

John Muir National Historic Site



MAP OF HISTORIC SITE

THE MUIR HOME TOUR

THE ORCHARD TRAIL

THE MARTINEZ ADOBE

1 INCENSE CEDAR. "I feel strangely attracted to this tree. The brown close grained wood, as well as the small scale-like leaves, is fragrant, and the flat overlapping plumes make fine beds, and must shed the rain well. It would be delightful to be storm-bound beneath one of these noble, hospitable old trees."

When John Muir died, one of his ranch hands lined Muir's coffin with incense cedar branches, and Muir's friends buried him a mile from here, beside his wife--at the foot of an incense cedar.

2 EASY ACCESS TRAIL. The trail to the left leads to the Muir house. You are invited to enjoy the splendid grounds that surround the Muir house as you follow the trail. Remember that every leaf, twig, and bud is part of a living system. Help preserve them for future generations by letting them grow undisturbed.

3 APPLES. Apples were not raised commercially in the Alhambra Valley, but many ranchers planted a number of varieties for their own tables. John Muir had some very definite ideas on the merits of wild apples and orchard apples:

"The fine wild piquancy of its fruit is unrivaled; but in the great question of quantity as human food wild apples are found wanting. Man, therefore takes the trees from the woods, anures and prunes and grafts, plans and guesses, adds a little of this and that, selects and rejects, until apples of every conceivable size and softness are produced...as utterly unfit for the uses of Nature as a Meadowlark, killed, plucked and roasted. Give to Nature every cultured apple--Codling, Pippin, Russet--and every sheep so laboriously compounded...and she would throw the one to her caterpillars, the other to her wolves."

Three separate areas exist on the Muir/Strentzel Ranch--the Victorian garden, the orchard, and the natural area by Franklin Creek. The parklike plantings around the Muir House gave pleasure and delight to the family and provided them with vegetables, fruits, flowers, and herbs.

4 PALMS AND FLOWERS. In the first decade of the twentieth century, palm trees were a favorite ornamental planting. The Washington palm growing tall and erect by the fence line in front of the railroad trestle is a member of the only native

species of palm of California. The Canary Island palm that grows next to the Muir House is a nesting place for barn owls. Muir planted flowers to please his daughters and his wife Louie. She was awarded many prizes for her flower arrangements at local fairs. The garden plot has been replanted by the Muir Garden Club.

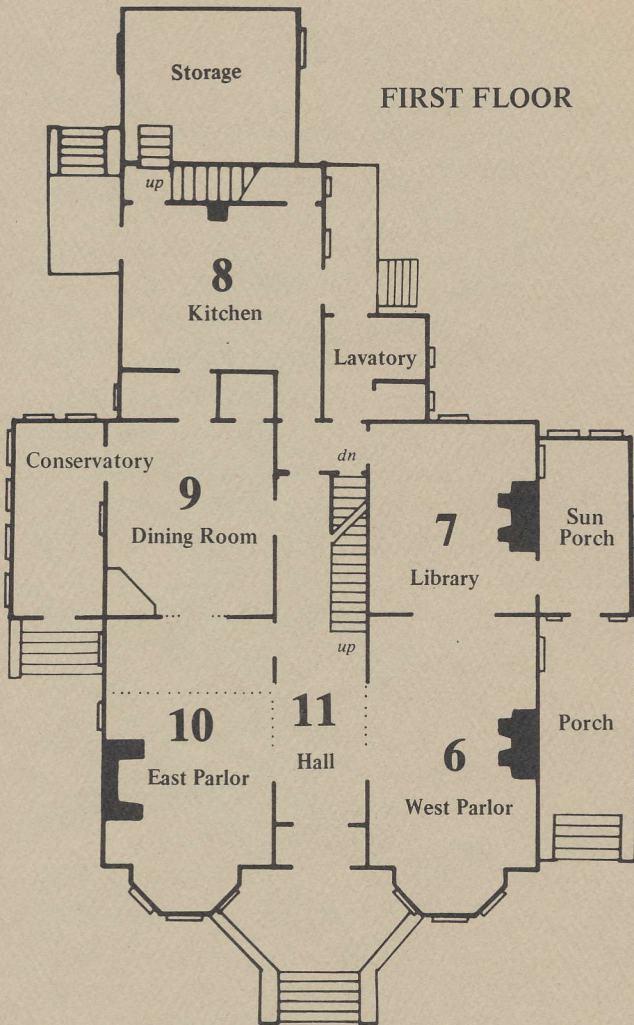
5 WATER STORAGE. The brick addition was added to the back of the house in Muir's time to enclose a water tank in the attic. Directly in front of you is a portion of another brick wall recently uncovered in an archeological study. This wall supported a huge water tank.



WELCOME TO JOHN MUIR'S HOME.

John Muir was born in 1838, in Dunbar, Scotland. His father took the family to Wisconsin in 1849 to try his hand at homesteading a farm.

John Muir began a thousand-mile walk from Indiana through the Appalachians to the tip of Florida in 1867. The following year he sailed to California. There he found the Sierra Nevada, his "Range of Light." Muir spent as much time in the Sierra as possible, working only enough to obtain "bread money." He became an expert on Sierra trees, plants and especially the recent geology of the area, proposing a then-revolutionary theory of glacial formation of the Sierra valleys such as Yosemite. Muir's successful defense of his glaciation theory against some of the most respected geologists of the time, plus his other writings on natural history, caused him to be in great demand as an authority on problems of the environment. John Muir died in 1914 at the age of seventy-six in Los Angeles. His funeral was held in this house and he is buried in the Muir-Strentzel cemetery not far from here.



This booklet will help you to learn about John Muir, America's pioneer conservationist, and the seventeen-room Victorian home that was his residence during the last twenty-four years of his life.

**FOR YOUR SAFETY PLEASE
WATCH THE STEPS.**

The original furnishings of the Muir house were removed after John Muir's death in 1914. The National Park Service is refurnishing the home to the period of roughly 1906-1914, using information provided by his daughter Helen Muir and others who had visited Mr. Muir at the time. Enjoy your visit.

It is important to remember that the house was not built by John Muir. It was built in 1882 by his father-in-law, John Strentzel, and reflects Dr. Strentzel's taste in architecture. John Muir and his bride lived in a small but comfortable Dutch colonial-style home about a mile from this site from 1880 until Dr. Strentzel's death in 1890. At that time, John Muir, his wife and two daughters, Wanda and Helen, moved into this home. During the ten-year period between 1880 and 1890, Muir managed both Dr. Strentzel's and his own ranch.

**HELP PRESERVE THE
FURNISHINGS. PLEASE DON'T
TOUCH THEM.**

6 WEST PARLOR. On the right side of the entrance hall is the west, or formal, parlor of the house. It is in this parlor that John Muir entertained some of the early supporters of the conservation movement. Muir's wife, Louie, was a superb hostess and a pianist of concert caliber.

The rooms with their twelve-foot ceilings were heated by seven fireplaces like the fireplace of imported onyx you see before you. Light was furnished by candles and kerosene lamps until John Muir installed electricity in 1914, shortly before his death.

In addition to his monumental work in conserving America's resources, Muir was also a patron of the arts. The works of the landscape painters Thomas Hill and William Keith hung in this home. Keith accompanied Muir on several trips into the high Sierra. The two Scotsmen were lifelong friends.

The gilt-framed reproduction of Muir Glacier by Thomas Hill was a donation to the site. Other reproductions by William Keith hang in the other rooms.

7 LIBRARY. This room will give you an idea of the opulence of upper-middle class Victorian life. The walls are paneled in redwood heartwood. The home is built almost entirely of redwood with the exception of the floors, which are Douglas-fir, painted to resemble light oak in the style of the period. The home cost an initial \$9,500, but extras such as the fireplaces and plumbing brought the final cost closer to \$20,000, a considerable sum for 1882.

Dr. John Strentzel was one of the most colorful figures in California history, having been a Polish revolutionary, a medical doctor, a Texas frontiersman, and a forty-niner before settling down to the life of a fruit rancher in the Alhambra Valley.

Dr. Strentzel's son-in-law, John Muir, proved to be a born orchardist and an astute businessman. In the ten years of partnership with his father-in-law, he was able to become financially independent. This independence allowed Muir to retire and devote the rest of his life to the fight to save America's natural resources. One result of that fight was the preservation of the Grand Canyon, depicted in the Thomas Moran print.

8 KITCHEN. Muir worked in the fields with his ranch hands but in the kitchen his Chinese chef was totally in command. John Muir was careful not to irritate his cook.

After the death of Mrs. Muir and the marriage of his daughters, the kitchen was not used as often and many of the kitchen utensils were put away.

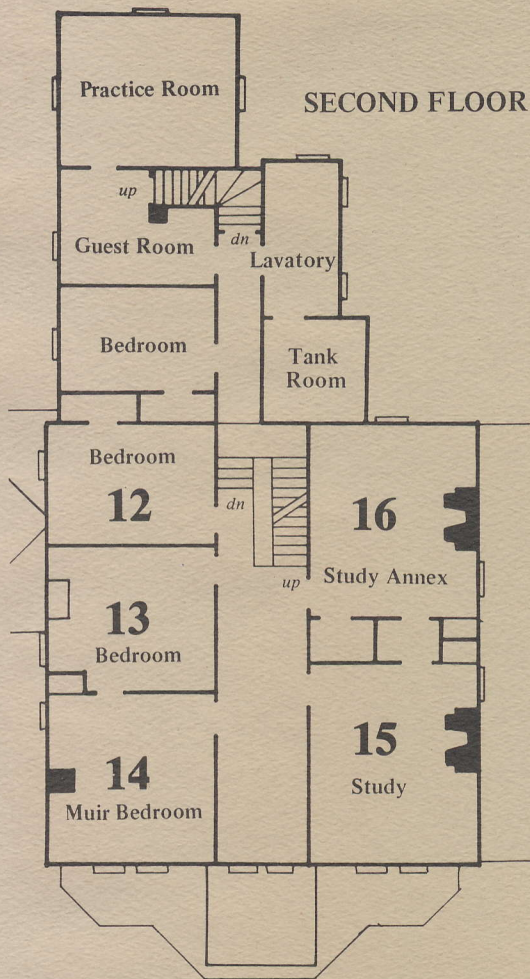
9 DINING ROOM. In John Muir's time, the dining room played a very important part in family living. Muir loved his family very much and wanted their company at evening meals. To assure that his two daughters, Wanda and Helen, would be at the table on time, Muir resorted to the clever strategy of telling serial stories that would not be repeated, so that it was important to be on time for each story. One story was the immortal dog story, *Stickeen* which Muir was persuaded to publish. Photographs of the Muir family are on the dining room table. You are welcome to look through the scrapbook.

The sideboard is made of native American butternut and is regarded as a good example of Victorian furniture. The fragile beauty of the cut glass should not be disturbed. Note the conservatory or solarium, a type of

greenhouse where tender plants could be grown year-round. The rocking chair in the conservatory belonged to John Muir's best friend, John Swett, shown in the photo on the dining room wall.

10 EAST PARLOR. The great earthquake of 1906 gave John Muir a chance to express himself architecturally. The earthquake destroyed some chimneys and damaged the east parlor fireplace. Since Muir had always longed for a massive fireplace where he could build a "real mountain campfire," he replaced the original marble fireplace with the brick mission style one. He also decided to enlarge the east parlor by taking out a bathroom (which was entered by the door that now goes nowhere). He installed the archway between the dining room and the east parlor at the same time.

11 HALL AND UPSTAIRS. To the right of the hat tree is the telephone; the Muir telephone bill seemed to average \$3.50 a month. Be sure to hold on to the handrail as you ascend the stairs. The hallway to the right of the landing leads to two guest bedrooms, a lavatory and a music



practice room. The first room on your left has an exhibit on Muir's boyhood and youth.

Please do not go beyond the gates!
John Muir's home is part of everyone's

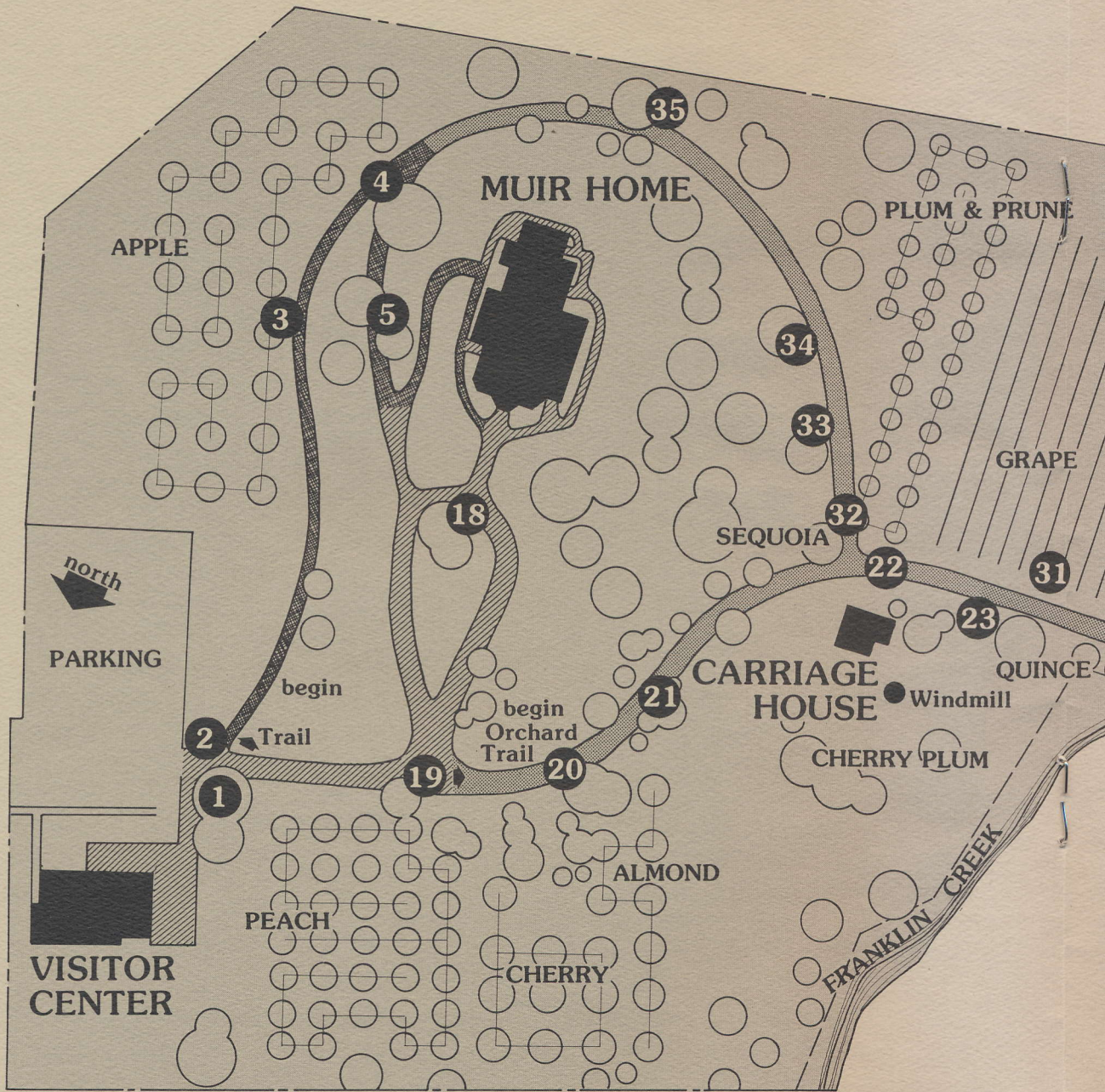
heritage; please help protect it. Do watch your step as you move down the hallway.

12 GOVERNESS' ROOM. John Muir preferred that his children be educated at home. This room is furnished the way a young woman who was acting as governess might have furnished her room.

13 CHILDREN'S ROOM. The next room on the right side of the hall was Wanda and Helen's bedroom when they were children. The bed is a typical feather bed of the period, very warm, but perhaps too soft and lumpy for our tastes.

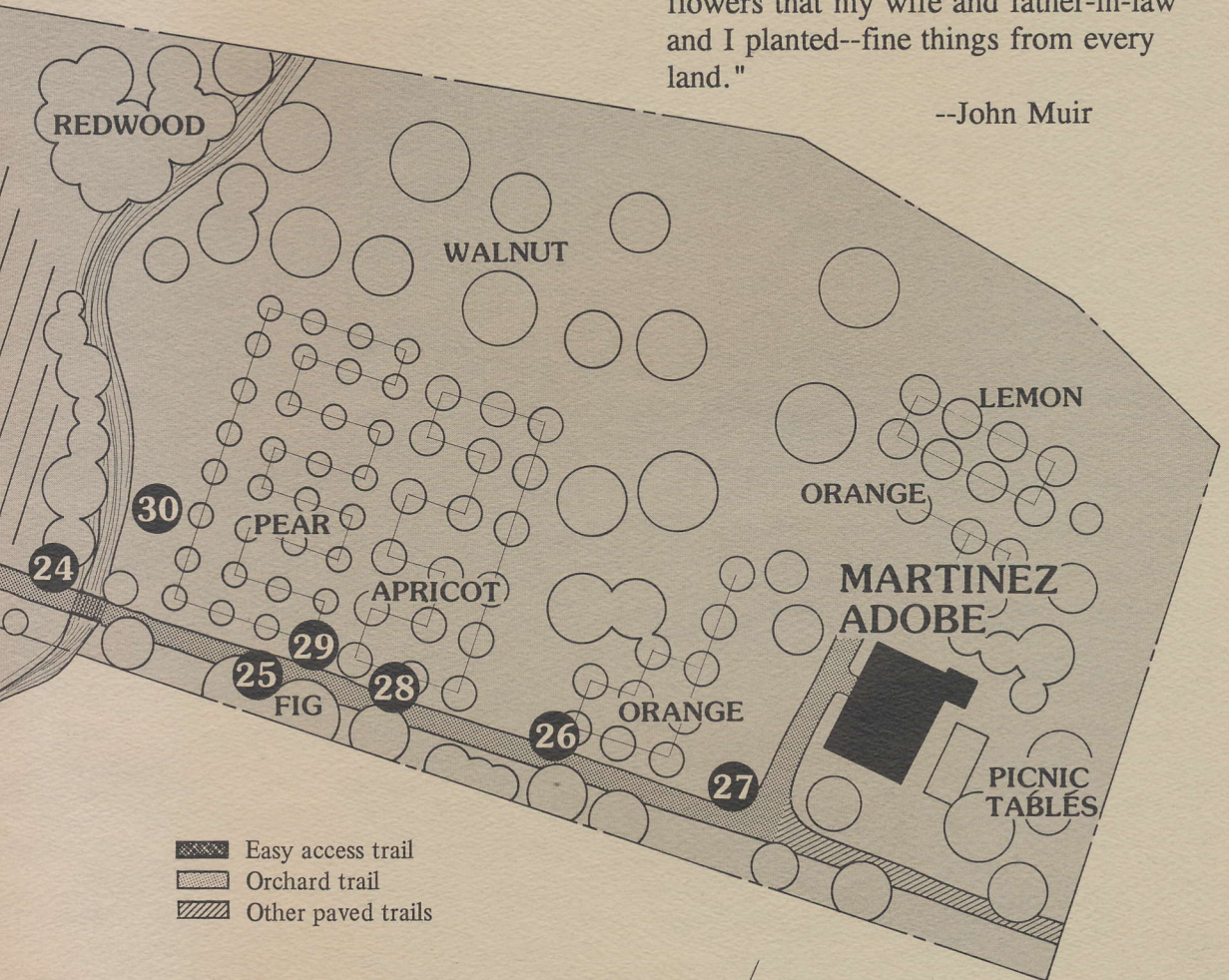
14 JOHN MUIR'S BEDROOM. The last room on the right at the end of the hall is John Muir's bedroom. The hallway was lined with bookshelves full of volumes from his extensive library. Muir loved the outdoors and refused to have curtains on his bedroom windows, as he enjoyed being awakened by the sun.

15 JOHN MUIR'S STUDY. Directly across the hall is the most important room in the house. This is John Muir's study, or, as he called it,



"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."

--John Muir



his "scribble den."

It was in this room that Muir wrote many of the books and articles that influenced the preservation of what was left of the American wilderness. Muir was a dedicated writer but not a very tidy one, and books and manuscripts were often left on the floor.

For many years the shallow metal drinking cup, easily hung on a belt, was a badge of membership in the Sierra Club, an organization co-founded by Muir in 1892 and still one of the foremost conservation groups.

To the left of John Muir's desk you see the symbols of two of his most prized possessions, the yellow hood of



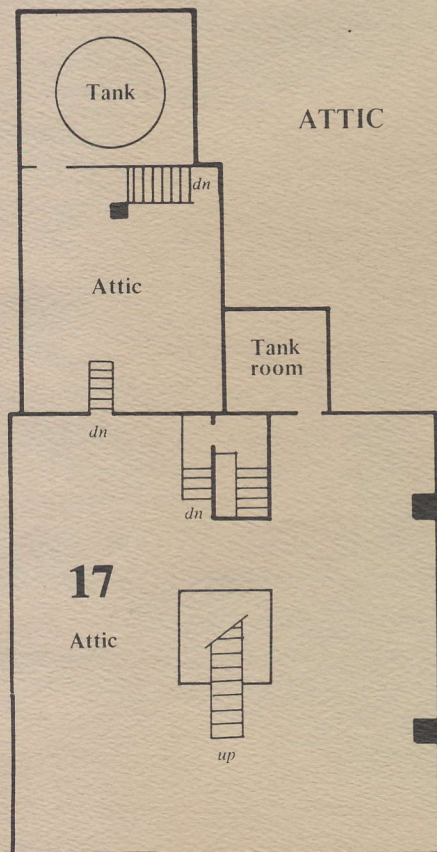
his honorary doctorate from Yale and a spear given to him by Alaska Native Americans commemorating his courage in venturing out onto living glaciers and dangerous bays. Although Muir received many other honors, his title of "The Great Ice Chief" is perhaps the most fitting.

William Keith's "The Oaks" occupied a place of honor above the fireplace.

The bowl on the mantle contains balls of dried bread. Muir would roll bread into bite-sized lumps and sun-dry them on the porch roof. Muir would use the bread balls as a snack as he worked through the day creating some of the enduring classics of American nature writing.

16 SIERRA CLUB EXHIBIT ROOM.

This room provides an insight into the early-day conservation movement. Under Muir's aggressive leadership, the Sierra Club won high praise from President Theodore Roosevelt for its role in forest conservation. The club supported legislation that added Yosemite Valley to Yosemite National Park, and helped establish Mount Rainier National Park in the Pacific Northwest and other parklands in the Southwest.



Both Helen and her mother used this room as a bedroom at various times. John Muir planned to use this room as a library annex for his study; he had a small doorway cut in the wall between the two rooms and had this room lined with shelves for his books and papers.

Exit into the hall and turn right for the stairs to the attic.

17 ATTIC AND BELL TOWER.

Attics were the final resting place of the family white elephants, objects too good to throw away but not quite nice enough to have downstairs. Attics were also a tremendous place for children to play on a rainy afternoon.

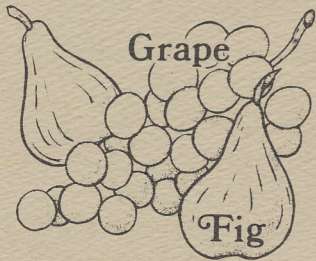
Caution! Only five persons should be in the bell tower at a time. Duck your head as you climb the stairs.

John Strentzel may have used the bell in the tower to summon the laborers to work. John Muir would often use the tower as a place of meditation in the quiet early morning hours of summer. As you have noticed, the view has changed considerably since John Muir's time. Yes, you may ring the bell.

The two doors at the end of the attic lead to water-storage tank rooms. This is the conclusion of the self-guiding tour through the Muir home. If you have questions, the park ranger or volunteer on the first floor will be delighted to assist you.

Please be careful descending the stairs. Be sure to hold onto the handrails.

18 THE OVAL GARDEN. As you leave the Muir house, notice the California bay tree that forms the centerpiece of this oval garden. One of California's most beautiful broadleaf evergreens, it is known for its pungent smell. Old fashioned roses splash color on the garden below.



WALK DOWN PAST THE OVAL GARDEN AND TURN LEFT TO BEGIN THE ORCHARD TRAIL.

John Muir would have extended his hospitality to you, so feel free to sample the ripe fruit that has been picked and washed for you. Please don't climb the orchard trees or try to pick the fruit yourself. Also please watch out for poison oak! The gardeners harvest fruit at the peak of ripeness and place it in boxes behind the visitor center as it becomes available.

19 PEACHES. Muir shipped several kinds of peaches to the East.

Reach down and touch the claylike soil. 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.

In 1909, Muir offered this invitation to a friend arriving at the railroad station: "I'll have the carriage at the station and peaches in the icebox."

20 CHERRIES. By John Muir's time there were more than fifty varieties of cherries. Cherries were a major cash crop on the ranch.

"The birds and the squirrels really got after the Cherries, but Mr. Muir wouldn't let us shoot or poison them."

--Muir Ranch hand



21 POMEGRANATES. John Muir did not raise pomegranates as a commercial crop, but the family did enjoy the fruit and flowers of this Old World exotic.

22 CARRIAGE HOUSE. Some time after John Muir's death, private owners moved the carriage house to a site next to the Muir house. Today, it has been returned to its original setting and preserved with as many parts of the original as possible. New, unpainted boards were added during the restoration process in places where the original fabric of the structure was destroyed or needed structural support.

23 WINDMILL. Beyond the carriage house you can see the windmill. It pumped water from the hand-dug well to the big house and westward to a tank on a vine-planted slope behind the adobe. Large tanks were placed near windmills to store water for domestic use, livestock, and irrigation in times of drought. The original windmill blades turn in the wind pumping water for use on the ranch today, but the wooden portion of the windmill had to be reconstructed.

24 FRANKLIN CREEK. The creek was named after Edward Franklin, who bought the Martinez Adobe from Vicente Martinez in 1853. This bridge is a replica of the one washed away by floods. Great, handsome draft horses plodded across the bridge, pulling

wagons laden with grapes, pears, and other fruit for the railway station or the ship docks in Martinez. In Muir's time, horse power was almost as critical as manpower in determining success or failure of a ranch.

25 FIGS. These historic trees date from the time of John Muir and may have been planted by him. They are reaching the end of their life span and new shoots from the original trees will be planted as the parent tree dies. Many years ago, John Muir used a similar process of regeneration by planting cuttings in his orchards.

PLEASE BE CAREFUL OF THE BEES IN FIG SEASON

26 SWEET ORANGE. Orange trees were first planted in Alhambra Valley by Muir's father-in-law, the renowned orchardist and plant breeder, Dr. John Strentzel.

27 MARTINEZ ADOBE. The story of this historic structure is told on page 15 of this guidebook and by exhibits inside. Feel free to walk through the adobe and resume the trail at stake 27.

28 APRICOTS. The apricot is a rapid grower and an early and heavy bearer in California. In Muir's time, most of the crop was dried.

29 PEARS. Bartlett pears were among the three most important crops on the Muir/Strentzel Ranch. This is a young orchard but it produces a good crop.

30 NATIVE PLANT AREA. Along the creek, willow, buckeye, elderberry, oak and toyon provide cover for quail and other small wildlife. This area is being developed to add native plantings so that you may enjoy some of Muir's favorite plant friends. He encouraged his daughters to learn the names of the plants as they walked the rolling hills together, asking: "For how would you like it if people didn't call you by your name?"

The coastal redwoods (*Sequoia sempervirens*) by the bridge are close relatives of the Big Trees in the Sierra; coastal redwoods are generally regarded as the tallest living trees. One tree in Redwood National Park holds the record at 367 feet.

31 GRAPES. The vineyard was replanted in 1976 by John Muir's grandson, John Hanna, a Napa County viticulturist, who kindly donated his time and skill for this project.

The practice of growing wine grapes on the hills and table grapes on the flat is said to have originated on this ranch. Historically, the vines were encouraged to grow close to the ground for increased warmth and shelter.

32 SEQUOIADENDRON GIGANTEUM, or BIG TREE.

This little Big Tree, far from its natural range in the Sierra Nevada, was planted by John Muir, probably in the 1890s. Larger specimens of *Sequoiadendron* are the most massive living things on earth.

Sequoias don't generally grow in lawns, so special care must be taken to protect the widespread root system that lies just beneath the surface.

33 PLUMS. The Santa Rosa plum, as well as dozens of other plum varieties, were developed by the great American plant breeder Luther Burbank.



34 TRUE CEDARS. Three types of cedars were planted on the grounds in Muir's time--the Mount Atlas cedar, the Cedar of Lebanon, and the Deodar cedar. No true cedars are native to the North American continent; all of these were imported from abroad.

35 EUCALYPTUS. During the winter of 1903-04, John Muir visited Australia to walk the forest and investigate persistent rumors of gigantic eucalyptus trees taller than the California redwoods. Muir was relieved to be able to write, "It is not true that any of the 200 or more species of the eucalyptus surpasses in height our Big Trees or Redwoods. I failed to find a botanist who had ever seen or measured a tree in all Australia more than 300 feet."

It is believed that John Muir planted the larger eucalyptus you see before you.

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.

THE MARTINEZ ADOBE

Thousands of acres were owned by individual families under the Spanish and Mexican land grant systems. The original Martinez grant contained over 17,000 acres and reached past the town of Pinole southwest of Alhambra Valley. (Don Vincente Martinez, son of the commandante of the Presidio of San Francisco, built this house of adobe bricks around 1849.)

The foundation of the Martinez Adobe is rough stone, while the walls are sun-dried adobe brick ranging in thickness from twenty-four to thirty inches. The roof was covered with shingles of either cedar or redwood.

Don Vicente Martinez lived in his adobe only four years before he sold it to Edward Franklin, the first of a series of owners who would change the land again.

Dr. John Strentzel, father-in-law of John Muir, purchased the adobe from an Australian, Thomas Redfern, in 1874. Dr. Strentzel, often called the father of California horticulture, soon replaced cattle with fruit trees of many varieties. Dr. Strentzel used the adobe as a store room and as a residence for his foremen.

Contrary to legend, John Muir and

his wife never lived in the Martinez Adobe, but it was the home of his elder daughter, Wanda, and her husband, Thomas Hanna. John Muir would often eat meals at the adobe and find time to play with his grandchildren.

The coming of heavy industry to Martinez in 1914, the year of Muir's death, saw the beginning of the end of orcharding in the lower Alhambra Valley. Population growth meant that the land had greater monetary value for homes than for orchards, and the land changed again.

By the 1960s, open farmland was replaced with houses and streets. Concerned citizens organized themselves to preserve a small sample of the past before it vanished, and in 1964, the adobe became part of the John Muir National Historic Site.

"...busy thinning apricots and peaches. How the time flies and how little of my real work I accomplish in the midst of all this ranch work!...How grand would be a home in a hollow Sequoia!"

--John Muir



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