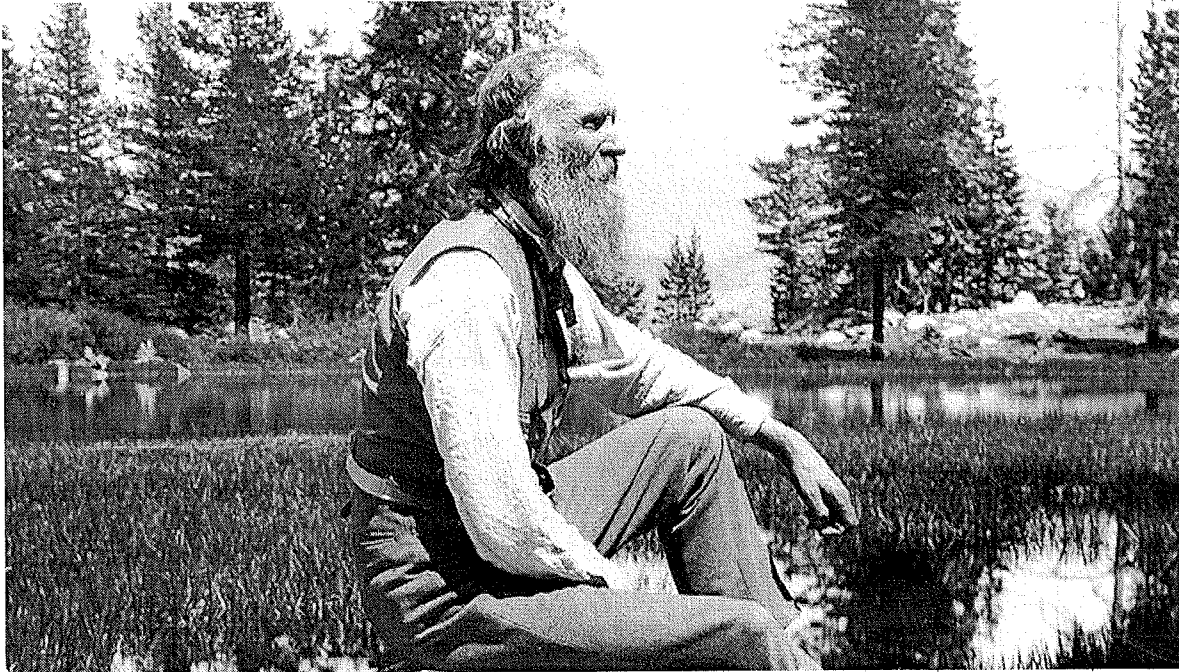


Inventors and Scientists: John Muir

By National Park Service and the National Endowment for the Humanities, adapted by Newsela staff on 04.21.17

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As America's most famous naturalist and conservationist, John Muir fought to protect the wild places he loved, places we can still visit today. Muir's writings convinced the U.S. government to protect Yosemite, Sequoia, Grand Canyon and Mount Rainier as national parks. Photo: Wikimedia

Synopsis: John Muir was the father of the American conservation movement. He moved to California seeking nature and decided to stay. His writings helped save Yosemite by convincing Congress to turn it into a national park. During his lifetime, Muir published more than 300 articles and 12 books. He co-founded the Sierra Club. The national conservation organization helped create many national parks after he died and today has over 2 million members.

Early Years

John Muir was born in Scotland in 1838. He was an adventurous child who loved playing outdoors. His father was extremely religious and stern and would sometimes beat the young John Muir. During his young adulthood, Muir's father forced him to memorize most of the Bible, which later influenced his writing.

At the age of 10, the family moved to the United States where they purchased a farm near Portage, Wisc. Muir loved exploring. When he wasn't working in his father's fields, Muir spend his time inventing all kinds of things: a field thermometer, a device that would tip him out of bed in the morning, and a model for automating the sawing of logs.

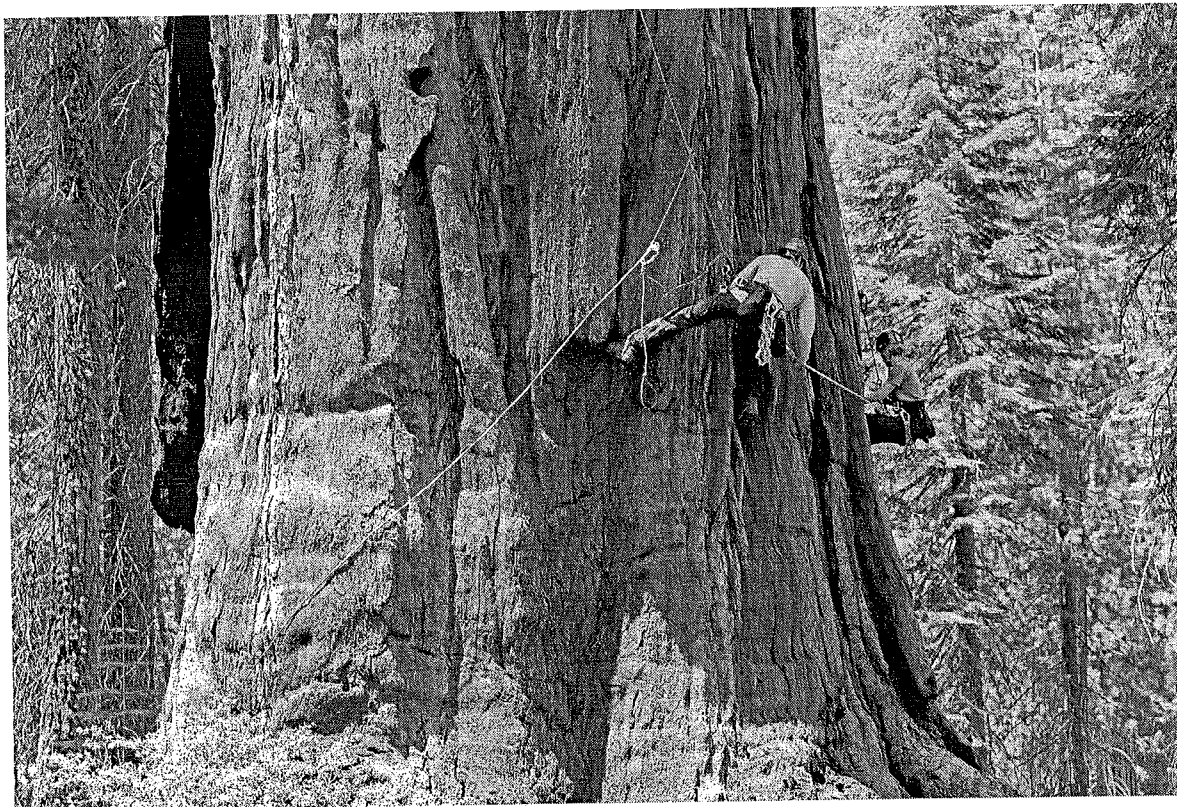
Muir went to the University of Wisconsin-Madison and studied science, philosophy and literature. In particular, he discovered his love for botany, the study of plants. He spent the summer of 1863 in the wilderness hiking down the Wisconsin River to the Mississippi River. It was during this time that Muir realized that he loved nature more than anything else and decided he wanted to study botany. He traveled to Canada to collect botanical specimens. He decided to delay his return to the U.S. to avoid the Civil War. Muir was a pacifist and didn't believe in war.

Muir worked in a factory and had an accident that left him temporarily blind. When he recovered, he determined that he would spend the rest of his life trying to absorb as much of the beauty in nature as he could.

Conservation In California

In the summer of 1869, Muir, now a shepherd, went with his flock to the mountains in California. Camping on the edge of Yosemite Valley, he was enthralled like never before. He spent six weeks hiking around the region and wrote about what he saw, expressing joy in every page. He developed a theory that slow-moving glaciers formed the valleys of the Sierra Mountains, the area that eventually became Yosemite National Park.

In 1871, Muir was able to meet his idol, writer Ralph Waldo Emerson. By this time, Muir had become well known for both his knowledge of and passion for the region. Muir was able to act as a guide for Emerson, showing him the mountains and sequoias. Muir left a strong impression on Emerson, and they ended up exchanging letters for the rest of Emerson's life.

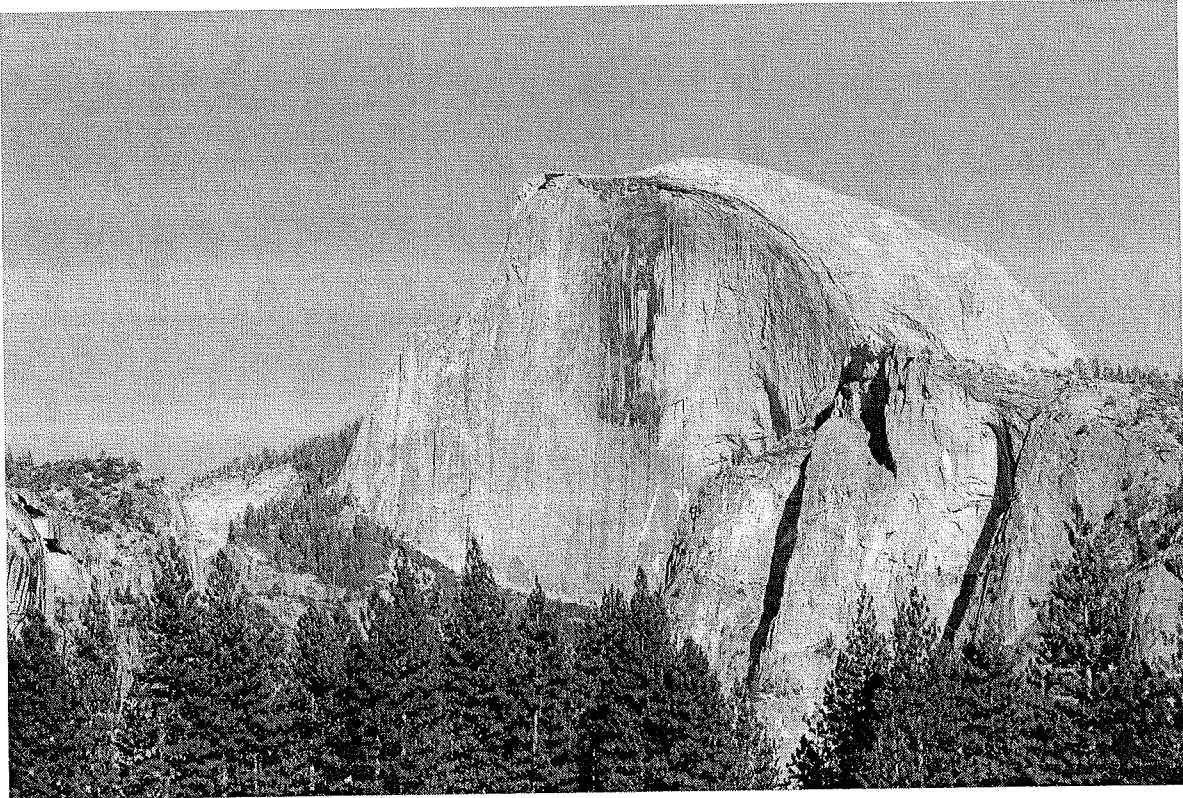


Around 1875, Muir began to focus more on issues of conservation. After he saw the Sequoia trees of the Sierra Nevada, he became impassioned to save them from loggers that were destroying the forests.

On April 14th, 1880, at the age of 41, John Muir married Louie Wanda Strenzel, and the couple had two daughters.

Creating National Parks

Muir wanted the U.S. government to establish more national parks. In 1890, there was only one national park - Yellowstone. Muir, however, wanted the Yosemite region to become a national park and wrote many passionate articles on the subject. There was fierce opposition from loggers and from those who viewed the park as a "waste" of California's natural resources. Nevertheless, in September 1890, Congress created Sequoia National Park and Yosemite National Park. By now, Muir was seen as the head of the Western conservation movement, and in 1892, he established the Sierra Club to advocate for conservation. He believed that only the government could guarantee the protection of forests.



In March 1903, Muir and President Theodore Roosevelt met and went camping high above Yosemite Valley. Muir asked for Roosevelt's help to save the forests and preserve the natural beauty of the region. Roosevelt, a conservationist, was very impressed with Muir and set aside 148 million acres of forest and doubled the number of national parks. In 1906, Muir convinced Roosevelt to establish the Petrified Forest National Monument to protect the fossilized trees of Arizona. In 1908, a grove of redwood trees near San Francisco became Muir Woods National Monument.

Later Years And Death

In 1907, Muir began a battle to save Hetch Hetchy, a valley in Yosemite National Park. The city of San Francisco needed water, and thought Hetch Hetchy could provide it. The city urged Congress to remove the valley's protection so that it could be turned into a water reservoir. San Francisco could have built a reservoir elsewhere, but Hetch Hetchy was seen as the cheapest option since the government already owned the land. Muir fought hard against the proposal, but when Woodrow Wilson became president in 1912, a bill to build a dam in Hetch Hetchy was approved.

The valley was destroyed and Muir was devastated. On Christmas Eve 1914, he died of pneumonia.

Two years later, in 1916, the National Park Service was created to oversee the national parks. John Muir played a major role in preserving Yosemite Valley, and his scientific theory about glaciers proved to be correct. Furthermore, his conservation work changed how our government views environmental protection.

Over his 76 years, Muir transformed not only himself, but the nation. He taught us “to slow down and think about what we are doing,” says Cornell University historian Aaron Sachs.

Muir once wrote, “I only went out for a walk and finally concluded to stay out till sundown, for going out, I found, was really going in.”

Quiz

- 1 Select the paragraph from the section "Early Years" that explains how John Muir realized he wanted to study nature.
- 2 Which selection from the article BEST explains why the decision was made to build a dam in Hetch Hetchy?

- (A) The city of San Francisco needed water, and thought Hetch Hetchy could provide it.
- (B) The city urged Congress to remove the valley's protection so that it could be turned into a water reservoir.
- (C) San Francisco could have built a reservoir elsewhere, but Hetch Hetchy was seen as the cheapest option since the government already owned the land.
- (D) Muir fought hard against the proposal, but when Woodrow Wilson became president in 1912, a bill to build a dam in Hetch Hetchy was approved.

- 3 Why does the author include the following paragraph in the section "Later Years And Death"?

In 1907, Muir began a battle to save Hetch Hetchy, a valley in Yosemite National Park. The city of San Francisco needed water, and thought Hetch Hetchy could provide it. The city urged Congress to remove the valley's protection so that it could be turned into a water reservoir. San Francisco could have built a reservoir elsewhere, but Hetch Hetchy was seen as the cheapest option since the government already owned the land. Muir fought hard against the proposal, but when Woodrow Wilson became president in 1912, a bill to build a dam in Hetch Hetchy was approved.

- (A) to show that the author disapproved of San Francisco's plan
- (B) to show why the Hetch Hetchy valley dam needed to be built
- (C) to show that Woodrow Wilson was not a conservationist
- (D) to show that John Muir did not succeed in all of his efforts

- 4 Which of the following sentences BEST develops the idea that John Muir was a capable scientist?
- (A) It was during this time that Muir realized that he loved nature more than anything else and decided he wanted to study botany.
 - (B) He developed a theory that slow-moving glaciers formed the valleys of the Sierra Mountains, the area that eventually became Yosemite National Park.
 - (C) Muir left a strong impression on Emerson, and they ended up exchanging letters for the rest of Emerson's life.
 - (D) After he saw the Sequoia trees of the Sierra Nevada, he became impassioned to save them from loggers that were destroying the forests.