



The Sycamore Islander

April, 2000

Volume 79, No. 4

Wildflower Walk Reminder

This Saturday, April 8, from 10:00 to noon; meet at the base of the spiral bridge over the parkway. Experienced leaders will assist in identification. The group will lunch (bring your own) on the Island after the walk. Wait Listers will find this a good opportunity to meet members and visit the club.

The April Meeting: Only 6 members attended the March meeting – 4 shy of the quorum requirement. No business was transacted -- but a great discussion was had by all and all the club's problems were solved.

The April meeting will be held on the Island on April 12 at 8:00 pm. A discussion on new member orientation is still on the agenda. As always, all members are encouraged to attend and bring their ideas and comments to the issues at hand.

In lieu of the customary minutes in this space, we are treated to this photo of our esteemed caretaker, sent to us by Marcia Loeb.



A familiar sight, Doc and his one handed operation. Cool.

The Sycamore Islander is a monthly newsletter of the Montgomery Sycamore Island Club. Articles, photographic essays, drawings, announcements, letters to the editors—any materials of interest to the membership and waiting list—are welcome and should be sent to the Editors, Jane and David Winer, 5927 Onondaga Road, Bethesda, MD 20816. Text and graphics may be sent as email attachments to davidwiner@erols.com in all common formats. The deadline for inclusion in a particular issue is receipt at the Editors' address ten days prior to the second-Wednesday monthly meeting of the club. **Earlier submissions receive priority.**

Spring Cleaning

—Jennifer Esch and Victoria Judson

On April 1st, Sycamore Island was one of more than 90 official sites for the 12th Annual Potomac Watershed Cleanup. Twenty-two volunteers journeyed down to the island to clean the Potomac, a great boom from last year's small but dedicated group of five. Groups also gathered in Pennsylvania, Virginia, Maryland and D.C. to clean waterways that run into the Chesapeake Bay. The effort went global this year, as the Arakawa-Sakura Club sponsored a cleanup of the Japanese "sister river" to the Potomac.



Many volunteers took to the water in various watercraft to remove plastic, styrofoam, and other trash from the river and shoreline. Gerald Barton was one of the first to arrive. He pulled out his thirty-five-year old canoe and teamed up with Jennifer Esch. They removed three large garbage bags full of trash, including 19 bottles, from the river. Frank Daspit and Nell Hennessy win the tire award, having removed five tires. Maybe their good fortune was due to having their dog, Lucky, as a look-out. (Rule enforcers, please note that Lucky did not set paw on the island, but stayed in Frank's canoe, with dog

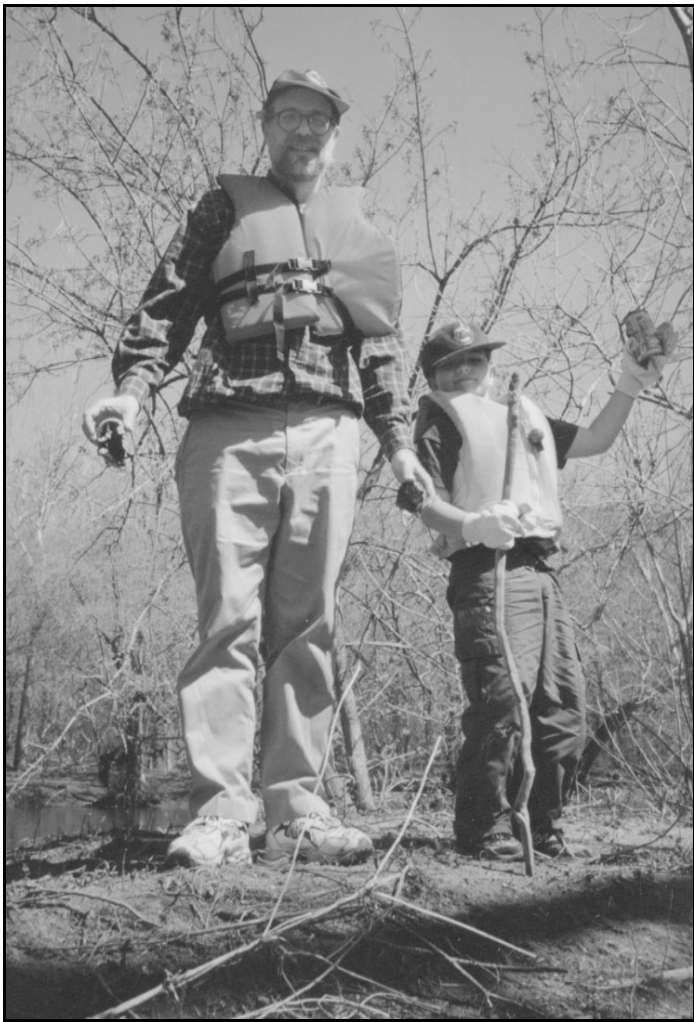
life-jacket attached.) Wayne Limberg showed that his commitment to cleaning the river was unparalleled. Arriving solo, he and Phyllis Taliaferro cleared debris all around the island. Then, Wayne took off on the shore and

cleaned down toward the dam. The Gelbs made cleaning a family affair. Robert journeyed by kayak and delivered trash

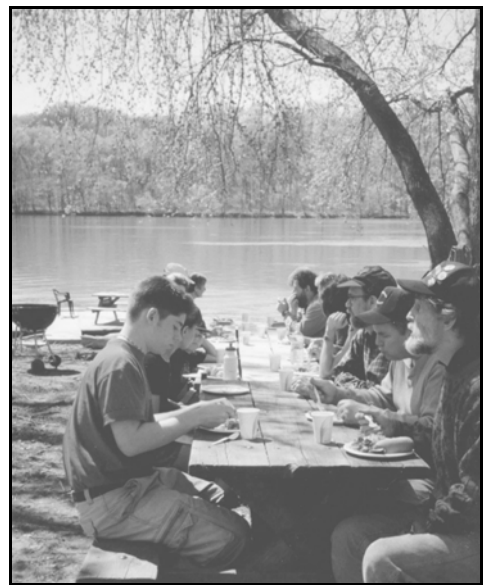
to his dad, Alan, and brother Michael in their nearby canoe. Maria Stenzel and Sarah Clark showed the utmost dedication. They passed off three large bags of trash to another canoe so they could keep going beyond the 12 noon deadline and haul in more junk. Thomas Esch, Michael Esch, and Vicki Judson found a trove of items on a small island right beside Ruppert, including a rusted truck wheel embedded in a tree branch. Major contributions were also made by Greg and James Super, Sally Strain and Sherry Pettie, and Fern and Jasper Ingersoll. None of this work could have been accomplished without the help of Doc Taliaferro, who cheerfully ferried the workers back and forth throughout the morning and helped the project run smoothly. *All-in-all, Sycamore Islanders removed 36 garbage bags of trash, pieces of tires, a lawn chair, and a wheel from the river.*

After their labors, the Islanders treated themselves to a potluck lunch.





Spring Cleaning Action
— Photos by Victoria Judson



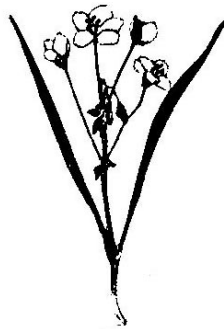


“Hidden Cove”

— by Karen Mathis

This splendid watercolor is part of an exhibit featuring the works of Karen Mathis, Tanya Davis, Polly Haecker, and Viviane de Kosinsky at the Spectrum Gallery in Georgetown. The gallery is at 1132 29th Street, NW, open 12-6 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, 12-5 p.m. Sunday. These paintings are on display until April 16.

Although the “Hidden Cove” site, shown here, is located on the Eastern Shore, we were struck by how much the painting resembles the Virginia shore across from the Club. The artist, Karen Mathis, particularly enjoys painting canoes and may visit the Island to scout for new scenes.



Young Islander Would Blow Away Styrofoam

—Renee Dunham

“We the undersigned believe that each person and company is responsible for preserving the environment.” Thus starts the petition that Jennifer Esch devised to induce companies to replace Styrofoam packaging with biodegradable alternatives. Jennifer, seventh grader at Thomas W. Pyle Middle School, is on the Sycamore Island waiting list, but she is not waiting for Styrofoam users to wake themselves up.

Jennifer took direction from her schools community service program to select an issue both local and international and to take steps to resolve it. Last fall at Sycamore Island, Jennifer and her family were tossing water-logged tennis balls, bobbing soda bottles, and irritating Styrofoam bits and pieces into canoes during the Potomac River cleanup. That was the first step. Next, she searched the Web to learn more about Styrofoam’s ill nature. Styrofoam production consumes oil, the manufacturing process releases carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, and it is not biodegradable. Nasty stuff.

When last summer her family received a seaweed press in the mail packaged in a corn-based foam that dissolves, Jennifer wrote to the company and again searched the Web - this time to learn more about the good stuff. She learned what biodegradable fillers were manufactured, that they didn’t cost much more, and indeed the price would drop if more companies switched to using them. The petition idea was born.

Although her school assignment had been satisfied, Jennifer continued her mission. She wrote to Potomac Conservancy, sponsor of the Potomac River Cleanup. They agreed to circulate the petition and distribute background information to the cleanup volunteers. What to do with these petitions? Jennifer will send them to companies that currently use Styrofoam together with information about alternatives. What can we do to help? Well, sign the petition for starters. We Islanders can find it posted in the Clubhouse during spring cleanup and for several weeks thereafter. Jennifer has also asked that we write in names of companies that use the S stuff in their packaging. What else? We can thank Jennifer for reminding us that changes can happen if we make the effort. In a simple beginning, there is the germ of possibility.

When Jennifer is not slinging sacks of Potomac debris into a canoe, she is playing flute, swimming on the swim team and is active in Girl Scouts. This summer she may be participating in a Johns

Hopkins program for talented youth. Their Paleobiology program intrigues her, as she is interested in the evolution of whales and, in general, how one can know the nature of a living plant or creature from a fossil or fossil fragment. When Styrofoam is extinct, what kind of life form do you suppose will be deduced from the little wormy fragments dug up one day?



Jennifer, with biodegradable foam packaging product.

Notes from the Island

The other afternoon I was sitting in the area known as the Caretaker's Yard... that area just below our great room... engrossed in my continuing study of the impact of goose feet on emerging trout lilies... trying not to upset them by following too closely for my observations... when our kitty Miss "T" came down the little slope from the front door. This is her first Spring, a wondrous event to coincide with her adolescence and filled with new experiences of every stripe. For some weeks she and the geese have been working out their relationship... they with a wary eye and she with great enthusiasm in discovering that birds could get so big. At first she would go bounding out with the unspent energy of new Spring... her sudden movements causing the geese to start and sometimes to be startled into jumping back with a flurry of wings. So much fun to get them riled and squawking. But they quickly got her number, and began to hold their ground, and so until now there has been wary dance as they felt out the boundary of each other's personal space... studying each other and then ignoring each other with practiced nonchalance... Miss "T" stalking and playing without actually ever charging and threatening except by maneuver. Great play for young cats... but nothing too serious. But of course everything is serious in Goose World, and it has seemed as though the geese have begun to develop the disdain that all wild things instinctively feel towards those lucky, privileged members of the animal kingdom that eat from cans... as though recognizing that the lack of seriousness indicates the killer instinct of hunger is missing.

And so, as I sat in the middle of the yard and Miss "T" made as if to come to me, I prepared to watch the dance. Instead, I was witness to the humiliating education of a young cat... her world changed forever. No more of this walking around each other warily. The geese attacked! In matters of goose territoriality it is mostly the male goose that toes it up. But in this case it was the female that

charged with single-minded determination every time Miss "T" tried to enter the yard. And she tried to get to my chair from almost every direction, backing and making great detours. But no matter how far across the yard the female goose might be, she would come charging and honking and flying across to deny any part of the yard to Miss "T," and at one point chased her ignominiously back up the hill to the safety of the Clubhouse steps. Obviously we are close to nesting time and any possible interloper must be made aware of the proper order of things. Such humiliation for such a young and previously undaunted kitty, who now seems to devote her energies to little bugs instead of birds bigger than she is. I have wondered if this might be the reason our large Czech cat, Barney, never comes out during the day when the geese roam the Island: fear of humiliation.

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This is a good time to publish the present policy on when the Club/Island is closed because of high water conditions. These conditions should be known by the Members and therefore should be defined clearly and publicly... and be reviewable. The Club Captain is always informed and consulted about Club closings. The Island is closed when the water level at the Little Falls gauge is above 5 feet and rising. This is the level at which the river is declared hazardous to recreational use by NOAA, and thus an insurance liability threshold. Club canoes may not be used above this level. The ferry becomes increasingly difficult to operate above this level, and should not be operated even by the regular Caretaker without the high water safety chains, which are extra chains added to the regular safety chains to allow the trailing end of the ferry to swing around further down river and farther from the safety line. Above 5 feet it is increasingly difficult to get onto the ferry from the towpath landing, especially

Notes from the Island

the river starts to rise over the ferry landing on the Island, and thus only wet or booted feet come onto the Island. When rising the river can do so suddenly and quickly, and thus go from 5 to 5.5 feet in a couple of hours

The Caretaker may open the Island when the river level is below 5.5 feet and falling. The river frequently rises quickly but falls slowly. The limiting factor here is usually the wind, as a brisk up-river wind can blow even a burly ferry person off the ferry rope when combined with high, fast water. The Captain has decided that only the regular Caretaker is authorized to operate the ferry above 5 feet, and therefore the Island is closed any Sunday the water level is above the hazardous level. This decision has been reinforced by previous attempts to allow substitute caretakers to operate the ferry between 5 and 5.5 feet... and the several incidents that have resulted. River levels and forecasts can be monitored on the back page of the *Washington Post* Metro section.

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The realization that some sort of critical mass had been reached occurred Saturday when it was suddenly apparent that the grass was gaining on the geese. There is now more green than bare brown on the lawn... most things have their heads up at least... and people can now bring their clueless feet on the Island without doing irreparable harm. The bluebells are bluing nicely, maybe only 20% so far, but even so it is quite a show. We will probably have an extended bluebell season this year because most are only an inch or so out of the ground. Actually we do not have a lawn, and will not until June. What we do have is an amazing wildflower garden resulting from the re-seeding that was possible because there have been no floodwaters over the lawn now for two years. I wish some of you old-timers would come down here and put your eyes on this and

tell me how it compares with lawns before the '96 floods. I remember the first year we were here a gentleman came down and expressed disappointment at the paucity of dog toothed violets, when in fact they seemed to be strewn everywhere. But this year they have appeared in the lawn by the zillions... and so too the regular violets, the Dutchman's breeches, the stars of Bethlehem, the marsh marigold, the Solomon's seal, a few so far unidentified, and of course the Spring beauties. Your Caretaker will again resist all pressure to mow anything except paths until they have all set seed.

Also the Island now has its first nesting goose... the location of said eggs to be kept secret to protect them from frivolous Members and unaccompanied children. However, our main goose couple is again constructing a nest in the root ball of the over turned sycamore tree near the Captain's float, and we will again this year have a "public" nest for everyone to see. There seem to be fewer geese this year, perhaps only 6 regular couples on the Island, and perhaps fewer than last year spending the night at the foot of Ruppert's Island. It could be that the geese feel that the neighborhood is being run down by the crowds at Hotel Cormorant there.

Your Caretaker was reflecting on these things and selfishly considering any justification to keep this announcement secret and the crowds at bay, when a cowbird landed and ran across the lawn. Of course... that was it... there are not yet any robins, the traditional sign... ergo the announcement must be postponed. The thought had only just fully formed before the first robin of the year landed and ran across the yard in characteristic fashion. So there you have it... I am commanded from above to tell you... get yourselves down here!

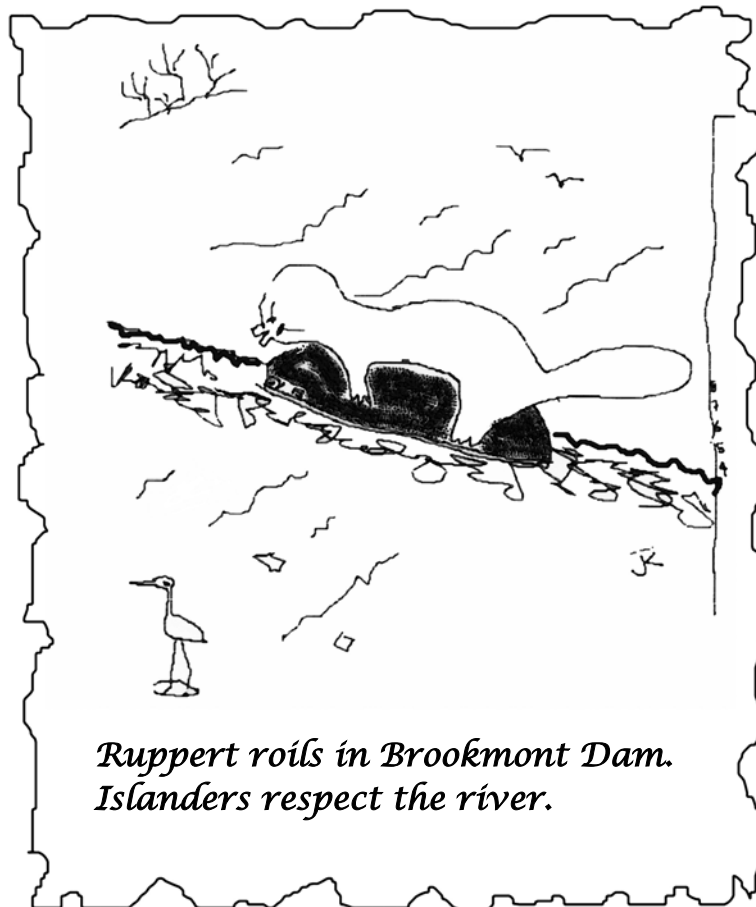
— Doc Taliaferro



Trouble in River City

Our annual visitors have been scouting out nest sites. These two mid-March Canadas were asserting their dominance over Miss T, the Island's almost grown kitty. The latter tried a few feints, but discouraged by the geese's bravado, fell back to a defense position under a bench. Doc's Notes this month include the blow-by-blow details.

Ruppert



Cartoon by Johnna Robinson

Sunday Relief Caretakers

Date	Time	Name(s)	Telephone
April 2	10:00 - 3:00 3:00 - Dusk	Norm Metzger Maxine Hattery	202 546-1034 202 362-1361
April 9	10:00 - 3:00 3:00 - Dusk	Margaret and Jim Matthews Greg and Susan Super (Service)	703 -892-1846
April 16	10:00 - 3:00 3:00 - Dusk	Jeff and Sandi Komarow Rochelle and Bill Banta	301 897-5996 301 718-4217
April 23	10:00 - 3:00 3:00 - Dusk	Judy and Jon Lentz Martha Sold and Dan Dozier	301 229-4968 301 654-8846
April 30	10:00 - 3:00 3:00 - Dusk	Christy and Garth Ross Marty Burgess and Al Brown	202 244-5379 301 229-9577

***** Caretaker Volunteers *****

**Call John Krasny (301-564-0342) or Jeff Komarow (301-897-5996)
to volunteer for caretaking in May You can also contact them by
e-mail at jfkrasny@erols.com or jeffkomarow@aol.com**

Large

There are no reports of large parties scheduled on the island during the months of
April and May

**A large party application form may be printed from the club's Web page at
<http://www.sycamoreisland.org/systems.htm>**

— or —

**To request a form through the mail, call the Supervisor of Parties, Bill Eichbaum
301-229-1713**



The Sycamore Islander

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<http://www.sycamoreisland.org>

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April 2000

This Issue:

- Islanders polish the riverscape.
- Foam, sweet foam.
- Last call for wildflowers (walk).
- Miss “T” encounters goose-steppers.



Alternative Transportation

—photo by David Winer

A group of youngsters and Moms visited recently by two-wheelers. One can reach the Island from the tow-path without dealing with that dreadful bridge and steep embankment— enter at Lock 6 or 7, or even further upstream, the tunnel at 79th Street.