



The Sycamore Islander

March, 2002

Volume 81 No. 3

March Meeting

The next Club meeting, Wednesday, March 13th at 8:00 pm, will be at the home of John and Judy Lentz. From MacArthur Boulevard, turn right on Mohican Road (one block west of the Sycamore Store). Go up the hill to a stop sign (a “T” intersection) turn right, and shortly bear left around a sharp curve. Their house, 5424 Mohican Road, is the third house on the left after the curve.

Our February meeting was at George and Renee Dunham's home on February 13th. A number of issues important to the Club were discussed at the meeting. Al Brown reported that the well and septic systems must be professionally evaluated and any needed modifications undertaken before the question of the renovation of caretaker's quarters can be addressed. John Matthews reported that the Club's electrical system has just been overhauled and brought up to code. A motion to drop the renovation plan and take the project appropriation off the books was made, but was tabled. Lisa Kliefoth reported that the Club received dues, fees, and donations for a total of \$47,902. For further details on the meeting see the minutes below. The meeting adjourned to the Dunham's dining room to enjoy the array of excellent refreshments provided by our hosts. George's and Renee's hospitality was much appreciated by all.

Minutes of the February 13 Meeting

Attendance: George Malusky, Sr., Chris Grant, George Malusky II, Brad Coolidge, John Matthews, Nancy Bower, Blair Bower, Peggy Thomson, Jane Winer, Jeff Komarow, Carl Linden, John Lentz, Al Brown, Mardy Burgess, Judy Lentz, Johnna Robinson, Jim Drew, Renee Dunham, Karl Kosok, Marcia Loeb, George Loeb, David Winer, Rosalie Fedoruk, George Dunham, and Ann Marie Cunningham.

The meeting was called to order by President Carl Linden. The minutes of the January meeting were accepted as published.

Communications: Joel Achenbach of the *Washington Post* will be writing an article for the Sunday magazine about the Potomac River, and how it enters the lives of people in the area. He would like to interview people involved in activities along the river. Ann Marie Cunningham will refer several names to him.

Marianne Ross wrote to request that the canoes “be released from their shackles” when conditions are favorable other than the water temperature. This rule was enacted after a very serious incident involving hypothermia last year.

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. **Note to submitters of announcements, articles, or letters: The deadline for inclusion in the April issue is receipt at the Editors' address on April 1. Earlier submissions receive priority.**

February Minutes (continued)

Treasurer: Alan Gelb reported (via email) that the budget is as expected.

Financial: Lisa Kliefoth reported (via email) that for the period 1/1/2002 to 2/11/2002, the Club received application fees, canoe fees, donations, dues, guest card fees and waiting list fees for a total of \$47,902.

Membership: Jeff Komarow reported that 21 applications for members' children have been received, which is a good sign for improved demographics and continuation of the Club's character. The waiting list is now at 205.

Alison Levine and Bob Palermo were accepted into membership, with the stipulation that they attend an orientation this year. The orientations will be held on Sunday, April 14 and Saturday, October 19.

Jim Mehlinger has become a senior member.

Captain: John Matthews wrote to John Noel of the Park Service about the condition of the path, and received an immediate response. John will cooperate with the Park Service in repairs and drainage.

The UV light used for water treatment is buzzing. John will ensure that it continues to work properly.

\$1500 was spent to bring the electrical system up to code in both the clubhouse and caretaker's quarters.

The ferry cable was detached. A new connection was placed there that cannot be easily disconnected.

Editor: Compliments were extended to Dave and Jane Winer on the exceptionally good issue.

Canoes: Jim Drew is updating the information on rack assignments. He plans to repair the seat in a club canoe. Some canoes don't have decals or leaders, and some don't appear to be river worthy. The Club owns a C1 canoe in which the paddler must kneel. This may be sold.

Inter-Generational Party: A pot luck dinner with activities for all ages will be held on April 20. Watch the *Islander* for information. Call Renee Dunham at 202-686-6451 if you can help.

Work Fest: The spring work fest will be held on April 27, with April 28 as the rain date.

Wildflower Walk: Renee Dunham will try to find someone willing to lead a wildflower walk this spring.

Building: Al Brown reported that the Club must correct the well, septic system, and other problems before the caretaker's quarters can be built. Estimates on repairs will be gotten. Fortunately, the electrical system was just corrected. These repairs are outside the charter of the building committee. Before getting building permits, we need a waiver on having a plat. The quarters are badly insulated causing high electric bills in cold months. The quarters should be moved to a higher elevation to lessen the possibility of flood damage, so it does not make sense to insulate the current quarters. Brad Coolidge moved to thank the building committee and caretakers, halt the building expansion, and cancel the appropriation for the project. The motion was tabled by a vote of 12-8.

Other Business:

No action has yet been taken by the personnel committee as to the caretaker's request for holidays.

George Malusky II expressed concern about the water quality in view of the poor fishing, greenish tint to the water, and sewage spilled in Hagerstown. The Dept of Natural Resources tests the water regularly during the summer.

The meeting was adjourned to tasty refreshments offered by the Dunhams. Their hospitality in offering their house for the meeting is very much appreciated.

—Ann Marie Cunningham, Vice President

Letter to the Editors

Fellow Members All:

As the minutes of our February meeting will show, I moved that we call a halt to the building expansion project that's been on our books for two years, cancel authorizations and caps for project expenditures, and thank the Ad Hoc Building Committee as well as Club officers and members for their many hours of efforts to bring the project into being.

The motion was tabled by 12-8 vote. At the March meeting I should like to bring the motion back to the floor for further consideration. This is just the right juncture for doing so. Why?

The first business is to discover if our septic and well systems are still functioning properly or need some remedy. This is a quite separate matter from further improving the caretaker's quarters: it affects not only the caretaker but the whole membership. Expenses of discovery and remedy, if in excess of funds provided for maintenance in the current budget, would not properly be charged to the club's authorization in June 2000 of \$31,000 for "an addition to the caretaker's quarters above the current quarters."

We need to discover what the membership now wants. The motion of June 2000 was posited on the concept of both improving the caretaker's present quarters and of reducing their flood vulnerability, per freehand sketches by the Captain. John Wiebenson, Club Architect, did preliminary design drawings published in the July *Islander*. Meantime the Ad Hoc Committee on the Caretakers Quarters, which in June had been authorized to approve "final details," accepted the architect's preliminary design drawings with the exception that "the quarters will be wider than those shown in the *Islander*." Minutes of the November meeting stated "It was the sense of the meeting that the Ad Hoc committee resume and act as agent of the Club in administering the building of the new caretaker's quarters. Al Brown and Mardy Burgess will chair the committee; John Matthews, Chuck Pill and Karl Kosok will be members... other members are welcome to participate."

From then to now, the minutes of successive monthly meetings as printed in the *Islander* have carried reports of the Ad Hoc committee's work and one report of Club action. I'll give the gist of these, you can re-read them in your file of *Islanders*. They show that in January 2001 the committee had another architect in mind, that in February the architect had submitted drawings, and that bids for construction would be going out, that in April one estimate had come in but just

for the shell of the building, and that in May the plan would cost more than the \$31,000 budgeted, and the committee was continuing its search for ways to reduce costs. The Club at this point adopted a motion to "provide a cap of \$50,000" on the project. In July Al Brown discussed the problem of getting a county building permit in our unique situation, and Tryon Wells stated his concern that last month's anonymous call to Montgomery County accusing the Club of wrongdoing may have a serious detrimental effect on the Club's reputation. In September Al projected a meeting with the Park and Planning Commission head to advance our cause. Then no word until February 13, 2002.

My motion was intended as a step toward clearing the decks for a new decision by the Club on what **it** wants to do. First of course is the septic/well question, but we shouldn't be using budding construction funds for that. Let's keep our accounts accountable in line with their authorizations

If we settle that question, should we move right ahead toward a new second story caretakers' place? What about other clubhouse needs like insulation and underpinning? The improvements already made in the kitchen, bed and bath of the present quarters have apparently satisfied Doc and Phyllis for the time being at least. We appreciate their patience and hope they are comfortable.

When and if we want to go for a building permit, what is the Club's choice of building plan? We saw Wiebenson's plan in the *Islander*, voted for it and paid for it. The Ad Hoc committee came up with another architect and another plan and last June cut down a handsome big tree that would stand in the way of "wider" quarters. That plan was available to be seen but was not printed in the *Islander* for all to see, only a sketch of how the club house would look from the towpath.

What now? We need to check the membership for current consensus: What we thought was fine a couple of years ago and could afford, or something more expansive and a couple of times more expensive? Or something in between?

There's no question that all involved in this saga have acted in what they saw as the best interests of the Club. We all have our own view. What's been done is done, let's clear the slate and see where the collective wisdom is now!

—Brad Coolidge, February 24, 2002

Letter to the Editors:

In all the balmy blue-sky white-sycamore days this season, I have felt the inescapable urge to take a canoe onto the Potomac, which is clear to the bottom. Alas, I'm stymied by the padlocked club canoes, which make me feel like a second-class member compared to owners of private canoes. I feel it is time to revisit this issue with the membership. Are there others who agree?

I plead with the powers-that-be to trust our common sense and self-preservative instincts, (I am not a daredevil) and to revise this inequitable policy.

If liability is at issue, I personally would gladly hold the Club harmless.

Thank you for listening.

—Marianne Ross

The Return of the Annual Wildflower Walk...



Spring has started on the Island. This spring-beauty (*Claytonia virginica*) had already popped up at the back of the club house on February 26.

Kathy Bilton, the field botanist who published the piece on fall wildflowers in the October, 2001 of the *Islander*, will meet walkers on Saturday, April 6 at 10:30 am at the stairs to the ferry. Rain or shine.

We are in for a treat. Kathy not only knows her plants, she also knows her history. For example, she noted in her article that the fall-blooming White Snakeroot (*Eupatorium rugosum*) is not only a handsome plant, it is also believed to have been responsible for the death of Abraham Lincoln's mother. We assume Mrs. Lincoln ingested the poison through the milk she drank--from cows that had grazed on the plant.



The Bluebells are coming! The Bluebells are coming! But, panic not... it happens every year.

We will not observe flowering White Snakeroot at this time of year, but we look forward to learning about current bloomers and their multiple uses. Bring a plant guide, if you like, but by all means check out ahead of time the website Kathy recommends as prep for the walk:

<http://www.potomacaudubon.org/springwildflowers.html>

Note that the wildflower walk is scheduled on the same day as the Potomac Watershed cleanup described on page 5. The Island coordinators of that event extend an invitation to the flower walkers to participate in the potluck picnic lunch.

—Jane Winer and photos by David Winer

It's time for Spring cleaning...

Saturday, April 6, is the 14th Annual Potomac Watershed cleanup. Volunteers from Maryland, DC, Virginia, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania will work to help clean the Potomac River and its watershed. Last year, people from 16 counties and 2 cities joined together to remove tons of trash from the Potomac Watershed. **For the past few years, Sycamore Island has been an official site for the cleanup.** We've removed several tires, huge amounts of styrofoam, lots of balls, and many,



many bags of trash from the river. Last year's hard working volunteers included Trip Reid, John and Ann Marie Cunningham, Nell Hennessy, Frank Daspit, David and Carson Whitmore, Maria Stenzel, Sarah Clark, Judy Lentz, Jim Drew, Noah, Elias, and Amelia Fatsi, and the Judson/Esch family. We hope to have an even bigger turn-out this year. With your help, we can make this year's clean-up our best yet.

The clean-up starts officially at 9:00 a.m. and lasts until noon, and is followed by a potluck lunch in Island tradition. Last year's repast

was delicious, with chicken, burgers, lasagna, figs, fruit, cheese, bread, and sweets. In past years, the cleanup has not only been a great success in preserving and beautifying our river, but also in connecting members and their families.

Mark your calendars and join other Islanders to do good, have fun, meet great people, and eat well. We will provide work gloves and trash bags. Please dress to get a bit dirty (and bring a contribution for the pot luck if you can). We hope to see you this year!

—Jennifer Esch and Vicki Judson

—photos from last year's cleanup by Vicki Judson



Winter Mood

Photographer Maria Stenzel came down to the Island to illustrate Paul Staunton's piece on winter canoeing (*February Islander*). The occasion coincided with the one snowy day we had this winter.

Included here are a few more of her efforts on that lovely dark afternoon.



A deep cloud cover hung low over the river after the snow stopped falling.

Maria's lens-views captured the somber beauty that settled in around the Island.



Maria Stenzel is working her way up the waiting list. She participates actively in Club functions and workfests. She keeps a kayak on the Island and paddles through the seasons.

Notes from the Island

Fri 1 Feb Lest there be any doubt about regarding the statistics of this year's unusually warm winter... we already have a winner in this year's polar bear contest to record the first swimmer of the year. Madeline Elfstrom went swimming last Sunday, 27 January.

Mon 4 Feb The snow showers are beautiful... but are forecast to be followed by winds gusting to 40 mph this afternoon and tomorrow. Folks thinking of visiting the Island should be mindful that this means that as a consequence there will be times when the ferry will be inoperable because of high winds.

The Island's family flock of mourning doves is growing. Looking this morning towards the sounds of their cooing... nothing could be seen at first... their plumage is a perfect match for the browns of the winter ground. But then one moved... and suddenly it could be seen that it was just one of six sitting on the ground, all but invisible when stationary.

Tue 5 Feb It was 20 degrees in the predawn light of the early morning ferry and the geese were splashing and carrying on in the water. Clearly the Island is afflicted with insane geese... as surely anyone with the wings of a goose and only half a mind would be in Florida.

Wed 6 Feb The problem began over the Christmas holidays... a plague of teenagers began it. Actually, not teenagers but twenty-somethings... even though they seemed to act like teenagers... although it could be either an indication of the times or the aged perspective of this observer. But parents or no... You all know the routine: walking in the door they are drawn irresistibly to the refrigerator, which they open and gaze into yearningly. Or leaving the TV they can spend an entire commercial interlude peering unfocusedly into the interior, presumably just watching the thermometer rise, as, just because the fridge door is open is no guarantee they will remove anything. There is a thought: the icebox as meditation tool. This despite the fact that we humped stuff down that hill for weeks in advance

so that the Caretaker's Wife could fulfill her aunty mission by emptying her purse for their munchie whims. The exception here is soda pop, where discovery is extinction. Anyway... this did not have to go on too long before the cats wandered over to see what the show was and thus we are now looking for a support group to join: humans who live with cats who are fridge gazers.

Thu 7 Feb Today we saw the first Robins on the Island... a sign and hope of spring on a day that is gray, cold, wet, and miserable. They seemed to be keeping company with a small flock of Bluebirds... also known as one of the first migrants of spring.

Fri 8 Feb Yesterday there were two swans cruising near the Captain's float. In years past we have received swan alerts from Jack Colwell, whose house up the hill affords him a good view of the downriver vista towards Little Falls and who over the years has kept an eye out for a particular group of swans that he reports spend only a day on our part of the river enroute to summer nesting grounds. Researching the records, his last reporting was on March 13, two years ago. So the swans are 5 weeks early... and perhaps a measurement of how early this spring is approaching. This is just additional evidence of the weird seasonal cycles we are experiencing. Further, the Caretaker's Wife now informs the Log that Captain John Mathews had reported possibly seeing swans almost a week ago along the towpath... and would not this be wonderful if it betokened the possibility they intended to stay in the area a while.

Today they were still in the river next to the Island, and referring to the field guide it would seem these are Whistling Swans. Starting midday the river was covered with masses of floating moss and lichen, as though somewhere square miles of rock face had been stripped of its covering. It was like some great migration... tons of it flowed by all afternoon and we had never seen anything like it. There was conjecture that the swans were feeding off of it and that this might be a contributing reason why they lingered in the

Notes from the Island (continued)

area... but the swans were not interested in it... they spent the late afternoon with their necks stretched underwater and their bottoms in the air and seemed far more interested in what was in the water as opposed to what was on the water.

Sat 16 Feb While the caretaker was on vacation, substitute caretaker Alison Levine arrived at the ferry landing this morning to find the ferry unlocked, unattached, and adrift in the slough. Howard Means was called to help, and together they fashioned two long poles together to snag and recapture the ferry. It was discovered that during Friday night, vandals had pried loose the chain links with tools, taken the ferry over to the Island, thrown away one of the life buoys on the ferry, cut the ferry dock line, cut the yellow rope that is used to raise and lower the ferry pull rope, and messed with certain caretaker possessions not inside the quarters. Fortunately, we have begun locking the quarters for the last several weeks when we leave, and thus they were not broken into.

It has been only three weeks since vandals cut the ferry pull rope and dropped it into the water... and it is noteworthy... and worrisome... that both attacks of vandalism were committed by persons with the forethought to bring tools. Furthermore, both incidents took place on freezing nights... begging the question of what kind of folks were down here then... and why. When this happens in the dead of winter... it also raises the question of what kind of threat environment the Island will face when the weather is warmer and the water warm enough for vandals to swim over at night... a problem that has been increasing the last two years.

Sun 17 Feb Yesterday's afternoon substitute caretaker, Tom Gibbon, purchased new rope and returned to the Island today to use his sailor's skills to repair the lines cut in Friday night's vandalism attack.

Thu 25 Feb When walking the Island, one can always find and see the "latest high water line" as determined by the backwater eddy detri-

tus. Sometimes this is high on the Island and is very apparent, much as a dirty ring around the tub might be. In this particular season, now officially the second driest winter on record, one must search the lower parts of the upper end of the Island to find any hint of water-deposited debris... so long has the river been low and pretending to be a lake. The weatherman indicates that this weekend we have the chance for the most rain since July... and that is forecast to only be a quarter inch.

What effects on the Island? For instance, at the upper end there is a large thicket of paw paw? Did some flood drop debris in that particular space with fruit... and if so, would it define what time of year the flood occurred... and by reverse logic, the age of the thicket and perhaps which year?

Mon 28 Feb It is loud down here! It is reminiscent of living in the heart of a great city, like the 24 hour carnival noise of the French Quarter in New Orleans, even though when picking out and identifying the loud noises one counts geese, falls and crows before airplanes and traffic. Especially the geese, who are beginning their territorial fights.

Why loud? At first thought it would seem as though still air is loud air... as there is no dopplering effect. But second thought was that it was from the fact that there was no dampening effect from the leaves... there being only hard winter surfaces to reflect sound. First one might be willing to bet on still... and then on leaves... and thus think that suddenly the primary force responsible for determining decibel level is identified. But then third and fourth thoughts and reasons occur... and it just goes to show how it is possible that the perceived correct reality/reason can change in a moment's thought. We change and reconstruct the paradigm of our life moment to moment... and never notice that we see only the surface of deep waters.

—Doc Taliaferro

Sunday Relief Caretakers March-April 2002

Date	Time	Name(s)	Telephone
Mar-03	10:00 - 2:00	Richard Edelson	301-951-0195
	2:00 - Dark	David Lyles	703-536-8692
Mar-10	10:00 - 2:00	Michael Pertschuk & Anna Sofaer	202-966-0352
	2:00 - Dark	Gene & Nancy Wathen	301-493-9499
Mar-17	10:00 - 2:00	Ted & Ann Zahn	301-229-5969
	2:00 - Dark	Jeanne Asherman	301-587-5790
Mar-24	10:00 - 2:00	Maxine Hattery	202-362-1361
	2:00 - Dark	Sherry Pettie	202-965-5366
Mar-31	10:00 - 2:00	Lucky & Bill Marmon	301-654-7893
	2:00 - Dark	Bob Henry & Dorothy Barthemes	301-229-4936
Apr-07	10:00 - 3:00	Ann & Alan Boneau	301-320-3695
	3:00 - Dark	Bobbi & Philip Brown	301-656-6991
Apr-13	10:00 - 3:00	Amanda & Peter Cannell	301-229-8658
	3:00 - Dark	Abigail & John Wiebenson	202-332-6857
Apr-21	10:00 - 3:00	Susan & Wayne Limberg	703-533-8639
	3:00 - Dark	Susan & Greg Super	703-892-1846
Apr-28	10:00 - 3:00	Michael & Beth Grant	202-234-7547
	3:00 - Dark	Judy & John Lentz	301-229-4968

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

To volunteer for Sunday relief caretaking, call

Bill & Lucky Marmon: 301-654-7893

or

Howard and Candy Means: 301-320-5270

It's a great way to spend time on the Island!

Volunteers from the waiting list are encouraged. Don't forget: Relief Caretakers sign in too!

Large Parties

No Large Parties have been reported for March 2002

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

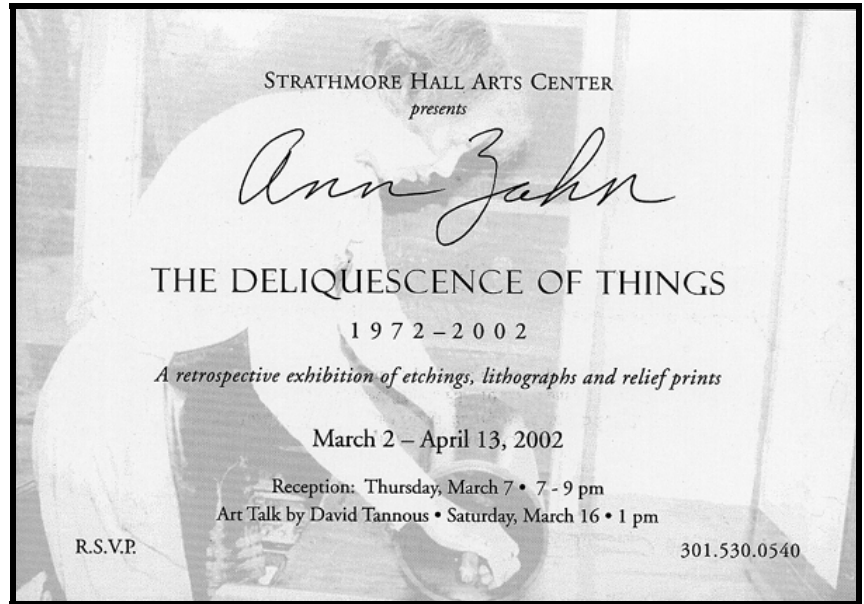
— or —

To request a form through the mail, call the Supervisor of Parties, John Noble
e-mail: jnoble@erols.com, phone: 301-320-3554, fax: 301-320-4216

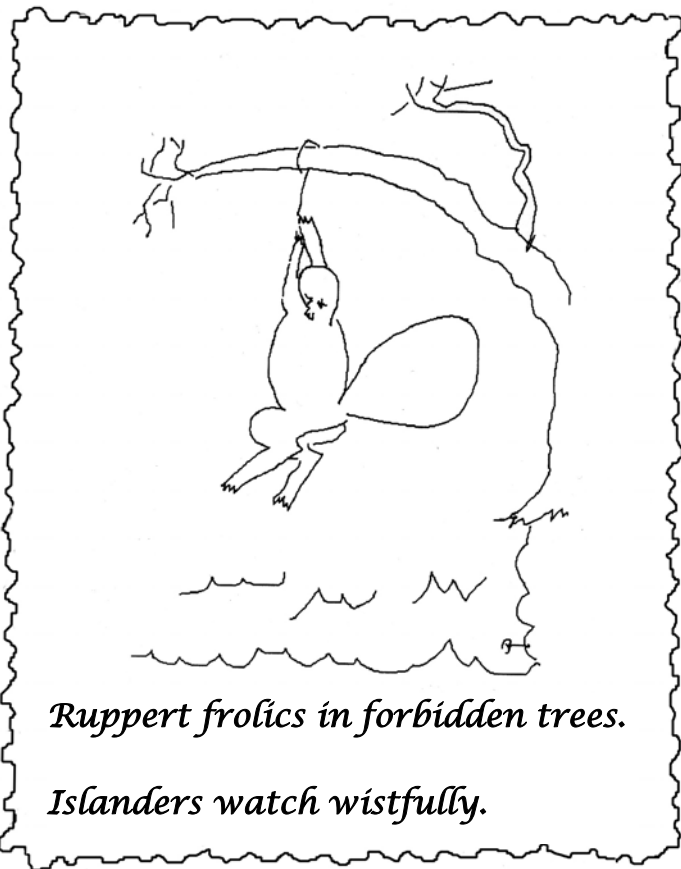
Artwork of special interest to Sycamoreans

Ann Zahn invites fellow Islanders to her exhibition of etchings, lithographs, and relief prints at the Strathmore Arts Center. Through April 13.

Ann notes that there will be a portrait of John Thomson and some river pictures in the show.



Ruppert



Cartoon by Johnna Robinson

Path Progress



Our Captain, John Matthews, recently took the initiative to approach the Park Service about improving the path down to Sycamore Island. John submitted a number of photos and suggestions about Islanders participating in the work needed to make the walkway less treacherous under foot.



The Sycamore Islander

6613 80th Place
Cabin John, MD 20818

<http://www.sycamoreisland.org>

To view this month's *Sycamore Islander* on the Internet, go to:
<http://www.sycamoreisland.org/dappled/islander.htm>

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March 2002

This Issue:

- Clubhouse utility systems in review.
- A plea to reassess and rebudget.
- Potomac cleanup set. Love to muckrake?
- Leader steps up. Wildflower walk on again.
- Last beautiful gasp of winter... in pictures.
- Several swans a-swimming.



Hannah Stein recently visited as a guest of Alan and Caroline Gelb, who were the guest caretakers that day. Hannah volunteered to pull the ferry at every opportunity... and compensated for small size with big determination!

—Photo by David Winer