

A 1988 view of Sycamore found on <http://terraserver.microsoft.com/>, provided by David Winer

The Sycamore Islander

April 2004

Volume 83 No. 4

President's Message

It's wonderful to get mail from you folks, because I would never have anything to say in this column without your ideas. A particular response to my last article reacted to the discussion of a "quiet, sleepy, secluded retreat" versus "a more lively, active, and dynamic Club." This couple suggested that the challenge "is to maintain a reasonable balance between the two tendencies." I believe that the rate of the small steps that were described in that article will ensure that the balance is maintained.

The part of the note that was even more interesting to me suggested that the combination of maintenance issues and the waiting list should be seen as an opportunity. They consider that the growth in the local area and the pressures on the waiting list are analogous to the highway situation – building more highways brings more people and more congestion. The more people in the area, the greater the pressure of people wanting to join, and so on. The couple that wrote believes that by changing the requirements for membership, we can resolve some of the maintenance issues. They believe that membership should be based upon a "sweat equity" requirement. This is a very timely suggestion, based upon our current plans to improve the caretaker's quarters. One way to contain costs will be to request volunteers to provide some of the labor. I plan to devote a portion of the next meeting for an open discussion of this suggestion.

April Meeting
Wednesday, April 14, 8 p.m.
At the Island!

To update you on the Building Committee's efforts, it finally did meet again. The river was high, but not quite high enough to force us to cancel again. Our relief caretaker was having a bit of a struggle with the high water and strong winds as she ferried us across. But it was a good meeting.

As a result, three of us will go to the County to discuss our options. Building in a floodplain generally is not allowed in order to protect wetlands. Since the clubhouse is already here, we know we can repair and maintain our current facilities, which means that the work would have to remain within the footprint of the existing building. An addition might be allowed, but our fear is that it would be considered new construction, and, therefore, would not be permitted.

In the meantime, we have two sets of architectural drawings for an addition that goes beyond the footprint. We also discussed options that would stay within the existing structure. The committee members will sketch other ideas for the committee to review and discuss. I hope that by the next meeting we will know which path to follow. I'll keep you posted on our progress.

Our next meeting will be April 14 on the Island at 8:00. Please come to hear more about the ideas of sweat equity and the building plans.

— Ann Marie Cunningham

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 Editor, Norman Metzger, 638 G Street, SE, Washington, DC 20003-2724 or by fax to 202/544-6027. Text and graphics may be sent as e-mail attachments to nm2@bellatlantic.net. **Note to submitters of announcements, articles, or letters: The deadline for inclusion in the May issue is receipt at the Editor's address by Monday, April 26th. Earlier submissions receive priority.**

Minutes of the March 10th, 2004 Membership Meeting

The meeting was hosted by John and Diane Noble.

Present: John Noble, Diane Noble, David Winer, Gerry Barton, Dorothy Fall, Harvey Resnik, Jane Winer, Jim Drew, Ann Marie Cunningham, Norm Metzger, Faith Earll, Jeff Komarow, Tammy Belden, Chris Grant, Brad Coolidge, John Matthews, Renee Dunham, and Peter Winkler

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 8:00 p.m. by John Noble's sounding of his gong.

Minutes: The minutes of the February meeting as published in the *Islander* were approved.

Communications: President Ann Marie Cunningham related two communications. First, she discussed a letter from a couple on the waiting list concerning eligibility for senior membership. In discussion afterwards, several of those present asserted that we have an obligation to follow the current waiting list in order. Any changes we make should be effective only with respect to new applicants, when the list is reopened. Ann Marie agreed that we should proceed cautiously in this area. Second, member Trip Reid also wrote concerning the size of the waiting list, and related it to the desirability of refuge in this area. Trip suggested that the Club have more of a requirement of "sweat equity" than it does now. In discussion, one member agreed that we should find some method of rewarding members who do more of the Club's work. Others agreed that we should consider the matter.

Treasurer's Report: Alan Gelb, reporting by email from Africa, advised us that the Club has now formally excluded our officers from our workers' compensation coverage. If we did not do so, our workers' compensation insurance policy would have to cover the officers, which would cost several thousand dollars.

Membership Report: Tammy Belden reported that we had no openings this month.

Tammy asked for help in determining which members could best speak to certain issues at the next new members' orientation, to be held on April 18. Those present provided names. Tammy will invite to the orientation all those near the top of the waiting list.

Islander Report: Editor Norm Metzger commended the officers for an overall grade of A- for timely submission of their reports for the March issue.

Caretaker's Report: Caretaker Joe Hage reported that we have lots of Club T-shirts remaining for sale. Joe will look into taking a CPR course. Several members had suggestions about the availability of courses.

Large Party Report: Large Party Supervisor John Noble reported that we have two large parties upcoming, one in April and one, during the canoe races, in May.

Canoe Supervisor's Report: Canoe Supervisor Jim Drew reported that the canoe float is back in the water. Gerry Barton added that we were lucky to still have both that float and the captain's float, given the unusual ice buildup between the canal and the island this year.

Building Committee Report: Next meeting, March 21 at 2 p.m.

Old Business: David Winer addressed the issue of buying a digital camera, to be kept on the Island, for use by the caretaker and the *Islander*. David has researched the issue and come up with a recommended purchase. The camera plus accessories would cost about \$200. After discussion, David's motion that we purchase the camera was approved.

Someone asked why the annual wildflower walk was set for Easter Sunday. The answer is that is when the guide agreed to lead it.

New Business: Renee Dunham stated that it would be a good idea if the Club had some large plastic bins on the Island to move things, especially during flooding. It was agreed that Renee or Joe was authorized to purchase them. John Matthews raised the issue of debris de-

posited by the storms alongside the canoe float. It might be difficult to dislodge. John also reported that the septic system had been checked this past month and that it was in good shape, for now. It was suggested, however, that we add on an additional leaching system (trench) for runoff from the washing machine. John stated that a Park Service official would like to have some Boy Scouts work on the path down to the Island. John opposes this idea, as he believes that recent Park Service work has not improved the path, and this would only make it worse. John would like to take back full ownership of the bridge, repair it properly, and pave the path. Ann Marie will speak with past president Carl Linden, a friend of the new Park Service area superintendent, to see if he can intercede with the Park Service on our behalf.

Announcements:

- Mar 21 Building Committee meeting at the Island
- Apr 2 –11 Joe on vacation. (Duncan Thomson will sub for Joe)
- Apr 11 Wildflower walk (see March *Islander*)
- Apr 18 New member orientation
- Apr 25 **Workfest**
- Apr 29/30 Commemorative C&O Canal Walk to/from Sycamore Landing (see p. five)

The meeting was adjourned at about 9:15 p.m., and all repaired to the dining room for refreshments provided by our hosts, the Nobles.

- Peter Winkler, Recording Secretary

The Building Committee Progresses

The Caretaker Quarters Building Committee held its second meeting on March 21, on the Island. After being forced by weather and river conditions to cancel scheduled meetings in December, January and February, the group finally had an opportunity to meet at the club. Various options that have been considered in the past were reviewed, suggestions were put forward and potential constraints or trouble spots were discussed. In preparation for the next meeting, members of the committee are doing some research on county regulatory requirements and developing a variety of layout ideas. The committee is made up of club members and volunteers from the waiting list: John Stapko, David Lyles, Ann Marie Cunningham, Star Mitchell, Jane Winer, Tryon Wells, John Matthews, Alan Gelb, Gerry Barton, Karl Kosok, Carl Linden, Joe McBride, Johnna Robinson, Chuck Pill, Ned Goddard, and Richard Bertaut. Former club president Jack Sanders is chair. Members of the club are encouraged to send opinions and suggestions to Jack at jsanders@werf.org or 4409 Neptune Drive, Alexandria, VA 22309.

— Jack Sanders

Reminder
Annual Club Orientation
Sunday, April 18th, 10 am to 1pm

All those on the waiting list who have not yet attended an orientation are urged to attend. The program will offer a great deal of information about the island and the Club--and includes lunch. To RSVP, volunteer, or for more information, contact Tammy Belden or Joe Belden, Membership Secretaries, at 301-320-2884 or tbel@loc.gov.

From Holly Syrrakos, Archivist: 75 Years Ago At Sycamore Island

Dear Ed:

Now that the time has come to start to work, in earnest, on the regatta scheduled for May 30th, I am beginning to wonder if it would not be better judgment to call off the affair. While some members have indicated to me that they do not believe a May regatta would be so successful this year, I have argued the opposite because I did not want to start or encourage pessimism. For this reason, I am writing you first and without having even hinted my ideas to anyone else. This means that if you disagree with me, the idea of calling off the affair need go no further.

You may recall that I disliked holding the regatta on May 30th from the start, since I thought it too early. I am still somewhat inclined to that view, though May 30th in a normal year might be all right. However, events of the past weeks or so lead me to believe that this is not a normal year. The high water and its resultant damage to the tents and the tennis court will cause tenters, —Reese, the Ackads, Bus and Jack—to work on their tents during a good part of May. Furthermore, Reese and others will work on the tennis court. Cole tells me he will be unable to paddle, in all probability, and I will not be able to paddle either. Bus may go on a trip to the west and Don Conner will not be able to put in much time practicing because of examinations. Altogether, we not only would lose contestants but the contestants who are left will not be in a position to practice as much as they should and my committee seems “shot”. Perhaps the above “flash” is pessimistic but I believe it is a fair statement and try as I might, I cannot weigh these disadvantages. Of course, a successful May regatta would start off the summer with a bang but a flop regatta would start us off with a gloomy taste in our mouths.

The way I dope it is as follows: The club will have to spend and will spend money on the tennis court this year and in the spring tennis is always in the lead at Sycamore. This being the case, why not start a tournament during May or why not start some baseball games with groups in the neighborhood? Either of these sports has a better chance of surviving and coming through with a kick than has canoe racing at this time of year....

Personally, I hate to do anything which would make it look as though we were going to back out of the regatta business and I've thought all this our pretty thoroughly. Nevertheless, I think we would have a better chance of keeping regatta spirit alive if we took care to have our regattas successful and my view of this spring's situation doesn't lead me to feel that things are very auspicious.

Another bad point about May 30th of this year is that it comes on Thursday. That is to say, there is no holiday before the day of the event in which we can all get together and handle the finishing touches. You know that our regattas pick up most of their steam just a few days before the event and if we have no holiday or Saturday beforehand it's not so good. On Labor Day we always have a half-day Saturday, Sunday and all Labor Day morning in which to get the slow ones pepped up and the four's assembled and I don't mind saying that I certainly hate to go to bat with no days beforehand in which to get the crowd going, particularly since they'll apparently spend most of May thinking of their tents and the tennis court.

Very truly yours,
[Unsigned]

From a letter dated April 25, 1929

Remember!

**Island Workfest
Sunday, April 25th, 8 am to 1 pm**

30 Years Ago: Justice Douglas Walks the Towpath

-- by David Sitomer

There once was a Justice from Oregon
who walked the canal back to Washington
he challenged the Post
to join him and still boast
of strip mining nature and go home again.
The editor walked those fine unpaved roads:
eight days and nights of trees, birds, and toads.
By the time he returned from 18 and 10,
he saw the light/was befriended by Zen.
Fifty years of Potomac wonderland, a celebration
of running ferries/picking berries/portage carries,
invites two weeks of camping on its shores.
Join the walk in Cumberland, 18 April,
a great vacation unless it pours.



-- Former member David Sitomer served as interim caretaker on Joe's vacation last year.

The C&O Canal Association is planning a through-hike of the entire 184.5 miles of the C&O Canal Towpath this spring to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Douglas' 1954 trek to save the canal. Two segments include Sycamore Landing: On April 29, a 15 mile hike from the Monocacy Aqueduct to the Landing, then, on April 30th, a 13-mile hike from the Landing to Great Falls. For details , see: <http://www.nps.gov/choh/News/douglashike.htm>

The *Post* editors wrote in January 1954 before Justice Douglas took them for a little walk:

By utilizing the old canal--no longer either a commercial or a scenic asset--it is estimated that the parkway could be built for \$100,000 a mile. The lovely Potomac Valley could thus be made available to sight-seers, campers, fishermen, and hikers with little distraction from its beauty...

And Justice Douglas's immediate response

I wish the man who wrote that editorial...would take time off and come with me. We would go with packs on our backs and hike the 185 miles to Cumberland. I feel that if your editor did, he would return a new man and use the power of your great editorial page to help keep this sanctuary untouched.

One who walked the canal its full length could plead its cause with the elegance of a John Muir. He would get to know muskrats, badgers, and fox; he would hear the roar of wind in thickets; he would see strange islands and promontories through the fantasy of fog; he would discover the glory there is in the first flower of spring, the glory there is even in a blade of grass; the whistling wings of ducks would make silence have new values for him. Certain it is that he could never acquire that understanding going 60 or even 25 miles an hour.

The *Post* editors of course accepted the invitation, and after walking the towpath and " numerous blisters and strained tendons later," the editors wrote in March 1954 that:

Many semi-wilderness stretches along the old canal ought not to be disturbed... It would be a shame, say, to invade the glen above Cresaptown, where the old drill marks are still visible; the magnificent 3,000 foot tunnel near Paw Paw, which remains a monument to the architectural and engineering genius of 110 years ago; the Roundtop Mountain area above Hancock; the stretch along the Catoctins above Point of Rocks; and of course the restored canal between Seneca and Washington which ought to be left untouched....

In Touch With Joe...

We've survived our second winter (I think it's safe to say that) and now we consider ourselves, not greenhorns, but seasoned veterans of this rustic lifestyle known as Sycamore Island. Another spring on the island and I feel the winter retreating from my bones. The return of each new plant or bird brings new excitement to this river refuge. The sun has migrated back and its giant arch has brought with it the colors and sounds of a world come alive. The seagulls have gone with the winter cold and the flocks of cormorants have filled the void, their silhouettes busy against the sky at sunset. The wood duck, the kingfisher, the great blue



Photo by Joe Hage (The Editor doesn't know either. Ask Joe.)

heron, the osprey, the bald eagle, and all my other non-winter neighbors have returned and I'm delighted with their company. The warm air has brought out our resident groundhog from its deep sleep and it is now busy trying to get fat. It's usually seen running for its hideout under the clubhouse, a piece of grass hanging from its mouth. To my amazement the bluebells and other wild flowers have emerged yet again. The way they defy gravity and break through the thick layers of mud and sediment year after year is truly incredible. The warm weather also brings out the people, and soon the beaver and the raccoon won't be our most frequent visitors.

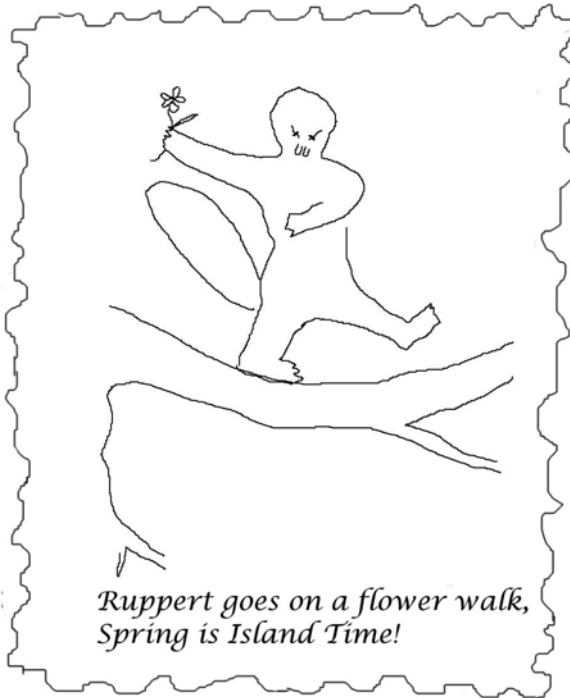
The geese have all staked out their territory and soon they will all be sitting on clutches of four or five eggs. Hiking around the island can be a little treacherous now as the geese defend their young. Please be careful and try to give the geese some space. Hopefully, they will be gone soon.

We managed to get the canoe float back in the river. What a crew we had: John Matthews, John Stapko, Sherry Pettie, Tryon Wells, Jim Drew, Gerry Barton and myself. No decision was unanimous but we worked hard all morning and got the job done. Sherry (a waitlister) earned a free weekend pass. I fixed a window and a light fixture and the two pipes that burst over the winter. The water is back on in the clubhouse so please wash your dishes, and remember to take your trash with you when you leave. I cleaned all the leaves and limbs from the top of the canoe shed and I found a big goose egg; it must have been a dud from last year.

The spring weather is great, and it's especially nice to see my daughters enjoying the island with their friends. It makes me happy to see them build a tree house or play capture the flag. That's why I moved here.

I won't be here between the second and the 11th of April. I'm taking the kids on a road trip for spring break. We're going to Florida to explore the canoe trails down there. While I'm gone the island will be under the competent supervision of my climbing partner and good friend, Duncan Thomson and his family. Please don't hesitate to lend him a hand if he needs it and please try to make him feel welcome and appreciated. Thanks, and I'll see all of you here for the work fest on April 25th!

A new Ruppert for April and the February one decoded



Ruppert

*—Created by
Johnna Robinson*



Yes, Ruppert, in the February newsletter, I was glad to see you there, up on a tree limb, contemplating goat Elmo down below. Actually, if readers were a bit mystified, I should confess, as I did at the December meeting, that on Elmo's previous visit to my house--Christmas '02--I did, following a towpath walk, ring the bell for the Sycamore Clipper to come pick us up. When Joe looked a bit perplexed on reaching us, I told him: I know dogs are absolutely not allowed on the Island, but look! Is this fellow a dog? No, he's a dwarf Nigerian goat belonging to daughter Hilary's family here on vacation from New Hampshire. There's nothing (yet) in the by-laws about goats. Joe joined the joke. Elmo thus had his first ferry ride (he loves Sailfish sailing by the way) and a quick trot around the Island with Hili and me. On this year's visit, we tried a repeat of our game on Christmas Day afternoon. But our ring for the ferry met with no response. (Maybe the Island was closed. The water was surely high.) Did you see us, Ruppert? Across the way, on the towpath. It felt good to make that stroll, and Elmo seemed happy with the freedom of it. As you don't read the *Washington Post*, Ruppert, you may have missed the account there that Elmo, unknown to us, strolling along Grafton Street that very Christmas day, was picked up by a policeman who, after an hour's play with him, called the animal rescue folk. And our family had to head out to Rockville to win Elmo's release. The news account ended: Shelter personnel relinquished the goat and said it was last seen on its owner's lap in the front seat of a Volvo. A second article in the *Post* was headlined "A Beloved Goat in the Lap of Luxury."

-- Peggy Thomson

Dan Sullivan - Early CCA Racing Activist

Long time CCAer Daniel Sullivan died suddenly Wednesday evening, March 3rd. He was 82. Dan was struck by a car and killed while crossing Clara Barton Parkway near the C&O Canal's Lock 8. Dan and his two greyhounds were in the median of the parkway and stepped into the westbound lane. The two dogs were also killed in the accident.

Dan was one of the early whitewater pioneers, first exploring many Appalachian rivers, including the New, and the Cheat Canyon from Albright to Jenkinsburg (along with John Berry, Bob Harrigan, and Henri DeMarne - their first run took two days. On warm summer evenings, all through the 1960s, Dan kept the Potomac River as his own personal treasure. After a long workday in Washington, DC, he would park at Lock six or seven, take off his business suit, and head downstream for a refreshing nightcap. He soon was slipping effortlessly down (and up) the many churning chutes of Little Falls. Dan was fascinated and exhilarated by the myriad sluice permutations of the last drop, given all the water levels and tidal changes. He never tired of that place - it was his alternate habitat. Then he would walk up the then little-used towpath, his jaunty red Klepper SL5 kayak atop his shoulder - leaning against his head.



Photo by Jim Reber

Dan also was an accomplished kayak racer, both in slalom and "downriver." As a racer, he was the perennial K1 favorite at Brandywine, Petersburg, Seneca, and Sycamore Island - slalom and wildwater. Early-on, Dan championed the development of paddle-sport in the United States, and coached many young athletes onward to the national and international stage. Dan was the "official" racing voice of the CCA in the early years, along with Bob Harrigan. Just a year ago, Dan and a spirited gang of river legends got together at Barbara Brown's house. Hair-raising exploits of derring-do were re-told anew, and during a showing of Bob Belton's "Give us a River" the sidebar commentary was stinging competitive.

Dan served as the finest possible citizen role model, and always lived life to the very fullest. There was a moving memorial service at Carderock, with more than 200 in attendance... many happy stories...over a sad affair. The scene was much like the ending of the movie Big Fish! Dan and Beverly led a fine life. Four great kids to follow on.

-- From Jim Stuart, Canoe Cruisers Association

49TH RUNNING OF CCA POTOMAC DOWNRIVER RACE MAY 16, 2004

Sycamore Island will be hosting the Potomac Downriver Race on Sunday, May 16th. At a new REDUCED rate, the pre-registration fee is being dropped to \$15 per person and \$20 per person at the sign-in. Tandem teams pay as individuals UNLESS they are a parent and child. A parent and child go for \$15 a boat pre-registered and \$20 a boat at the sign-in. Free T-shirts and a free lunch will be given at the end of the race. There will be awards for winners. 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. If the river is over 5 feet, the race will start at Old Anglers Inn. This is a race for **anyone** from the pros to parent/child tandem teams. Any kind of a boat can enter, but you need a helmet, PFD, and air bags.

For a pre-registration form and more details, go to the CCA website: www.ccadc.org and click on <Potomac Downriver Race>. If you feel that you just cannot paddle, I need **LOTS OF VOLUNTEER HELPERS**. Get involved and meet new friends! If you can help with the race (many easy jobs), please call me at 301-530-3252 or e-mail me at: kayakingvstar@aol.com.

If anyone would like to be a **sponsor** and put **your company/business** name/logo on our T-shirt for \$100, please, please contact me. This would be great advertisement for any business and you can use it as a tax deduction for a charitable contribution! We need sponsors to keep our registration fee low.

-- V. Star Mitchell, Downriver Race Chair



Dreaming of Summer: In and On the River

Rediscovering the free-for-all essence of swimming in rivers

By Harry Eyres, *Financial Times*

The pleasures of river-swimming are a fairly recent discovery for me, even though I was habituated in childhood to the bracing effects of cold sea and loch bathing. An "ah ha!" moment (as the Gestalt therapists call it) came a few years ago when I plunged with a couple of friends into the fresh and youthful river Thames at Kelmscott.

Despite spending much of my childhood and youth either quite close to or pretty much on the banks of this waterway, I'd never actually taken a dip in it, and was amazed first by the sweet-smelling and invigorating quality of the water, and then by the delicious sensation of being right at river level rather than just above it, as in a boat or punt.

This produces a "Ratty" or even ottery effect: you see the reeds, flowers and willows by the bank in a peculiarly intense light and feel somehow at one with the water.

That summer was a fine one for river swimming. High on Dartmoor, near the source of the River Teign, the same friends and I discovered a pool wide and deep enough for proper swimming, with the added bonus of a chorus of skylarks, wheeling buzzards and the surprised looks of some shaggy Dartmoor cattle finding their watering place invaded by giant anthropoid newts.

Late in the summer I tried a river about as different from the peaty, burn-like upper Teign as you could find in Britain, the surprisingly wide and stately Great Ouse at St Ives, Cambridgeshire. This St Ives, much less well known than the arty resort in Cornwall, is a handsome market town, whose chief glories are the medieval bridge and the broad river it crosses, which has not yet been robbed of its water-meadows.

Swimming there on a gentle bend of the still, warm river for half an hour of an early Septem

The world lapping at our shore

By John Cunningham

So much of the pleasure to be found at the Sycamore Island Pleasure Club lies in canoe voyaging on our river. Many members have their own canoes at the Club, of course, and the Club maintains its own fleet for use by members and guests. In the last few years, there has been a deliberate effort to maintain the Club's history of being an organization devoted to canoeing. In that spirit, and with the spirit of John Seabury Thomson hovering palpably over my shoulder, I offer this small essay on canoeing experiences from the Club. Perhaps it will encourage some of our newer members to try this wonderful way of enjoying the world that literally laps at the Island's shores.

Departing from the canoe dock, most paddlers head up the channel, dodging the ferry as necessary and settling into a comfortable rhythm. A small challenge is presented near the Island's north end by the silt islands which have grown steadily larger over the years. In the spring, nesting geese can often be seen on them, and beavers find this a good area to establish dens. At high water, it is sometimes possible to pick your way through the rocks near Sycamore Island itself, but the better and easier course is to swing wide toward the Maryland shore, avoiding drowned tree trunks.

You will now find yourself entering the wide channel between the Maryland shore and Ruppert's Island. Look for herons nesting in the quiet and marshy areas on Sycamore's northern end and Ruppert's southern end. The option is presented of angling a bit south around Ruppert's (avoiding coming aground on the delta bar) and entering the main channel of the Potomac. The attractiveness of this choice, if you wish to proceed further upstream, will often be controlled by the level of the river and the wind. Even on a quiet day, the strength of the downstream current in the main channel can be surprising. Several years ago, Ann Marie and I were part of a small party of adventurers who were determined to paddle from Sycamore all the way up to Stubblefield Falls, the rapid just north of the American Legion Bridge. Although it was a warm summer day and

Eyres....

ber evening was the best cure for my unrequited feelings towards a flame-haired Fen country poetess.

The best of all British rivers for swimming - and possibly the most beautiful British river full stop - for me has to be the meandering, majestic and multi-faceted river Wye.

People who buy second-hand books and attend literary festivals will be familiar with the Wye at Hay, and the lovely walk that takes you upriver from the bridge, where the stream runs fast and shallow, through the common meadow called The Warren to a bluff-shadowed, sweeping bend. On the elbow of this bend is a perfect bathing spot where you can step down the bank or if you're braver than me dive into the deep, nearly always coolly flowing water.

At the height of the last freakish UK summer, the temperature was balmy and just down-stream from the bend the shingly Warren beach turned into a Welsh Border country riviera, complete with parasol-shaded picnicking families and children and dogs flinging themselves into the shallow river. Why put yourself through the hell of Gatwick departure lounge and the dubious delights of some Mediterranean beach where spit-roasting heliophiles have to turn over in synch, when you can enjoy the amenity that god provided in our green and pleasant land.

All along the Wye and Usk, last summer, people seemed to be rediscovering a basic, convivial pleasure, enjoyed by our ancestors since early times and more or less forgotten in the age of overheated private pools. Part of that conviviality is precisely the non-private, free-for-all essence of swimming in rivers that are surely too precious to belong exclusively to anyone. That is part of the theme of Roger Deakin's splendid book *Waterlog*, an infectious celebration of the joys of outdoor swimming in Britain, but also a horrifying reminder of how much we have lost, and are losing, as our rivers are mercilessly exploited for intensive agriculture and used as sinks for pollution.

For all my appreciation of British rivers, I have to admit that the most beautiful river I have ever swum in is three hours' flight away to the south-east, in north-west Greece. The Aoos flows south through a spectacular gorge from Konitsa near the Albanian border to lake Pigon just north of Metsovo. The gorge, cutting through the high Pindus mountains and overhung with dense stands of pine trees remains in my mind as an epitome of wild loveliness. Swimming there in the pools punctuated by huge, smooth white boulders might make anyone feel like a young Greek god.

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Cunningham....

the river was typically low for that time of year, we quickly learned that we had badly underestimated how long our trip would take, as we were forced to lie in eddies on a regular basis in order to recuperate from our upstream exertions. We made it, and portaged around Stubblefield, and had a good time running it as we headed back downstream – but we haven't tried it again!

If the decision is to stay in the channel, views can be had of Ruppert's on your left and the Maryland shore on your right. Ruppert's will be free of human intrusion, thanks mostly to its magnificent stands of poison ivy. On the other shore, you will probably see fishermen and perhaps teenagers swimming near the remains of the rope-swing tree (a classic case of something being killed by its own popularity). The thick trees screen out nearly all the traffic noise. Bird song, the paddles being drawn through the water, and your own conversation are the only sounds.

At the head of the channel, a series of islands and small riffles present itself. The easiest route is to the left, where it is only necessary for the bow paddler to watch for rocks as you proceed into the main channel of the river. Paddling up through the center of the islands is rewarding for the quiet and beauty that surrounds you, but you will probably encounter a dead-end created by fallen trees. On the right, however, there is an interesting challenge presented by a twisty channel with swift-flowing water and a slight drop. Strong paddling and good coordination between bow and stern can achieve success. Try it – the worst is that you will have to hop out and haul up the drop.

You are now in the main channel of the Potomac. If you are lucky, National Airport traffic is taking the southern approach, and the air above you will be filled only by cormorants, herons, and ducks. Proceeding further upstream is certainly possible – but remember, the current will make you work! Bow paddlers, again, must be on rock sentry duty. Once you turn downstream, paddling is almost unnecessary, unless the wind is against you. The current becomes an ally, and you can be a canoe cruiser (to borrow the name of our sister organization). Your home on Sycamore Island comes into view, perhaps with children enjoying themselves on the swim float and picnickers under the trees. Before you know it, you'll be back at the canoe dock, happy and thinking already about your next voyage. See you on the river!

John Cunningham is a very active and demonstrably enthusiastic member of the Club.

Saturday Relief Caretakers April—May

April 3, 2004	10:00 a.m. - 3:00	Heddy and Trip Reid	202-363-8554
	3:00 p.m. - dark	Sally Strain and Dick Walker	202-363-4546
April 10, 2004	10:00 a.m. - 3:00	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
	3:00 p.m. - dark	Iris and Larry Miller	202-244-0772
April 17, 2004	10:00 a.m. - 3:00	Renee and George Dunham	202-686-6451
	3:00 p.m. - dark	Jan Pappalardo	301-229-8360
April 24, 2004	10:00 a.m. - 3:00	Eric and Renee Simpson	703-821-7556
	3:00 p.m. - dark	John Lentz	301-229-4968
May 1, 2004	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	Pat and Dick Roth	202-686-0270
	3:00 p.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
May 8, 2004	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
	3:00 p.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
May 15, 2004	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
	3:00 p.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
May 22, 2004	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
	3:00 p.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
May 29, 2004	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
	3:00 p.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	

*** Caretaker Volunteers ***

To volunteer for Saturday 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

Date	Time	Who	What
April 17	11 am on	Alan and Caroline Gelb	15 to 20 for a picnic and canoeing

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

Island Dates — April and May

April 11: Wildflower Walk (see March issue)	April 25: Workfest (page five)
April 14: April Meeting (Island, 8 pm)	May 12th: May Meeting (Island, 8pm)
April 18: Orientation (page two)	May 16: Downriver Canoe Race



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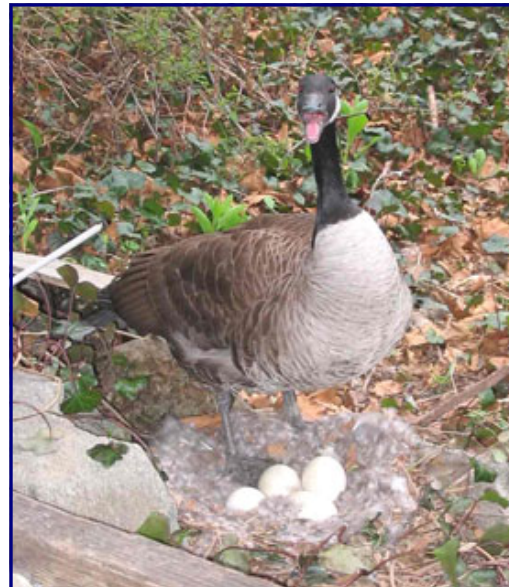
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<http://www.sycamore.org>
To view this month's Sycamore Islander on the Internet, go to:
<http://www.sycamoreisland.org/Laika/islander.htm>

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April 2004

- The Joys of River Swimming
- A Paddling Baedeker
- That Walk on the Towpath
- When to Hold a Regatta
- Elmo and Ruppert



Go Lay Your Own Eggs!

Photo by Joe Hage