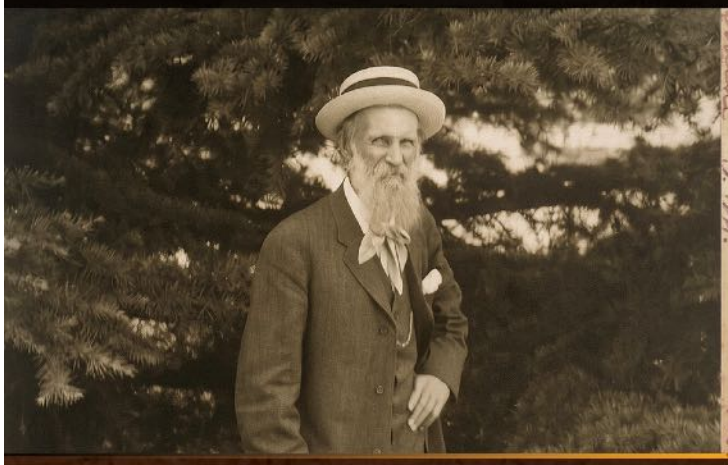
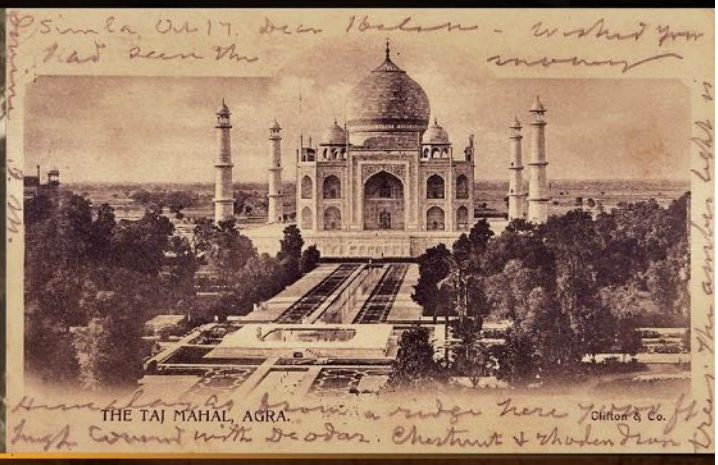
JOHN MUIR *in* INDIA

A Naturalist's Journey from the Great Banyan to the Snowy Himalaya





HAROLD W. WOOD, JR.
(Foreword by Chander Mohan Parsheera)

John Muir in India:

A Naturalist's Journey from the Great Banyan to the Snowy Himalaya

by

Harold W. Wood, Jr.

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For more information about John Muir in India, see:
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John Muir's 1903 India Itinerary

September 30: Arrived in Calcutta aboard the steamer *Bengala* out of Rangoon.

October 1: Visited the Royal Botanic Garden, then boarded a train bound for Darjeeling at 4 p.m.

October 2: Darjeeling - Arrived via the famous "toy train," the "Little Himalayan Railway." He spent several days here, visiting the Lloyd Botanic Gardens and enjoying views of the spectacular Himalayan mountain peaks, including Kangchenjunga. He left Darjeeling on October 6, when it appeared that rain and bad weather would deprive him of a view of Everest.

October 9 & 10: Benares - visited the gardens, bazaar, temples, and the holy Ganges River ghats.

October 10 & 11: Lucknow & Cawnpore - visited the sites of the "Indian mutiny" and British war memorials.

October 12 & 13: Agra - Visited the Taj Mahal and other historic sites in Agra.

October 14: Delhi - Sightseeing in Delhi.

October 15: Simla - Arrived in Simla via the famous "Mail Tonga," walked through the deodar forests and reveled in the mountains.

October 21: Bombay - Arrived in Bombay, made travel arrangements.

October 24: Left Bombay bound for Cairo to see the Pyramids.

December 4: Ceylon - After seeing Egypt, Muir returned to "British India" for a day in Ceylon.

Introduction

"The amber light is divine."
- John Muir, upon seeing the Himalaya Mountains.

On the evening of October 3, 1903, the famed Scottish-American naturalist John Muir wrote a letter to his wife, Louie. After months away, he was now on the opposite side of the planet from his home in Martinez, California, lodged in the mountain town of Darjeeling, India. Having traveled halfway around the world, he wrote, "This so far is the most interesting part of my trip." Using the same enthusiastic language he usually reserved for California's Sierra Nevada, he told her he had just seen a most "glorious view of the highest part of the Himalaya."

Even among enthusiasts of John Muir's writings, few are aware of his nearly month-long visit, at the age of 65, to what was then still "British India" in the autumn of 1903. When I first discovered that he had traveled to India, I was immediately intrigued.

What was John Muir (1838–1914), the naturalist and writer already renowned for his adventures exploring California's Sierra Nevada mountains and Alaska's glaciers, doing in faraway *India* of all places?

By the time of Muir's visit to India, he had published his first two books, *The Mountains of California* (1894) and *Our National Parks* (1901), and dozens of articles on the wonders of nature and on forest preservation in America, published in leading magazines of the day, like *Century*, *Harper's Weekly,* and *Atlantic Monthly.* These publications had brought him fame and

increasing support for protecting America's forests, and for creating new national parks. His writings contributed greatly to the creation of Yosemite National Park in 1890, and later additional national parks and forest preserves. Additional books, published near the end of his life and posthumously, have remained widely read, as people are readily drawn to his vivid accounts of his passion for nature and his timely calls to protect and preserve it. One of his best-known passages offers simple advice: "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 off like autumn leaves." Its corollary was a call to preserve wildness: "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 alike."

Perhaps Muir's greatest legacy is not even wilderness preservation or national parks as such, but his teaching us the essential characteristic of the science of ecology, the interrelatedness of all living things. He summed it up nicely: "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe."

John Muir has for so long been identified as the protector of wilderness in California, Alaska, and the western United States that we sometimes forget that he had long held a global worldview, one that accepted all other living things as our "earth-born companions and our fellow mortals." Muir recognized that all of nature had intrinsic value. Preserving nature was not for human benefit alone; it was also for the sake of nature itself. He wrote: "Why should man value himself as more than a small part of the one great unit of creation? And what creature of all that the Lord has taken the pains to make is not essential to the completeness of that unit–the cosmos? The universe would be incomplete without man; but it would also be incomplete without the smallest transmicroscopic creature that dwells beyond our conceitful eyes and knowledge."

In May 1903, five months before writing home from Darjeeling, Muir had accompanied President Theodore Roosevelt on their now-famous three-day camping trip in Yosemite. Muir had in fact delayed a planned trip around the world to seize the opportunity "to do some forest good in talking freely

Image Intro 1
John Muir with President Theodore Roosevelt at Glacier Point, Yosemite, May 1903.

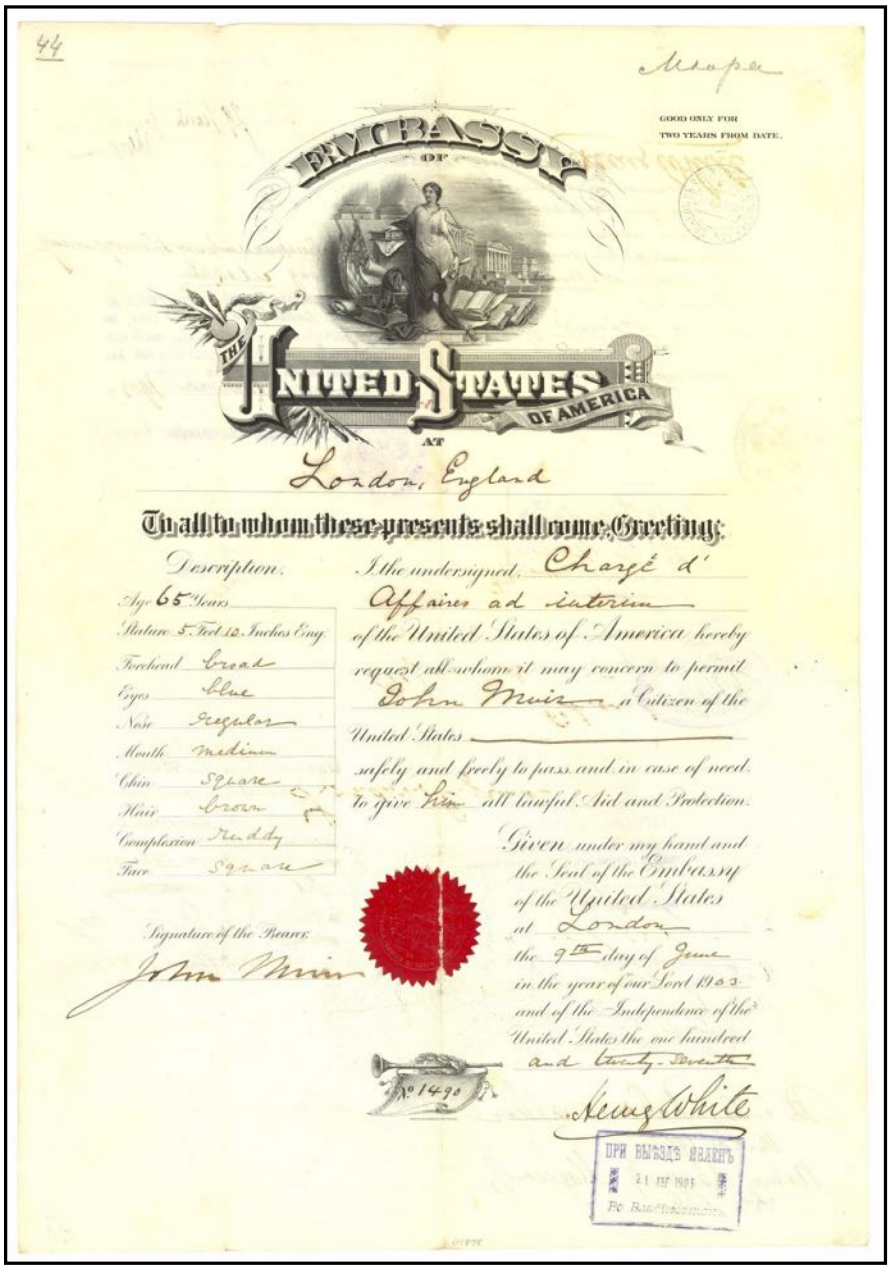


Source: Underwood & Underwood [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons.

around the campfire." Indeed, Muir's words helped inspire President Theodore Roosevelt's innovative conservation programs, including establishing the first National Monuments by Presidential Proclamation. During his presidency, with Muir urging him on, Theodore Roosevelt signed into existence five national parks, 18 national monuments, 55 national bird sanctuaries and wildlife refuges, and 150 national forests.

The iconic photograph of Muir and Roosevelt standing together on Glacier Point in May of 1903 is frequently re-published even today.

Image Intro 2
Side 1 of John Muir Passport



But before that month was over, Muir was well on his way to Europe with his botanist friend Charles Sargent (1841–1927) and Sargent's son, Robeson.

Image Intro 3
Side 2 of John Muir Passport



One of their planned stops was Russia. Going to Russia at that time required a passport, and Muir obtained one before he left, showing he was a naturalized citizen. But upon arrival in London, Sargent, who had taken charge of everyone's passports, discovered that all their passports were

missing. Thinking they had been stolen aboard ship, Professor Sargent was able to obtain a new passport for Muir and the rest of the party at the U.S. Embassy in London. In fact, they had slipped into the lining of Sargent's suitcase and would not be discovered until they were back in Boston.

Muir's new two-page emergency passport is shown in Images Intro 2 and Intro 3.

Emergency passports such as this were issued abroad by diplomatic and consular officials for emergency purposes only and were valid for only six months. Issuance of such emergency passports began in 1874 but was discontinued pursuant to an act of Congress of July 3, 1926.

So, when Muir wrote his wife in October, he'd already been traveling for nearly five months. Instead of the hoped-for botanical gardens and natural areas, Sargent had dragged him to innumerable museums and art galleries, of which Muir soon wearied. They "did" all the cultural sites of London, Paris, and Berlin. In St. Petersburg, the Russian capital, Muir described it as a "huge semi-dismal old town, of huge yellow public buildings, war monuments[,] barbaric colored churches & cathedrals & palaces full of armor[,] jewelry & some fine paintings." Later in Moscow, he again found all the "guns and weapons most wearisome to behold." He didn't really perk up until visiting some beautiful forests in Finland and crossing the temperate forests of Siberia on the Trans-Siberian railroad. But in China, he became sick with ptomaine poisoning, and spending so much time on the train in his weakened condition was not something he wanted to do. He complained that Sargent kept urging him on, despite his illness.

Rather disgusted with the militaristic cultural artifacts that he'd seen so far, and not in good health, he could have stayed with the Sargents and immediately crossed the Pacific from China directly to his home in California. But he wanted to see more trees and great mountains of the world which he had yet to observe first-hand. Muir left the Sargents in Shanghai, rejoicing in his new-found solitary freedom. His first destination was India. Now he could concentrate on nature, not museums.

According to Muir's own assertion, he had not originally planned to go to India at all on this trip crossing the globe. In his letter to Louie written in Darjeeling, he clearly stated that he "had no thought or hope of coming here

when I left home, or indeed until I separated from Sargent." Yet, he devoted most of the month of October to touring India.

Although India was a last-minute addition to Muir's itinerary, his decision was hardly random. He had long been fascinated by the Himalayas, particularly their glaciers, forests, and geological and botanical features.

His decision to add India to his itinerary shows how he had long held a strong fascination with India, especially its trees, forests, mountains, and wildlife. Indeed, in an 1873 newspaper report from Wisconsin about his Yosemite explorations, it was reported that when Muir was shown some photographs of the Himalayas, he said, "I must study those Himalayan glaciers – after I have finished with [Yosemite] Valley." The journalist laments that if Muir goes to India, "when he goes California will lose one of the purest minded, most sincere, modest, and energetic searchers after truth, she has ever held within her borders."

Muir in fact had a personal relationship with one of the foremost botanists of the time, who had written extensively about the flora of the Himalaya. In 1877, Muir had camped and botanized with noted English botanist Sir Joseph Hooker in Northern California, along with American botanist Asa Gray and California pioneer John Bidwell. Their botanizing expedition explored the Lassen Peak and the Mt. Shasta region. Hooker and Muir found and catalogued the Twinflower (*Linnaea borealis*), the first of its kind discovered in California. Muir recounts how, around the campfire, Hooker told stories of his travels in the Himalayas, "and of his work with Tyndall and Huxley and grand old Darwin." A portion of Muir's tribute to the great botanist Linnaeus tells the story of John Muir's travels with Asa Gray and Sir Joseph Hooker in the forests around Mount Shasta.

Muir maintained a continuing correspondence with Hooker for years afterward, and even visited him at his home in Sunningdale, outside of London, in 1893. Muir's conversations with Hooker were not confined to the mountains and flora; they spoke frequently about scientific luminaries of the day: "Huxley, Tyndall, Darwin, Sir Charles Lyell, Asa Gray, etc."

In a 1902 letter, Muir congratulated Hooker on the completion of his "great work on the Flora of India."

Upon returning from his world tour, in October 1904, Muir wrote to Sir Hooker, lamenting that he had been unable to visit him when in London, and commenting "You were so many times in mind when I was in India and I often thought of the pleasure you must have had as a young, enthusiastic naturalist in the magnificent New Zealand forests. Your long life, Sir Joseph, has been truly noble; and I am, with sincere respect and admiration... Faithfully yours, John Muir."

Muir had two copies in his personal library of the 1891 edition of Hooker's *Himalayan Journals*, which he annotated in the back pages, primarily with botanical notes. Muir also had noted a specific reference to Darjeeling and its favorable climate, foretelling his eventual visit there.

Muir's interest in India was part of his global consciousness. In Muir's second book, *Our National Parks*, published in 1901, just a couple of years before his world travels, in the final chapter about "The American Forests," Muir described how "Every other civilized nation in the world has been compelled to care for its forests," except for the United States. After recounting how many European nations had "refused to deliver its forests to more or less speedy destruction," he went on to assert that some nations in Asia were likewise already doing more than the United States. This included India, where he explained that "systematic forest management was begun about forty years ago, under difficulties presented by the character of the country, the prevalence of running fires, opposition from lumbermen, settlers, etc. — not unlike those which confront us now." He applauded the fact that India already had an area under sound forest management larger than that of all American national parks and reservations.

Muir's personal library further shows that India was never far from his mind. In 1901, Muir gave his then 20-year-old daughter Wanda the book, *In the Ice World of the Himalaya* (1900) by Fanny and William Workman.

This gift is especially interesting since it was co-authored by Fanny Workman, one of the world's first female professional mountaineers. She set several women's altitude records, published eight travel books with her husband, and championed women's rights and women's suffrage. The Workmans cycled thousands of miles on their travels through Europe, North Africa, India, Ceylon, Burma, Indo-China, Indonesia, and elsewhere.

Members of the French Alpine Club, they climbed many peaks in the Alps. Motivated by an interest to see “something of the treasures of Buddhist, Hindu, and Mohammedan Architecture and Art” of the East, they went to India. Not confining themselves to bicycle in the lowlands, the couple spent two summers among the higher Himalayas, writing that “during 1898 we made an expedition from Srinagar, to which point we cycled, into the mountains of Ladakh, Nubra and Suru, and in the autumn, from Darjeeling into Sikkim.”

They returned to this region seven times over the next 14 years. Despite not having modern climbing equipment, the Workmans explored several glaciers and reached the summit of several mountains, eventually reaching 23,000 feet (7,000 m) on Pinnacle Peak, a women’s altitude record at the time. These mountaineering expeditions incorporated “many days' march beyond even semi-civilised villages, into the savage and trackless wastes, that surround the giants he would conquer.”

Muir was likely especially interested in the Workmans’ detailed descriptions of the rigors of Himalayan mountaineering. But their appreciation of the spiritual and sacred found in the mountains surely resonated the most with Muir:

“He who has spent months among the silent glaciers and peaks of the icy wilderness on the northern boundary of India, can understand, why the Men of the Hills should invest these temples, built by architects no man can emulate, with a sacred character...”

Muir would have agreed, as he frequently in his writings referred to forest groves, mountains, and canyons as cathedrals or temples. He wrote in his journal that “No synonym for God is so perfect as Beauty. Whether as seen carving the lines of the mountains with glaciers, or gathering matter into stars, or planning the movements of water, or gardening - still all is Beauty!”

Another mountain climbing book that Muir had in his library was *Climbing on the Himalaya and Other Mountain Ranges* by J. Norman Collie, published in 1902.

Muir had also prepared for his travels by reading about the natural history of India, and some of its human history as well. In addition to the mountain climbing books, Muir also had a copy in his personal library of

Caleb Wright's 1860 book, *India and its Inhabitants*. Although filled with the Eurocentric religious and social prejudices of the time, the book was illustrated with enlightening engravings of the diverse ethnicities of people of India. Of most interest for Muir, it also included engravings of some natural features, such as the native Indian Banyan tree, a copy of which is featured in the Calcutta chapter of this book.

On the ship to Rangoon, Burma (present-day Yangon, Myanmar), he noted in his journal that he was reading Sulpiz Kurz, the Curator of the Herbarium at the Royal Botanical Garden in Calcutta, quoting from his *Forest Flora of British India*, 1887 [sic]. Muir noted that Kurz enumerated 1500 species, and Muir's avid interest in the flora of the mountains of India is shown by his detailed notes copying out extensive portions from Kurz's botanical publication.

Muir did not confine himself to reading about India alone. His ship stopped briefly in Burma (which between 1897 and 1937 was administered as a separate province but still part of British India). He reported in his journal reading Nisbet's *Burma Under British Rule*, concentrating on the sections about the teak forests. Muir would have been interested in Nisbet's comment in that book that outside of areas where slash-and-burn agriculture was still practiced and allowed, "The killing or injury of teak and certain other reserved trees, and permitting fire to spread into Reserved Forests are also prohibited, and are made punishable under the forest laws; but the latter are, in these particular respects, applied only with leniency and discretion." Unlike the forests of the United States prior to forest protection laws, Muir may have been interested to learn from Nisbet that "Teak trees have always in Burma been royal property, and the ownership of all teak trees growing in any of the forests, reserved or unreserved, is vested in the Government."

Although botany was a major focus of his travels, Muir was also fascinated by people. While in Rangoon, changing ships to depart for Calcutta, he noted, "The crowd of natives and Indians of different castes at the wharf was extremely interesting, brightly colored and varied, never before saw so brightly clad a crowd, or one so varied and interesting."

It would seem Muir had prepared for this human element as well, as he possessed in his personal library several books about human cultures. Each

of these books had chapters covering India and its people, and several had Muir's annotations on the back pages, showing that he was carefully reading them.

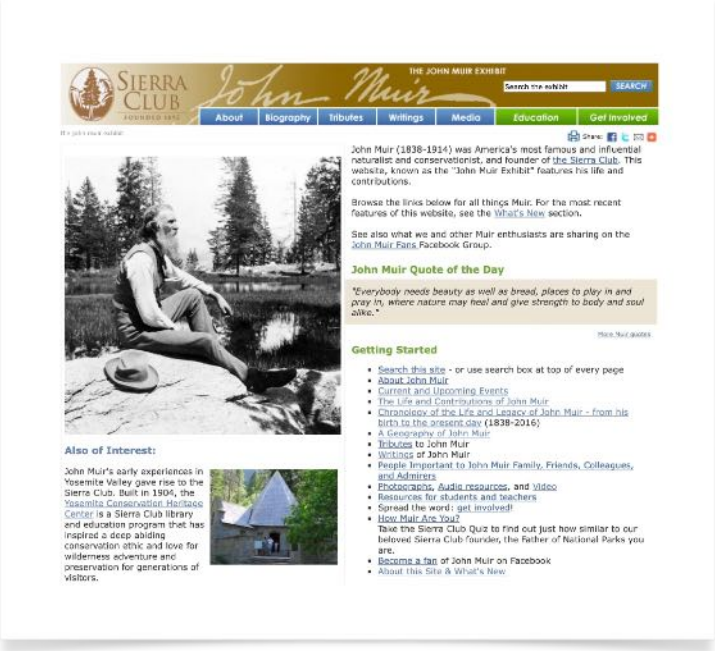
In fact, as early as 1872, Muir had written his friend Jeanne Carr, "I read your Hindu extracts with much interest," showing that long before his travels there, he had some acquaintance with the history and literature of India. (Letter to Mrs. Ezra S. Carr, March 16th, [1872], in *The Life and Letters of John Muir*, Chapter 9, 1903.) After such readings, Muir surely realized that he was about to encounter in India not only unique mountains and forests, but also a people, a culture, and a history that he could not help but find astounding and fascinating.

I can imagine why Muir would find the idea of going to India appealing. Although I am California-born, I lived an entire year as an 11-year-old boy in India, 58 years after John Muir's visit. I've returned to India twice since then.

When I was a boy living in India, I pined for America's national parks because my father had often taken me on camping and fishing trips, and I was already feeling the same love for wilderness that John Muir had. My homesickness as a boy in India was alleviated somewhat by visits to some of the beauty spots of northern India. Just as Muir adventured in bits of wildness as a boy, I pretended I was a world explorer by clambering up a tiny canyon stream located near my boarding school in the Himalayan foothills. From these forests, I could glimpse snow-capped peaks far above. Climbing up the trail through the forest every morning to get to school, I loved the beauty of the unique flowers and trees, though sometimes found the monkeys throwing fruit at me an irritant.

Later with my family, I reveled in the beauty of the lakes and mountains of Kashmir; I went wildlife watching for wild rhinos in northeast India and heard thrilling tales of tigers while riding an elephant through their habitat. We visited one of the wettest spots on Earth at Cherrapunji, a beautiful mountain area covered with vegetation, and I regularly climbed a tall pine in

Figure Intro 1 John Muir Exhibit Website, May, 2026.



This website, now redesigned, is located at:
https://www.sierraclub.org/john-muir-exhibit

my backyard in the hill-station of Shillong, from where I could see surrounding tree-tops among the hills. Like the average tourist, I saw the Taj Mahal, and plenty of cities, but was fortunate to actually live in some of India's more remote landscapes, among forests and scenic hillsides.

I wish that the "travel diary" my mother made me keep contained more passages about my boyhood life in India. Alas, it emphasized only the "travel days" going to India and back, with only a few scant passages written about India itself. And yet, it was the year living there that is forever imprinted in my memories as a major turning point in my life.

John Muir started keeping a journal in his twenties. Years later, when I was also in my twenties, I would too. Muir's journals began at least as early as 1867 and spanned through 1911. Fortunately, he kept a journal of his world tour in 1903-04, as part of that lifelong habit. That is the source for much of this book. Unfortunately for us, this journal was often much more of

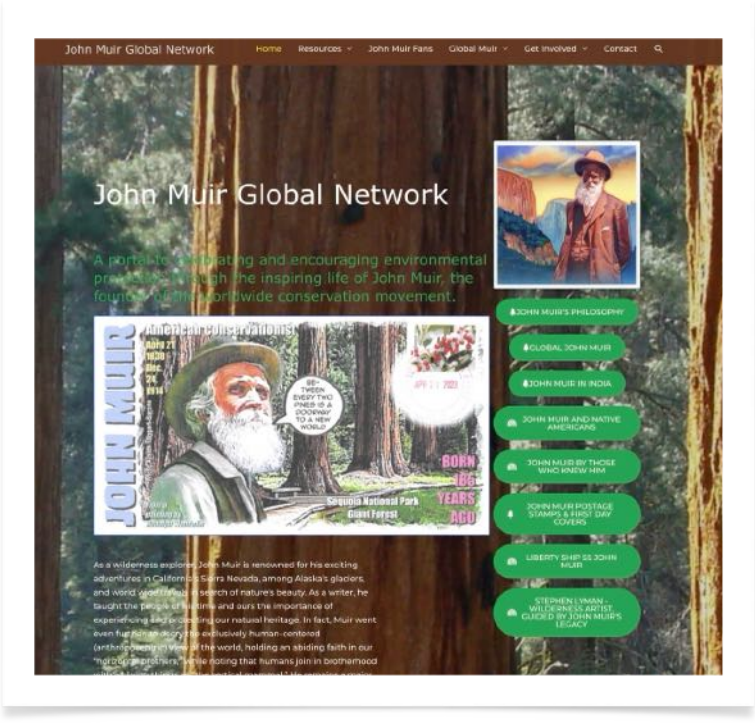
a limited "travel diary," unlike his earlier lengthy rapturous essays he penned while exploring alone in the Sierra Nevada in his youth. But I often think that journal-writing, as practiced by Muir and many of his contemporaries, is something that all of us can learn from and emulate. See my essay "Journal Writing with John Muir:"

https://planetpatriot.net/journal-writing-with-john-muir

Returning to California, my continuing interest in mountain forests, meadows, lakes, and peaks, and equally in desert landscapes, would lead me to discover, in junior high school, the writings of John Muir. I became enthralled with his adventurous and poetic writings about nature.

At the same time, the chaotic diversity and exotic wonders of India continue to hold a fascination that is hard for anyone to forget. My interest in both India and John Muir grew steadily over the years. In 1994, when I

Figure Intro 2 John Muir Global Network Website
October, 2026



Visit this website at: johnmuir.org

launched the John Muir Exhibit website, first briefly with the University of California, Davis, and then for over 30 years hosted with the Sierra Club, my interest only grew as people from around the world contacted me with questions about Muir.

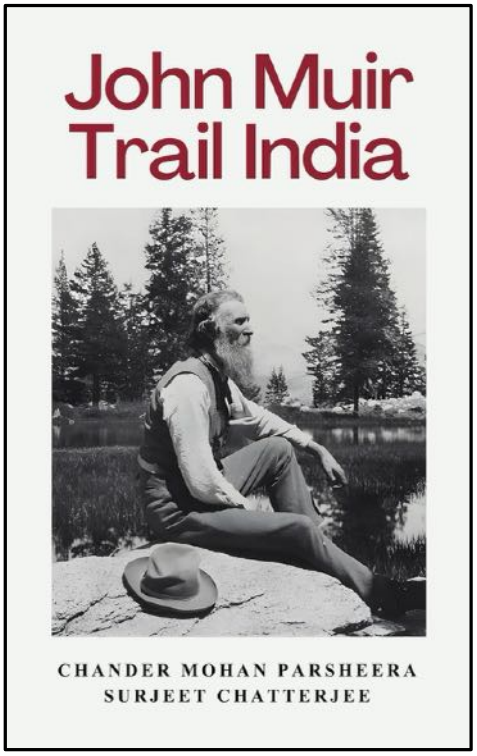
A few years later, this growing interest resulted in the John Muir Global Network https://johnmuir.org/, with special emphasis on Muir's world travels and the growing inspiration his life and legacy brings to people around the world. This latter website includes supplemental information about Muir's travels in India, as well as information relating to his travels throughout the world.

Most of the questions I received came from the U.S., Canada, and Scotland. But in 2003, a student in New Delhi, India, contacted me for more information about John Muir for a school project. Like many others, the student's research about Muir led to a greater interest in the natural world, including the natural history of India. Her questions reminded me that Muir had spent time in India, but I realized I didn't then know much about his sojourn there.

I was intrigued by the idea of combining what I knew about India with what I knew about John Muir. I embarked on a study of Muir's original journals and letters during his India sojourn, and with photo research provided by my Indian correspondent, presented a preliminary slide show of the results at the 2006 John Muir conference held at the University of the Pacific. This book is a significant expansion of that original presentation.

In 2023, as I was working to complete this book, I was glad to learn about two people in India who were working to re-trace John Muir's visit to India: tourism specialists Professor Chander Mohan Parsheera (Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla, India) and his associate Ms. Surjeet (Eshita) Chatterjee. I soon began a regular correspondence with Dr. Parsheera, exchanging messages as they researched Muir's archival writings. I gladly assisted his research with an early copy of this book, and shared many of the resources that I had found in researching it. Their on-site visits to the locations John Muir explored during his India tour in 1903 often included interviews with hotel staff, railway officials, and botanic garden authorities to gather insights and contextual information. Many of the people they met

Figure Intro 3 John Muir Trail India Book Cover



wanted to learn more about John Muir, and to find ways to recognize his forgotten visit to their location so long ago.

The result of their research is *John Muir Trail India | A Book for Nature Lovers on the Man Who Inspired the Leave-No-Trace Philosophy,* published in India in early 2026. Their book is quite different from this one, as it focuses on the present, while here I focus on what things were like during Muir's 1903 visit. Dr. Parsheera asked me to write the Foreword for their book, which I was happy to do! As tourism scholars and researchers, Dr. Parsheera and Ms. Chatterjee early on recognized that modern-day treks along Muir's various routes around the world can inspire today's travelers. Thus, the authors assert that following John Muir's trail in India would "not only promote tourism in multiple regions of India but also encourage collaborative efforts in environmental education and sustainable development." To this end, Dr. Parsheera's and Ms. Chatterjee's contribution

is an important addition to John Muir's legacy. I am grateful that Dr. Parsheera also contributed the Foreword to this book.

My research into Muir's visit to India revealed not only the places Muir visited, but also something of the restless curiosity, humor, and receptiveness to new experiences that characterized his travels.

He had earlier written, "All the wild world is beautiful, and it matters but little where we go, to highlands or lowlands, woods or plains, on the sea or land or down among the crystals of waves or high in a balloon in the sky; through all the climates, hot or cold, storms and calms, everywhere and always we are in God's eternal beauty and love." In the same passage, he asserts that "the spot where we chance to be always seems the best, and it requires a distinct effort of the will to get oneself in motion for a change of place."

But the chance to see more beautiful forests, magnificent mountains, and wonderful glaciers would always inspire him.

As one newspaper account of his trip published on his return explained, "Where other travelers find good, bad, or indifferent hotels, Muir found mountains and trees which he greeted in every land he visited as old friends."

Despite his fondness for temperate and cold mountains and glaciers, he simultaneously had a somewhat ambivalent yet strong attraction to tropical climes: "So also in the glorious exuberance of the tropics we would abide forever, were we not driven and pulled away by the same mysterious forces that send birds and animals on their travels."

And so it was easy for Muir to conclude, as he wrote in 1890: "Every excursion that I have made in all my rambling life has been fruitful and delightful, from the smallest indefinite saunter an hour or two in length to the noblest summer's flight…."

Although the prime objective of Muir's visit to India, not surprisingly, was to see the mighty Himalayan mountains, glaciers, and their Deodar cedar forests, his visit also included a somewhat typical tourist sojourn to the historic cities of Benares, Lucknow, Cawnpore, Agra, and Delhi.

Because Muir had relatively little enthusiasm for architectural monuments, he only occasionally offered observations about them, in contrast to most India travelogues. When he did comment, he often expressed interest in their history.

Muir even wrote with evident delight about some of his modes of transportation, including Darjeeling's famous and historic "toy train," and Simla's exciting pre-railroad "mail tonga," which Rudyard Kipling had celebrated in verse.

Muir also witnessed and described the scenes of religious devotion along the banks of the Ganges River at Benares, which remain profoundly fascinating.

In virtually all of his writing, especially when transforming his journals to published writings, Muir often omitted facts regarding people he encountered or traveled with, names of places he visited or stayed, routes he took, or his modes of transportation. His expressed purpose in his published writing was typically to "entice people to look at nature's loveliness." His method was to describe a sacralized, divine landscape, a benign wilderness which to him was "Nature's warm heart." But many of his journals give notations of the names of people he met and where they were from. So Muir's interest in people as well as places and nature is more evident in his journal entries than in his published writings.

It can be readily inferred from his journal on virtually all of his travels, as well as from his extensive correspondence, that Muir was a spirited conversationalist and delighted in social exchange with other people. Clearly, Muir spent many hours talking by the fireside hearths of friends or new acquaintances he made in his travels. On mountain excursions as a younger man, this might be around a campfire with fellow travelers; but in his later travels in his 60s and 70s, it may just have often been in a hotel, a restaurant, a train car, or a steamship.

So, reading Muir's journal entries of India results in some surprising insights. For one thing, compared to his contemporaries, Muir exhibited a notable and unusual tolerance when encountering a culture that was considered strange and ungodly by many Westerners of his time.

Another insight is Muir's humor. As Robert Underwood Johnson, his friend and Century Magazine editor wrote: "A delightful feature of our campfire talks was Muir's Scotch humor. Despite his mock contempt for man he was deeply interested in human nature… reminding me of the effective method of Mark Twain."

On his Indian sojourn, just as on his trips in the American West, Muir engaged in plenty of playful, teasing humor with people he met, native and non-native alike.

As his friend and editor, Francis H. Allen, commented: "In more intimate relations he was a 'born tease,' and he delighted to take his friends 'down a peg' when he thought it advisable, all with the greatest good humor."

As Robert Underwood Johnson further tells us, Muir "loved companions and craved good talk, and was glad to have others with him on his tramps, but he rarely found congenial friends who cared for the adventures in which he reveled."

And so it was that on his trip to India, Muir no longer had the Sargents as traveling companions, and was rather glad to be rid of them. But despite initially reveling in being "alone," he quickly connected with another congenial person to accompany him on much of his excursion to India. William Lord Smith was a big game hunter, who was in the middle of an around-the-world trip to hunt big cats. Despite their contrasting interests, the two men apparently developed an agreeable traveling companionship. Smith, who was younger than Muir and a seasoned traveler, often assisted the older Muir during the trip in making and implementing their travel arrangements. Smith's remarkable life and his relationship with Muir are explored further in an appendix in this book.

In contrast to Smith, Muir was drawn primarily to plants, glaciers, and mountain peaks—all of which he found in abundance in India.

Accordingly, as soon as he arrived in Calcutta, Muir made haste to make a pilgrimage to the Great Banyan Tree — still living today — in the Royal Botanic Gardens. Then in Darjeeling, he and Smith spent some rainy days barely catching glimpses of the snow-capped peaks. At Simla, he gloried in the Deodar forests, writing more detail in his journal about them than any other phenomena he saw.

Yet Donald Worster, in his extensive 2008 Muir biography, *A Passion for Nature*, tends to downplay the effect Muir's world travels had on him. Worster claims: "He had added to his herbarium, his stock of impressions, his long list of friends and colleagues, but he came home with no new large insights into nature or society. Nothing in his journal suggests that travel had helped him see the world, himself, or his adopted country more profoundly. Had he walked the whole distance, it might have been different."

But perhaps the seeming lack of "new large insights" was because John Muir *already had* a global, even cosmic view of the world. After all, we are talking about someone who as a young man listed his "address" on the front cover of his field journal in 1867 as "Earth-Planet, Universe." He would go on to write in his posthumously published 1915 book, *Travels in Alaska*:

"When we contemplate the whole globe as one great dewdrop, striped and dotted with continents and islands, flying through space with other stars all singing and shining together as one, the whole universe appears as an infinite storm of beauty." He later confirmed this global perspective, writing how there was always an "*eternal sunrise, eternal sunset, eternal dawn and gloaming, on seas and continents and islands, each in its turn, as the round earth rolls*."

Muir had long embraced the writings of Alexander von Humboldt, that theorist of cosmic unity amidst the complexity of phenomena. Muir's unique, nature-centered views about spirituality and religion, as we shall see, would allow him to overcome some, if perhaps not all, of the cultural prejudices of his time.

Muir's embrace of the equality of all mankind is well expressed in this 1872 statement he wrote in a letter to a friend:

"We all flow from one fountain Soul. All are expressions of one Love. God does not appear, and flow out, only from narrow chinks and round bored wells here and there in favored races and places, but He flows in grand undivided currents, shoreless and boundless over creeds and forms and all kinds of civilizations and peoples and beasts, saturating all and fountainizing all."

As shown in the chapter on Benares (Varanasi), Muir seemed far more tolerant of people of many religions, cultures, and races than the majority of 19th-century European visitors.

As noted author Dean King says, “The preponderance of Muir’s writing and work demonstrates that he cared profoundly about all people and held a special spot for the weak and downtrodden.”

In any case, Muir’s journals and letters home during this period contain only a hint of what he saw and felt in India and the other places he visited on his global travels. His journals served only as a reference for future writing—in this particular case, never fulfilled. Because Muir often scribbled these entries at odd moments, they frequently lack detail.

Yet, although we have today a mere inkling of what Muir experienced in India, if we combine his journal and letters home with what we independently know or can observe about many of the special places he visited, we can reach a much better understanding of how John Muir experienced what the Persians called *Hindustan*. Reviewing Muir’s journals in light of the kind of amazing places he visited, it is difficult to imagine that his experiences in India left no lasting impression on him.

Examining Muir's travels in India offers fresh insights into his understanding of Nature and humanity, and reveals a fascinating, largely forgotten chapter in the life of one of America's most influential naturalists.