



The Sycamore Islander

March, 2003

Volume 82 No. 3

President's Remarks; March Meeting

At the February meeting, I was informed that my remarks in last month's *Islander* were not entirely correct, which led to a very productive and timely discussion. While it is true that there usually is advance warning of high water on the Potomac, as happened early in January, and again following the combination of heavy rains and snowmelt the week after President's Day, there are occasions, such as occurred during Hurricane Agnes, where the rain in this area is heavy enough for a sustained period of time, that it causes an immediate rise in the water level.

The discussion that followed was most important because it led to the creation of a committee, chaired by former president Blair Bower, which will identify the tasks that must be done in order to secure the Island as best as possible. They will consider what would be affected at various water levels, and prioritize tasks accordingly. Please call Blair if you are interested in helping on this committee.

Preparation for a flood takes a significant amount of labor, and the caretaker alone cannot do it all, especially if the water rises rapidly. We need a list

of volunteers who can be contacted to help on possibly short notice. Please call or email me if you might be available to help.

Of course, the most important thing is to keep our caretaker and his family safe. At one time in the past, the Park Service was involved in evacuating a caretaker. At that time, John Thomson felt that the best way to get the caretaker off the Island was by canoe, rather than the way it was done. If you are an expert canoeist, and would be willing to help should such an occasion arise (which is less likely now, since prediction methods are so much better, and because our caretaker is quite capable in a canoe), please call or email me.

The meeting was not entirely consumed by such heavy topics. We set the dates for a number of spring events, the Potomac River Cleanup is April 5, the Spring Flower and Tree Walk is April 6, the Workfest is on April 12, and the only New Member Orientation of the year is on April 26. Mark your calendars. Details to come.

Also, please complete the survey that is included in this *Islander*. Your responses will guide many actions that may be taken this 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 Mar. 28. Earlier submissions receive priority.**

See you at 8:00 on March 12, at Carl Linden's house, at the next meeting. To get there, from Glen Echo, take MacArthur Boulevard toward DC, past the Sycamore Store. Take the next right on Maryland Avenue. Turn left on Ridge Drive. 6406 is on the right.

—Ann Marie Cunningham, President

Minutes of the February '03 Meeting

President Ann Marie Cunningham called the meeting to order at 8:15 p. m.. Those present were: Gerald Barton, Blair Bower, Nancy Bower, Betty Burchell, Ann Marie Cunningham, Alan Gelb, Caroline Gelb, Jeff Komarow, Carl Linden, George Loeb, John Matthews, Johnna Robinson, Tryon Wells, Dave Winer and Jane Winer.

The minutes, as published in the *Islander*, were approved.

The meeting began with an extensive discussion of the Club's procedures and preparations for assuring the safety of the caretaker and his family in the event of flooding, severe weather and winter conditions. A committee consisting of Blair Bower (chair), John Matthews, George Loeb and Tryon Wells was established to formulate an action plan of such procedures and preparations. The President will write an article on the subject in the *Islander* asking for volunteers to help carry out these procedures and preparations when needed.

Treasurer's Report: Treasurer Alan Gelb said there was nothing special to report this month other than routine activities.

Captain's Report: Tryon Wells also said there was little to report aside from the usual difficulties that ice conditions present in getting to and from the island. It was noted that John Matthews had obtained the crusher run gravel that

has greatly improved egress on the upper end of the path to the Island.

Editor: Dave Winer reported that he has received a number of calls from people who would be interested in doing the editor's job in exchange for a "service membership." The idea of establishing a "service membership" is currently under consideration in the Club.

A draft prepared by George Loeb and Ann Marie Cunningham of the survey to be distributed to the membership on the question of what the overall goals the Club should be and how to attain them was discussed in detail and suggestions for changes in the draft were offered by the discussants. George Loeb and Ann Marie Cunningham will revise the draft based on the discussion and the final version of the survey will be published in the March issue of the *Islander*. Any further comments on the draft can be made by e-mail.

New Business: It was decided that the Spring Flower Walk will take place on April 6th and will be led by club members RG Steinman and John Parrish. The annual Potomac River cleanup will be the day before on the 5th, the island Workfest will be held on April 12th (rain date on the 13th), and the Orientation for new members will be on April 26th, the last Saturday of the month. The question of an endowment for Sycamore Island was raised. Ann Marie will call the Legal committee (Maurice Tobin) to discuss it.

The meeting adjourned at 10:15 and repaired to the Gelbs' dining room where a sumptuous table of fine foods and libations was enjoyed by everyone present.

Next meeting: The next meeting will be held at Carl Linden's house at 8:00 p.m. on March 12th.

—Carl Linden, Recording Secretary

Issues about Membership:

Introduction to the Survey

Significant issues that could change the nature of the Club are being discussed at every meeting. Those of us who attend the meetings hold the best interests of the Club at heart; however, the question has arisen – do our opinions truly reflect the majority view of the membership and applicants on the waiting list? We've decided to find out, before we act. I hope that you will all respond. But first, I would like to provide some background on the issues that your responses will help to resolve.

There is an expectation that members volunteer to support the Club. But participation in the support of the Club and maintenance of the Island is down. This may be due to the aging of the members, and their reduced physical capabilities. Should we increase participation by bringing in new members?

Another issue is waiting list fatigue. The next people likely to become members have been on the waiting list since December 1993, and the last person on the waiting list (number 193) is likely to have to wait an even longer period of time. Many of us feel that these people, especially those who support the Club through volunteering at work fests and relief caretaking, should be given some relief from the long wait.

These questions raise the bigger question of the overall usage of the Island, whether it can sustain a larger membership or greater usage and still remain the beautiful, natural environment that we all love. It appears that the usage of the Island is gradually decreasing, along with the number of members who volunteer to operate the ferry or help at the workfests. There also are fewer children on the Island. Do we therefore want to revise the way we select new members in such a way as to encourage characteristics that we deem beneficial, like those who have demonstrated that

they will participate actively, those with children of an age who would appreciate the experiences offered by the Island, or those who will contribute their technical skills or finances to the well-being of the Island? **Any drastic change would be done in a way that people currently on the waiting list would not be adversely affected.**

There have been many suggestions as to how to resolve some of these issues. One suggestion has been to encourage (or require?) more people to assume senior membership (which is based, not upon age, but upon 20 or more years of membership in the Club, and rewards longevity by reducing the dues in half). This could be done by reducing the number of years that makes one eligible for senior status, or by adding an age criteria so that it would be based upon either age or longevity. Senior and honorary members are not included in the limit of 155 regular members, so changing eligibility could allow some applicants to move from the waiting list to regular membership.

Another suggestion has been to reward people on the waiting list who support the Club, either on a *quid pro quo* basis where they would be given usage privileges more or less equivalent to the service they render, or by advancing them up the waiting list. Another idea would be to establish a maximum time on the waiting list, after which they would automatically be eligible for membership. This would temporarily increase the number of regular members above the limit of 155.

Before we settle upon any approach, we need to determine what you, the membership, believe to be important, and what actions you believe to be appropriate. Please complete and return this survey. If you would like to speak personally to someone about any of these issues, please sign your name and so indicate in the last comments line.

Website Member Survey Form

Be sure to read the Introduction to the Survey on p.3 before responding. The Waiting List Pass, Senior membership, and background to the issues are explained there.

Identification

I. What is your current membership status?

- Regular Honorary
 Senior Applicant

II. What is your age group?

- 20-29 50-59
 30-39 60-69
 40-49 over 70

Island Usage

III. Approximately how many times did you visit the Island in the:

- Summer (Apr-Oct) Weekdays Weekends
Winter (Nov-Mar) Weekdays Weekends

IV. Do you use the Club with your:

- Children
 Grandchildren
 Friends

V. What do you do when you visit the Island?

VI. What is your impression of the level of usage of the Island currently?

- UNDERutilized
 Just right
 OVERutilized

VII. Based upon your impression of Island usage, should the number of regular members be:

- A. Increased, from 155 to _____
 B. Left as it is.
 C. Decreased, from 155 to _____

Membership Questions

VIII. Should steps be taken to reduce "waiting list fatigue"? Yes No

If yes, select any you think appropriate:

- A. Applicants who contribute to the Club

(e.g., relief caretaking, committee membership, participating at workfests, coming to monthly meetings) could:

a. Receive a one-day pass for each contribution.

b. Move a step higher on the waiting list for completing three activities (similar to the requirement for hosting a large party).

B. Abolish the three-year waiting list period for Waiting List Pass eligibility.

C. Limit the wait to a maximum number of years, after which they would become members.

If yes, how many years? _____

Other: _____

IX. Should the membership selection process be changed to favor those who meet the Club's needs, instead of considering applicants on a first-come, first-served basis?

- Yes No

X. Should senior membership be changed?

- Yes No

If yes, select any you think appropriate:

The number of years of active membership required to qualify should be:

Reduced from 20 years to _____.

Increased from 20 years to _____.

A minimum age for eligibility for senior membership should be established.

What age? _____

The change from regular membership to senior should be mandatory rather than optional.

Other: _____

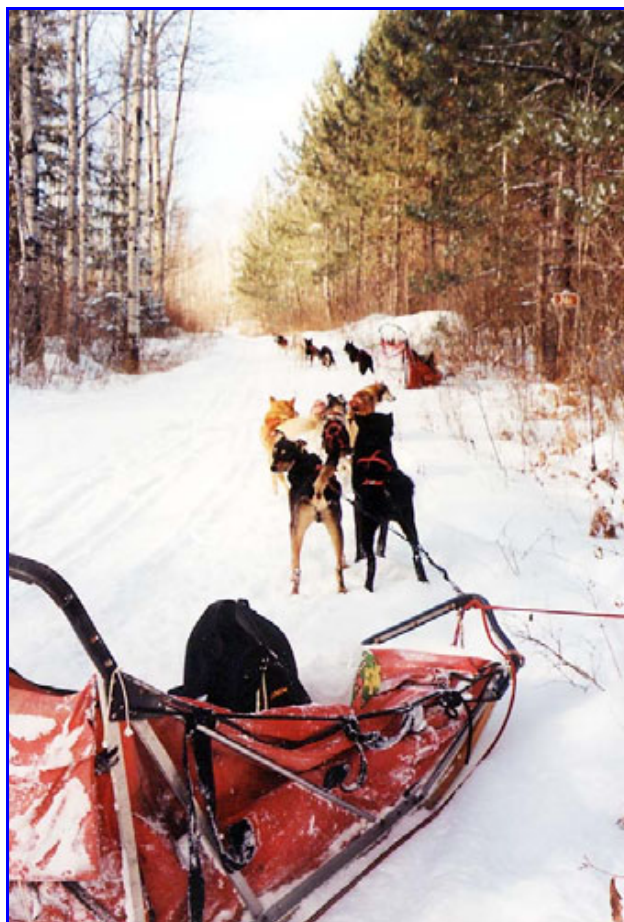
XI. The Island has needs for services or skills that aren't provided by member volunteers. Should there be a new class of membership for persons who provide substantial service to the Island that members do not provide? (See Dave Winer's article in the January *Islander*.) Yes No

Comments:

Mail completed surveys to **George Loeb, 6920 Fairfax Road, Bethesda, MD 20814**

Minnesota Boundary Waters... *In January!*

—By V. Star Mitchell



The advantages of going to the Boundary Waters in January are you can "walk on water" and there are no mosquitoes or black flies. I was in northern Minnesota January 25th—31st on an Elderhostel "Active Outdoor/Snow Activity" program. The program was held at the YMCA Camp du Nord (Camp of the North), which is 5 miles (as-the-crow-flies) from the Canadian border and 15 miles north of Ely, MN.

This was a program of dog sledding, cross country skiing, snowshoeing, and nature study. At the gate in Minneapolis, I teamed up with a fellow Elderhostel traveler, Mary Marshall, coming in from Skaneateles, NY. We had a lovely dinner at the airport in Minneapolis and then caught our connecting flight to Duluth, Minnesota.

The Elderhostel staff had previously arranged the coordinating of participants. Chris Hegenbarth was the Director of Elderhostel Programs. Chris' husband Peter McClelland operates White Wilderness Sled Dog Adventures and was the owner of the sled dogs (Alaskan Huskies). Our charming instructor and wilderness guide was Lynn Ann Vesper. This program was affiliated with Vermilion Community College who provided our excellent equipment.

After awaking Sunday morning, I realized I had forgotten my leg gaiters and the two prescriptions that I take daily. It was -14 degrees with a wind chill of about -20 degrees. My new friend Mary and I left the motel to walk the highway and to go to a sporting goods store to look for gaiters. Luck was with me and the store had them for \$20. In order to get my two prescriptions, we trekked a long way in a howling wind across an eight-lane highway to a drugstore.

Gale (so named because he was born in a gale storm) drove from the northern tip of Michigan in a driving snow storm. He was driving 20 mph in Michigan and thought he would not be seeing Duluth until sundown. When he got into Wisconsin there was no more snow. Due to the snowstorm, Gale was an hour late arriving at the motel. We then drove north 125 miles to the YMCA Camp du Nord.



We had a nice cabin with two bedrooms and a half bath on the ground floor, one bedroom, full bath, kitchen, large dining/living room, and stone fireplace on the second level. The loft contained two bedrooms. The first night the heat downstairs was not working and my room was 50 degrees. After that the management got me an electric heater and my cold room problems were solved.



For all of our meals, we had to walk ¼ mile to the mess hall (right on frozen Lake Burntside). Every morning it was extremely cold, usually below zero, but one morning it was -29 degrees. By the time I got there, my eyelashes and nose hairs were frozen. A wonderful meal and a roaring fire in the big stone fireplace always greeted us.

Dogsledding is an exhilarating experience. The temperature was 4 degrees and my feet and hands froze (not literally), but the dogs were just so happy to go to work. The musher of my sled, Mike Neal (trains dogs for the Iditarod), is a big 6'3" man with a deep voice, but the noble dogs were happy to obey my commands of "Gee!" "Haw!" "Let's go!" "On by!" And "Whoa!" Mike and I were the "sweep" sled and Ryan Savolainen led us through the trails and across the lake.

The sled hits a lot of bumps and there is a concern that your feet might bounce off of the runners (they are usually under snow), or that you might not step on the drag soon enough or hard enough and ultimately run over your dogs going down a hill. Also, there is apprehension that your foot might slip off of the claw break, and with my weight, I pretty much needed to stand up on the claw break with both feet. There are no reins or whips, but these loyal, well-trained beasts (man/woman's best friend) are so utterly eager to please.

The second day out on the lake, one of the sleds hit a thin ice pocket, the ice broke, and some of the dogs went in the water. With the help of the instructor and the lead dogs of that sled (who did not go in the water), the wet dogs were quickly pulled out. They shook off, rolled in the snow and said with big dog smiles, "Let's go!"



We skied a mile out on Hegman Lake to observe some Indian pictographs. They were worth seeing. Need I say, we had the entire lake to ourselves. The second day out on snow shoes, a deer killed by a wolf was found. We visited the Wolf Center and through the window I got some wonderful pictures of a captured wild wolf.



At night we had lectures and viewed slides about wolves, sled dogs, nature, and Minnesota folklore about animals. If you happened to have any down time, there were videos to watch about all of the above.

One night, we went out into the middle of frozen Lake Burntside and howled to the wolves. We thought we heard faint and distant answers to our calls. In that clear and crisp environment, I had not seen so many stars in the sky since I was a kid lying in the grass on a summer's night in Tennessee.

One afternoon after a morning of skiing, Gale, Suzanne, and I drove into Ely. Ely is known as the "Canoe Capital of the World." The area offers the best access to the famed Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and Quetico Provincial Park. Ely is encompassed by the Superior National Forest, which has 2,021 lakes over 10 acres in size with a total of 314,545 acres of water, plus 1,975 miles of streams. Within the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, 1,000 lakes of 10 acres or more in size are accessible by water. In winter, cross-country skiers, snowmobilers, and dog sleds are in their glory as they traverse the hundreds of miles of well-groomed trails in the area. The area has an average annual snowfall of about 80 inches

In Ely, we checked out the Super Surplus, gift shops, and the outfitter stores, all of which are my



kind of stores. I loved the winter wear that they had for sale—fur hats, mukluks, wool pants, thick, thick mittens,

mitten inserts, wool shoe liners, anoraks, balaclavas, and everything else one needs for the nippy weather. Of course, there were also canoes, PFD's, paddles, and other boating equipment. The Ely people were also beginning the carving of ice sculptures for the Ice Sculpture Festival, so we checked out the local ice artwork of the town.



The last night, there was an activity in which I did not participate. In the 20-year-old Finish sauna, you were supposed to get as hot as a firecracker, run down an ice covered wooden plank, and jump into a hole in Lake Burntside. Although I did not check the outside temperature, I'm sure it was around zero.

The manager of the camp had carefully sawed through three feet of ice in the lake, put a ladder in the water, and set an oil lantern on top of all of the ice that he had sawed out of the hole

Mary and I found our way in the dark to the sauna and checked out what was going on. Some people just did the sauna and left, but four brave souls did jump into the hole in the lake. By the fire that night, no one could shut up their bragging

One must be 55 years old to join Elderhostel. However, they made an exception for me and let me in at 39. Not every program is "Active Outdoor," they have "normal" trips all over the US and the world. I had previously done two trips—one of 3 days in Gettysburg studying the Civil War and 19 days across the US retracing the footsteps of Lewis and Clark. Elderhostel's trips are always excellent and I highly recommend them.

—photos by Star Mitchell and Dan Eaton

Star Mitchell is (obviously) an active outdoors-woman. She enjoys whitewater trips in warmer climes, and is Sycamore's Liaison to the Canoe Cruisers Association.



Snow people enjoy canoeing and swimming too!

Above-freezing temperatures February 9 made for an ice-free ferry crossing as Joe Hage greeted us for our stint as relief caretakers.

And the melting snow made for perfect conditions to do some snow sculpting. Our intrepid canoeists were outfitted with coonskin hat courtesy of Joe, a cap from the Lost & Found Box, some fragments of charcoal briquettes for eyes, blown-down branches for limbs, and of course life jackets and paddles from the

club. Joe helped us sculpt the canoe around Lewis and Clark, as he came to call our snow people. Only two visitors, our neighbors Nancy and Roman, came to the island that day to see the handiwork. But we wondered what the resident wildlife must have thought of these mysterious paddlers.

—Relief caretakers
John, Susanna and Polly Membrino



Annual Flower Walk scheduled.

Widened subject matter offered by new leaders.

You may not receive the April issue of the *Islander* in time to plan for the flower walk this year, so this is your notice to put on your calendar: it will be **Sunday, April 6th**, led by Islanders, RG Steinman and John Parrish. **People on the waiting list are encouraged to come along.** We'll meet at 10:00 at the ferry steps. From there, we'll amble upstream toward lock 7, about one-half mile.

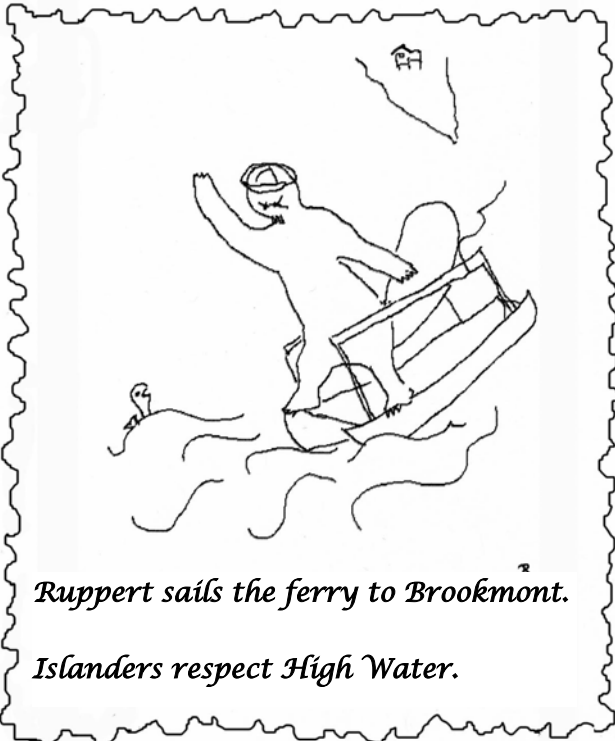
Our focus will be on blooming wildflowers and trees and shrubs. Our destination is a giant, rare Shumard Oak and we will keep an eye out for the uncommon Chinquapin Oaks. If our timing is right, we can expect to see the rare White Trout Lily, Wild Blue Phlox, Golden Ragwort, Virginia Blue Bells, and other herbs, flowering and not. Along the way, we will encounter the more common and magnificent floodplain trees, including

Silver Maple, Box Elder, Hackberry, Black Walnut, and Sycamore, and some of the typical floodplain plants such as Spring Beauty and Yellow Trout Lily.

Due to frequent floodings and disturbance, the Potomac River Gorge harbors the highest concentration of rare plants in the State of Maryland, if not the mid-Atlantic. This disturbance in the alluvial floodplain soil brings many non-natives, so we will take some time to learn what is native and what's not.

Bring a lunch and some water. We can picnic together back at the island, and perhaps do some more botanizing there. The plant expedition should conclude around 1:00. We will lead the hike rain or shine, unless it is a deluge. Call RG Steinman or John Parrish if you have any questions, 301-565-2025.

Ruppert



Ruppert sails the ferry to Brookmont.

Islanders respect High Water.

Cartoon by Johnna Robinson

In touch with Joe...

My daily log this past month was predictably filled with not-so-unique stories of the "Storm of '03" and meticulous accounts of the post-storm river levels. This month I've watched this dynamic river change from solid ice (strong enough to skate on), to clear, soothing, emerald green, to the threatening muddy brown torrent it is right now.

I like winter and I'm so glad that we finally got some good winter weather around here. I feel so lucky to happen to be living on the Island during this record-setting season. The Island has been so beautiful these days, especially when the sun shines on the snow and the water and on the dazzling shapes and forms created by the ice. Sure there are some inconveniences to living here but they are easily outweighed by the advantages of being able to ice-skate right outside my door or to canoe around the Island after a snow-



Joe manages to get his family off the Island for some winter recreation in the big snow of February. Top conditions for sledding and snowshoeing —photo by Dave Winer

fall. I did some sledding and I got a chance to try snow shoeing for the first time. The kids and I loved it, thanks Dave. This winter has also been special because I haven't had to commute back and forth to work on those days when the weather has turned our roads into congested nightmares. That is definitely a plus.

Winter is also a great time to observe the wildlife around here. To my surprise I've been noticing more fauna, or evidence thereof, than I ever would have expected for this time of year. The snow on the ground allows me to track the animals and there are no leaves on the trees for them to hide behind. Another thing that might bring these animals out of hiding is that for many it is the beginning of the breeding season. This month I've seen Bald Eagles, beaver, Hooded Mergansers, Common Mergansers, an American Coot, two Black Vultures hovering over a deer carcass snagged on a branch and two fuzzy little black things that might have been a breeding pair of mink. The frozen conditions have



An American Coot walks on ice near the ferry.

—photo by Joe Hage

allowed the fox to venture out to the middle of the river. It was awesome to see the silhouette of a fox out on the ice one night as the last rays of the sunset faded. Like the river, this whole ecosystem down here is very dynamic. The plants and animals are always changing, one phase leading to the next with no clear separation between the seasons



Beaver tracks and a sapling meal. Next to the ferry.

—photo by Joe Hage

I put a door on the men's locker room, for all you modest guys, and I did some other rearranging and cleaning in there. What I did was a big improvement and it makes it a little nicer to go in there but I still haven't done the painting and that should help quit a bit too.

About the flood or the no-flood. The most interesting part is that the weather service called *me* to warn me of the possibility of a flood. I didn't even know they had my number. It did seem like we had all the ingredients for a repeat of the flood of '96 and I had all kinds of calls from concerned members. Luckily, however, we were able to avoid any kind of submergency. —Joe Hage, Caretaker

Sunday Relief Caretakers March-April 2003

Date	Time	Name(s)	Telephone
March 2, 2003	10:00 a.m. - 2:00	Susan and Howard Weiss	301-320-3766
	2:00 p.m. - dark	Elissa Free & Bill Nooter	202-537-1434
March 9, 2003	10:00 a.m. - 2:00	Tom Hylden and Shelly Davis	301-951-4156
	2:00 p.m. - dark	Susan and Tove Elfstrom	703-533-5537
March 16, 2003	10:00 a.m. - 2:00	Meg and Charlie Jones	301-229-1917
	2:00 p.m. - dark	Alison Levine and Bob Palermo	301-320-4353
March 23, 2003	10:00 a.m. - 2:00	Sarah Duggin and Kirk Renaud	301-718-9632
	2:00 p.m. - dark	Susan and John O'Sullivan	202-362-6211
March 30, 2003	10:00 a.m. - 2:00	Tom Lott	202-362-8282
	2:00 p.m. - dark	Jack Sanders	703-799-6624
April 6, 2003	10:00 a.m. - 3:00	Rich Lodish	301-656-2148
	3:00 p.m. - dark	Norman and Nancy Metzger	202-546-1034
April 13, 2003	10:00 a.m. - 3:00	Pat and Richard Roth	202-686-0270
	3:00 p.m. - dark	Warren and Ann Brown	410 295-0377
April 20, 2003	10:00 a.m. - 3:00	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
	3:00 p.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
April 27, 2003	10:00 a.m. - 3:00	Steve Newman and Mary Tisdale	703-528-4352
	3:00 p.m. - dark	Barbara and Stott McCoy	301-320-4322

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

To volunteer for Sunday relief caretaking, call Candy Means: 301-320-5270.

Volunteers from the waiting list are encouraged. It's a great way to spend time on the Island!

Large Parties

No Large Parties are scheduled for the month of March.

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



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/spackle/islander.htm>

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March 2003

- Membership matters moving modestly. Survey form seeks sense of members.
- Famous canoeing area has many other charms in winter.
- Snow People find recreation at Sycamore.
- An opportunity to botanize if April ever arrives.



Kaylen goes off to school in an unaccustomed mode—on foot. —photo by Joe Hage