



The Sycamore Islander

June, 2003

Volume 82 No. 6

President's Remarks; June Meeting

One spring day I was walking along the towpath just below the Island, and I saw three geese with four goslings swimming in the river. They were headed downriver, toward the dam, when the noise of a cyclist startled them. The geese all turned and headed upriver against a strong current. Unfortunately, the little goslings, try as they might, were unable to make any headway against the current. One of the geese looked back, and saw their dilemma. She turned, circled back, took position just in front of them, and started back upstream. The little ones, paddling in her wake, were able to make progress upriver. I'd always thought that the mother leads the way because she knew where they were going. I hadn't realized that it was done for the same reason that geese fly in formation – to break the currents and make the journey easier.

Sometimes the Island does that for me, breaks up the currents that are pushing me in the wrong direction, and makes things a bit easier for a while. Hopefully, the water levels will drop soon, and we can all begin to enjoy the Island again. The high water again prevented our meeting from being held on the Island, and this time, Carl Linden came to the rescue. At the last minute, he invited

the meeting to his home. We had a very sociable evening, with the most important item on the agenda was the great pleasure of bringing some new members into the club. Afterward, there was a chance to get to know each other better. Hopefully, the when the meetings can be held on the Island, we can continue the social time. Plan to come for a picnic prior to the next meeting, which will be at 8:00 on June 11. See you then.

—Ann Marie Cunningham, President

Minutes of the May 14 , '03 Meeting

Because of high water, the meeting was held at the home of Carl Linden. President Ann Marie Cunningham called the meeting to order at 8:10 p.m. Those present were Ann Marie Cunningham, Fran Short, Jeff Komarow, Norman Metzger, Dorothy Fall, Carl A. Linden, Bill Marmon, Jim Drew, Alan Gelb, John Stapko, Joe Hage, Dave Winer, Tryon Wells, Terry Murphy, and Peter Winkler.

Minutes: The April minutes as published in the *Islander* were approved.

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 **new** Editor, Norm Metzger, 638 G Street SE, Washington, DC 20003-2724. Text and graphics may be sent as email attachments to nm2@bellatlantic.net in all common formats. **Note to submitters of announcements, articles, or letters: The deadline for inclusion in the July issue is receipt at the Editor's address on June 16. Earlier submissions receive priority.**

Minutes of May 14 Meeting (continued)

Treasurer's Report: Treasurer Alan Gelb circulated a chart for year 2002 showing budgeted and actual expenditures. We came in at 103% of budget, because of expenses associated with the replacement of the caretaker. So far this year, we are good shape. Alan will report again at the end of the summer.

Membership Report: Membership Secretary Bill Marmon reported that several members had requested to go to inactive status: Albert Brown and Martha Burgess, Ken Murphy, and John Smith. Brown and Burgess have moved to Annapolis; the latter two are remaining in the area, and their requests were approved by a show of hands. Taking those transfers to inactive status into account, as well as some resignations and transfers to senior status, Bill reported that we had seven openings for new members. The meeting voted on and approved membership for Paul Lang and Joan Barron, Roger Herst and Judith Bader, Mary Ann Stein, Craig Iscoe and Rosemary Hart, Joseph and Luisa McBride, Hester Ohbi and Robert Beauchamp, and Robert and Betty Brown. The application of Elaine Shannon and Dan Morgan was passed over because they had not attended an orientation. They were made first on the waiting list, which is now down to 170 applicants.

Caretaker's Report: Caretaker Joe Hage reported on the recent near-completion of work on the well. The appearance of the water, Joe reported, is excellent, but it has not yet been tested. Water pressure is also improved. In discussion, it was agreed that the contractor's plans and drawings for the well would be maintained in a file by the Captain.

President's Report: President Ann Marie Cunningham reported that she would look into the feasibility of a Mid-summer's Night Party

again this year. She will also see to the scheduling of the regatta.

Canoeing Report: Canoeing Supervisor Jim Drew reported that member Frank Daspit will conduct a canoeing class on the Island on May 17, weather permitting.

Editor's Report: Dave Winer reported that the June issue of the *Islander* would be the last one edited by co-editors Dave and Jane Winer. Norman Metzger will be taking over. Dave encouraged everyone to help Norman by submitting items in a timely manner.

Old Business: The meeting took up the proposed amendment to the Standing Rules, published in the May *Islander*, that would entitle an applicant who assisted in Club operations or maintenance to a day pass for use of the Island. After discussion, the motion carried, as amended: in 2004 and thereafter, the applicant must have attended a formal club orientation. In discussion, it was agreed that guest passes would be maintained by the caretaker and the captain, to be given to applicants consistent with the rule.

Tryon Wells asked about current efforts to revise our Membership Rules. In response, Vice President Jeff Komarow stated that he is forming a committee to assemble demographic information about the membership, which we can then use to think about rules revisions.

Announcements: The Canoe Cruisers downriver canoe race will take place June 14. The next Club meeting will be held June 11.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30. Refreshments were served by our host, Carl Linden.

— Peter Winkler, Recording Secretary

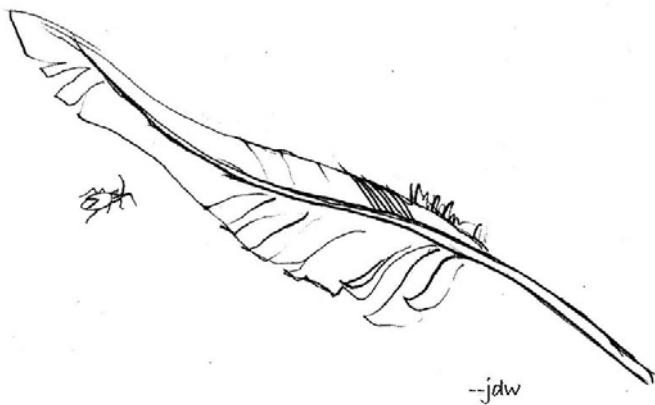
Editor's Farewell

This issue of the *Sycamore Islander* is our last production as Editor. When we started five years ago, we had no idea how much we would become involved in the Club as a result of this job. We look back and realize that our reward has been getting to know and work with so many Islanders in getting out all those issues. A learning experience, indeed!

From the first, we wanted to live up to the standards of the former Editor of so many years, John Thomson. We always considered how he might approve of our efforts to carry on his wonderful work, and we know that Norm Metzger is so well qualified and so enthusiastic that the newsletter will continue to flourish under his editorship.

Of course we thank the contributors who have worked so diligently to produce the various pieces that they volunteered, in some cases with a little arm-twisting. Remember, the *Islander* is written by Club members and patient "wait listers," not by the Editor. Please continue to give Norm the same support.

—David and Jane Winer



LOCKER ALERT!

If you have a locker on the Island and you want to keep it, please contact me so I can label it. I'm trying to determine how many lockers are available for the other members to use. Also if you are interested in having your very own locker on the island please let me know. Thanks for your help!

—Your Caretaker, Joe

The Island's irascible beaver, Ruppert, is vacationing in Iceland this month.

In keeping with our recently started tradition, we are pleased to announce the third annual

Midsummer Night to Midsummer Sunrise Party on the Island

June 21

All members and everyone on the waiting list
are invited to join in this delightful event.

- ⇒ Night Fishing
- ⇒ Marshmallow Roasting
- ⇒ Singing
- ⇒ Night Canoeing
- ⇒ Tenting
- ⇒ Early Morning Fishing



Bring sleeping gear, and be there for a delicious dinner, festive evening, charming night, and eye-opening morning breakfast. Arrive after 4: p.m. on Saturday, and depart whenever it pleases you.

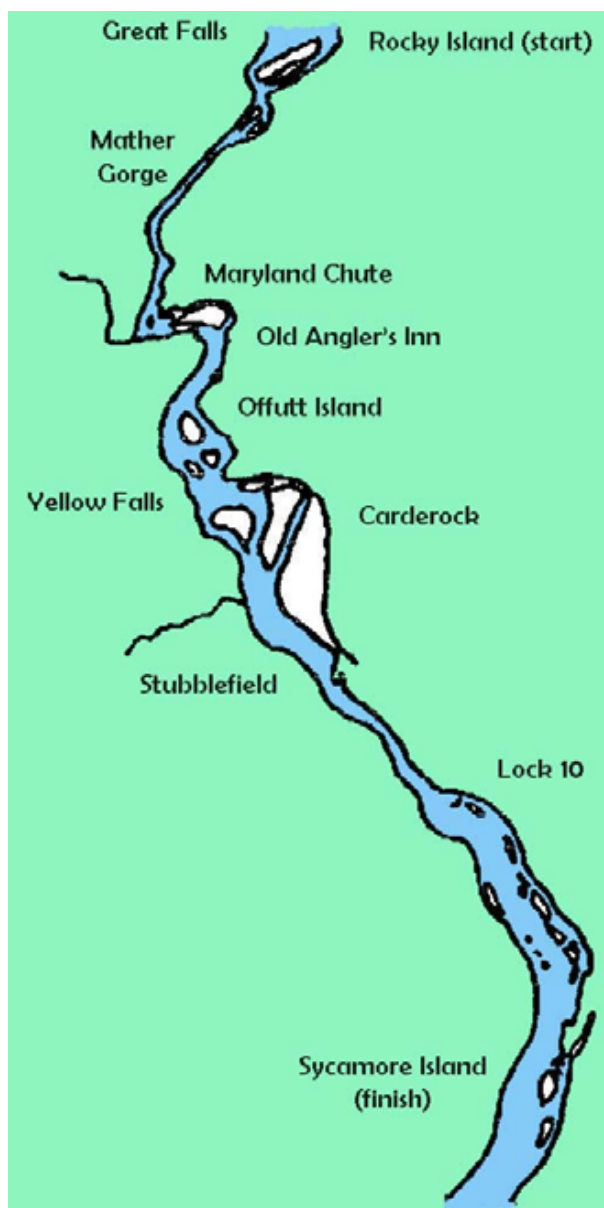
Please bring a side dish for dinner (a dish to share), the Club will supply the burgers, etc. and drinks. Sunday morning breakfast will feature French toast and hot beverages. We will plan on campfire stories and maybe some songs by attendees after dinner. The series on Stonehenge will continue in honor of the midsummer sunrise, and we trust a good time will be had by all.

We hope to see you all there! —The Entertainment Committee

48th CCA Downriver Race: Be there on June 14!

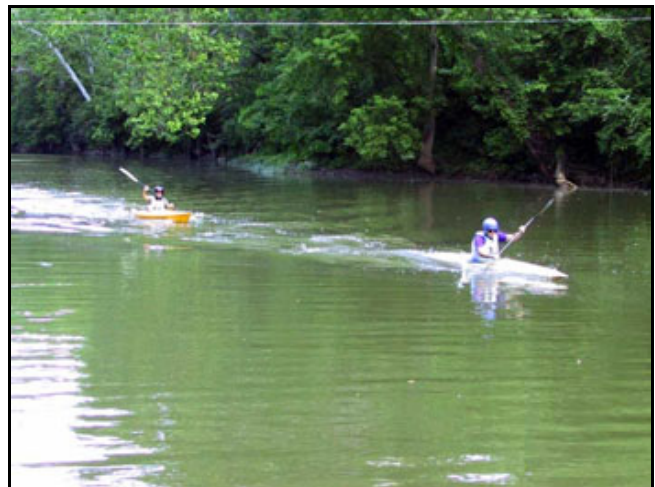
—By V. Star Mitchell, Race Liaison

Sycamore Island will be hosting the 48th Canoe Cruisers Association and the Bethesda Center of Excellence Downriver Race June 14th. Sign-in begins at 9 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. at Great Falls Inn (Maryland). The race is down the Potomac River from Rocky Island to



Sycamore Island. As usual, our Sycamore Island Club will supply cookies and lemonade for the racers. If the river is over 5 feet, the race will start at Old Anglers or may be cancelled.

This is a race for ANYONE from the pros to parent/child tandem teams. The fee at the sign-in is \$25. For more details go to <http://ccadc.org> and click on *Potomac Downriver Race*. Do join the fun and paddle the race!



CCA '02: The Sycamore Island ferry rope finish line.

If you do not wish to paddle, the CCA needs LOTS of VOLUNTEER helpers. Get involved, NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY (on-the-job-training)! They need safety boats, starters, finishers, boat inspectors, shuttles, and general gophers. One easy job is to just come down to the Island that day and "hang out" to show your support for the Club and for the race. If you can, please bring one or more JUGS of WATER for the racers. If you can help with any other activities, please call me at 301-530-3252 or e-mail me at:

kayakingvstar@aol.com.

Star Mitchell is Sycamore Island's Liaison with the Canoe Cruisers, and is active in both clubs.

A Little Day Trip on the Cacapon

—by David Winer

When Tryon Wells asked Jane and me to join his friends for their annual run down the Cacapon River, we immediately agreed. I had paddled this lovely stream in West Virginia a few times, but more than thirty years ago. Memories returned of clear water flowing through a charming semi-wild valley and fascinating forests and cliffs all around. This has been a favorite stream for novice to intermediate white-water paddlers for a long time—I looked it up in a 1959 river guidebook: “A small fast stream, giving wonderful white water sport in extremely beautiful scenery.”

Our fiberglass canoe down at Sycamore Island is the only one we have that is suitable for rocky river travel so the evening before I paddled it down the canal to Lock 6, where Jane met me to put it on the car. The early forecast the next morning included a front moving through with a chance of tornadoes. Hmmm, something to mull over. But we set off with hopes that the weather would have passed through by the time we reached the meeting place at Capon Bridge.

Windshield wipers thumped all the way. Jane even had to use the overhead light to see her crossword puzzle. When we got to the river we could see that the recent spell of wet weather had swollen the stream to alarming proportions, but none of the other paddlers seemed overly concerned. In addition to Islanders Tryon Wells, Peter Jones, and Holly Syrrakos, we had Caroline and Eliza Hazard, Cathie Faint, and Joe Hage’s brothers, Steve and Peter. Quite a compatible bunch as it turned out. We ran a shuttle, leaving our cars at the take-out bridge downstream, then set off in five canoes, donning parkas against the lingering rain.

Initially, the current moved us along quickly and there were no difficulties--none of the usual rocks to avoid since they were deeply submerged. This piece-of-cake situation called for a reality alert from our former Caretaker, Peter



The group made good speed in the swift current.

Jones, and Holly Syrrakos who had made this trip with Tryon often: we would probably encounter standing waves to smash through instead of having to maneuver through frequent rocky passages. Oh, how true this prediction turned out to be!



What’s a little rain when you’re having a good time?

Standing waves require the paddlers to enter perpendicular to them so as not to broach sideways and then capsize as the waves wash in over the gunwales. It’s really not supposed to be difficult—just plough straight ahead and enjoy the smash, smash, smash, and the exhilaration. And that is indeed the way it worked for a while. But the waves began to increase in size after a few miles. Before long we would need to bail out water coming in over the bows. Soon we had spills

and frequent stops for emptying the boats. In spite of these setbacks I must note that we were having a grand time. Everyone had come prepared for dunkings with dry clothes in water-proof bags, and the water was not so terribly cold.



When we reached the rapids it was a different river. Here, Peter Hage manages to avoid a drop-off.

I had a special reason not to capsize though—a digital camera to keep dry and at the ready. So I was tying very hard to find the best passages through the rough spots. Nevertheless, there were rough spots around nearly every bend, and eventually one caught us. As we swept around a hard left turn the canoe angled straight for a branch off the right bank, hanging about two feet over the water. As Jane crunched into it she rolled sideways and the canoe rolled with her. The branch was way too thick to bend, about four inches thick, so I just latched on with both hands and hung there as the boat swept on under me and capsized.

It's interesting, what goes through one's mind at a moment like this. I watched Jane and the canoe bobbing along and could see that she was o.k., with help from the other canoes waiting below. My only thought was to see if I could

keep that electronic camera in my breast pocket from going under. Somehow I was able to slip under the branch, stretched out horizontally by the current, and hand-over-hand, make it to shore. The camera never went completely under water, but was so wet that it stopped working. Arrggh. Fortunately, putting the soggy camera in a dry bag at that point saved it from total ruin at the next major encounter with the river.

We came to a long stretch of water with unavoidable standing waves and lots of them, one after another. These waves were higher than the freeboard in our canoe, so each one managed to slop water in as we ploughed through—and of course each time that happened the boat got less buoyant, and the next wave deposited still more water. We ran out of freeboard before we ran out of waves as the canoe simply settled into the drink. The others managed to stay afloat to aid us as we drifted into calmer water. At this point Jane and I were happy to hear that the take-out was near. And we soon discovered that our ancient dry-bag had leaked so much that the clothing inside was much too wet to use.

Before long everyone was loading up cars and taking group snaps. Some stayed in the area for more canoeing, some went to a resort for the night, and some of us cruised back home in warm cars in time for supper.



Survivors at the take-out. Wet, cold, and happy.

Afloat photos by the author, before his camera got wet; dry land photo by Peter Hage.

Well Repair

--By Joe Hage

The day had finally arrived and they were on their way to begin the work on the Sycamore Island well. All of the preliminaries had been taken care of. The contract with Easterday Well Co. had been signed and Frank Easterday had brought down his foreman, Lester, the week before to look things over. I made the important call to the Park Ranger to get permission for the trucks to drive on the towpath. And of course I made sure that I had all the laundry and dishes done and that I had plenty of fresh water stored, since I might not have running water again for five days.



The Easterday crew measuring and testing the new installation behind the Caretaker's quarters.



At the ferry landing. Well digging operations call for lots of equipment and materials. All hauled over on the ferry.

It was a perfect spring day when Lester and his crew showed up. The river was at a nice safe level and everything went smoothly. The men were busy unloading tools and equipment from their truck by the time I arrived with the ferry. They had a little heavy-

duty wagon that they used to quickly load the ferry. There were four of them, and two other, younger guys were going to show up later when it was time to move the gravel. Naturally, they had many questions about the island and what it was like to live here, but they wasted no time in getting the old well dismantled and our pump disconnected.

The first thing they wanted to do was to flush out the well. Over time, large amounts of sediment had settled in the bottom and needed to be washed out. They were able to pump water from the river to do this. They then lowered another pump down into the well to pump it out. Now they could inspect the condition of the bottom of the well as well as the sidewalls. They invited me to look down into the shaft and I was amazed

at what I saw. The shaft is 24 feet deep and I could easily see down to the bottom. The walls were lined with what looked like 50-gallon drums with the tops and bottoms cut out. These lined the walls for the first 20 feet or so but then the shaft opened up at the bottom. The last four feet of the hole was wider and the sides were hidden in darkness. I could see big rocks and pieces of concrete on the bottom. I was thinking that it looked like a cave when I realize it was actually an underground stream. When the pump was turned off the well filled up quickly, which was a good sign, plenty of water.

The big boss, Frank Easterday showed up later and he and Lester assessed the situation in the well and decided on the best strategy. It was decided that an insert of PVC tubing would be fabricated and placed inside the existing well. This insert would have a large screened section and would reach all the way to the bottom of the well/creek. Inside of this would be a smaller piece of pipe, also equipped with screens. Between the two pipes



The top of the gravel pack (surrounding the white PVC tube) is 13 feet below ground level; the well itself is much deeper, down 11 feet more.

there was to be a gravel pack, hundreds of pounds of pea gravel. The first pipe would be flush with the ground but the second, smaller pipe, from where my water was to be pumped, was to extend 4 feet above the ground for high



A day of pumping water out was needed to clear the clay from the loads of gravel placed in the well.

water protection. To seal the inside of the well they would use something called "hole filler" (Imagine!) that expands and then hardens when it comes in contact with water. And so it was done and my water was back on in four days. The most difficult part of the project must have been moving those many wheel barrels full of gravel!

The Island's tap water now seeps through the screens of the large pipe, is further filtered in the gravel and then passes through the screens of the smaller pipe where it is pumped into a holding tank inside the house. Inside the holding tank is a pressurized air bag to maintain water pressure and ensure that the pump doesn't get over worked. Our holding tank was low on air so Lester brought down his air pump and took care of that.

The water is then filtered and then finally it passes under an ultraviolet light to kill any bacteria that may be present. I'm very happy that this work was done on the well. I have improved water pressure and the peace of mind of having nice clear tap water.

Joe Hage, as the Club's Caretaker, lives on the Island year 'round.

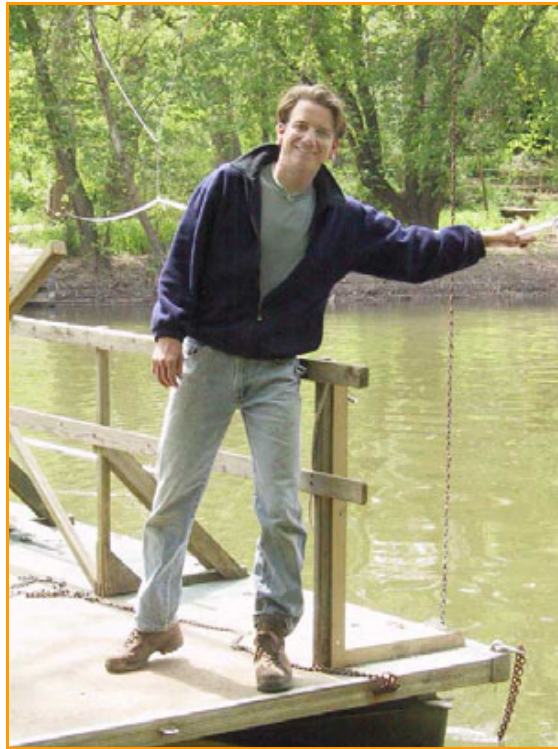
In touch with Joe...

It's been a bad month for Islanders! The rain and the high water have swamped many island picnics and parties this past month. The water level hasn't been below five feet since May tenth! I'm torn between feeling guilty because the ferry has been closed so much, and being a little angry that my first spring on Sycamore Island has seemed more like winter in Seattle. The kids and I have been able to come and go without too much trouble, but it just isn't as much fun on the Island when the floats are unreachable, the landings are under water, and when there's mud everywhere. The water is only three degrees warmer than it was over a month ago! We wish the sun would come out and that the bell would start ringing.

On the positive side, the month started out with nice warm, sunny days. It was perfect weather during that first week while they were here working on the well. The river was clear, and it was safely below the hazardous stage. I even went swimming. There is a positive side to this incessant rain as well, making it possible to paddle some of the smaller, usually drier, streams in the area. There are many great canoeing rivers and streams around, most of which rarely have enough water in them, until now. This wet spring has made it possible for me to explore some great canoeing in Rock Creek, Catoctin creek in Virginia and the Rappahannock River near Remington, Virginia. These three streams, which are normally dry boulder fields, were transformed into raging white water torrents, perfect for a day's adventure.

It has been an interesting month as far as the wildlife is concerned. The most unusual development is that a ground hog has somehow been marooned on the island and is setting up house under

the men's locker room. It's tail is a bit mangled and it seems to have a limp, I'm guessing that it must have had some type of traumatic experience before it found itself on Sycamore Island. Right now I don't see any reason not to let it stay but if it starts any trouble I'll have to evict it to the mainland. As far as the birds go, this is usually the month to watch for warblers. I have seen some of the more common warblers and I've also seen scarlet tanagers, heard vireos and have been visited by large groups of cedar waxwings. The geese and the wood ducks have finished hatching their broods and the swallows and nighthawks are here in force to eat all these bugs in the air. The jewelweed is flourishing in this wet weather. Some of these plants have reached chest height already. The raspberries are beginning to flower, and I'm looking forward to eating those in a month or so.



I got out the lawn mower, now that all the blue bells are gone, and managed to get the lawn cut in between rainstorms. I've spent some time pulling kudzu and the

mustard garlic plants that I see. I finished painting in the men's room but the big project this month has been my kitchen. This was a room that was desperate for a paint job. There were four layers of wallpaper dating back to the forties or fifties, and no painting was ever done after the new cabinets went in a few years back, so there were also many different colors showing here and there where the old cabinets had been. I also made some cabinet doors for the old shelves in the room and I must say the room looks pretty good. It is a big improvement, well worth the effort.

Looking forward to seeing you all down here in the nice, sunny and hopefully dry weather of June.
— Joe Hage, Caretaker

Sunday Relief Caretakers June-July 2003

Date	Time	Name(s)	Telephone
June 1	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.	Penny and Bob McNulty	301-229-6453
	3:00 p.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
June 8	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
	3:00 p.m. - dark	Judy and Richard Hope	202-232-2445
June 15	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.	Star Mitchell	301-530-3252
	3:00 p.m. - dark	Donna Mateski	202-256-8157
June 22	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.	Toby and Janet Smith	703-553-7732
	3:00 p.m. - dark	Chris Weals and Amy Hancock	301-320-7075
June 29	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
	3:00 p.m. - dark	Janis and Richard Pappalardo	301-229-8360
July 6	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
	3:00 p.m. - dark	Jennifer Urquhart and Mike Edwards	202-244-0446
July 13	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
	3:00 p.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
July 20	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
	3:00 p.m. - dark	Whitney Pinger	202-686-5443
July 27	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
	3:00 p.m. - dark	Leanne Rees	301-365-5048

***** 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 June 2003

Date	Time	Who	What
June 4	10: a.m. to 1: p.m.	Peter Winkler	16 4th/6th Graders End of Year Event
June 7	4: p.m. to evening	Joe Hage	several friends

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: janoble@erols.com, phone: 301-320-3554, fax: 301-320-4216



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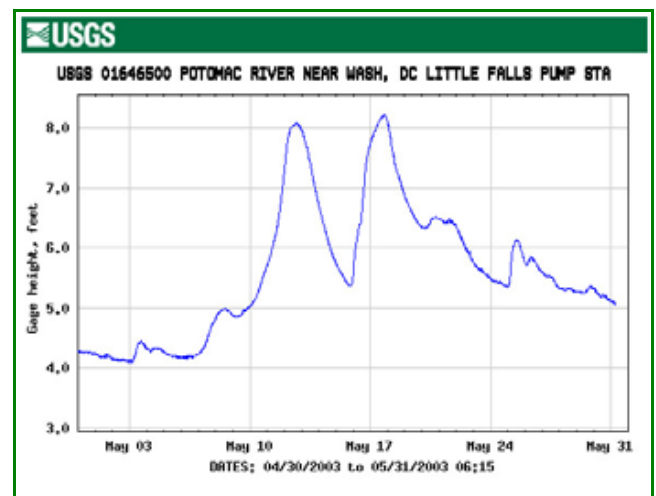
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June 2003

- New Editor, Norm Metzger, Welcome!
- Water, water... everywhere. Lots of it.
- Our well is swell.
- Cacapon Cruising.
- Midsummer Night Party is on again.



Visited the Island lately? Neither has anyone else. Current usually requires our ferry to close when the Little Falls gauge reaches five feet, exceeded in the last 21 days in May.

—graph from the U.S. Geologic Survey