



Launching

Photo by David Winer

The Sycamore Islander

May 2004

Volume 83 No. 5

President's Message

Our last meeting was held at Johnna Robinson's house after the river rose and prevented us from meeting on the Island, as planned. We are very grateful for her hospitality.

The meeting primarily consisted of a rather freewheeling discussion about the plans (or those that are about to be formed) for the caretaker's quarters. The discussion was prompted by the growing realization that we are not likely to be able to build outside the current footprint of the clubhouse. It seems that regulations designed to protect wetlands and floodplains will prevent us from expanding. Three of us will be meeting with the County to gain a better understanding of what the rules and processes are.

The first part of the discussion was based upon the possibility that all construction must occur within the footprint of the current building. We considered the possibility that the club membership might lose some of the open areas upstairs in the building in order that the quarters could be moved up to the second floor and out of the floodplain. In general, people were accepting of this, provided that more or less equivalent accommodations for the club members were built elsewhere. Some of the points that were made are:

- That perhaps the caretaker's living room could be raised to the level of the second floor.
- That the area from the top of the stairs (above the flat roof by the door to the main room) to the kitchen to the ladies rest room could be used for the caretaker.
- It's important to maintain a kitchen for club members.
- The girls should each have their own room.
- It would be all right to move the ladies' locker room downstairs.
- Is it possible to use the tool shed in some way?
- It could be done in stages over a period of time.

The second part of the discussion concerned the financing of the construction. It is possible that the total cost of the construction could be more than what had been considered in the past. The committee is trying to work within the old budget for the caretaker's quarters; but any improvements to areas used by the club members could be in addition to the previous budget. It was felt that the

May Meeting

**Wednesday, May 12, 8 p.m.
At the Island!**

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. Telephone: 202/544-6027 or 202/445-5436 (cell). **Note to submitters of announcements, articles, or letters: The deadline for inclusion in the June issue is receipt at the Editor's address by Monday, May 24th.** Earlier submissions receive priority.

clubhouse as a whole has had little in improvements in many years, and is now in need of a facelift or even more. Some of the points made on financing are:

- That the financing and construction could be done in stages over a period of time.
- That there is a reserve fund that could be drawn down to cover the expenses, and then would need to be built up over a few years.
- We should wait to learn the total cost, then work out the strategies.
- We should avoid any costs (architectural fees, permits, consultants) until we have a clear plan and direction.

The third discussion concerned the idea of sweat equity. It was clear that this must be carefully planned, with specific tasks and direct supervision in order for the volunteers to do quality work. Sweat equity will only be used to perform tasks that will help us reduce expenses.

Be assured that we will consider all of these points and more as we proceed with the building plans. I will keep you informed of all decisions that we make, and all expenses that we incur or plan to incur. Our next meeting will be at 8:00 on May 12 on the Island. We should by then have the answer to at least the one question – whether we can build outside the footprint. Perhaps we might even have some simple sketches of floor plans.

— Ann Marie Cunningham

What's Everybody Looking at?



Photos by David Winer and Norman Metzger

**The answer
on page 8**

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

From the Minutes of the May 13, 1929 Meeting

“Captain of the Island Cole reported that he had had a colored man working on the tennis court to replace the surface washed off by the flow of April 14th and that the court is now in good shape. The Captain reported that the flow was not quite as bad as the 1923 flood.... The ferry landing on the north side of the Island were washed away but caught in trees on the south shore and they have now been restored to their proper position.

“Captain of Tennis Thomson reported that he had been concentrating his efforts on seeing that the court was placed in shape for the coming tournament and that detailed plans would be announced at the June meeting.

“Moved that Carlton Roberts be expelled from the Club for arrears totaling \$35.75 and that his canoe be sold at auction by the Captain of Canoeing on May 19th, any money due the club to be deducted from the proceeds and the balance to be held for Mr. Roberts.

“The Regatta Committee reported that the Executive Committee had indefinitely postponed the regatta set for May 30th because of the delayed season and the recent flood.

“Moved that the President be authorized to reimburse the W.R.E. Co. if they will place a sign upon the car stop to indicate that it is ‘Sycamore Stop.’”

A note at the end of the minutes says, “At close of meeting—62 men; 22 women.” It seems this is the number in membership at the time.

Reading the Minutes from 75 years ago, one can't help but notice both the similarities the differences with modern day Sycamore Island. The floods still reign supreme—forcing us to decide upon repairs and events. But, we no longer have the tennis court, haven't appropriated a canoe in years, and the streetcar is long gone. And, the membership numbers remind us of a time when Washington was a much smaller city.

— Holly

Remember!

49TH RUNNING OF CCA POTOMAC DOWNRIVER RACE MAY 16

Sycamore Island will be hosting the Potomac Downriver Race on Sunday, May 16th. 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. The pre-registration fee is \$15 per person and \$20 per person at the sign-in. Tandem teams pay as individuals UNLESS they are a parent and child. 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). 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.

— Star Mitchell

In Touch With Joe...

Aldo Leopold wrote, "I know of no solitude so secure as one guarded by a spring flood....and I conclude (with inner glee but exterior detachment) that the question of traffic, in or out, is for this day at least, debatable only among carp." Survival and new beginnings is the theme of the drama being played out here on the Island. The plants and animals here provide us with so much beauty and excitement, and great stories of wildlife encounters. We've had a swimming squirrel, a black snake trying to eat a goose egg, and a brave club member grabbing the snake to save the egg. We were visited by a strange white bird, (carrier pigeon) which stayed for a four-day layover. We have giant turtles doing balancing acts on logs. We have roosting cormorants and nesting eagles. We have warblers, hummingbirds, gold finches and baby geese. We have distraught parents whose eggs were washed away in a flood as they stood by helplessly. There are wood ducks and house finches and Carolina wrens all nesting on the island. We have busy beavers, raccoons, voles and muskrats; and the ground hog has new digs all through the island. The bluebells and the other wild flowers have finished their display and the trees are exploding with green, bringing us shade and the beauty of the shadows playing in the sunlight. Every spring the story is the same and somehow I never grow tired of it.

The girls and I went to Florida for spring break. We had a blast! We paddled through the Okefenokee Swamp and took a trip down the crystal clear, spring-fed waters of the Ichitucknee River. I'll have to write more about that later.

The spring Workfest was a huge success. It was the fourth Workfest that I've led and I think it was the most fun and the most productive. Thank you to everyone who came out to help make it a success and thanks to the Maluskys for bringing and cooking all the food. I have an ongoing project of painting and bug proofing the screen porch if anyone who couldn't make the Workfest is interested in pitching in.

Scenes from the Spring 2004 Workfest



Photos by
Norman Metzger
and Joe Hage

The Canoe Consultant

Buying a Used Canoe

After absorbing some of your Consultant's prior columns, you have decided to make the leap from Club canoes to one of your own, but are daunted about the price of a new model. Don't be concerned about seeking out a used canoe – there is an active market.

One reason is the savings of 1/3 – 1/2 compared with new canoe prices of about \$1,000 for a typical 17' good quality, general purpose boat. Another is the ability of the average buyer to judge condition and adjust an offering price accordingly. After deciding on the type and approximate length of canoe desired, a major consideration is whether it has been wrapped around a rock in its prior life. The telltale sign is a rippling effect on the hull, generally amidships. Don't necessarily reject the boat on this basis, but be sure to get a bargain. Condition of seats, thwarts, and gunwales are easily noted, as is hull abrasion especially at the stern position. The presence of skid plates is a plus. Minor scuffing is not a concern as it can be covered with a little spray paint. Used Kevlar canoes are sometimes available if boat weight reduction is desired, but will be priced accordingly. As implied above, feel free to negotiate the price.

So where to look? Being a canoe club member, leads your Consultant to suspect that the answer to your dreams might be on or near Sycamore Island. Check with Joe and your fellow Islanders. To widen the search, try boat classifieds in *The Washington Post*. Another possibility is local new canoe dealers, although they generally avoid used boats preferring the profit on a new model (unlike the car market). Springriver Corp. (springriver.com) is an exception, but even there only a few used canoes move each year. A good nearby source is Shenandoah River Outfitters, Luray, VA, which is constantly selling from their inventory of some 200 canoes at prices starting around \$450. They also have an annual canoe auction, this year on September 25th. Some local schools buy used from Shenandoah (shenandoah-river.com).

Also, just enter “used canoes” on Google and some half dozen sites will appear. These vary from dealers who have a used inventory to something like paddling.net, a nationwide marketplace with everything from a 30' fur trade canoe replica to a 13' poke boat. Shipping costs will consume most of your advantage from buying on the used market so a big hitch is that you will have to pick it up. To avoid this hassle, check the websites of local canoe clubs where used canoes are offered. These include the Canoe Cruisers Association (ccadc.org), Monocacy Canoe Club (monocacycanoe.org), and Coastal Canoeists (coastals.org), each of which may offer up to a half dozen used canoes at any given time. However, take a few minutes to read through the site of one dealer, Red Rock Wilderness Store, Ely, MN, where there is an extended, well-informed discussion of canoe performance and materials.

The search itself is half the fun. Go for it!

Next column (July issue): Basic strokes – Part II.

The Annual Flower Walk

By Renee Dunham

It was a cool and cloudy day, with occasional misty rain--a perfect expression of springtime to set the tone for the Annual Wildflower Walk on April 11. Islanders John Parrish and RG Steinman, members of the Maryland Native Plant Society, led us through the lush flood plain of the Potomac. It was easy to imagine our small group as ancient Indians walking through these early spring blooms, or even as visitors to Eden.



Clara Bertaut sampling the pleasures of a spice bush as guides John Steinman and RG Parrish look on. Photo by Renee Dunham

Would you like to know what we found? Fragile fern, Ramps (not in bloom) with onion flavored leaves that would do a salad proud; Yellow Trout-lily, Meadowrue, Mayapple getting ready to bloom (those with V-shaped stems), Common Blue Violet, and unusual (for the locale) creamy-white Violet Striata; also Wild Blue Phlox, Canadian Waterleaf that doesn't need to bloom to be beautiful; Virginia Bluebells of course, Golden Ragwort, clumps of Sessile Trillium, Cleavers (not in bloom), Dutchman's Breeches, which definitely do look more like pants than the clearly heart-shaped Squirrel Corn I am always confusing it with; also Blue Cohash which is a mountain species - hence rare in the Potomac area, Buttercup and . . . more. There is a lovely cadence to the names.

John and RG raised our eyes from the ground to the barks of Butternut, Black Walnut, White Ash and Hackberry; put our noses to pungent Spice Bush and promised delights in the future fruits of Pawpaw saplings. The youngest of our group perched on the biggest grapevine John and RG had seen in this area.

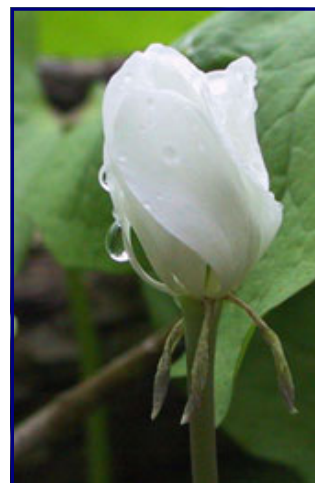
I felt privileged to be looking at many rare and endangered species. Those that had official State rank or status were protectively flagged by National Park Service naturalists. The yellow flags marked rare species and the orange flags marked rare plant communities. Among those yellow-flagged were Twin Leaf and Ostrich Fern – both extremely rare in Montgomery County; also, the Few-flowered Valerian. We saw a number of other State-listed rarities on our walk, including the White Trout-lily and the Golden Alexander, the Shumard Oak and the Butternut tree. RG suggested: “Don't pass up a chance to eat a Butternut (also known as White Walnut). Its taste is superior to the Black and English Walnuts.”

Following the Walk, David Winer provided us with his home-baked Hot Cross buns, warmed in the Clubhouse oven. We sat around the warm oven sipping hot tea, and enjoyed a sense of well-being for having experienced spring in such lovely detail.

Thank you John and RG for the lively, light-hearted dance through the woodlands, and thank you, Sycamore Island, for having brought us all together. We are so lucky.

Wildflowers and Hot Cross Buns

—Photos by Renee Dunham and David Winer



Twin Leaf



George Dunham (holding the umbrella) and co-leader RG Steinman



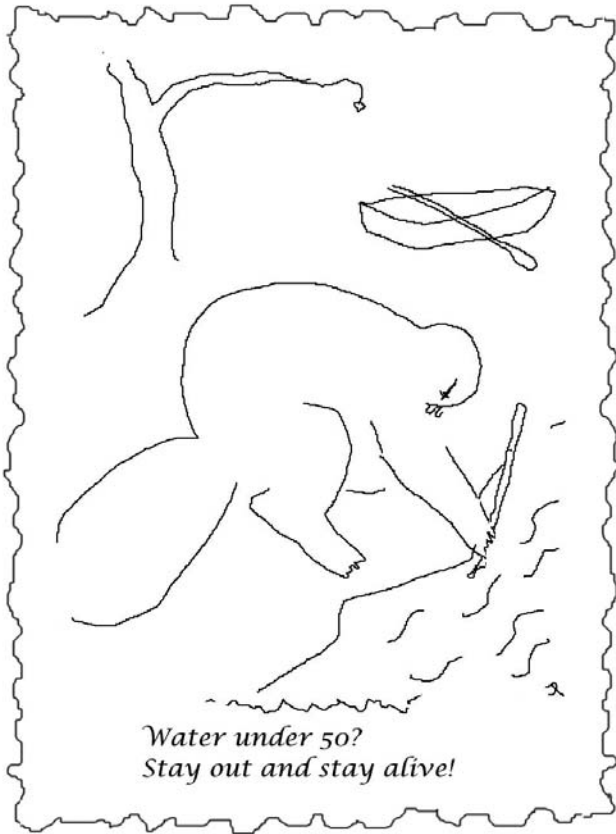
Ready for their close-up.



Of course, I know what this is.



Surely a vile rumor that some people came just for the Winers' Hot-Cross Buns. Still.....



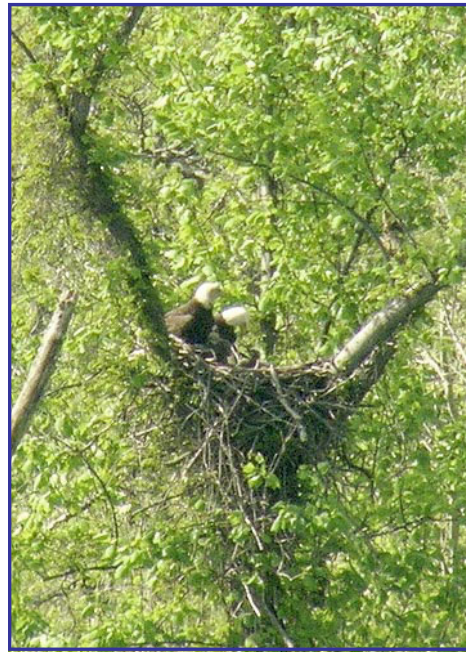
Ruppert

*—Created by
Johnna Robinson*

Bald Eagles Nesting on the Virginia Shore



A parent on the nest, photographed by David Winer



And here Jack Powers caught both parents on the nest arising for their two newborns.

Saturday Relief Caretakers May—June

May 1, 2004	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	Pat and Dick Roth	202-686-0270
	3:00 p.m. - dark	Norm Metzger	202-544-6027
May 8, 2004	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	Betty and Bob Brown	703-356-6355
	3:00 p.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
May 15, 2004	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	Cora Shaw and Bernard Veuthey	202-362-5859
	3:00 p.m. - dark	Richard and Penny Doolittle	301-229-5632
May 22, 2004	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
	3:00 p.m. - dark	Whitney Pinger	202-686-5443
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>	
June 5, 2004	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
	3:00 p.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
June 12, 2004	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
	3:00 p.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
June 19, 2004	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
	3:00 p.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
June 26, 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
May 15	10 am to 2 pm	George and Shelley Malusky	Cub Scout Canal Hike and Lunch
June 3	10 am to 1 pm	Peter Winkler	Burke School 6th Grade

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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May 2004

- Everybody's Lookin'
- The "Sycamore Stop"
- The Right Canoe at the Right Price
- Flowers and Hot Cross Buns



Yet Another Island Quadruped
Photo by Norman Metzger