



John Muir obituary from the *Los Angeles Record* from the Dr. Walter Lindley Scrapbook Collection, Hornold/Mudd Library at the Claremont Colleges.

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESKTOP

John Muir is long gone, but we still live in the California that Muir set up for us conceptually—a California divided between the cities where people live, the economically productive landscapes of farming, ranching, and mining, and the spiritual wilderness cathedrals of nature beyond.

But that is changing. Increasingly, we're thinking about nature across that spectrum: in the underlying natural infrastructure of our cities, in the ecosystem services—think water and pollinators—that support agriculture in California, as well as in our wild lands, and the wild parts of our cities, suburbs, and farms. We're recognizing culture across that spectrum, too. Even the most remote wilderness areas owe something to people: Native Americans who reshaped the land with fire and other cultural practices for millennia; conservationists who, for better or worse, envisioned wilderness as a place apart, fought for it, codified it in law, and protected it in practice; and all of us, who now find our own fingerprints—and, increasingly, our carbon footprint—all over the land.

This issue of *Boom* is all about exploring how we think with nature today: that is, how we use nature to think about ourselves, other people, animals, plants, history, the future, and, of course, what on Earth we're talking about when we talk about nature.

“Nature is perhaps the most complex word in the language,” wrote the great literary critic Raymond Williams in his book *Keywords*. “The idea of nature contains, though often unnoticed, an extraordinary amount of human history,” he added in an essay on “Ideas of Nature.”

This is a big year for anniversaries commemorating nature and history in California—it is the one-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of Yosemite as a park, the one-hundredth anniversary of John Muir’s death, and the fiftieth anniversary of the Wilderness Act.

We hope to help make this an occasion for thinking about the changing nature of California today, as well as looking backward.

Of course, it’s always tempting to add “and looking forward” in California, the eternal land of the future. Based on the observations, reports from the field, essays, maps, photography, art, and other reflections we’ve gathered here, the future of nature seems very much up for grabs at this moment in our history—that’s why it’s exciting to be thinking with nature in California today.

In an epoch that some are now calling “the Anthropocene”—a period in which the human imprint on Earth has become so pervasive and dominant that it will leave a distinct mark on geological strata in deep time—we will have more and more conversations that recognize the creative mixture of culture and nature at large in our world. California is already abuzz with such conversations. We’ve gathered some of them here in *Boom*.

We’re going to bring these conversations from the pages of *Boom* out into the world through events with partners throughout California this fall—the Autry National Center, the California Historical Society, Rancho Los Alamitos, UCLA, and the Western History Association. Please check our website at boomcalifornia.com for details. You can also sign up for our newsletter there, follow us on Twitter @boomcalifornia, or like us on Facebook to keep up with the latest from *Boom*. We’d love to hear from you and meet you at one of our events!

We’d like to thank our colleague Glen MacDonald for his support and inspiration in conceiving this issue. The former director of the Institute of the Environment and Sustainability at UCLA, Glen now holds the UCLA John Muir Memorial Chair in Geography. The establishment of the chair coincides with the centenary of Muir’s death in Los Angeles, which offers a poignant and opportune time to reflect on current conceptualizations and potential futures of nature in California. Both Glen and I would like to personally thank Hollis Lenderking, UCLA class of 1971, for his generosity in establishing the Muir chair at UCLA and supporting this issue of *Boom*.

Yours truly,
Jon Christensen