A Mountain Calling

by Amy Leinbach Marquis, National Parks

1 John Muir never liked the word “hike.” Even in the 19th century, American society’s connection to nature had grown increasingly shallow, people’s time outdoors rigid and hasty. Muir, on the other hand, preferred to saunter. “Sauntering meant taking your time, valuing what you see,” says Tad Shay, lead interpretive ranger at John Muir National Historic Site in Martinez, California. “It meant stopping to enjoy the view of a lake, not running past it.”

2 Born in 1838 in the seaside town of Dunbar, Scotland, Muir began his love affair with nature at a young age.

3 In 1849, Muir’s father sacrificed the family’s wealth in Dunbar for a harsh farming life in America, claiming an 80-acre plot of land in central Wisconsin. It was in this pastoral wilderness—its open skies, frozen meadows, and thousands of migrating birds—that Muir found his own religion.

4 Muir was nearly 30 the first time he ventured into California’s Sierra Nevada Mountains. He was overwhelmed by the landscape, scrambling down steep cliff faces to get a closer look at the waterfalls, whooping and howling at the vistas, jumping tirelessly from flower to flower. “We are now in the mountains and they are in us, kindling enthusiasm, making every nerve quiver, filling every pore and cell of us,” he wrote.

5 Muir quickly found work as a sheepherder to keep this precious place near. Guiding his flock through the foothills and into higher elevations, he began his lifelong courtship with the Sierra Nevada. He spent much of his thirties alone in the mountains, carrying a tattered blue journal that he filled with sketches, scientific observations, and soulful writing.

6 Although he preferred living on society’s fringe, he also longed for human companionship. Muir began publishing his writing in 19th-century travel publications that East Coast tourists read on trains bound for the West. Soon, famous scientists and writers joined him in the Sierra Nevada. Ralph Waldo Emerson affected Muir deeply. So did President Teddy Roosevelt, whom Muir invited on a camping trip in the sequoia forest with one stipulation: No politics allowed. Roosevelt went on to establish Yosemite as a national park.

7 “We like to say that Muir got the ball rolling for the National Park System,” Shay says. Four more significant designations would follow, thanks to Muir’s influence: Grand Canyon, Mount Rainier, Petrified Forest, and Sequoia. America would come to know Muir as “The Father of Our National Parks.”

8 In his 76 years, Muir published more than 300 articles and 12 books. He moved a president to create the U.S. Forest Service and co-founded the Sierra Club, which helped establish several new national parks years after his death, and now boasts 1.3 million members.

9 It’s quite a legacy for a man who was so adamant about taking his time.

10 “Our lives are so rapid these days,” Shay says. “Perhaps the best way to honor Muir is simply to slow down and appreciate nature for its beauty.”

1 adamant: firmly fixed

Go On
Albert Palmer was a companion of John Muir on several memorable “saunterings” through the Sierras. His memoir is a treasure of the early conservation movement in America.

from The Mountain Trail and Its Message

Excerpts from The Mountain Trail and Its Message by Albert W. Palmer, published by The Pilgrim Press, 1911.

1 There is a fourth lesson of the trail. It is one which John Muir taught me [during an early Sierra Club outing].

2 There are always some people in the mountains who are known as “hikers.” They rush over the trail at high speed and take great delight in being the first to reach camp and in covering the greatest number of miles in the least possible time. [They] measure the trail in terms of speed and distance.

3 One day as I was resting in the shade Mr. Muir overtook me on the trail and began to chat in that friendly way in which he delights to talk with everyone he meets. I said to him: “Mr. Muir, someone told me you did not approve of the word ‘hike.’ Is that so?” His blue eyes flashed, and with his Scotch accent he replied: “I don’t like either the word or the thing. People ought to saunter in the mountains—not hike!

4 “Do you know the origin of that word ‘saunter?’ It’s a beautiful word. Away back in the Middle Ages people used to go on pilgrimages to the Holy Land, and when people in the villages through which they passed asked where they were going, they would reply, ‘A la sainte terre,’ ‘To the Holy Land.’ And so they became known as sainte-terre-ers or saunterers. Now these mountains are our Holy Land, and we ought to saunter through them reverently, not ‘hike’ through them.”

5 John Muir lived up to his doctrine. He was usually the last man to reach camp. He never hurried. He stopped to get acquainted with individual trees along the way. He would hail people passing by and make them get down on hands and knees if necessary to see the beauty of some little bed of almost microscopic flowers. Usually he appeared at camp with some new flowers in his hat and a little piece of fir bough in his buttonhole.

6 Now, whether the derivation of saunter Muir gave me is scientific or fanciful, is there not in it another parable? There are people who “hike” through life. They measure life in terms of money and amusement; they rush along the trail of life feverishly seeking to make a dollar or gratify an appetite. How much better to “saunter” along this trail of life, to measure it in terms of beauty and love and friendship! How much finer to take time to know and understand the men and women along the way, to stop a while and let the beauty of the sunset possess the soul, to listen to what the trees are saying and the songs of the birds, and to gather the fragrant little flowers that bloom all along the trail of life for those who have eyes to see!

7 You can’t do these things if you rush through life in a big red automobile at high speed; you can’t know these things if you “hike” along the trail in a speed competition. These are the peculiar rewards of the man who has learned the secret of the saunterer!

1 derivation: origin
How does the author of "A Mountain Calling" introduce the idea of "sauntering" to the reader?

A by giving the dictionary definition
B by quoting a national park ranger
C by relating it to Muir's childhood
D by showing a part of Muir's journal

Which detail from "A Mountain Calling" shows that Teddy Roosevelt was greatly influenced by his camping trip with John Muir?

A "No politics allowed."
B "So did President Teddy Roosevelt, whom Muir invited on a camping trip . . ."
C "Roosevelt went on to establish Yosemite as a national park. . . ."
D "America would come to know Muir as "The Father of Our National Parks.""

Which detail from "A Mountain Calling" seems to go against the claim that Muir preferred to saunter?

A "'Sauntering meant taking your time, valuing what you see,' says Tad Shay. . . ."
B "He was . . . scrambling down steep cliff faces to get a closer look at the waterfalls, whooping and howling at the vistas, jumping tirelessly from flower to flower."
C "He spent much of his thirties alone in the mountains, carrying a tattered blue journal . . . ."
D "He moved a president to create the U.S. Forest Service and co-founded the Sierra Club, which helped establish several new national parks years after his death. . . ."

With which of these ideas is the author of "A Mountain Calling" most likely to agree?

A Private nature parks should be turned over to the U.S. Forestry Service.
B Rushing to see as much of a natural park as possible is sometimes necessary.
C America finally has enough national parks to satisfy everyone's needs.
D Every American should try to visit a national park at least once in his or her life.

Go On
21 Which detail from “A Mountain Calling” proves that John Muir played an important role in protecting America’s wilderness?

A Muir’s family gave up wealth to move from Scotland to rural Wisconsin.
B Muir enjoyed spending lots of time outdoors in the mountains.
C Muir wrote travel publications, and these were read by tourists traveling west.
D Muir helped start the Sierra Club, which helped established national parks.

22 Which idea should be left out of a summary of “A Mountain Calling”? 

A Muir is clearly the greatest defender of the great outdoors in American history.
B Muir wanted others to appreciate the beauty of the American wilderness.
C Muir traveled with famous people like Ralph Waldo Emerson and President Roosevelt.
D Muir influenced the creation of the National Parks System and U.S. Forest Service.

23 How does the author of The Mountain Trail and Its Message introduce John Muir to readers?

A by describing what Muir looked and sounded like
B by quoting from Muir’s journal
C by retelling a conversation he had with Muir
D by giving a short biography of Muir

24 In paragraph 5 of The Mountain Trail and Its Message, what does the word “hail” relate to?

A a threat
B a greeting
C a storm
D a suggestion
25. Which sentence from *The Mountain Trail and Its Message* best supports the statement in the passage that Muir himself “lived up to his doctrine,” or beliefs?

A. “There are always some people in the mountains who are known as ‘hikers.’”

B. “His blue eyes flashed, and with his Scotch accent he replied: ‘I don’t like either the word [hike] or the thing . . .’”

C. “He stopped to get acquainted with individual trees along the way.”

D. “[Y]ou can’t know these things if you ‘hike’ along the trail in a speed competition.”

26. Paragraph 5 of *The Mountain Trail and Its Message* tells that Muir would often have people “get down on hands and knees if necessary to see the beauty of some little bed of almost microscopic flowers.” Based on this evidence, what can the reader conclude about John Muir?

A. He liked to show off his knowledge.

B. He had poor eyesight.

C. He was excited to share his love of nature.

D. He was a very lonely person.

27. What does the author of *The Mountain Trail and Its Message* mean when he says people should “listen to what the trees are saying”?

A. People should slow down, relax, and enjoy the silence of the forest.

B. Trees really do talk, and people just need to know their language.

C. Birds sing and animals chatter in the trees if people listen to them.

D. People should look for messages that others have carved in tree bark.

28. Which detail from *The Mountain Trail and Its Message* gives the strongest reason for why it’s better to “saunter” through life than to “hike” through life?

A. “And so they became known as sainte-terre-ers or saunterers.”

B. “. . . he appeared at camp with some new flowers in his hat and a little piece of fir bough in his buttonhole.”

C. “People ought to saunter in the mountains—not hike!”

D. “How much finer to take time to know and understand the men and women along the way . . .”

Go On
29. Which of these activities is the author of *The Mountain Trail and Its Message* most likely to enjoy?
   A. going for a drive through the country
   B. jogging briskly along a forest path
   C. competing in a long-distance marathon
   D. canoeing slowly along a stream

30. Which sentence from *The Mountain Trail and Its Message* best supports the idea in “A Mountain Calling” that Muir “longed for human companionship”?
   A. “[Hikers] rush over the trail at high speed and take great delight in being the first to reach camp and in covering the greatest number of miles in the least possible time.”
   B. “One day as I was resting in the shade Mr. Muir overtook me on the trail and began to chat in that friendly way in which he delights to talk with everyone he meets.”
   C. “There is a fourth lesson of the trail. It is one which John Muir taught me [during an early Sierra Club outing].”
   D. “How much better to ‘saunter’ along this trail of life, to measure it in terms of beauty and love and friendship!”

31. Which idea from “A Mountain Calling” has the most support in *The Mountain Trail and Its Message*?
   A. “Born in 1838 in the seaside town of Dunbar, Scotland, Muir began his love affair with nature at a young age. . . .”
   B. “Muir quickly found work as a shepherder to keep this precious place near.”
   C. “. . . ‘Perhaps the best way to honor Muir is simply to slow down and appreciate nature for its beauty.’”
   D. “‘Four more significant designations would follow, thanks to Muir’s influence. . . .’