

John Muir and 'Year of Natural Scotland-2013'

Wendy Robertson Fyfe continues reflecting on some contributions of Dunbar's famous son, Father of Conservation and some developments in the 21st Century towards the John Muir Centenary Year in 2014.

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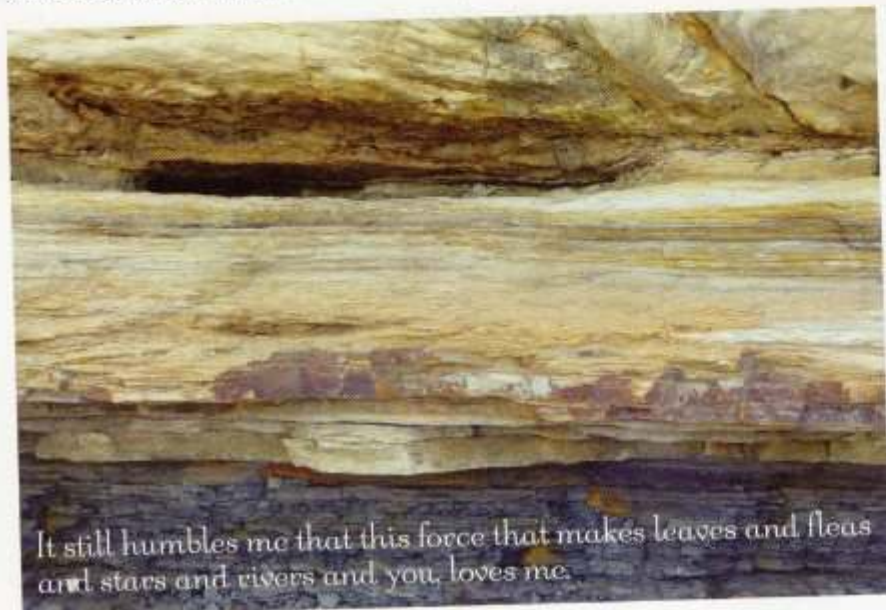
In the first two articles I touched firstly into 'going out is really going in'; unexpected experiences with beloved mountains and singing trees; the challenge of believing that maybe everything we think is true, is really not true; of a deeper connection with nature, even more than first experienced; the work of others' such as Bill Plotkin around Nature/Soul and that we are

nature, the human aspect of nature, born of and from this universe; of one of Thomas Berry's contributions regarding nature not as a collection of objects but a community of subjects who are speaking, singing, crying and that, as humans, we've become autistic in just speaking with ourselves; of highlighting our destruction, in a matter of a few hundred years, of 65 million years of Earth's

development. Also, as John Muir said, maybe 'In God's wilderness lies the hope of the world'; that nature shows the way. Maybe it's time for us to surrender to the Earth's wisdom that Rilke spoke of and that John Muir was so passionate about throughout his life¹¹. Maybe, as stated in the first article, the ways of the Western world as 'separate', when 'hitched to the universe', needs to fall.

The second article spoke to how Muir's childhood experiences in Scotland¹¹ informed his later years influencing the father he became, to Bill Plotkin's life work regarding relations between nature and the human soul; of nature tasks and culture tasks and that we in the Western World have given more emphasis to the later; to the different stages of human development, specifically here the 'Explorer in the Garden'¹² and the 'Wild Indigenous One' as part of one of four aspects of the Self in 'Wild Mind'¹³; of showing John Muir as having cultivated these aspects of himself, as indeed we all can through, for example, wanderings, conversations, imaginings and expressions. Both articles bring forward the experience of the Earth and Universe as animate and ensouled; of invitation to imagination.

In this article I want to touch into the 'Year of Natural Scotland 2013', a



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Crumbling Earth layers (Gullane).



Call of the Trees (Larks Wood, Tynninghame)

celebration of Scotland's natural beauty. On relevant Scottish websites^(4,5,6), images, words and 'assets' abound around adventure, play, art, history, food, activities, the great outdoors and wildlife. A brilliant place to be ... and it is. John Muir is acknowledged as part of the celebrations relating to his legacy in the development of Scottish National Parks and Nature Reserves. Delightfully there are two Nature Reserves in East Lothian, the John Muir Country Park and at Aberlady. There is something here about all that nature gives us ... and nature does. And is that it? Reminds me of a John Muir quote, also on one of the websites "Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul." I'm thinking of 'pray' and 'soul' and I'm wondering if these are missing in representations and celebrations of our 'Year of Natural Scotland' Even though beautiful ... which it is, I wonder if nature is here portrayed as something of 'object' to be used and wildlife as 'spectacle' for 'separate' human use - for increasing health, tourism and business. I'm wondering what it is that is given to nature? What are we willing to offer this planet which is also in distress such as with global warming, disasters, competition and war,

from our taking/exploiting? I'm wondering about reciprocity and where might John Muir's legacy be in that.

Satish Kumar from Schumacher College in Devon speaks of deep ecology⁽⁷⁾, an ecology in which all life has intrinsic value and rights; a river the right to flow and so on. He notes that there are 8.4 millions species on this planet, of which we humans are one. Deep ecology speaks to the relation and value within and between all living forms; that humans are not at the top of an 'evolution pile' We humans are a diverse lot too, aren't we just. Kumar goes further to speak of a reverential ecology which challenges Darwinian notions of survival of the fittest and that, in fact, the species are in a dance. In a way, this is similar to how Berry's 'collection of objects' which informed particular political and economic structure accordingly becomes a 'communion of subjects' which informs different social structures developing from the Universe as a story still in the telling. Geneen Marie Haugen⁽⁸⁾ speaks to the power and importance of the imagination, imagining 'as if' the world is animate even if unsure and seeing what difference this makes in our lives. Maybe here the world can be imagined in dance. This perspective is not that humans don't need food, homes, pleasure from our earthly home, but more how and the way.

All the people mentioned here emphasize gratitude. Nature both gifts and sacrifices to us rather than as a right or expectation; even the air we breathe. In John Muir's 'pray' and 'soul', the Earth becomes sacred. I wonder if 'sacredness' and 'reciprocity' is missing from this 'Year of Natural Scotland 2013' and what difference it would make to



Cotton grass dancing with summer's breeze (Aberlady).

include. As Kumar notes, the Earth both maintains and gives life. A beautiful saying of Maya Angelou is "It still humbles me that this force that makes leaves and fleas and stars and rivers and you, loves me." Dougie MacLean, the wonderful Scottish poet/songwriter/ musician in 'Home' says "In the breathing of the turning leaves your heart is heard forever." John Muir knew and experienced this and spent his life in conversation and conservation that we might hear, that we might remember.

Yesterday I was walking very slowly, whilst praising, singing and grace-dancing in conversation along the path in the stunning Aberlady Nature Reserve. As I was approaching the dunes before the sea, a number of volunteers were working a chain up the dunes handing forward big sacks of rubbish they had collected on the shore from the tides. Ah, pleasure and reciprocity in various ways. I felt such joy and singing in my heart - it was as if the very dunes and beach, birds and sea were singing out in glee! And maybe, they were

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Canyon and waterfall echo, (Zion National Park, Utah).

And what of my own wanderings and conversations so far, my diving in with Bill Plotkin and Mary Marsden from the Animas Valley Institute and the group of fellow adventurers I referred to in the first article? I'll leave you with this poem to ponder until we meet again:

Elemental

Earth

You,
who pulls me down.
Into your dryness
I crumble
to dust.
Take me
down.
Dancing.

Water

I am ambushed, taken in.
You have me, completely.
I dive, deep below
under your surface.
Sensing your flow to my skin
I stroke you,
feeling you press up on my body
as my body presses down;
sound density.
Enrapture.

Fire

Naked for your heat,
you enter my bones.
I smell you in the darkened wood
as I breathe
feeling sweat
streaming down my back
and my face turning amber,
then red.
Ravished.

Air

You, unseen.
I stir in you
as you bring life in me.
I sense you move inside
as I move through you.
I sing you.
Sing me.
Song.

I am Your dry clay,
wet me,
shape me.
Burn me in Your furnace
for Your desire.
For I am completely and utterly in owe of You

Wendy Robertson Fyfe

Wendy invites you to share your own experiences, ideas and responses at info@wendyrobertsonfyfe.co.uk. Wendy developed and guides 'The Walk' along coastal East Lothian. She is a Soul Guide, psychotherapist, photographer and teaches at The Open University in Scotland.

- 1 Muir J, 1992 The Eight Wilderness Discovery Books Introduction by Terry Gifford, Diadem Books, London; The Mountaineers, Seattle
- 2 Plotkin B, 2008, Nature and the Human Soul, Cultivating Wholeness and Community in a Fragmented World. New World Library, California
- 3 Plotkin B, 2013, Wild Mind, New World Library, California
- 4 www.visitscotland.com
- 5 www.snh.gov.uk
- 6 www.eventscotland.org
- 7 Kumar, S, Beyond Deep Ecology video, www.spiritualecology.org
- 8 Haugen, G M, Imagining Earth, in Spiritual Ecology, The Cry of the Earth 2013 ed by Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, The Golden Sufi Center,