s readership. Then, with legislation in hand, Mr. Underwood would travel to Washington, D.C., to contact the right people for support. This plan was agreed upon and Muir began writing, as well as drawing up proposed boundaries that included the watersheds of the Tuolumne and Merced rivers.

Advocate for Wilderness Preservation

The American Frontier was gone by the 1890’s and the myth of inexhaustible resources was apparent. Americans were beginning to lend an ear to those who called for change, and those who suggested that Manifest Destiny was untrue, and causing damage to the land. At 52 years of age, Muir was setting the stage for his public career as an advocate for wilderness conservation. In July, Muir left to explore Alaska and Muir Glacier, discovered and recently named for him. Returning in September, his second article, “Features of the Proposed Yosemite National Park” was published in the *Century Magazine*. On September 30, 1890, both houses of Congress passed House Resolution Bill 12187, and president William Henry Harrison signed it

into law. Yosemite had been declared the second National Park in the United States, providing federal protection and maintenance in perpetuity.

Exactly one month later, Dr. Strentzel died in Martinez, and was buried near a pear orchard and a small creek. Louie and John soon moved into the mansion to care for Mrs. Strentzel, and the delay caused by the transition forced Muir to cancel his trip to Kings Canyon. Family members, who had taken up management of the land, alleviated the pressure of managing the thousands of acres of farmland, so Muir could freely travel, write, and preach for conservation. Three national parks were protected by federal measures, and multiple forest preserves were established during the early 1890's. However sheep still grazed on protected grasslands, and while cavalry patrols were assigned to these lands, they were not able to keep all lumbermen and shepherds out. Robert Underwood Johnson had recommended as early as 1889, "to start an association for preserving California's monuments and natural wonders – at least Yosemite".⁴¹ An association was organized along the lines of the Appalachian Mountain Club; the Sierra Club held its first meeting on June 4, 1892, and Mr. John Muir was named president. He held this position until his death. The articles of incorporation stated the purpose of the Sierra Club was threefold: recreation, education, and conservation.⁴² Only two years later would Muir's first book: The Mountains of California, served as a catalyst for increased membership in the Sierra Club and participation in annual outings. The Mountains of California is still known as Muir's finest work.

1893 brought the World's Columbian Exposition to Chicago, celebrating the 400th anniversary of Columbus reaching the New World. Muir's friend William Keith had been calling for Muir to travel with him to Europe with him for ages, and this "White City" seemed a logical stopping point on the way to New York City. Wined and dined in New York, Muir was

⁴¹ Worster, *A Passion for Nature: The Life of John Muir*, 183.

⁴² Wilkins, *John Muir: Apostle of Nature*, 184.

soon ready for the solitude of the ship. Muir took one quick detour before leaving for Europe to visit Emerson's grave in Sleepy Hollow, Massachusetts; Keith and Muir strolled out to Walden Pond, where Muir noted, "No wonder Thoreau lived here two years. I could have enjoyed living here two hundred or two thousand".⁴³ Arriving in Liverpool, the pair soon travelled to Dunbar, and explored Muir's childhood home. He also explored Norway, Switzerland, and England, before returning home to the United States. He stopped in Washington, D.C., to confer with officials on forest reservations.

The next three years of John Muir's life were concerned with the U.S. Forestry Commission. The government appointment in 1896 of this commission was made up of a geologist, hydrologist, surveyor, and engineer, plus Muir as an unofficial advisor. Congress had appropriated \$25,000 for expenses, and on July 5, 1896, the Forestry Commission embarked on its western tour.⁴⁴ The next year was spent writing articles in favor of forestry, published in Harper's Weekly and Atlantic Monthly. In 1898, Muir accompanied the commission on their southeastern tour, and had the pleasure of reuniting with Mrs. Hodgson in Florida, who had saved him from malaria thirty years before.

Forestry aside, the Muir ranch was slowly changing during this last decade of the nineteenth century. Louie and John had made the ranch a sort of sanctuary from the outside world with rolling hillsides and fruitful orchards, but soon the independent children of Muir looked outside their intimate world. Wanda became a student at the University of California at Berkeley, while Helen, always sickly, stayed at home. In 1897, Muir sold a right-of-way on his land to the Santa Fe Railroad, for a nominal \$10. They erected a viaduct through the vineyards and trains passed several times a day, seemingly negative in the eyes of a quiet family. This invasion into the landscape did offer the girls and Muir free fare on the train and quicker

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 192.

transportation, increasingly important in this new age. Muir was in fact a shrewd businessman, and soon had the latest technologies in his home, including electric lights and telephones.

The dawn of the twentieth century found Muir in his “scribble den”, a room on the second floor of his house, with a view over the ranch and watershed. Surrounded by journals of adventures gone by, John Muir was faced with the compilation and publication of his second book. Published in 1901, this book included articles on Yellowstone, Yosemite, Sequoia, and the forest reserves. This year was also a significant one for conservation in other ways, specifically the election of Theodore Roosevelt to presidential office. Conservation was on the president’s mind from the start; and in December, he made this declaration: “The forest and water problems are perhaps the most vital internal questions of the United States at the present time”.⁴⁵ Seeking to resolve these vital issues, Theodore Roosevelt went to the source of conservation, John Muir. Muir took this into consideration in cancelling a trip, knowing this meeting would affect real change. By May of 1903, Roosevelt had arrived in San Francisco. Soon Muir was accompanying the president to the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees, with Muir pointing out attractions. On May 15th, they camped in the grove and hiked to Glacier Point the next day. Ignoring the scheduled banquets and reception in Yosemite Valley, Roosevelt’s last night was spent with Muir at Bridalveil Meadow, with a view of El Capitan. This meeting of the minds did indeed affect real change, for at the end of Roosevelt’s presidency, the forest reserve acreage had soared from 43 to 150 million.

With another world tour under his belt, Muir came home to Martinez in late 1904, and two of the women in his life soon became ill. Helen was diagnosed with pneumonia, and Louie had an acute case of lung cancer. Louie quietly passed on August 6, 1905, and little remains of her memory, aside from a small number of photograph. Louie Muir’s grave is positioned on the

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 214.

ranch next to her father and mother, but most surprisingly, John Muir wrote little about his wife, from his engagement to her death. Distractions were needed after his loss, and Muir dove back into lobbying, spurred partially by the fateful Great San Francisco Earthquake of 1906.

At five a.m. on April 18, the ground began to shake so hard that it was picked up on international Richter scales. While most of the damage hit the bay area, damage was also seen in Martinez, forty miles away. All four chimneys fell from the walls of the Muir mansion, one that Muir rebuilt himself. What was not destroyed by the quake itself was devastated by fire that soon sprang up around the city. This historic quake cemented the need for alternative methods of getting water to San Francisco, and the main source had already been surveyed in Yosemite National Park. Hetch Hetchy Valley, the small valley that Muir previously named “little Yosemite valley”, was targeted for its 3,000-foot walls and small mouth. Seeing the immediate threat, Muir threw himself into the battle, and took up an older battle along the way.

One victory did come in this era, the long-awaited boundary expansion of Yosemite National Park. In 1906 Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees were included in Yosemite National Park, finally encompassing the watersheds that feed the valley, as Muir originally intended. The fight for Hetch Hetchy was more complicated and did not end happily. The Sierra Club backed the cause quickly and soon began printing pamphlets with the title “Everyone Help to Save Famous Hetch Hetchy”. Muir hiked to and camped in the valley in 1908, writing later in *The Yosemite*, “Hetch Hetchy Valley, far from being a plain, common rock-bound meadow, as many who have not seen it seem to suppose, is a grand landscape garden, one of Nature’s rarest and most precious temples.” Although the cause has been labeled one of the most important grassroots conservation causes of all time, powerful men lobbied for its damming the valley, by December of 1912, the battle was lost. By 1914, construction of the

Hetch Hetchy Dam began, clear cutting of the valley and submerging the floor with 300 feet of water.

Weakened by this terrible defeat, Muir turned to more practical advocacy, lecturing on proper management of natural resources in natural parks, and in favor of automobiles in Yosemite Valley, in order to increase visitorship. Muir's health began to trouble him, his lung ailments increasing in seriousness. Accepting the invitation of the Sierra Club, he headed south to the newly dedicated Muir Lodge, but on the train his health took a turn for the worse. Diagnosed with pneumonia, Muir was taken to the Los Angeles hospital and died quietly on Christmas Eve of 1914, alone. The Sierra Club held a service and Muir was memorialized and buried in the Strentzel Ranch, next to Louie and Dr. Strentzel, his grave reading "John Muir Born Dunbar Scotland", a Scotchman to the end.

John Muir died two years before the National Park Service was established in 1916. Millions of acres of wilderness have been preserved in the United States, and the Sierra Club continues to conserve and educate today. Muir is considered the father of the American conservation movement and the national park idea. As an immigrant, John Muir embodied the American spirit and lived both a life of wilderness freedom and the diligent rancher. The story of John Muir's life should be told in an accurate manner; the national park idea begins with Muir, and interpretation at federally owned properties is an appropriate tribute.

CHAPTER THREE
CURRENT INTERPRETATION AT YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK
AND JOHN MUIR NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

It is truly a sign of honor when efforts of commemoration begin before an individual's passing; this honor was bestowed on John Muir. Before Muir's death in 1914, the Sierra Club named their lodge in Sequoia National Park for Muir. In 1908, William Kent, national parks advocate, bought a large old growth forest plot across the San Francisco Bay, deeding it to the Department of the Interior on the condition it be named Muir Woods. Steadily, more sites and objects bore the name Muir; by the 1960's environmental influence, this trend snowballed, and today there are abundant reminders of Muir in name only. John Muir streets and highways criss-cross California and beyond, the American schoolyard landscape is dotted with small plaques declaring specimens the Muir tree, and places that Muir once walked more than a century ago are now direct remembrances.

Commemoration is defined by ceremony; a person or event is celebrated by doing or building something, in order to remember.⁴⁶ Although commemorative objects and places bear the names of individuals, sometimes they do not fully represent the nature of the recipient. Would John Muir really want a highway leading to Yosemite named after him? A man of duality, he advocated the use of cars in Yosemite, but also denounced stage coaches as a mode of travel in his early years, opting to walk the dusty and dangerous road to the Heart of the Sierras. Although questions like these cannot be conclusively answered, the essence of the commemoration of Muir should take aim at his central character: a man of extraordinary knowledge and will power, initiative and hard-work, naturalist, explorer, writer, and advocate. Commemoration is one mode of respect and remembrance. The presence of commemorative

⁴⁶ Dictionary.com, Commemoration, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/commemoration>, accessed February 5, 2011.

objects or sites bearing Muir's name across the United States, Canada, and Scotland forms an introduction, an association, leaving the viewer to explore individually.

In contrast to commemoration, interpretation tells a story, and connects a site with specific people and events, teaching and presenting accurate information. This action educates and provokes the visitor, who views tangible evidence and hopefully gains something, whether knowledge or perspective. Sites that interpret the story of John Muir are found in Scotland, Wisconsin, Canada, and Alaska - basically where he made an impact and the story begs to be told. John Muir Memorial County Park, which preserves Fountain Lake and the surrounding area, interprets John Muir's Wisconsin childhood with informational panels, but mainly leaves the visitor experience to natural scenery.⁴⁷ Within the National Park Service, minor sites interpret John Muir in various ways. Muir Woods National Monument, across the San Francisco Bay, has a small visitor's center that tells information about Muir, and William Kent's intent to name this old growth forest for Muir.

Although commemoration and interpretation are defined in different ways, the essence of these words is similar: remembrance. While commemoration grasps at more intangible concepts, such as permanence and legacy, it can also transmit information important to the story. For example, at Mount Rainier National Park, Camp Muir sits at the base of the vast Mount Rainier, commemorating the area where Muir rested in 1888 before his impressive climb. In King's Canyon National Park, below Yosemite in the Sierras, the Muir Hut sits in the wilderness commemorating his exploration of the area. To the informed hiker, these sites match story with landscape, and interpret the story in a real, meaningful way. While many sites transmit information about the significant life of this man, one must visit two sites in California

⁴⁷ Town of Buffalo, Wisconsin, *John Muir Memorial Park – State Natural Area*, <http://www.tn.buffalo.wi.gov/community/muirpark.asp>, accessed February 7, 2011).

to obtain a full understanding of John Muir: Yosemite National Park and John Muir National Historic Site.

John Muir called California home for forty-five years; he lived in the wilderness of the Sierra Nevada, the metropolis of San Francisco, and the rural Alhambra Valley. He also explored vast areas of California and climbed its tallest mountains. Muir took on many roles while living in the newly formed state: shepherd, sawyer, writer, rancher, businessman, advocate, and scientist. Parts of John Muir's life are told at various National Parks in the United States, but the most direct interpretation is told at Yosemite National Park and John Muir National Historic Site. If a visitor to California had to choose only two sites to visit to learn about John Muir, it would be these two. Yosemite National Park shows Muir the climber, scientist, and writer. John Muir National Historic Site informs the visitor about Muir's life as a rancher and businessman, but also his vocation as writer and advocate.

Interpretation of Muir at Yosemite National Park

Yosemite National Park, at the heart of the Sierras, is filled with sublime scenery: 3,000-foot-high granite walls of Yosemite Valley, two glacial rivers flowing throughout the park, countless waterfalls, pristine meadows, and snow-capped peaks. With all of these magnificent natural features to enjoy and interpret, few individuals in the cultural history of Yosemite make the list of people actively interpreted in the park. Among those honored individuals are Galen Clark, protector of the Mariposa Grove; James Hutchings, innkeeper and Yosemite guide; the Buffalo Soldiers, who protected the park during the time of military occupation; and Ansel Adams, photographer and resident of Yosemite. While these individuals are significant in their own right, John Muir is beloved by National Parks visitors and advocates for his inspirational words of protection, the words of the prophet poet: "Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountain is going home; that

wildness is necessity; that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life”.⁴⁸

John Muir has, and deserves, a position in the cultural history of Yosemite National Park, along with Clark, Hutchings, the Buffalo Soldiers, and Adams. Clark was Yosemite’s first guardian, Hutchings took tourists in and taught them about their surroundings, the Buffalo Soldiers protected the area from destructive lumbermen and shepherds, and Ansel Adams captured the magnificence of Yosemite on film and disseminated these images worldwide. Muir’s contributions to Yosemite National Park are unique, however, because he was not only an early explorer and advocate for the preservation of the heart of the Sierras, because he was an eloquent spokesman for its grandeur throughout his entire life. (Figure 3.1) Muir used his experience in Yosemite to spark the conservation idea in the American public, and his memory is still strongly connected to this place.



Figure 3.1: Muir in Yosemite Valley. Source: Francois E. Matthes, *Francois Matthes and the Marks of Time: Yosemite and the High Sierra*, (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1962), 9.

⁴⁸ John Muir, “Wild Wool”. *Overland Monthly*, April 1875.

Traditional Modes of Interpretation at Yosemite National Park

Traditional interpretation at Yosemite National Park takes the form of informational text on panels, which are located inside museums and along trails and roads. Outdoors, these panels are called wayside exhibits. At Yosemite National Park, the visitor center in Yosemite Valley highlights Muir by way of two panels and a realistic bronze sculpture. The visitor enters the early 1960's era building and follows models that illustrate the geologic formation of Yosemite. Around the corner is a series of interpretative panels about Muir. The first panel begins with one of his most famous quotes, "Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and cheer and give strength to the body and soul alike".⁴⁹ Four images of Muir are featured on this panel, Muir the young man, Muir the writer, Muir the naturalist, and Muir the advocate. (Figure 3.2) The text presents Muir as the most famous Yosemite caretaker, explains his first visit and summer in the Sierra, and his eventual turn to advocacy and writing. In the bottom right corner, the well-known image of Roosevelt and Muir at Glacier Point is coupled with a caption on Roosevelt's conservation efforts.



Figure 3.2: Interpretative Panel in Yosemite Valley. Photograph by the author.

⁴⁹ John Muir, *The Yosemite*, (New York City: The Century Company, 1912), 35.

Around the corner is a smaller panel, which illustrates the Hanging Nest that Muir constructed for himself in the Hutchings sawmill. A film is shown every half-hour in the theater next to the visitor center tells Yosemite's history, as well as Muir's contributions to conservation. Entitled *The Spirit of Yosemite*, the film opens with the auditory experience of water crashing to the floor of Yosemite Valley. Muir is explored in his relation to Yosemite, and a voice-over quotes some of his most eloquent words. The film positions Yosemite National Park as the lasting legacy of Muir and his conservation efforts. At the Tuolumne Meadows Visitor Center, a multitude of panels interpret natural features and wonders, which are highlighted by quotes written over the years by John Muir. This variation of interpretation emphasizes the literary contribution of this mountain man.

Interpretation in the Landscape at Yosemite National Park

Panels are positioned throughout the cultural landscape of Yosemite National Park highlighting the significant people and in the area's history. Mariposa Grove is interpreted as the homestead of Galen Clark, protector of the Giant Sequoias. Historic inn-keepers are commemorated at their historic places of business. Regarding James Hutchings and his association with John Muir, a panel sits next to a boulder below Yosemite Falls, which illustrates where the sawmill and Muir's Hang Nest stood. These panels have more power than those in the visitors' centers, for a connection can be made between the actual landscape and the individual, hopefully forming a lasting impression. At Soda Springs, in the center of Tuolumne Meadows, a panel speaks of Muir's first visit to the high country, his urge to explore, and spiritual connection to this place. (Figure 3.3) An image of Muir, as well as a journal entry focusing on the geology of the area, is included with the text.



Figure 3.3: Interpretative panel at Soda Springs. Photograph by the author.

The last panel that interprets John Muir is a significant one. At Bridalveil Meadow, under the beautiful Bridalveil Fall, a panel was placed in the grass to mark the spot where Muir and Roosevelt camped on their momentous trip to Yosemite. It discusses the historic view of the valley, El Capitan, and the pristine meadow that Muir and Roosevelt saw one hundred years ago, as well as the importance of the issues they discussed. This panel claims that formulative ideas of the conservation movement were shaped here. It is true that Roosevelt went home from his trip preaching in a similar vein as Muir about conservation of wilderness, and he subsequently significantly increased the nation's forest reserve.

Direct interpretative panels are very effective in terms of transmitting information. Presently directly, the visitor has the choice to absorb the information or leave it. What better venue for this mode than Yosemite National Park, where National Park Service interpretation was born.⁵⁰ Along with the panels throughout the park, inside and out, other objects and sites interpret and commemorate John Muir's life and legacy simultaneously. Approximately one half-mile from the base of Yosemite Falls, affixed to a small boulder, a bronze plaque denotes the spot where Muir's pine shake cabin once stood. Although, through research and site

⁵⁰ MacKintosh, *Interpretation in the National Park Service*, 34.

analysis, this location has been proven inaccurate, the commemorative plaque is a gesture that rings true to visitors. With one line of descriptive text, this unassuming plaque allows the visitor to absorb information, but have the freedom to enjoy the landscape around as well, especially the Yosemite Falls Muir loved so much.

John Muir spent countless hours in the wilderness of Yosemite. In contrast to today's Yosemite--with visitor centers, shopping areas, paved paths, and distinct road systems throughout--the nineteenth century Yosemite landscape was wild. Hotels and boarding houses were congregated in Yosemite Valley, few residents called Yosemite their permanent home, and shepherders moved their herds through the high country. John Muir came to be known as the premier mountaineer of the Sierras, and made many first ascents of the western peaks. A strong believer in the regenerative qualities of climbing, he urged people to, "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 own freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while cares will drop away from you like the leaves of autumn".⁵¹

What better mode of commemoration for Muir's time in the wilderness than a major California hiking trail crossing the crest of the Sierra Nevada? The John Muir Trail begins in Yosemite Valley north to Tuolumne meadows and then turns south, traveling to its terminus at Mount Whitney, the highest point in the contiguous United States. (Figure 3.4) Along the way, the John Muir Trail travels through the Ansel Adams Wilderness, the John Muir Wilderness, Kings Canyon National Park, and Sequoia National Park.

⁵¹ John Muir, *Our National Parks*. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1901), 57.



Figure 3.4: Illustration of John Muir Trail. Source: Dean Delago, *John Muir Trail Home Page*, <http://www.hikejmt.com>, accessed January 12, 2011.

Theodore Solomons, member of the Sierra club, was the main motivator for this trail, and planning commenced after Muir's death in 1914. Trail systems on the walls of Yosemite Valley existed from the efforts of Anderson and Souleviski, early trail-builders who braved the steep grades to give mountain access to tourists. Some of these segments were connected in the planning of the trail, significant because Muir most likely hiked these trails in his travels⁵². The rest of the route was mapped by Joseph N. LeConte, son of the geologist Joseph LeConte, who will be discussed further in a the next section of this chapter. By 1915, California had appropriated funds for the construction of the trail, and it was completed in 1938.⁵³ In total, this trail runs 211 miles, thirty-five of which run through Yosemite National Park. The John

⁵² Hal Roth, *Pathway in the Sky: the Story of the John Muir Trail*. (Berkeley: Howell-North Books, 1965), 42.

⁵³ Suzanne Suedo, *Hiking Yosemite: A Guide to Yosemite National Park's Greatest Hiking Adventures*. (Helena: Globe Pequot Press, 2005), 259.

Muir Trail climbs steeply out of the valley, but immediately provides hikers with stunning views of the high country. (Figure 3.5)



Figure 3.5: Along the John Muir Trail at Cathedral Lakes. Photograph by author.

John Muir immersed himself in the whole experience, rather than just the ascent of mountain peaks. For him, it was “an extreme physical challenge, but it was also an ecological, aesthetic and spiritual journey”.⁵⁴ Whether taking a day hike a few miles up and down the Yosemite Valley, a weekend through-hike of the Yosemite section, or the intensive five week 211 mile trek, one can experience Muir’s memory while also absorbing some of the most beautiful sights of the Sierras by setting foot on the John Muir Trail. Wilderness designation restricts any interpretative signage, which creates a truly unique and natural experience for the hiker or back-backer, and a proper tribute to John Muir.

⁵⁴ Graham White. *Sacred Summits: John Muir’s Greatest Climbs*. (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1999), xiii.

The Sierra Club's Contribution

Behind the scenes of any major national park lies a non-profit organization that supports the park's mission and funding needs. Interpretation is also presented by non-profits in some situations. The Sierra Club is a fitting structure for interpretation of John Muir, since he was a co-founder and first president of this premier conservation organization. Muir led many sierra outings, taking large groups on rambles through the mountains. He also advocated for wilderness conservation through the Sierra Club, who backed his message and helped spread his word. The Sierra Club manages two properties at Yosemite National Park, which are both named and memorialized for men who contributed to wilderness knowledge and preservation: LeConte Memorial Lodge and Parsons Memorial Lodge.

Joseph LeConte was a professor of Geology, as well as a charter member and early director of the Sierra Club. 1901 marked an exciting moment for the club: they took their first national outing that year, hiking from Yosemite Valley to Tuolumne Meadows. John Muir was in attendance, as well as his two daughters. As mentioned earlier, this outing gave Muir and Robert Johnson Underwood time to discuss their plans to establish the true Yosemite National Park, with valley included. Before the group departed from Curry Village, Joseph LeConte suffered from a heart attack and died. LeConte was a close friend of Muir for over thirty years; Muir had first met him in 1870, when Muir escorted LeConte through wild lands for ten days. LeConte was also one of the first people to stand behind Muir in his theory of the glacial origin of Yosemite Valley.⁵⁵ In memorial of LeConte, the Sierra Club arranged to erect a stone building in Curry Village, as a reading room and information center. (Figure 3.6)

⁵⁵ Sierra Club, *Environmental Education: LeConte Memorial Lodge*. <http://www.sierraclub.org/education/leconte>, accessed February 20, 2011.



Figure 3.6: LeConte Memorial Lodge. Photograph by the author.

John White, a Berkeley architect, designed the building to harmonize with its natural setting. It was constructed from rough-hewn masonry, with wood shake shingles on the roof. The steep pitch of this roof reflected the verticality of the Yosemite Valley walls.⁵⁶ LeConte Memorial Lodge was dedicated in 1904, and soon began filling its walls with books of science and nature, including books by John Muir. When the National Park Service was established in 1916, the Sierra Club joined with the newly-formed agency to work on interpretative programs. The LeConte Memorial Lectures were sponsored by the Sierra Club and University of California, and were used as a model for National Park Service interpretative programs throughout the United States.⁵⁷

LeConte Memorial Lodge was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1987 and continues to offer a summer program series. The memory of LeConte survives, as well as the legacy of his friendship with Muir. John Muir is always a central interpretative subject in the summer series. Last summer, lecture titles included “John Muir and Teddy Roosevelt in 1903”, “Nature’s Beloved Son: John Muir’s Botanical Legacy”, “John Muir and the Big Trees, and John Muir at Home: John Muir National Historic Site”, given by the lead interpretative ranger at

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

John Muir National Historic Site, Thaddeus Shay. The presence of this building is appropriate for the site, a structure in Yosemite's cultural landscape, encompassing the relationship between Yosemite's grandeur and the built environment. By entering this building, consciously stepping through the threshold, the visitor has a moment of respite, and gains knowledge in the meantime.

Parsons Memorial Lodge sits in the center of Soda Springs at Tuolumne Meadows. It was built by Bernard Maybeck in memory of Edward Taylor Parsons, who died the same year as John Muir, of failing health likely attributed to the difficult battle over Hetch Hetchy. Parsons joined the Sierra Club in 1900, served on the outing committee, and later became club director.⁵⁸ The building was situated in Soda Springs because it served as a good starting point for future outings into the high country. Massive in size, Parsons Memorial Lodge was constructed of rubble stone masonry gathered onsite. (Figure 3.7) Like LeConte Memorial Lodge, Parsons also provides a summer lecture series. During the summer of 2010, the first lecture pertained directly to Muir: "Walk the Sky: Following the John Muir Trail". In this lecture, the visitor was provided information about the origins of the trail, but also presented visual images taken along the way, a virtual tour of this difficult backcountry hike. The Sierra Club is fortunate to have an intimate relationship with Yosemite National Park, and such a magnificent backdrop for their memorial buildings. While it may seem odd that there is no John Muir memorial building at Yosemite, his presence is found elsewhere throughout the park. It is fortunate that both these memorial buildings foster discussion of Muir and his influence on the Sierra Club. The picturesque setting of Parsons and LeConte lend to discussions of the contributions of the American conservation movement.

⁵⁸ Laura Soulliere Harrison, *LeConte Memorial Lodge National Historic Landmark Nomination*. (San Francisco: National Park Service, 1985), 4.



Figure 3.7: Parsons Memorial Lodge. Photograph by the author.

The Theatre of Muir

A unique and popular mode of interpretation can be found in the performances of Lee Stetson, every summer inside the Yosemite Village Theatre. (Figure 3.8) Lee Stetson, an actor originally from Massachusetts, performs three to four shows per week, appearing as John Muir himself. These performances have occurred since 1983, and Stetson tours the country in the winter, spreading the reach of his show. The subjects of the performances are: Conversation with a Tramp, John Muir Among the Animals, The Spirit of John Muir, and Theodore Roosevelt and John Muir: the Tramp and the Roughrider. Stetson is very convincing in the role of Muir, having grown his beard long and exhibiting the same extreme slender frame.

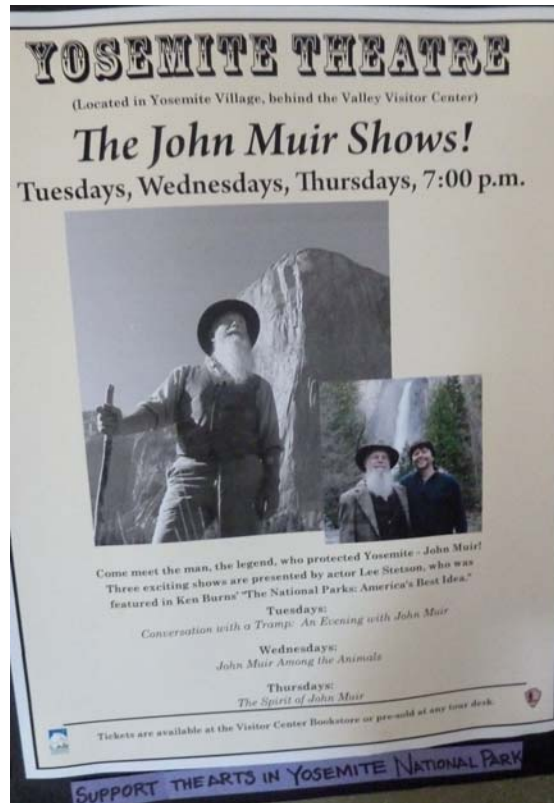


Figure 3.8: Poster for Muir shows near Yosemite Valley Theater. Photograph by author.

John Muir has been brought back to life, in a strange way, through the performances of Lee Stetson. The major contribution of Stetson is the reach of his shows; over the years, he has performed to over a quarter of a million people.⁵⁹ Visitors everyday learn about the life of Muir in an engaging way, and are presented with a personal form of interpretation, in contrast with the non-personal wayside exhibits.

John Muir is interpreted in a variety of ways at Yosemite National Park: interpretative exhibits in visitor centers, wayside panels along trails and roads, lectures, and the John Muir Trail. While culture and history are rich in this area, natural scenery is the focus of interpretation at Yosemite National Park. John Muir spent many extended visits here but he chose to build his life in Martinez he built his life, and he is buried there, along with his family.

⁵⁹ Lee Stetson, *Presentations*, <http://www.johnmuirlive.com/present.html>, accessed January 20, 2011.

Interpretation at John Muir National Historic Site

Historically, the Muir-Strentzel ranch spanned 2300 acres, filled with orchards of productive fruits. The size of the ranch has dwindled over the decades; Muir sold many acres to fund his conservation efforts, the land was divided by family members after Muir's death, and eventually it was further splintered by suburban development. Today, the National Park Service unit is positioned near the John Muir Highway; the visitor exits the highway on the Alhambra Avenue exit, and turns left into the small parking lot, now across the street from a gas station. The suburban setting of the site must seem strange to the visitor, who has come to learn more about this mountain rambler. The Muir mansion looms above Alhambra Road, and the trestle he authorized to bring agriculture closer to him crosses the road. This is a powerful statement about Muir's life and the change that has occurred since 1890. The preservation of this historic site is a success. To understand the nature of this cultural preservation accomplishment, a short administrative history is needed.

As stated earlier in this chapter, efforts to commemorate Muir started even before his death. Little was publicized about Muir's Martinez home and the ranch life he lived for 24 years, but little was known to the public about his private life as a rancher. Pilgrimages began during the 1930's, and a formal hike by the Sierra Club was organized in 1933, leading to Muir's gravesite.⁶⁰ There was little interest in the Italianate mansion on the knoll. By the early 1950's the formerly rural, agricultural land was developing fast, gaining popularity for its proximity to San Francisco. Large plots were sold and subdivided. Preservation of the Muir Homestead was proposed in a variety of ways: county park, memorial shrine, and state park, to name a few. In 1955, Henry and Faire Sax purchased the Muir House for \$23,000, "to block its

⁶⁰ Jeffrey Killion and Mark Davidson. *Cultural Landscape Report for John Muir National Historic Site*. (Boston: Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation, 2005), 172.

destruction by a proposed subdivision”.⁶¹ Five years later, the preservation efforts of the John Muir Association paid off, and the National Park Service began management of the site.

Correspondence from the newly formed John Muir Memorial Association was the first contact. Endorsements came in the next year from the City of Martinez, Golden Gate Audubon Society, and Sierra club brought attention at the National Park Service, and soon a history survey and inventory commenced. A bill to establish the John Muir National Monument was brought before Congress in 1962; however the Department of the Interior recommended it be postponed until all studies were completed.⁶² On August 31, 1964, John Muir National Historic Site was established under Public Land Law 88-547, “as a public national memorial to John Muir in recognition of his efforts as a conservationist and a crusader for national parks and reservations”.⁶³

The entrance to John Muir National Historic Site is through an adapted animal hospital, rehabilitated as the visitor center. (Figure 3.9) The building is small and has a few pictures on the wall of Muir, and stuffed animals illustrating the surrounding wildlife. Rangers stand behind the desk and provide the self-guided tour brochure. The visitor may view a short film about Muir or exit through the back to start the tour. After exiting through the back, a hayfield with a young orchard is visible to the viewer, providing an agricultural context to the mansion they are about to enter. One walks up the knoll and enters through the front door of the Strentzel-Muir house.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 174.

⁶³ Public Land Law 88-547. Historic Sites, Buildings, Objects and Antiquities, 1967.



Figure 3.9: John Muir National Historic Site Visitor Center entrance. Photograph by author.

The Muir House is interpreted in the manner of a traditional house museum. (Figure 3.10) This study focuses on interpretation of the cultural landscape, which concerns structures as well as living vegetation. The interior of the house is not usually discussed in the context of cultural landscape preservation, but the nature of this particular structure, where John Muir wrote some of his most significant works, begs description and analysis.



Figure 3.10: Strentzel-Muir House front entrance. Photograph by author.

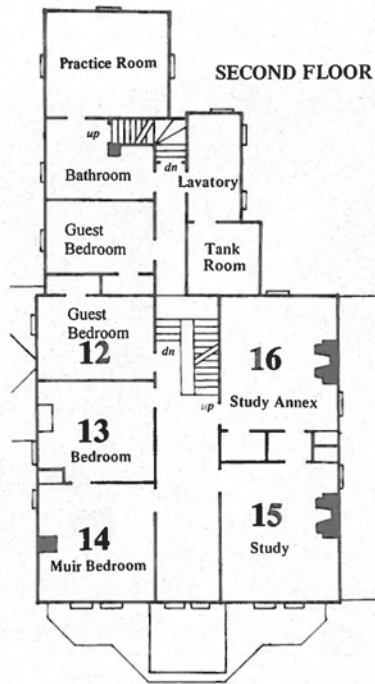
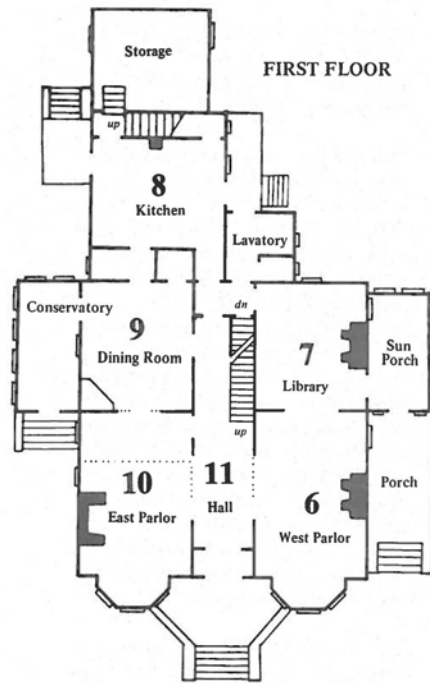


Figure 3.11: First and second floor plans of Muir House. Source: Rubissou, *John Muir National Historic Site*, (Tuscon: Southwest Parks and Monuments Association, 1990), 3.

The Muir House is a large building that contains over 15 rooms, five of which are connected directly with conservation history and Muir's attempt to bring nature indoors. On the first floor, east of the dining room, a narrow solarium provided the Muir family with respite and the enjoyment of plants year round. (Figure 3.12)



Figure 3.12: Solarium in the Muir House. Photograph by the author.

Muir loved being, and the solarium represents Muir's attempt to control nature and bring it closer to him. It is in this room that Muir sat with visitors and discussed current events and conservation strategies. Muir not only loved rugged wilderness, but botany and horticulture, and this room expressed that point eloquently.

The East Parlor is entered from the left of the central hallway. Furnished with paintings of the Sierras, as well as typical Victorian furnishings, the fireplace is the most significant fixture of this room. When the house's chimneys collapsed during the earthquake of 1906, John Muir had them rebuilt. (Figure 3.13)



Figure 3.13: Muir's interior campfire in east parlor. Photograph by author.

The fireplace was also damaged; instead of rebuilding it in kind, however, Muir had the chance to express himself and bring the essence of a campfire inside.⁶⁴ By enlarging the mouth of the fireplace, he could build a “real mountain campfire” in the newly designed space.

On the second floor, across the hall from Muir’s bedroom, is the most significant room of the house, the Scribble Den. (Figure 3.14) In this room, Muir wrote many of the books and articles that influenced preservation of wild places and gave form to the early conservation movement.



Figure 3.14: Scribble den. Photograph by author.

John Muir’s desk is one of the only personal, authentic pieces of furniture in the house; its significance is emphasized by the writings he produced there. Positioned at the front of the

⁶⁴ Ariel Rubissou. *John Muir National Historic Site*. (Tucson: Southwest Parks and Monuments Association, 1990), 2.

house, Muir's desk was arranged under the tall windows of this Italianate house; from here, Muir had a great view of his land holdings. Before and after he worked the land, Muir would write in this room, an activity that provided him with both stress and relief. Muir proposed the Yosemite National Park from this room, and well as fought the battle of Hetch Hetchy.

The Sierra Club Exhibit room, as it is called presently, is located behind the Scribble Den, and it currently houses temporary exhibit related to Muir's botanical legacy. Around the room are framed botanical specimens collected by Muir on his travels. Adequately repurposed as an exhibit room, Muir originally envisioned this room as a library, but it was never designed in this manner. While walking around this room, the visitor learns about the extent of Muir's travels, his early and continual commitment to botany and his collection of interesting and new specimens.

The third floor of the Muir house is used as an attic space with a small exhibit curated by the Sierra Club. In the center of the room a steep stairway leads to one of the most unique features of the house, the bell tower. (Figure 3.15) While Dr. Strentzel used the bell to call the laborers to work, Muir often used the tower as a place of meditation.⁶⁵ The arched windows give the visitor a 360-degree view of the landscape of the John Muir National Historic Site, as well as the community of Martinez and the greater Alhambra Valley.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.



Figure 3.15: View from bell tower of Muir House. Photograph by author.

These rooms interpret vital aspects of John Muir's home life during the years of his residence. John and Louie's interest in horticulture is reflected in the solarium's verdant appearance and the variety of plants exhibited and cared for. The east parlor exhibits Muir's unique approach to repairing the damage incurred by the earthquake of 1906, and his attempt to bring the outdoors inside. The scribble den and Sierra Club exhibit room signify John Muir's contribution to literature, conservation, and botany. Finally, the bell tower literally brings the outdoor in, with a 360-degree view of the landscape below and beyond the house. These places interpret Muir in many distinct ways, but his agricultural legacy can only truly be seen in the soil below.

A Victorian Agricultural Landscape

Upon exiting the Muir house, the visitor is confronted with a towering California bay tree, which constitutes the centerpiece of the oval garden area. (Figure 3.16)

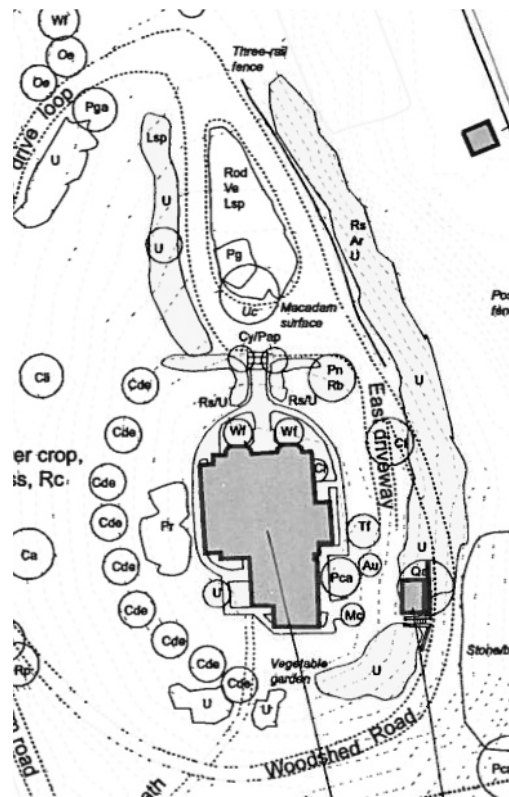


Figure 3.16: 1914 planting plan. Note oval garden at the top of the plan. Source: Killion and Davidson, *Cultural Landscape Report for John Muir National Historic Site*. (Boston: Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation, 2005),

134.

The self guided tour points out that it was customary for the Muirs to use a bay tree branch as their Christmas tree. The National Register of Historic Places nomination noted that this area is significant due to its Gardenesque design. Evolving from the Gardenesque style, the oval garden is unique for its exotic character, emphasized by plants John Muir brought back from his travels. “I hold dearly cherished memories about it [the house] and fine garden grounds full of trees and bushes and flowers that my wife and father-in-law and I planted – fine things from

every land.”⁶⁶ Descending from the steep knoll, visitors see heritage varieties of peaches, cherries, and pomegranates. The farmer in Muir is elaborated upon, discussing Muir’s shipments of fruit to the east and cherries’ position as a major cash crop on the ranch in Muir’s time. (Figure 3.17) An interesting feature of the tour brochure is the invitation to reach down and touch the soil. The brochure informs visitors that, “The nutrients in this rich soil, the cycle of winter rainfall and the warm, dry summers made dryland farming of peaches practical in the Alhambra Valley one hundred years ago”.⁶⁷ This action of touching and contemplating the soil itself, without which Muir’s history would veritably have changed, is a unique invitation to learn about the agricultural landscape of John Muir National Historic Site.

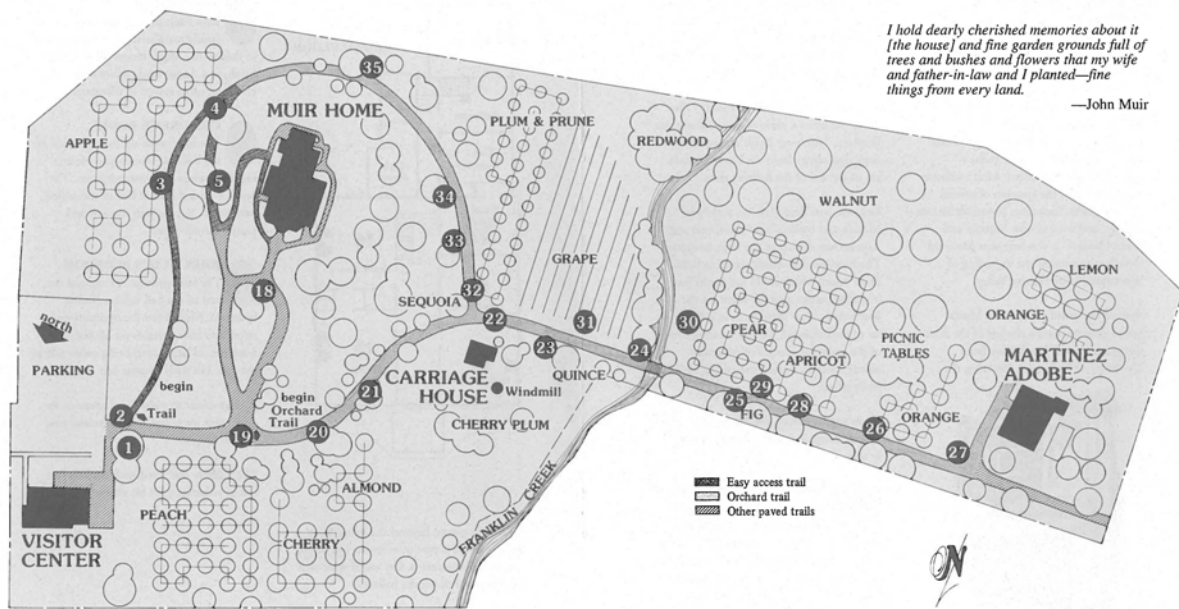


Figure 3.17: Site plan. Source: Rubissou, *John Muir National Historic Site*, 4-5.

At the intersection of the circular carriage drive/loop and the historic farm road, a small carriage house faces northwest toward the entrance of the Muir house. (Figure 3.18) This

⁶⁶ National Park Service, *John Muir National Historic Site Brochure* (Washington D.C.: National Park Service), 3.

⁶⁷ Rubissou, *John Muir National Historic Site*, 4.

building was moved closer to the house some time after Muir's death, but it was moved back to its current and historic location and rebuilt in 1983.⁶⁸



Figure 3.18: Interior of carriage house. Photograph by author.

The Muirs used this structure to store their horse-drawn carriages and some farm equipment. These objects are still found inside the structure, donated by a local family.⁶⁹ Outside the carriage house, a wayside exhibit explains the importance of the carriage as mode of transportation in the Alhambra Valley.

John Muir never owned an automobile and his family owned at least three buggies. The exhibit also speaks shortly of the restoration of the building. On the right side of the panel is a historic photograph that shows the landscape setting of this area in 1891.

A windmill rises behind the carriage house. Although not a historic landscape feature, it adds to the agricultural essence of the site. The tour brochure informs the reader of the mechanics of windmills, and their significance in irrigation. Several windmills once dotted the

⁶⁸ Killion and Davidson, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 4.

⁶⁹ Rubissou, *John Muir National Historic Site*, 6.

working spaces of the Strentzel-Muir ranch. Inside the carriage house, as seen above, a sign tells a brief history of windmills and their importance to the Strentzel-Muir ranch, and how they converted wind to mechanical energy, in order to “pump, grind, compress, or agitate.”⁷⁰ Sourcing high above any other farm structure, the windmill at John Muir National Historic Site intimately connects the Muir house and its agricultural surrounding, both powerful in their own way.

Franklin Creek flows east of the carriage house and windmill, dividing the agricultural zone of the John Muir National Historic Site in half. A non-contributing bridge crosses the creek, built to resemble an earlier bridge that washed away in a flood. East of Franklin Creek, a mature fig tree looms over the pathway. This fig tree is the only historic fruit bearing plant in the agricultural area.⁷¹ (Figure 3.19) This tree has been dated to the late 1890’s, and possibly was planted by John Muir himself.⁷²



Figure 3.19: Historic fig tree. Photograph by author.

⁷⁰ National Park Service, *John Muir National Historic Site Interpretative Brochure* (Washington: National Park Service), 2.

⁷¹ James K. Agee. *Historic Trees of John Muir National Historic Site*, (San Francisco: National Park Service, 1978), 5.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 6.

At the far eastern end of the site the Martinez Adobe stands as a sentinel, steady in its position as the oldest building in Martinez. (Figure 3.20) This structure connects the site with its early history as well as shedding light on later uses significant to Muir's history. The Martinez land grant system contained over 17,000 acres of land; Don Vicente Martinez, son of the commandante of the Presidio of San Francisco, built this house of adobe bricks in 1849.⁷³ Originally, the building was set on a foundation of rough stone, the walls were constructed of sun-dried adobe stacked brick, and the roof was covered with shingles of cedar or redwood.⁷⁴ The appearance of the structure is much different today, due to the Victorian transformation completed by the Muirs.

Dr. Strentzel purchased the adobe in 1874 and used it as a storeroom and residence for his orchard foreman. When John Muir took control of the ranch, it was used for the same purposes for approximately 30 years.



Figure 3.20: Martinez adobe. Photograph by author.

⁷³ Faye Goolrick, *John Muir National Historic Site Long-Range Interpretative Plan*. (Harper's Ferry: National Park Service, 2010), 11.

⁷⁴ Rubissou, *John Muir National Historic Site*, 7.

It became the home of Muir's eldest daughter, Wanda, and her husband Thomas Hanna in 1906. Muir often ate meals at the adobe, playing with his grandchildren. In past years, the interior of the adobe structure was covered with large pictorial panels with Muir quotes and descriptions of places closely related to Muir's preservation efforts. Due to an agreement with the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail, a new exhibit was installed in the spring of 2010, which describes the Anza expedition of 1775-1776. The area surrounding the Martinez Adobe is planted with sweet oranges and lemons. Oranges are significant in this setting, for orange trees were first planted in the Alhambra Valley by Dr. John Strentzel, an area now famous for its citrus production. West of the small orange orchard are picnic tables and a grill. The park hosts many school programs and school children often bring picnic lunches.⁷⁵

After a rest or extended stay at the Martinez Adobe, the visitor is directed back along the path, and directed toward the southern agricultural area. Beyond the picnic tables, a small apricot orchard grows next to a larger pear orchard. Nearing the end of the interpretative tour and brochure, the information reduces in length and support with quotes. The pear orchard is placed in line with the most important crops on Muir's ranch, along with cherries and grapes. This description ends, "This is a young orchard but it produces a good crop." ?

West of the creek is a beautiful young grape vineyard. The Strentzel-Muir ranch was known for its grapes, and an interesting form of commemoration has occurred here. John Muir's grandson, John Hanna, a Napa Valley viticulturist, planted this vineyard in 1976. The brochure discusses historic methods of grape growing. Adjacent to the vineyard, a small orchard of plums and prunes are maturing.

Any visit to a site related to John Muir would not be complete without a discussion of trees. While many plants and some trees were previously discussed in the self-guided tour of

⁷⁵ Killion and Davidson, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 10.

the grounds of John Muir National Historic Site, the tour is properly concluded with three types of large, historic trees, dating to Muir's time. A few of these trees were planted by Muir's own hands. At the intersection of the circular drive and the old farm road, a *Sequoiadendron Giganteum*, or Big Tree is quite large, yet very young in relation to the ancient groves in Sequoia National Park and Yosemite National Park. (Figure 3.21)



Figure 3.21: Path to Muir house. Note the young sequoia on the right. Photograph by author.

A historic tree study completed by James Agee in the 1970's dates this tree to 1897. Far from its natural range in the Sierra Nevada, it is believed that John Muir brought this seedling down from the mountains, and planted it close to his heart and home.

Turning right at the intersection, rounding toward the back of the house, the visitor is presented with three distinct types of true cedars: Mount Atlas cedar, cedar of Lebanon, and Deodar cedar. True cedars are not native to North America, and the brochure informs the visitor that these trees were all imported from abroad. The dating of these trees is documented as such: the Mount Atlas from 1899, Lebanon from 1899, and the Deodor from 1944, not contributing to the period of significance of Muir's life on the ranch.⁷⁶ In their position on the

⁷⁶ Agee, *Historic Trees of John Muir National Historic Site*, 5.

east of the house, once mature, these trees provided a screen from the agricultural happenings of the ranch.

Four eucalyptus trees are grouped near the southern fence and boundary of the site. These are the remains of the eucalyptus grove that John Muir and neighbor John Swett planted on the southern slope of the knoll.⁷⁷ This is not mentioned in the brochure; instead, the brochure discusses Muir's trip to Australia in 1904 and his search for gigantic eucalyptus trees, said to be taller than the California redwoods. Abruptly, the self-guided tour ends here, leaving visitors standing at the back of the Muir mansion, gazing at the remains of a eucalyptus grove and the boundary fence. The visitor is directed, "You may return to the visitor center from this point or exit the park by following the trail behind the house, and continuing down the easy access trail".⁷⁸

Mount Wanda and the Strentzel-Muir Cemetery:

The Other Side of John Muir National Historic Site

Although the house unit, which encompasses the mansion and agricultural grounds, is the largest and most visited unit of this National Park Service site, a visit to Mount Wanda adds perspective for the visitor. A 326-acre oak woodland and grassland, this site is located across Highway 4, which runs by the Muir house. (Figure 3.22) Moderately steep trails lead the visitor, on foot or horse, to a 660-foot elevation view of the surrounding area. A 360-degree experience is possible here, providing views of the greater context of the Alhambra Valley, along with features of the House unit, such as the windmill; on a clear day, one can see the outline of the Sierras. (Figure 3.23)

⁷⁷ Killion and Davidson, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 68.

⁷⁸ U.S. National Park Service, *John Muir National Historic Site Brochure*, 2.

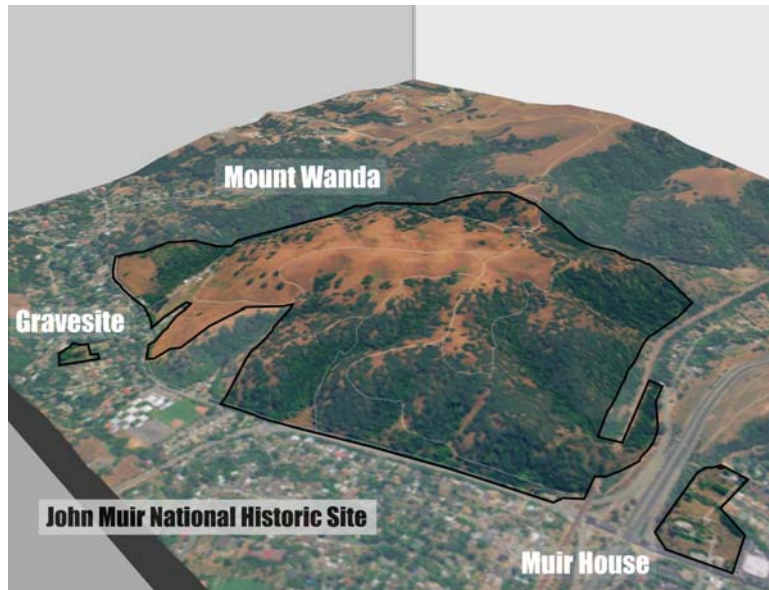


Figure 3.22: Topographical model of John Muir National Historic Site. Source: Killion and Davidson, *Cultural Landscape Report for John Muir National Historic Site*, 232.

Interpretation is minimal on Mount Wanda, letting the natural area speak for itself. The National Park Service acquired this land in 1993, surprised at its mostly undeveloped appearance.⁷⁹ Numbered guideposts correspond to a brochure available at the visitor's center. Other modes of interpretation take the form of nature walks, led by park rangers. Wildflower and bird walks occur throughout the year, and full moon walks occur in the summer. Mount Wanda is a significant resource for its natural character amid the suburban development of Martinez. John Muir led his daughters and family around this area, ultimately naming it after his daughter.

⁷⁹ Killion and Davidson, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 1.



Figure 3.23: View from the top of Mount Wanda. Photograph by author.

Cemeteries and gravesites are direct forms of commemoration and remembrance; human remains are laid to rest in appropriate settings, and these sites are visited when one wishes to pay respect. John Muir is buried one mile from his house, and the family cemetery is contained within the John Muir National Historic Site. To visit the site, one travels north on Alhambra Road and turns right onto a small residential road, aptly named Strentzel Lane. No parking spaces are available, and the entrance to the gravesite somewhat seems like trespassing, as private property surrounds the site on all sides.

This parcel of land was purchased by Dr. John Strentzel in 1853; around this time he planted a pear orchard and established the gravesite. These trees were later grafted by Muir in

the 1880's, and today they constitute one of the oldest commercial orchards in California.⁸⁰ Along with the pears, Strentzel planted eucalyptus and incense cedars, possibly marking a boundary to the site. Behind the gravesite, a small creek flows quietly. (Figure 3.24)



Figure 3.24: Eucalyptus tree at the Strentzel-Muir gravesite. Photograph by author.

When Dr. Strentzel died in 1890, Muir noted the size of the eucalyptus and likened it to a guardian angel watching over the graves.⁸¹ A fenced enclosure surrounds the historic granite enclosed that originally marked the cemetery entrance. A granite monument commemorates the life and death of Dr. John Strentzel, Mrs. Strentzel, and son John Erwin. The monument takes the form of an obelisk and measures four feet by four feet and five feet tall. Louie and John Muir's grave markers are identical in appearance, granite with an arched top and rusticated

⁸⁰ Killion and Davidson, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 398.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 399.

base. (Figure 3.25) They lay side by side and both are inscribed with a floral engraving. John Muir's grave marker includes his birthplace, Dunbar, Scotland, above his date of passing. Along with these significant individuals, Muir's daughter Wanda, along with her husband Tom Hanna, were buried in the gravesite by 1947.



Figure 3.25: John and Louie Muir's gravemarkers. Photograph by author.

There is little to no interpretation of the gravesite unit of John Muir National Historic Site. Behind the desk at the visitor's center, a map of Martinez includes a wayfinding marker for the cemetery, but the rangers do not actively make its presence known. There is no mention of the site on the website or in the interpretative materials. This is a respectful measure, with relation to John Muir's resting place and for the surrounding neighborhood.

Interpretation is achieved at John Muir National Historic Site through a variety of ways: a traditional house museum, ranger-led tours, a self-guided tour of the grounds, a short film in the visitor's center, a guided hike on Mount Wanda, and Muir's gravesite as a non-

interpreted commemoration. This small National Park Service unit is approaching its 46th birthday, and its managers and interpreters are beginning to re-evaluate their methods.

Yosemite National Park's reputation towers over that of John Muir National Historic Site. Millions of people go to Yosemite to experience the landscape and learn about Muir through interpretative panels, theater performances, or hiking the John Muir Trail. While large in size, with sublime natural features to interpret, as well as the lives of the pioneers of Yosemite, the interpretation of John Muir is short of ideal. The following chapter outlines the areas in which interpretation of John Muir's life falls short, in terms of the cultural landscape of Yosemite National Park and John Muir National Historic Site.

CHAPTER FOUR

WHERE INTERPRETATION IS LACKING

John Muir's life was full of activity: immigration, relocation, mountain celebration, and dedication. His life has been mythologized, like the life of Abraham Lincoln or George Washington, who are remembered for their legend more than their actual lives. Donald Worster, who wrote Muir's most recent biography, John Muir: Passion for Nature, said in an interview for his book tour, "People see him as ... Buddha or Moses. They think he came down a mountain trail and his feet never touched the soil".⁸² Like most myths, the myth of the John Muir mountain man is not totally correct. This myth is projected at Yosemite National Park, while John Muir National Historic Site attempts to show his role of rancher, businessman, and father. Conservationists want a rambler to hold up as a hero; they wish to attain the freedom he had while living in Yosemite. If one is truly interested in John Muir, his role in the conservation movement, and his life story, they will accept the many unique sides of this man, reaching ultimately for more complex, multi-faceted understanding.

Ideal is a strong word. It is believed to be perfection, an aspiration not to be achieved. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines it as "an ultimate object or aim of endeavor: goal."⁸³ While lofty and difficult to reach, an ideal is attainable, if you try. The interpretation of John Muir at Yosemite National Park and John Muir National Historic Site falls short of ideal. While hindrances stand in the way, as well as personal biases and attitude, what is the point if an ideal is not worked towards? The ideal message visitors could take away from a visit to both Yosemite National Park and John Muir National Historic Site is a balanced perception of John Muir's time at both places. Muir made contributions not only to conservation and botany, but agricultural business in California as well. An analysis must be made before the ideal is sought,

⁸² Jeff Baker, "John Muir; The Man, The Legend". *The Oregonian* November 25, 2008.

⁸³ Merriam-webster.com, Ideal, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ideal>, accessed March 1, 2011.

and the following discussion lays out the areas where interpretation of John Muir falls short of ideal.

Yosemite National Park

A major issue confronted in this study is the overemphasis of the number of years that John Muir spent in Yosemite. Compounding this issue, the interpretative text in the park surrounding Muir is vague in relation to the duration of his stays. In the Yosemite Valley Visitor Center interpretative panels focus on his first summer in Yosemite Valley, and his subsequent journey to the high country. One panel reads, “When his shepherding job ended, he worked in Yosemite Valley building and operating a sawmill to cut lumber from downed trees”.⁸⁴ His permanence in Yosemite is also implied with the Hang Nest panel, dating the construction of the dwelling in 1870. There is no mention of Muir’s departure from Yosemite, and many visitors leave Yosemite thinking he never came down from the mountain.

An interesting point surrounds the interpretation concerning Muir’s homes in Yosemite. He camped in the high country, lodged in Black’s hotel in the winters, built his pine shake cabin, and Hang Nest. What is absent in current interpretative materials is the existence of the cabin John Muir built near Lamon’s Orchard. Muir worked for James Hutchings for two years, finally leaving his employment in the fall of 1871. Motivated by research, Muir hiked into the high country, finding the glacier on Black Mountain, the first living glacier found in Yosemite. Upon return from his discovery, he boarded at Black’s hotel for the winter. In the spring of 1871, John Muir built a small cabin, “in a clump of cornus bushes, near the Royal Arches, on the banks of the Merced.”⁸⁵ Positioned near Lamon’s young apple orchard, the presence of his cabin near the Merced River and the astonishing Royal Arches charged his

⁸⁴ Wilkins, *John Muir: Apostle of Nature*, 302.

⁸⁵ William Frederic Bade. “John Muir in Yosemite”. *Natural History*, 20, number 2 (1920); 131.

brain to write. (Figure 4.1) By 1872, he had published three articles about Yosemite in leading journals.

The Interpretation Division has given scenery and convenience priority over Muir's second cabin in Yosemite Valley. The Yosemite Falls cabin is commemorated by a plaque, and visitors marvel at the astonishing sight of this massive fall tumbling to the earth. Conveniently located just outside the development of Yosemite Village, this interpretative wayside is perfect for visitors to see on their way in or out of Yosemite Valley. In contrast, the Lamon orchard cabin has been managed in a different way, to say the least. In the 1930's or 1940's, the National Park Service, with help from the Civilian Conservation Corps, burned this structure, a management practice that was common⁸⁶. Natural scenery was believed to be the highest use and many buildings in the national parks, especially small cabins, shared this fate. Nowadays, some of the historic apple trees survive, still bearing fruit, hidden behind the stable complex of Yosemite Valley.



Figure 4.1: Path through Lamon's Orchard in Yosemite Valley. Source: Michelle Hansen.

⁸⁶ Dan E. Anderson. *Pioneer Yosemite History Center Online*. <http://www.yosemite.ca.us/pioneer-yosemite-history-center>, accessed February 26, 2011.

Lamon's corral was expanded by early twentieth century National Park Service employees to suit visitors who wanted to tour the valley from above the ground. Two campsites are now located north of the stable, where Muir's cabin once stood.

Twenty miles south of Yosemite Valley, Wawona is most known for the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias, slightly west of the tourist area of Wawona. Formerly called Clark's Station, Wawona is where Galen Clark first settled in Yosemite, around 1855. He established the area as a tourist destination soon after his settlement, and built a cabin in the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias in 1861. Clark sold Wawona to the Washburn Brothers and they built a hotel in 1876. The Wawona Hotel still stands and operates today, surrounded by Hill's Studio, the Pioneer History Center, and a pristine golf course.

Hill's Studio was historically used as an artist's studio and later a dance hall, but today it is managed as the Wawona visitor center and backcountry permit center. Interpretation in the Wawona visitor center is limited to an exhibit on the life and art of Thomas Hill. Behind the studio is the Pioneer History Center, a collection of historic buildings from all areas of Yosemite, moved to this location in the 1960's as a unique form of historic preservation. The purpose of the Pioneer History Center is to transport the visitor back in time, to the era of the Yosemite Pioneers, but this effort is inauthentic. While these buildings were saved from demolition, they are taken out of context and placed in a village setting, unrealistic in nature. What is astonishing is the desire to place these buildings on the land that Galen Clark, one of the most significant pioneers of Yosemite once inhabited.

Also absent from this area is mention of John Muir's visits to Wawona. On the Yosemite National Park website, hidden in the Galen Clark biography section, one sentence deals with Muir: "Muir met Clark at his Wawona ranch during the legendary botanist's first

visit to Yosemite.”⁸⁷ Another significant figure accompanied Muir to Wawona in 1871, Ralph Waldo Emerson; this story also is left untold.

One of the grandest landscapes in Yosemite National Park is the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias. Along with Yosemite Valley, this grove was included in the Yosemite Grant of 1864, making it the first federally protected grove of trees. Interpretation of the Mariposa Grove is attained through the Mariposa Grove museum, located on the site where Galen Clark built his cabin in 1871, and a brochure for a walking tour of the grove. (Figure 4.2) The exhibit inside explores the ecology and history of giant sequoias, and also sells books and postcards. The brochure directs visitors to ten specimen trees, and tells of their significance and natural features. John Muir’s name is dropped here as a conservation advocate, along with Galen Clark, but no mention of his visits is expounded upon.

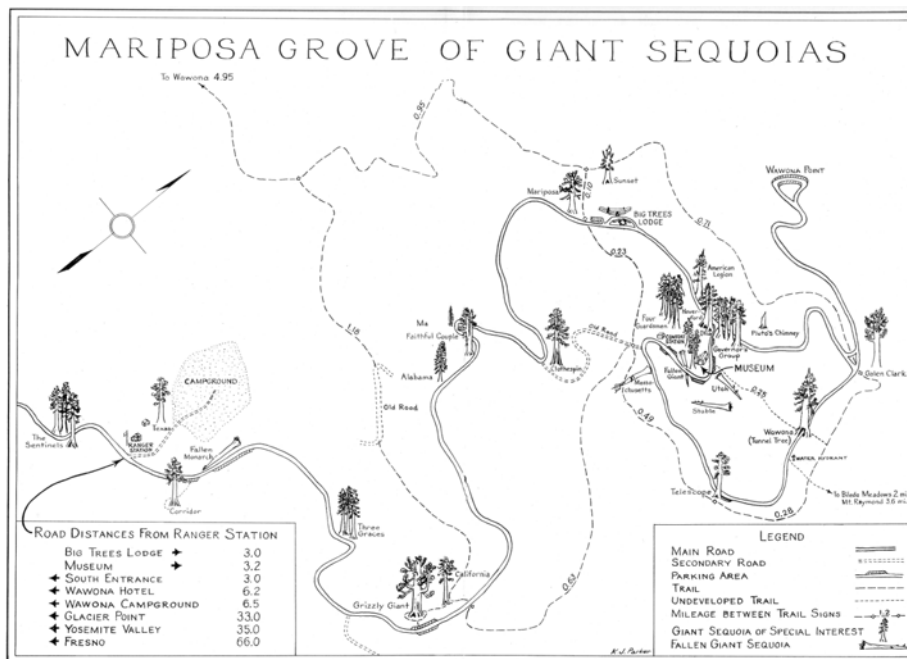


Figure 4.2: Historic Map of Mariposa Grove tour. Source: James W. McFarland. “A Guide to the Giant Sequoias of Yosemite National Park” *Yosemite Nature Notes*, 28, no. 6, June 1949, 37.

⁸⁷ National Park Service. *Galen Clark*. <http://www.nps.gov/yose/historyculture/galen-clark.htm>, accessed February 27, 2011.

While Yosemite uses John Muir's name as a token of conservation and wilderness exploration, information significant in the timeline of those movements are glossed over. Muir exited through Wawona on his first trip to Yosemite in 1867 and stayed at Clark's Station. In 1871, John Muir brought the world's leading transcendentalist writer to the Mariposa Grove, and even called Ralph Waldo Emerson a sequoia! Lastly, on May 15th, 1903, John Muir accompanied Theodore Roosevelt to the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias, and they camped under the massive branches of these giants. If the picture of Roosevelt and Muir is used in the Yosemite Valley visitor center, as well as discussed in the Bridalveil Meadow, why not include any of this information alongside the story of Galen Clark in the Mariposa Grove?

Journey into the Wilderness

Yosemite National Park is considered the laboratory where National Park Service interpretation was created. Through naturalist-rangers and early parks administration, interpretive programs and organization were implemented in the mid-1920's. Stephen Mather organized interpretative activities, getting tourists into nature and helping them leave with knowledge and a desire to preserve. One of the greatest ideas to arise from Mather's stewardship was the High Sierra Loop, a series of five backcountry camps connected by a trail system that allows backpackers to hike for a day and arrive in a camp with meals prepared and permanent tents to sleep in. This strategy alleviated the congestion of Yosemite Valley and into the high country, of which Muir spoke so highly. Currently, trained ranger-naturalists serve as guides to hikers for the backpackers' five-day trek, interpreting the wilderness and giving campfire talks.

John Muir is considered one of the first knowledgeable guides of Yosemite, giving tours to small groups while Hutchings was away. Through his active and respectful relationship with the environment surrounding him, he was able to jump from rock to rock, with seamless energy

for the power of the mountains. Whether it was an early group of tourists, Emerson, Robert Underwood Johnson, Roosevelt, or the countless others he led through this sublime landscape, Muir embodied the naturalist guide, and later channeled this knowledge and enthusiasm into essays advocating conservation.

John Muir was present at the Sierra Club's first outing in Yosemite National Park, during 1901. Over one hundred members attended, including Muir's daughters, and the outing was a complete success. William Colby, head of the committee that organized the outing wrote in his report, "the association with so many genial spirits, and the valuable instruction obtained from the learned lights of the party, made it a pleasure and a memory never to be forgotten."⁸⁸ John Muir, along with faculty from Stanford University and the University of California at Berkeley, gave campfire talks about the natural sciences.

Recently, this mode of interpretation and guiding has gone out of fashion. Yosemite National Park rangers lead tours in the front-country, but rarely take visitors on themed retreats into the wilderness. There is a great missed opportunity here, in the gap between interpretation, natural resources, and history. John Muir was deeply involved in nature guiding, and he participated in the first major outing of its kind within Yosemite National Park. John Muir and his dedication and advocacy for the wilderness, not to mention his history within the park, is a prime subject for an extended themed interpretative outing.

The John Muir Trail is under-interpreted in the park as well. The two major starting points of the trail are Happy Isles, the true start of the trail, in Yosemite Valley, and Tuolumne Meadows, the first stop in the high country. Happy Isles is managed as a nature center, with interpretative programs geared mostly toward children. No historical information is found at Happy Isles about the impetus, history, or significance of the John Muir Trail. Topographical

⁸⁸ Stanford E. Demars. *The Tourist in Yosemite: 1855-1895*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1991, 75.

trail maps are sold that highlight the main stopping points for camping and provide backcountry rules. In Tuolumne Meadows, quotes by John Muir are printed on banners that hang from the ceiling of the visitor center, although no mention of the history of the trail is found. With over thirty miles of the John Muir Trail running through Yosemite - almost all of it within the 95% of Yosemite National Park that is designated wilderness the lack of backcountry interpretative programming surrounding Muir is severely lacking. John Muir loved these wilderness places, and his journals document his spiritual feelings toward Yosemite. A Muir themed guided hike would be interesting and effective way to connect hikers to the John Muir Trail and the greater context of wilderness enjoyment and conservation.

John Muir National Historic Site

The visitor center is the main entry point to a park. Visitors come first to this structure, pay their entrance fees, gather brochures, and are introduced to the site with displays and interpretation. At John Muir National Historic Site, the initial associative experience is lacking. John Muir was one of the most influential conservationists and environmental of the nineteenth and twentieth century; he deserves a better introduction than some stuffed animals and some photographs. The visitor center at this site is a rehabilitated animal hospital, with cramped spaces, low ceilings, poor lighting, and a very small display area.⁸⁹ (Figure 4.3)

⁸⁹ Goolrich, *John Muir National Historic Site Long Range Interpretive Plan*, 12.



Figure 4.3: Display area at John Muir National Historic Site visitor center. Photograph by author.

The visitor sits in a room, multi-purposed as theater and conference room, and then is shuffled out through a small hallway, with administrative offices on the left. In 1965, when the National Park Service began management of the site, the inefficiency of the visitor center was noticed; this issue has been reiterated for decades with no solution. In 2000, plans were made to construct a new \$2.2 million visitor and education center. The design called for a reception area, exhibit space, reading room, staff offices, bookstore, and auditorium.⁹⁰ The fundraising was taken up by the John Muir Association, but inadequate funds were raised, and this plan has been put on hold. A proper setting is required for the visitor to be introduced to the significance of the figure of John Muir, his agricultural home life, and his consequent wilderness conservation efforts. At the moment, this is not attained at the John Muir National Historic Site.

After exiting through the back door of the visitors center, the self-guided tour begins. (Figure 4.4) A young apple orchard is visible, with old farm machinery creating a sense of place.

⁹⁰ Goolrich, *John Muir National Historic Site Long Range Interpretive Plan*, 80.

This young orchard is not a historic feature, but is an example of the National Park Service's attempt to bring back the ranch character of this landscape.



Figure 4.4: First guidepost of self-guided tour at John Muir National Historic Site. Photograph by author.

The visitor turns left from this field and walks up the hill toward the Muir house. The outside is inviting, with light colors and palms flanking its impressive design. Although ornate and Italianate compared to the vernacular style of the agricultural space, the mansion is appropriate, for it directly points out the dualistic nature of Muir's life and work.

During the late 1960's, the Strentzel-Muir House was the highlight of the historic site; the agricultural context had not yet been reestablished. A brief discussion of the Muir house and its interpretative methods brings a more thorough understanding of the landscape surrounding it. Although the interior of a house museum is not usually analyzed through the lens of cultural landscape, the generic nature of the house of such an unconventional man leads to a confused view of the entire cultural landscape. This house is the most identified elements of the site, and its Italianate style and flanking palms has become an icon for Martinez and the site itself. First and foremost, the house's interpretative program does not attempt to reconcile the idea of John Muir that most visitors arrive believing him to be, the explorer and champion of

the Sierra Nevada, to the ranch manager he was in Martinez, who lived in Victorian luxury. This house historically overlooked the Alhambra Valley, exemplifying the stature of a successful fruit rancher.⁹¹ Beginning in the 1960's, National Park Service staff began furnishing the house using period pieces from 1906 to 1914. Only the upstairs Scribble Den has documentation as to style and arrangement of furniture, so the furnishings of the rest of the rooms are speculative at best.⁹² No information directly tells the visitor that these furnishings did not belong to the Strentzels and Muirs. Although nominated to the National Register of Historic Places, the significance of the exterior of the house is not mentioned, much of which can be easily listed on one wayside panel. The high cupola and Italianate features are significance and ornate for this historic farming community. While the first and second floors do tell the family history of the Muirs, there is no central theme throughout the museum, no element bringing all the rooms together to answer questions like, How did John Muir get to this place in his life, after rambling in the mountains for so long?, What links are there between his home life and the public political life he took on?, and How did Muir's life and work on the ranch influence the later articles and issues he fought for?

Interpretative programs are offered at John Muir National Historic Site, mostly in the summer months. School groups frequent the site, which constituted almost 4000 visits last year alone. An Environmental Education Program is offered one day a week from April to June. Learning stations are set up throughout the site, and hands-on activities encourage "appreciation for the accomplishments, life, and legacy of John Muir at his Martinez home".⁹³ An Earth Day celebration is held annually on the Saturday of the Earth Day week, which coincides with Muir's April 21st birthday. The celebration is centered around tours of the house, a John Muir living history character, and tents staffed by non-profit organizations.

⁹¹ Killion and Davidson, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 297.

⁹² Goolrich, *John Muir National Historic Site Long Range Interpretive Plan*, 10.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 13.

One of the most popular activities in years past was Muir Heritage Ranch Day. Sponsored by the John Muir Association, this day celebrated the fall harvest and the fruit ranching heritage of the Muir family.⁹⁴ Ranch day is a great opportunity to connect the community and other visitors to the heritage of Muir through his agricultural accomplishments, and has room to grow in the areas of authentic demonstrations and temporary interpretative signs. Unfortunately, Ranch Day has been put on hold, due to funding; the last Muir Heritage Ranch Day was held in 2006. There is great power in specialized interpretative programs. They get visitors into an active role, and transport them back in time to the historic period of 1890-1914, an important aim of interpretation. Participants take active interest in the subject at hand and are eager to learn. With generic programming and a focus on young children, this avenue of interpretation is closed off in many ways.

A Fruitful Legacy

To achieve full interpretation of John Muir's life, the resources of the site must be managed properly, providing a foundation on which to build an appropriate interpretative program. Within a cultural landscape, this task is especially difficult, for the subject at hand is a biotic system, rather than the cut wood and stone of a structure. According to national register documentation, the period of significance for the John Muir National Historic Site was originally determined to be 1800-1914; however, more current evaluations have narrowed the period of significance to the time when John Muir lived at the Strentzel-Muir ranch: 1890-1914. Maintaining even a piece of the historic orchard and plant material is a success after over one hundred years, multiple private owners, suburban development, and a multitude of management procedures. Although a small amount of historic material dating from Muir's time

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

remains, it forms the backbone of direct interpretation concerning John Muir's life and legacy as a fruit rancher in the Alhambra Valley.

There is a hierarchy of significance built into the National Register of Historic Places protocol; a property may be nominated as having local, regional, or national significance. John Muir National Historic Site is nominated under national significance for its association with John Muir, noted conservationist and national parks advocate. One step below, the site is regionally significant as a distinctive example of the agricultural development of the Alhambra Valley.⁹⁵ Although other national parks throughout the country show the reach of John Muir's conservation efforts--Yosemite, Sequoia, Petrified Forest, and Glacier Bay--John Muir National Historic Site is the only site where John Muir's hands turned the soil and produced fruit that was transported from coast to coast.

From Dr. John Strentzel to John Muir, this land was transformed from a natural valley into a 2300-acre fruit ranch, with non-native plants producing agricultural commodities at staggering volumes. At one point, apples, pears, peaches, plums, apricots, figs, cherries, currants, blackberries, gooseberries, strawberries, sugar beets, oranges, almonds, grapes, and olives dotted the landscape of the Strentzel-Muir ranch. After Strentzel's death, John Muir streamlined the crops, making pears and cherries the main crops. Contradicting the myth of Muir as preservationist, he saw an opportunity for a larger market if the railroad came closer to him, so Muir agreed to have the railroad tressel come directly across his property. These themes and events are essential to understanding the development of this land and in turn, the product of the only parcel of land that Muir worked intimately for almost fifteen years. Interpreters and managers have done what they can with what they have with this site, the odds being against it in many ways. Small in size, surrounded by suburban development, and

⁹⁵ Killion and Davidson, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 296.

with lessening funds, the fact that the National Park Service manages it is a victory. This victory was achieved over fifty years ago, and there is opportunity to grow in a major way here.

The Muir house unit faces a large range of historic landscape management issues. Historically, orchards extended up and down the hills surrounding the knoll as far as the eye could see. Today, the visitor is shuttled through young orchards, where the historic location and planting patterns have not been followed. Pruning is an issue of concern because current pruning styles do not reflect historic accuracy or form.⁹⁶ Of all the fruit-bearing plants surrounding the house and the agricultural area, only one mature fig remains from John Muir's lifetime. This tree is almost forgotten in the circulation pattern, and the eye is drawn to the orchard rows opposite the fig. The orchard spaces are from the National Park Service period, and are non-contributing; many varieties planted are non-authentic varieties, which do not reflect the historic period. This is a sad fact, for the large expanse of historic orchards has been almost entirely lost, and the new orchards that have been planted are old enough now that it would be wasteful to take them out and plant more authentic varieties.

In Muir's era, a lush and verdant Victorian garden surrounded the house, with plants and trees planted by John and Louie Muir. This is the one spot in the landscape where Louie can be interpreted in relation to her husband, and this connection is missed in the current management. The gardenscape has lost its essential feeling, now regularly mowed and pruned by maintenance staff. Non-historic plants currently fill historically cleared areas, disrupting views and vistas. Highlights of this area are the presence of trees planted in Muir's lifetime, the grouping of cedars, the sequoia, as well as the remains of the eucalyptus grove. These plants are briefly discussed in the interpretative materials, but not emphasized enough.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 326.

Mount Wanda is considered a completely natural area, a haven where John Muir sauntered on hikes with his family and friends. This story is true, but not complete. Mount Wanda's hillside slopes were historically used as orchards, and the remains of orchards stand as proof. A small apricot orchard still grows on a south facing slope, but is in poor health and not maintained.⁹⁷ Also on Mount Wanda are a small olive orchard and a grouping of walnut trees. These appear to date from the historic period, but more research is needed for verification.

The horticultural jewel of the John Muir National Historic Site is the grounds of the Strentzel-Muir gravesite. Nineteen trees of the pear orchard remain at this unit, the last of one of the oldest commercial orchards in the area. The significance of this orchard is found in the lineage of this planting. Dr. Strentzel planted them when he established the gravesite, and John Muir grafted them to continue their existence. Other sections of the pear orchard can be seen in residential backyards surrounding the site. These pears were planted as a commercial orchard, but also as a setting for the cemetery. This planting makes the environment more pleasant to the eye, with the creek running behind the graves. The other major element of significance at this site is the huge eucalyptus tree that towers over the cemetery. John Muir noted its position as a guardian angel for Strentzel's funeral, and Muir's own funeral service was held under the trees massive branches.⁹⁸ Given such significance, it is a shame that these resources are not connected with the interpretative programming of John Muir National Historic Site. The nature and vulnerability of the site is an issue, but the proper solution is not the isolation of the resource. The National Park Service's mission is to promote as well as regulate their historic resources, for current and future generations.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 326.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 399.

Circulation and Vistas

Connectivity and circulation are essential for the success of a National Park Service unit. Imagine Glacier National Park without the Going to the Sun Road or North Carolina without the Blue Ridge Parkway; while these examples are on a larger scale, they demonstrate the significance of connecting one point to another, within the greater site. At the house unit, the carriage drive-loop and sidewalks are contributing to the historic period, but the easy access trail is non-contributing. This trail is necessary, however, for access around the park. Another example of this necessary circulation is the visitor center area. While the parking lot and walkway are not compatible with the historic period, they are in the development zone and provide access for the visitor. No major issues were cited in the circulation of Mount Wanda, and the modern trails are compatible with the use of the area.

Many issues face the gravesite unit with respect to circulation. The first of these is the lack of organized transportation or direction to the site. The cemetery sits literally in the middle of a residential neighborhood, with Strentzel Lane dead ending into someone's property. As a hidden resource, visitors to the site miss the enjoyment and this important link between John Muir's place of living and that of rest. Within the gravesite unit, the circulation is very poor. A small parking lot is no more than a pullout, and there is no circulation within the cemetery. Behind the pear trees and the eucalyptus, the cemetery fence is hard to spot even when looking for it.

Views and vistas are significant regarding the character-defining features of association and feeling. A beautiful view stays with the visitor longer than reading a sign with lots of text. During this historic period, the topography of the region afforded ample photography of the area, providing a vital record for the history of the ranch. (Figure 4.5)



Figure 4.5: Historic View of Strentzel-Muir Ranch from Mount Wanda, Source: Killion and Davidson, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 348.

Many historic images were used to measure the integrity of views and vistas at John Muir National Historic Site; vistas were rated poorly. Commercial intrusions, maturation of plant material, and other factors have diminished the viewsheds of this site. These views need clearing to attain more integrity concerning the historic period and to provide the optimum association and feeling toward the site and its significant inhabitants.

Partnerships

While this thesis has focused on Yosemite National Park and John Muir National Historic Site individually, the two sites should communicate and work together for a unified vision of John Muir for the future. Past and present superintendents of John Muir National Historic Site have offered different perspectives on this issue, one believing there was already a

strong relationship between the sites and the other saying there is little relationship.⁹⁹ From an outside perspective, the relationship between the two significant sites is weak. There is little communication between the sites, and the main activity is the travel of interpretative rangers to and from Yosemite National Park to expand their interpretative message at John Muir National Historic Site. There is no formal partnership between the sites, and outside non-profits, such as the John Muir Association and the Sierra Club, are engaged with both sites, but on difference projects.

Although 180 miles apart, these sites can work together remotely on interpretative messaging. Most people who travel to Yosemite National Park from far distances fly into San Francisco and then drive to Yosemite. A stop at John Muir National Historic Site, only one hour's drive from San Francisco, on the way to Yosemite, will provide a larger and varied context of John Muir's life. When the visitor arrives at the destination of Yosemite, there is more information to consider and provide a foundation for understanding Muir's motives for wilderness preservation.

⁹⁹ Tom Leatherman and Margaret Eissler, telephone interview with author, February 6, 2011.

CHAPTER FIVE

RECOMMENDATIONS

The two sites discussed and analyzed in this study--Yosemite National Park and John Muir National Historic Site--have three key elements in common: they are owned and managed by the National Park Service, the sites are both in California, and they interpret the life of John Muir. More numerous are their differences. Most striking is the difference in size; John Muir National Historic Site is less than 350 acres, while Yosemite is 747,956 acres, which is approximately 1200 square miles.¹⁰⁰ Secondly, these two sites are categorized differently under National Park Unit status. Yosemite is a national park and John Muir is a national historic site. These categories denote resources and use, as well as cultural emphasis. Yosemite's huge land mass and abundance of natural and cultural resources, as well as its almost 94% wilderness designation, surely set it apart from the smaller, culturally-focused John Muir National Historic Site, whose purposely is to interpret the life of John Muir and his family. Resulting from these differences there is definitely a high contrast in operating budgets, employment numbers, and management plans. Because of these differences, recommendations for interpretation of John Muir will vary in feasibility and implementation.

Yosemite National Park Management and Implementation

Operation of a park of this size demands a large employment base and budget. Yosemite National Park's operating budget for 2010 was \$29,360,382, which is spent on every aspect of running the park, from museum management to restoration of backcountry cabins.¹⁰¹ The National Park Service employs around 2,000 people in Yosemite National Park, spread between the seven divisions of the unit. Interpretative services demands a branch of its own, while all resources, natural and cultural, are housed in the division of resource management and science.

¹⁰⁰ National Park Service, *Yosemite National Park statistics*, www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/statistics.htm, accessed March 1, 2011.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

With a variety and multitude of resources to manage, new plans are frequently initiated and written throughout the year. Currently, fourteen management plans are in the works at Yosemite National Park, including plans concerning the Tuolumne Wild and Scenic River, Ahwahnee Hotel Fire and Life Safety, Half Dome Trail Stewardship, Scenic Vista Management, as well as the Long Range Interpretation Plan. These projects are team projects, drawing participants from multiple divisions and branches. The Long Range Interpretative Plan is in draft form, and its publication is slated for the end of Winter 2011.

Yosemite's Comprehensive Interpretative Plan opens with the park's purpose and significance. The national park's purpose is to preserve the resources and processes of the environment, as well as to make these resources available to people for their enjoyment, education, inspiration, and recreation.¹⁰² The park's significance is broken into nine sections, which include its outstanding scenery, three groves of giant sequoias, large percentage of wilderness acreage, Tuolumne Meadows, and association with American Indian tribes. Interpretative themes that are explored in this document are large in scope. It begins, "Yosemite National Park is shaped by interconnected cultural and natural forces--forces that continue to create dynamic change."¹⁰³ Fourteen themes are discussed in the pages of this document, but John Muir is not mentioned once. These themes are broad and overarching; while Muir's name is not in type here, his spirit and impact of Yosemite's history is implied throughout. Following are the themes that can be connected to John Muir's legacy:

- Yosemite's beauty draws people from all over the world and from all walks of life and can bring as sense of peace, serenity, and tranquility – a welcome respite from the pressure and stresses of everyday life

¹⁰² National Park Service, *Yosemite Park Long Range Interpretative Plan, Draft Form*, 2010, 3. Provided by Daniel Schiable.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 6.

- Giant sequoias offer opportunities for sharing Yosemite-related stories, including the inspiration to create the Yosemite Grant, the preservation of unique places, survival, and the wonder of living things so old and large.
- The concept of wilderness originated in the United States with the conviction that some wild land resources are most valuable to Americans when natural processes are allowed to prevail. Yosemite wilderness is managed to retain its primitive character so that it can remain a special place for people to examine their relationships to the natural world.
- For more than 6,000 years, people have engaged directly with the Tuolumne River, its meadows, and surrounding granite domes. Layers of human history communicate stories of Tuolumne as a place of inspiration, debate, and spiritual renewal.
- Yosemite's pristine natural environments provide for an exceptional diversity of living things and serve as a vital living research laboratory.
- Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove were the first globally recognized natural areas to be set aside by any government for public benefit and appreciation of landscape beauty, making Yosemite the birthplace of the national park idea, which has spread throughout the world.
- The post-1850 cultural story in Yosemite provides abundant opportunities to reflect upon the history of visitation, preservation, management, and the development of a National Park Service ethic.
- The connection between climbers and Yosemite is historical, physical, and spiritual. Rock climbing immerses people in this place, which can promote appropriate, sustainable, and direct connections to Yosemite.¹⁰⁴

John Muir's life can be interpreted through any of these themes. He sought spiritual connection and rejuvenation from nature, climbed its peaks (with no modern climbing gear), and formulated some of the earliest thoughts of the National Park movement. John Muir spent thoughtful times in Yosemite National Park, investigating its formation, exploring its topography, and drawing inspiration from its beauty that helped form his poetic call for conservation. John Muir's spirit is felt in Yosemite National Park, and serves as an appropriate setting to learn about his time in the 'Heart of the Sierras'.

Yosemite National Park has the operating budget and management skills to successfully draft and implement their long-range interpretative plan. The size and variety of resources

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

hinder Yosemite's staff from extensively elaborating on these themes, and the broad nature of the themes allows for creativity and flexibility in the outcome of the recommendations. John Muir should be focused on specifically, for he is the father of Yosemite National Park and the National Park System. There is room for his legacy to be interpreted through the long-range interpretative plan, but also the possibility of glossing over some significant aspects of Muir's time in Yosemite. Below are specific, recommendations for the expansion of interpretation of John Muir in Yosemite National Park, beginning in the Yosemite Valley, and concluding with Hetch Hetchy, the site of the bittersweet battle that Muir lost at the end of his life.

Recommendations for Yosemite National Park

While the draft interpretative plan for Yosemite National Park has addressed many overarching themes that are in harmony with the interpretation of John Muir's time in this area, specific recommendations are made here to address distinct areas significant to Muir. More interpretation of Muir will properly highlight his position in the designation of the park and the National Park System.

John Muir Trail

More information should be interpreted at the beginning of the John Muir Trail at Happy Isles in Yosemite Valley, as well as the popular high country starting point, Tuolumne Meadows. The information currently exhibited is a good start: his name on the trail signs and quotes hanging in the Tuolumne Meadows visitor center; this coverage does not sufficiently explain the impetus and planning put into the John Muir Trail. Planning to construct a trail over the Sierra crest began before Muir's death and the commemorative measure of naming it after Muir was decided right after his death. An accurate interpretative panel in the Tuolumne Meadows visitor center explaining Muir's link to the John Muir Trail would refresh hikers coming in out heading out on the trail, and give tangible knowledge to the visitor.

The trail system must be studied in depth before any further steps can be taken. In 1986, a National Register of Historic Places nomination for the John Muir Trail was drafted by Linda Greene, who was then employed as a historian at the National Park Service Denver Service Center. This draft currently sits in a drawer in the History, Architecture, and Landscapes branch of the Resource Management Division of Yosemite National Park. Nominations are not useful to the public and federal government if not submitted and finalized. Simple steps like this will aid in the analysis and utilization of the bountiful resources of Yosemite National Park. The national register nomination for John Muir Trail should be completed and submitted, so the significance of the trail is nationally known and documented.

Yosemite Valley was important to John Muir in many ways. For all the hiking and climbing he did in the high country, he always returned to the Yosemite Valley for contemplation and rest. Recognition at two other sites in Yosemite Valley will strengthen his legacy, spreading accurate information about Muir the sawyer, writer, and Yosemite pioneer.

Lamon Orchard Interpretation

John Muir built a cabin in Lamon's orchard and wrote three articles in 1873 that were published in *Overland Monthly*: "Yosemite Valley in Flood"; "Twenty Hill Hollow"; and "Living Glaciers in California". He wrote under the protection of a roof he built, under the shade of Lamon's apple trees, and with a view of the majestic Royal Arches of Yosemite Valley. There is no photographic documentation of the cabin, and little written description. The National Park Service, with help from the Conservation Civilian Corps, burned down this cabin in the 1930's, destroying the last tangible heritage of Muir in Yosemite National Park. An interpretative plaque or panel should be placed here to illustrate a full spectrum of Muir's residences in Yosemite. Apple trees from Lamon's orchards still exist and bear fruit in Yosemite Valley yearly. Apple picking festivities are held here and the stables bring visitors to

the area. This is an opportunity to highlight the presence of Muir in this area of the valley and link the orchards to his life in Martinez. Muir was surrounded by apple trees during 1873, and went on to raise fruit trees for 25 years in Martinez. A connection can and should be made here, for in the presence of historic trees, the link between rambler and rancher can be seen.

Yosemite Pioneer Cemetery Recognition

Currently, the Yosemite Pioneer Cemetery is the final resting place of James Hutchings, Galen Clark, James Lamon, and multiple native inhabitants of the valley. There is ample room for a memorial to John Muir here, so that he may be remembered in both places: the land he truly called his home, Yosemite, and the land where he worked and made a family, Martinez. Most grave markers in the cemetery are small in nature and state basic biographic information.

(Figure 5.1)

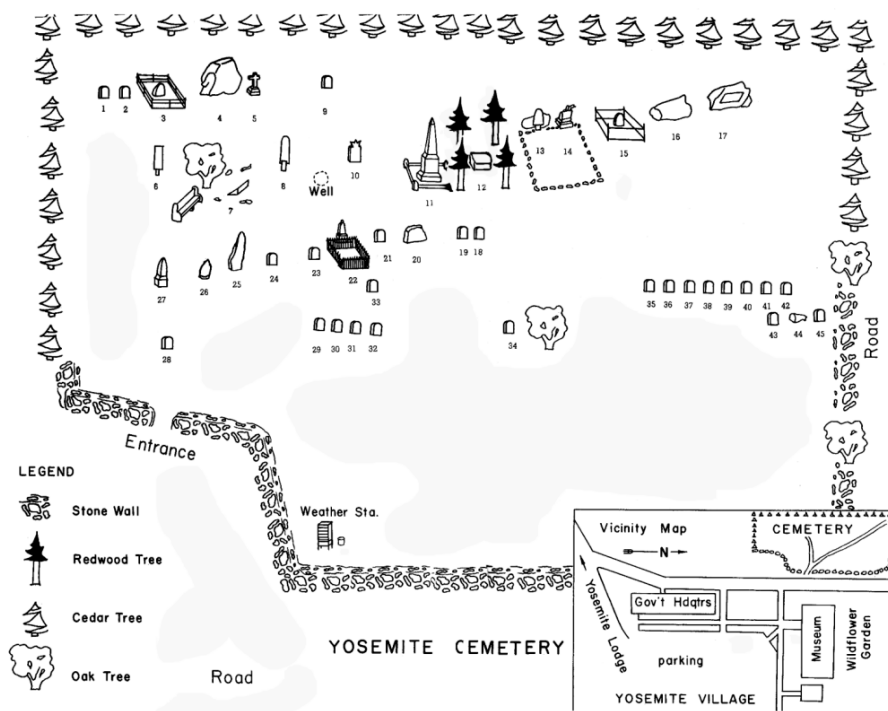


Figure 5.1: Yosemite Pioneer Cemetery illustration. Source: Linda Greene, *Yosemite: the Park and its Resources*.

(California: National Park Service, 1987), 346.

A commemorative plaque would be appropriate in the open space between some of the graves. If this is not possible, the Pioneer Cemetery would be a great place for a memorial tree. Four sequoias were planted by Galen Clark when he had a bad case of tuberculosis and feared death; a single sequoia planting would serve as a memorial to the work Muir did in Yosemite.

Wawona and/or Mariposa Grove Interpretation

John Muir visited Wawona and the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees on his first trip to Yosemite in 1868. He also accompanied Ralph Waldo Emerson and Theodore Roosevelt to the Mariposa Grove on different trips, and highlighted the unique resources in the area. There is little mention of John Muir in Wawona, and an interpretative panel at the visitor center would provide accurate information concerning Muir and his time here. The visitor should know that Muir loved this place and chose it to show the beauty of Yosemite to key individuals, one of which, Roosevelt, took his ideas straight from Wawona to the American public.

Hetch Hetchy Interpretation

The battle over Hetch Hetchy and Muir's eventual loss is credited as part of the reason for Muir's death. After the loss, his energy was down, his loneliness increased, and he soon after died quietly alone. Hetch Hetchy Valley and dam are secluded in nature, entered through national forest lands and surrounded by summer camps and retreats for San Francisco city employees and dam workers. (Figure 5.2) Along the dam, plaque commemorate the builder of the dam, as well as its height and the amount of water it provides for San Francisco. What is not told is the story of the fight over Hetch Hetchy and the loss of "little yosemite".



Figure 5.2: Hetch Hetchy Dam and filled valley. Photograph by author.

An interpretative panel should be placed near the bridge across the dam, which tells the story and possibly quotes some of the words John Muir wrote in protest would be an honest approach to this historic grassroots conservation battle and interpret the other side, the manipulation of natural resources for human consumption in a federally-protected land, at the sake of the Hetch Hetchy Valley. With this information, the visitor could be encouraged to make up their own minds about the events that occurred there.

John Muir National Historic Site: Fortunate Timing

During the past decade, managers at John Muir National Historic Site have utilized the National Park Service's planning expertise, as well as reaching outside the federal government to contractors and historians, hoping for a fresh perspective of the site and its significance. In 2005, the Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation, a quasi-governmental agency, published the Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) for John Muir National Historic Site, which concludes with treatment recommendations for the historic landscape of the Strentzel-Muir ranch. According to the National Park Service policy, "the cultural landscape report serves as the

primary supporting document guiding the treatment of a cultural landscape, and is required before major intervention.”¹⁰⁵

The first recommendation contained in the CLR concerns the period of significance. The National Register of Historic Places nomination notes the period of significance as 1800-1914, which extends far before John Muir’s residence at the ranch. The CLR recommends shortening the period of significance for the site to 1849-1914, which includes the construction of the Martinez Adobe, which is significant to Muir’s life as a residence for Muir’s daughter and son-in-law. The period of interpretation is recommended as 1890-1914, the time period directly related to John Muir’s time at the ranch.

After in-depth evaluation and analysis, the Cultural Landscape Report recommends a treatment of rehabilitation for the historic landscape of John Muir National Historic Site, which

recommends some changes to allow for contemporary uses while retaining the landscape’s historic character. A cultural landscape’s character-defining features and materials are protected and maintained as they are in preservation, but a determination is made prior to work that a greater amount of historic fabric has become damaged or deteriorated over time and replacement and repair will be required. The standards allow for the replacement of extensively deteriorated, damaged, or missing features using either traditional or substitute materials. Only this treatment includes an opportunity to make possible an efficient contemporary use through alternative alterations and additions.¹⁰⁶

This treatment focuses on retention of all existing historic plantings, as well as restoration of the scene that will speak directly of Muir’s involvement in commercial orchards and vineyards.

Goals for the landscape are clearly laid out in chapter one of the treatment section of the

Cultural Landscape Report are generic and apply to this treatment specifically:

- identify, retain, and preserve historic features and materials
- protect and maintain historic features and materials
- repair historic features and materials

¹⁰⁵ Killion and Davidson, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 9.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

- replace deteriorated historic materials and features
- design for the replacement of missing features
- alterations/additions for the new use.¹⁰⁷

Narrative treatment guidelines and tasks, chapter two of the CLR, provides as philosophical basis for “sound stewardship of the park’s landscape and enhance its historic character”.¹⁰⁸ The guidelines are presented first as a set for landscape characteristics—natural systems and features, land use, circulation, topography, vegetation, buildings and structures, views, and small-scale features. The characteristics that pertain to the interpretation and management of the life of John Muir in this study are narrowed from seven to four: circulation, vegetation, buildings and structures, and views. Park-wide guidelines are set by the categorized by feature.

The circulation of John Muir National Historic site consists of roads, lanes, walkways, and steps, which include both historic and new additions. Historic roads frame the house, and connect the Martinez Adobe with the Muir House. The foremost issue is differentiating between historic and new roads and paths. Guidelines for circulation include: retention and preservation of historic roads, repaving of historic roads with historic unbound earthen materials, and restoring missing triangle intersection of carriage loop.

Buildings and structures contribute to the historic significance of the park as a defining landscape characteristic. Included in this category are the Muir house, Martinez Adobe, walls and steps of the house, and gravemarkers and enclosures of the cemetery. Lost structures include the woodshed, Alhambra windmill, and ranch foreman’s house.¹⁰⁹ The Visitor Center is the largest non-contributing structure of the landscape. Guidelines include the preservation of

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

existing historic buildings and structures, reconstruction of the woodshed, and removal of non-historic materials to enhance the historic character of the site.

The most neglected feature of the John Muir National Historic Site is its historic views and vistas. Mature plant materials currently block views documented in historic photographs, and diminishes the integrity of these features. Guidelines for views and vistas are aimed specifically at three viewsheds. First, the visual relationship between the Muir House and Martinez Adobe should be restored; non-contributing plant material should be removed along Franklin Creek, keeping the height of the material low, as well as removing non-contributing trees from the west orchard space. Second, the view from the Muir house to Mount Wanda should be preserved. Its historic character is compromised by the grove of coastal redwoods planted as a buffer for State Route 4. Removal of these trees is recommended, as well as non-contributing vegetation along the south-east and south-west boundary fences. Third and lastly, the visual relationship between the Muir house and the Visitor Center should be rehabilitated.¹¹⁰ In a 1905 photograph, the view extended from the house far beyond the ornamental plantings, reaching across the knoll towards hayfields and orchards in the distance. Today, the scene has shifted from agricultural to suburban, diminishing the integrity of this view significantly. Recommendations include emphasizing the view from the visitor center towards the Muir house, which is the first glimpse onto the landscape. Removal of the blue elderberry, a California live oak, and a coast live oak on the east side of the drive, as well as a coast live oak and elm along part of the visitor center fence will remedy this situation.¹¹¹

Long term interpretative planning began at John Muir National Historic Site in August of 2009, with a two day planning workshop held on site. The ideas of this workshop were utilized in the publication of the Long Range Interpretative Plan, published in March of 2010.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 40-54.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

One of the main issues discussed was how to integrate interpretative messaging about John Muir and nineteenth century agriculture into the restored historic landscape.¹¹² Community outreach recommendations are laid out in the first section of the plan. Topics include building relationships with the residents of Martinez, Contra Costa County, and the San Francisco Bay area, extending opening hours to seven days a week and eliminating the three dollar operating fee, using communicative devices such as bulletin boards and interactive calendars to inform visitors of current and future environmental and park-wide activities, as well as planning around the 1916 bicentennial of the National Park Service.¹¹³ The CLR recommends improvement of the overall initial visitor experience at the site, which focuses mainly on repurposing the visitor center, moving office space to a remote location, and installing dramatic oversize images of Yosemite and other landscapes associated with Muir. The most interesting recommendation of this section aims at repositioning the John Muir National Historic Site as the “first stop in a continuum of exploration of John Muir’s life and influence in California and throughout the National Park System--and indeed, as a first stop in exploring our national parks.”¹¹⁴

Personal services recommendations of the CLR include increasing the amount of ranger led tours, restructuring the content and length of tours, basing shorter tours on themes put forth earlier in the document, instituting more ranger-led tours of Mount Wanda, and beginning official ranger-led tours of the Strentzel-Muir cemetery. These efforts will result in concise and accurate interpretative information for the visitors, and give the visitor more interpretative access to the full landscape of John Muir National Historic Site.

¹¹² Goolrich, *John Muir National Historic Site Long Range Interpretive Plan*, 22.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

The CLR sets recommendations for non-personal services at the site as well. Audiovisual and web-based programming for the John Muir National Historic Site is discussed. While not entirely connected to the landscape, this type of dissemination of information will inform visitors before they come to the site, and also provide a virtual world for those who have interest in Muir, but are unable to visit the site. The first recommendation concerns the interpretative brochure. Revision is recommended, providing the visitor with instructions on how to access the gravesite, as well as creating short-self guided audio tours covering an array of interpretative themes. Self-guided audio tours are unobtrusive to the landscape, compared with interpretative panels, advised against in the CLR of 2005. A program is suggested that directs visitors through the historic orchard restorations and discusses the changed landscape of the Alhambra Valley. A few exterior exhibits are proposed. One that is of particular interest. It reads,

choose one or two locations within the historic landscape where the integrity is already compromised and explore ways to use an interpretative kiosk, reproduction agricultural tools or equipment (a stack of wooden shipping crates, a ladder for picking fruit), or other creative devices to support interpretative panels while distracting from the intrusive modern view.¹¹⁵

The Historian's Perspective

In May of 2010, three prominent historians arrived at John Muir National Historic Site. They were asked to evaluate and make recommendations concerning the interpretative strategy at the park. Sponsored by the Organization of American Historians, three individual reports resulted from this visit. The first historian was Cynthia Ott, and her report centered on interpretive themes that can give a better understanding of Muir and the context of nature and the National Parks. Also explored in her report is the concept of John Muir National Historic Site as a site of interconnections: the relationship of humans to the natural world, wilderness

¹¹⁵ Killion and Davidson, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 180.

versus tamed nature, and rural versus natural ideas. The first recommended theme is entitled, “Environmental advocacy: Nature Protection and Community Building”. Ott notes the opportunity here to teach visitors about environmental advocacy from Muir’s era to the present. “Muir’s letter writing campaigns from his second floor office marked a pivotal point in conservation history.”¹¹⁶ She also aptly notes the Muir house’s place in wilderness conservation history, where community engagement was necessary for change to occur. The house was a hub of activity for Muir, a place where many people came to visit and discuss conservation issues. The second theme concerns the Idea of Wilderness, and what better place to discuss this concept than the home of one of its first advocates. “Instead of taking for granted that wilderness is one thing and that everyone knows what it means, the site should historicize it.”¹¹⁷

The second theme Ott puts forth is “Managing Nature: Connections between Farm and National Park Management”. She believes it is important to connect the farm and park landscape, which can ultimately challenge visitors’ assumptions about the site and perceptions of Muir. There are similarities between management of farms and orchards, as well as forest and parks, and the resources at John Muir National Historic Site are valuable for expressing this connection.¹¹⁸

“Muir’s office is a very compelling and inspirational place”.¹¹⁹ The writer-in-residency program would flourish here. Writers could use a second floor room to write and be inspired by the landscape at John Muir National Historic Site. This writer could also aid in community participation. Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site just instated this program in 2010

¹¹⁶ Cynthia Ott, *Report for John Muir National Historic Site*. (Organization of American Historians, 2010), 5.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 9

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 12..

and the current writer is working on an agriculturally based story and has been warmly welcomed to Flat Rock, North Carolina.¹²⁰

Ott sees the landscape of the site as an opportunity to educate visitors about botany and food from the historic period to the present. The Farm to Food and Botanical Education Program would show visitors that Muir was a keen businessman but also cared deeply about natural and designed planting. Also, Ott suggests a community garden be planted where the historic kitchen garden was, which would engage the community more actively.

A second report was written by Donald Worster, author of *Passion for Nature*. Worster's recommendations mainly concern the interpretative use of the Muir House; he puts forth ideas about using part of the first floor to explore ideas of agriculture, food, and daily life on the Strentzel-Muir ranch, as well as using some of the second story rooms to house a temporary writer in residence. While not pertaining directly to the landscape, Worster uses his vast knowledge of the life of John Muir to recommend future uses for rooms to better interpret this early conservationist's life.¹²¹ Another idea of note centers around the visitor center. He proposes a new visitor center, on the scale of the new center in Dunbar, Scotland, that uses a large window system to frame the Muir mansion on the knoll as a proper introduction to the site.¹²²

The third historian to report on the John Muir National Historic Site was Douglas Sackman. His report is titled "The Fruits of the Home: Re-introducing Muir in his Hybrid Landscape, in between the City and the Wilderness". Sackman utilizes his academic expertise in the agricultural and horticultural history of California to analyze this landscape through its position in American agricultural practice. Focusing on the theoretical and historical basis of

¹²⁰ National Park Service. *Carl Sandburg National Historic Site news*, <http://www.nps.gov/carl/parknews/wir.htm>. Accessed March 7, 2011.

¹²¹ Donald Worster, *Report for John Muir National Historic Site* (Organization for American Historians, 2010), 5.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 8.

Muir's significance, Sackman lays out three contexts that can be explored in the interpretative scheme of the site in the future. First, he explores reintroducing John Muir through food and fruit, claiming Muir as California's most famous fruit grower. Second, an initiative can be brought to JOMU in partnership with local fruit growers, in which managers ask residents to "eat California fruit."¹²³ There is a strong resonance between California and the rise of the western horticultural landscape. There was a transition from gold mines to fruit growing in the late 1890's and Dr. John Strentzel and John Muir are underemphasized characters in that change. Muir's friend and neighbor Dr. Ezra Carr compared gardening with social evolution in a speech at the Horticultural Fair in Southern California,

Love of country could not exist till cave and wigwam were supplanted by the hut, the permanent abode around which the vine might clamber, and the gentler races of animals gather for protection. The sour bog had to be reclaimed by the labor of the husband man, who reclaimed the wildness of his own nature in the process, until he grew sweeter with the grasses, less savage and more generous with the fruiting fullness of his trees. The gradual transformation of the savage into the citizen may be traced in the changes in the animal and vegetable world which have accompanied it, and we may look for the greatest improvement where the close and constant relations of man and Nature are the most agreeable and permanent.¹²⁴

John Muir brought the mechanisation of agriculture close to his home with an agreement in 1890 to let the Southern Pacific Railroad cross a trestle over his ranch.

Reinforcement of Recommendations for John Muir National Historic Site

The existence of these historians' analytical recommendations is a promising sign for this significant historical and cultural site. The remnants of historic orchards at the site are the most tangible horticultural legacy of John Muir. Their recommendations are appropriate and they being implemented by Keith Park, horticulturist for the John Muir National Historic Site, hired in 2008. The hiring of a NPS employee to specifically carry out the recommendations of the CLR is a great step.

¹²³ Douglas Sackman, *Report for John Muir National Historic Site* (Organization of American Historians, 2010), 3.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

The Long Range Interpretative Plan was completed in March 2010; implementation has not begun in earnest. The community outreach options are great in the long range interpretative plan, for it is vital to connect John Muir National Historic Site with the surrounding communities. The Strentzel-Muir ranch was the center of the community of Martinez in the late Victorian era, and the center of Martinez today as a tourist destination. A significant recommendation provided by the CLR regarding personal services concerns the Strentzel-Muir cemetery. Ranger-led tours to the cemetery will allow visitors to pay respect to the spirit of Muir at his final resting place. Non-personal recommendations, which do not involve rangers, are successful in their attempt to bring recent technological advancements into the dated visitor center and house museum of John Muir National Historic Site.

Some of the ideas discussed in the Long Range Interpretative Plan are expounded on in the reports of the three historians sponsored by the Organization of American Historians. Cynthia Ott recommends practical actions towards strengthening between the surrounding communities and the John Muir National Historic Site. She places the Muir house as a hub of activity, where issues of conservation were discussed by many distinguished individuals, and an interpretative scheme surrounding these ideas could easily be implemented in the house or visitor center. Ott and Sackman share ideas concerning the local food movement, farm to food initiatives, and botanical education programs, and more importantly, their place at this historic site. Sackman emphasizes that the John Muir National Historic Site is one of two parks in the area that informs the visitor of agricultural history.

Critiques of Recommendations for John Muir National Historic Site

The Cultural Landscape Report recommends no additional interpretative panels be placed in the landscape, in order to preserve the agricultural appearance of the grounds. The integrity of the agricultural landscape is compromised, but interpretative panels will inform the

visitor of the historical context and appearance of the area in the historic period: 1890–1914. Historic Images should be placed at specific points throughout the site, where the visitor may view the before and after of John Muir National Historic Site, the current appearance and the significant landscape managers are working to rehabilitate.

Many themes discussed by the interpretive plan and three historians can be incorporated carefully into a minimal number of panels in appropriate spaces in the landscape. Second, interpretative panels are the most direct form of interpretive, besides ranger-led tours. Interpretative panels also give the visitor freedom to explore the landscape on their own, guiding their unique path through the landscape. Many themes discussed by the interpretive plan and three historians can be incorporated carefully into a minimal number of panels in appropriate spaces in the landscape.

Additional Recommendations for John Muir National Historic Site

Interpretative programming is a creative medium to disseminate information, and John Muir National Historic Site will benefit from bringing old programs back and initializing new programs. Muir Heritage Ranch Day was sponsored in years past by the John Muir Association; the last celebration was held in 2006. Honoring Muir's legacy of fruit ranching in the Alhambra Valley, this activity occurred during the fall harvest, praising earthly abundance as well as this significant individual. Bringing back Muir Heritage Ranch Day hopefully will reengage the community, bring more recognition for the site, and exhibit authentic recreations of nineteenth and early twentieth century agricultural practices. Funding was the major issue for the discontinuation of Ranch Day; perhaps in the future the budget will allow the activity to recommence.

Connectivity is a major issue at John Muir National Historic Site, some visiting leaving the site without exploring Mount Wanda or the Strentzel-Muir gravesite. The Long Range

Interpretative Plan and CLR recommended connecting the units in passing, but this is an immediate need that requires funding and attention, for proper access will create an immense change in how visitors perceive the site and what they ultimately take away. Two options seem viable for this site: a shuttle or a walking trail. The shuttle will guarantee security at the sites, plus more control over the interpretation. For example, a ranger could drive the small shuttle from the house unit to the foot of Mount Wanda, and a short hike would follow, led by the ranger already on-site. Then, the shuttle could travel from the foot of Mount Wanda to the residential setting for the Strentzel-Muir gravesite, creating little interference with the neighborhood by driving one small shuttle. The ranger could read choice quotations from and about John Muir, and encourage discussion.

A new, interconnected hiking trail could enhance the feeling and historical association of the park, and convey the story of a family and a head of household, who happened to also be the father of the American Conservation movement. Research is inconclusive in the area regarding historic trails and paths in the area, but additional research could shed light on circulation patterns that could be incorporated. In an ideal setting, the walking trail would be beneficial for transporting the person back in time, walking slowly through the landscape and absorbing the surrounding Alhambra Valley. The trail should be dirt or gravel, not hard surfaced; this will lend a contributing character to the new feature. Unfortunately, suburban development has destroyed that landscape, small residential developments, gas stations, and state routes cutting through the previously rural and pristine valley. Today, a walking trail from the house unit, toward Mount Wanda, and back to the Strentzel-Muir gravesite would be dependent on busy street crossings, the image of sprawl and suburban experience between the sites. Maybe this is what the park needs, however, to tell the full story of not only John Muir and his land, but the process of development he warned against, and its effect on his home and

legacy. This could be the central interpretative theme of the hike: the then and now of John Muir's residence. How has life changed since the early 1900's, and would Muir recognize this landscape? Muir sometimes stood in the middle of the conservation/preservation battle. He wanted wilderness preserved, but reserved the right to farm and manipulate the land he owned. The duality of this man and his life would provide ample information for a self-guided hiking brochure.

Publicity is one of the major issues that John Muir National Historic Site faces today. When Keith was asked the question "what is the biggest issues facing the success of John Muir National Historic Site?", he said that visitors confuse it with Muir Woods National Monument.¹²⁵ Across the San Francisco Bay, Muir Woods is an extremely different resource, and it does not interpret Muir directly. In order for visitation to rise, someone publicize its existence. A direction to Muir's home, strategically placed at Muir Woods or Yosemite National Park, would be useful.

Partnerships

Partnerships are a vital link to communication and cooperation. The CLR suggests stronger bonds between the John Muir Association, Western National Parks Association, Sierra Club, and other related groups.¹²⁶ Suggestions like this are scattered throughout the interpretative planning documents and the historians' reports. Most importantly, Yosemite National Park and John Muir National Historic Site managers should get together and start the conversation about these issues. Without open communication, discussion of issues facing the two sites together and individually, the bond between these sites will continue weakly. Yosemite National Park and John Muir National Historic Site both offer valuable information about Muir and his life, but together his legacy will shine.

¹²⁵ Keith Park, telephone interview with author, February 8, 2011.

¹²⁶ Killion and Davidson, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 97.

CHAPTER SIX

FEASIBILITY AND CONSTRAINTS

Constraints and feasibility concerns arise from any well-planned course of action. Not all of these issues come from within the National Park Service; the general public has thoughts and opinions that can be difficult to weave into the management scheme. Partnering non-profit organizations may have mission statements or funding objectives that do not meet the goals of National Park Service sites. The majority of implementation issues come from funding constraints the bureaucracy of federal agencies, and the long periods of time needed to implement recommendations. Below is a short discussion of these feasibility concerns, with ideas drawn from interviews with National Park Service staff during the spring of 2011.

At Yosemite National Park there is a disagreement between employees on the position of John Muir in the park: over-emphasized or lacking. One manager in Tuolumne Meadows believes that the story of Muir is already too widespread in the park, and that Muir gets credit for things others contributed to.¹²⁷ This idea was not expounded upon during the interview, however. Interpretative rangers may be more apt to see room for improvement concerning Muir, and have the general disposition of wanting to distribute as much information as possible.¹²⁸ With these dissenting views, it becomes evident how many voices are heard in the management of this magnificent national park.

Mythology has an interesting effect on the vision of John Muir and his significance in the American Conservation movement. Many visitors to Yosemite National Park see Muir as a mountain Rambler, a poet prophet of the wilderness, never suited to business pursuits. Visitors to John Muir National Historic Site are surprised at the level of luxury that John Muir lived in,

¹²⁷ Margaret Eissler, telephone interview with author, February 6, 2011.

¹²⁸ Dean Shenk, telephone interview with author, February 12, 2011.

and are slow to absorb his other lifestyle. Lack of publicity and the stubborn mindset have hindered the popularity of John Muir National Historic Site. In order to affect change in this area, time and open mindedness are needed. Biases of non-profits may inhibit a broader view of Muir, for every organization has its own goals and intentions. For example, the Sierra Club seems an obvious partner at John Muir National Historic Site. However, their mission statement may defer them from funding cultural projects, even if directly connected to the legacy of John Muir: “To explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the earth; to practice and promote the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems and resources; to educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment; and to use all lawful means to carry out these objectives.”¹²⁹ Large in scope, it may be difficult for the Sierra Club to work with the John Muir National Historic Site, for their mission pertains to the wild places of the earth, not agriculturally controlled, suburban landscapes.

In contrast to the Sierra Club, the John Muir Association mission reads: “The mission of the John Muir Association is to celebrate the life, share the vision, and preserve the legacy of John Muir through education, preservation, advocacy and stewardship, in partnership with the National Park Service at the John Muir National Historic Site.”¹³⁰ More focused and smaller in scope, John Muir National Historic Site benefits directly from the work of this non-profit organization, whose original and successful goal was the preservation of the Strentzel-Muir house.

As with all major federal projects, funding is of utmost importance. Seeking support and financial backing is a long and arduous project. For example, the John Muir Association has established a capital campaign to raise \$2.2 million for a new visitor center, but the goal has not been met. This lack of funding leaves John Muir National Historic Site with facilities that are

¹²⁹ Sierra Club. *Mission Statement*. <http://www.sierraclub.org/welcome>, accessed March 9, 2011.

¹³⁰ John Muir Association. *Mission Statement*. <http://johnmuirassociation.org/php/about.phpmission>, accessed March 8, 2011.

below the National Park Service standard, and impairs the visitor experience and their takeaway message. Steps have been made to restore a sense of place at the John Muir National Historic Site. Young orchards are thriving and producing fruit that visitors can eat on site, tasting the essence of the agricultural pursuit. Although some varieties are inauthentic to the historic orchards that Strentzel and Muir planted, these young plants do create an image and fill the space of this previously thriving Victorian agricultural landscape. It takes time for trees to grow and hopefully in twenty years or so, the mature vegetation will lend a more authentic air.

The relatively small size of John Muir National Historic Site compared to Yosemite National Park is a major issue for visitorship. Millions of people flock to Yosemite every year because of its sublime grandeur, mountain beauty, and regenerative powers. Mountain climbers, hikers, upscale vacationers, and campers all visit this massive park, and spend various amounts of time. Currently, in a temporary economic recession, visitors try to stretch their vacations, and a week at Yosemite seems to trump a short trip to Martinez, California and the John Muir National Historic Site. Keith Park, horticulturist at the site, commented that some people confuse the site with Muir Woods, across the San Francisco Bay.¹³¹ With the first nationally protected landscape to compete with, John Muir National Historic Site seems to slide out of the public view.

The John Muir Trail is a significant commemorative effort, completed in collaboration with California State government, U.S. National Forest Service, and U.S. National Park Service. This trail runs from Yosemite Valley to Mount Whitney, and crosses some of the most magnificent Sierra scenery available for hiking in the United States. A trail system from John Muir National Historic Site seems like a good idea, connecting the sites by path, Muir's

¹³¹ Keith Park, telephone interview with author, February 8, 2011.

preferred form of transportation. Unfortunately, the non-rural nature of this route detracts from its historic character. Hikers embark on the trail in order to experience natural beauty and wondrous views, not to walk along the highway, or meander through suburban sprawl. The distance between John Muir National Historic Site and Yosemite National Park is roughly 180 miles, and would take over two-and-a-half days to complete. More feasible for many people would be a driving tour, winding across California and entering Yosemite National Park through Groveland, California, as Muir did. This would require cooperation between counties, thorough planning, and ample funding; while a good idea, other recommendations are of higher priority.

The CLR serves as a recommendation model, and it is administered by a competent professional trained in horticulture and historic preservation. The long range interpretative plans for the two sites are already published or nearing publication, but there is always opportunity to revise and amend these reports.

Conclusion

Timing and funding aside, the fact stands that John Muir must be interpreted, accurately and appropriately. He is the father of our conservation movement and wrote eloquent articles about wilderness and its regenerative power. “The mountains are calling and I must go.”¹³² Muir spent the prime of his young life rambling in the Sierra Nevada and climbing its peaks. After the age of 40, he came down from the mountain and made a life as a rancher. He had a family and the house stands today. The house he slept in, wrote in, and worked on stands today, rising prominently from the land. Although surrounded by suburban development, it is a link to his lesser-known past, and stands as a jewel of the Alhambra Valley. Visitors to one of these sites learn about Muir and some of his life, but Yosemite is connected to Martinez in a

¹³² Muir, *John of the Mountains*, 34.

unique way. John Muir's life took him from Scotland to Wisconsin, the Appalachian Mountains to the Sierra Nevadas, from natural solitude to rural family life. Martinez, California is where John Muir spent the last third of his life and was laid to rest in the family cemetery in 1914. He was a man of cosmic understanding and saw a connection in distinct parks. "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe."¹³³

¹³³ Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra*, 54.

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