



What's Good for the Goose....

Photo by Joe Hage

The Sycamore Islander

August 2005

Volume 84 No. 8

President's Message

Frequently, someone expresses concerns to me about safety and liability issues. In a natural setting like Sycamore Island, there are many hazards. And, of course, there is no way to eliminate them, even if we wanted to. The river is perhaps the biggest hazard, yet it is also the best part of what makes our Island so special. The Club has passed many rules in the interest of our safety, but we never hired someone to enforce those rules. Instead, we have taken the position that it is up to each and every one of us to act in a responsible manner. I believe this is a good time to reprint the Code of Honor that was adopted some years ago, that emphasizes individual responsibility for safety.

The Sycamore Island Code

As Sycamore Islanders, we seek an environment in which members of the Club can relax, recreate and find enjoyment in ways that protect our safety and that of our guests, as well as the natural environment. The natural and recreational aspects of Sycamore Island depend on our personal concern both for each other and for ourselves, along with our collective respect for the beauty and power of nature. We must take upon ourselves individually and collectively the act of participating in the creation and preservation of the Island's environment. We realize that as part of the Sycamore Island Club community, our actions affect those around us as well as the natural quality of the Island. We understand that membership in the Club includes a commitment to the Island and to the Club membership.

In a club like ours, where there is no lifeguard, no enforcer of the rules, it is inherent each member to embrace basic water safety rules, and to not endanger themselves or others. These simple rules include:

- Always swim with a buddy.
- Watch your children, teenagers, and friends when they're swimming.
- Wear life preservers when you're in a canoe.

There also is a rule that children must be supervised when they're playing pool. This is primarily to prevent damage to the baize. If someone mentions the rules to you, please take that reminder as a friendly concern for safety and well-being, coming from a member who is living up to the commitment expressed in our code.

I hope to see all of you at our next meeting, on the Island at 8:00 p.m. , Wednesday, August 10th.

— 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 email attachments to normanmetzger@verizon.net. Telephone: 202/544-6027 or 202/445-5436 (cell). **Note to submitters of announcements, articles, or letters: The deadline for the September issue is receipt by the Editor by Monday, August 29th.**



**A Sycamore Island Zen Experience
12-Step Enlightenment for VOLUNTEER CARETAKERS
By Gerry Barton**

- 1. You get time on the Island — a big bonus for Waiting List Members**
- 2. A chance to spend time on a beautiful low-energy-use boat on the Potomac River**
- 3. Opportunity to meet new Island folks**
- 4. Time to talk with old friends**
- 5. Make a cup of tea or coffee in our rustic kitchen**
- 6. Have a cup on the serene deck overlooking the geese, sycamore trees, and the Potomac**
- 7. View nature, including the Sycamore Eagles Nest**
- 8. Sit on the Captain's Dock and enjoy the river**
- 9. Take a canoe trip around the Island before or after your shift**
- 10. Bring along friends to enjoy a day on Your Island**
- 11. Meditate and then buy a Sycamore T-Shirt**
- 12. Bask in the knowledge that you are a Sycamore Islander**

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

Selections from the August 1930 *Sycamore Islander*

First is an announcement of some importance.

*Sycamore Broadwater Regatta to be Held on Labor Day
Lower River Clubs to Send Crews to Regatta at Sycamore*

“Washington Canoe Club, Potomac Boat Club and other lower-river organizations will send crews to compete in The Broadwater Regatta to be held at the Island Labor Day afternoon and we are thus assured of seeing some sharp competition in all events. All of the races will be in canvas canoes, since the lower river clubs are sending their racing craft to an out-of-town regatta on Labor Day.

“The gathering of the lower river clubs at Sycamore for this year’s regatta will mark a resumption of the regattas which were an annual event until about 1920 and Chairman Hayden Collins of our regatta committee hopes that this year’s event will be so successful that these regattas will become a regular event at the Island.

“The principal reason for holding regattas is to win favorable publicity for the Island and to bring to Sycamore other folks who are interested in the river and in canoeing. We are urging the lower river people to come to Sycamore Labor Day morning, bring their lunches and make a day’s picnic of it. In this manner we’ll introduce them to the upper river and the chances are certainly excellent that some of them will become interested in Sycamore and that we’ll thereby gain a few new members. If we make a good showing in the regatta we’ll stand a better chance of interesting some young bloods in Sycamore and that’s an idea very close to the hearts of the Club’s officers.”

The weather was a topic of interest.

“The drought has lowered our well somewhat and we therefore ask you to let no water go to waste,—don’t pump well water down the drain, better leave it in the well.

“Old-timers at Sycamore say that the river has never been as low as it is just at this writing. A sixfooter can almost walk across to Virginia and there are some brand-new rocks to sit on. Crowds have been at the Island every Sunday during July, bigger crowds than

we've had in years.”

The usual fishing report with an unusual twist.

“Fish—bass—have been caught at Sycamore during the past few weeks...but Mildred Lovett topped them all by luring a nice bass into her canoe. She was out paddling at night and the bass jumped in. Mildred almost jumped out but reconsidered in time to keep the bass for breakfast.”

And, finally, a new ferry.

“Dick Ackad, builder of ferry boats de luxe, received a note of thanks for his good work in building us a new ferry. Dick built the ferry at a contract price but he gave us much more than our money's worth.”

I was very interested in the photos from Margery Glass, printed in the July *Islander*. It is nice to put faces to some of these names. Maybe others caught it, but the ice skaters weren't on the canal. Rather, they were on the river between the ferry landing and the Island, facing downstream. Must've been a cold winter. — Holly

Minutes of the July 13, 2005 Membership (Non) Meeting

Attending: Ann Marie Cunningham, Tove Elfstrom, Jeff Komarow, Carl Linden, Norm Metzger, Joe Hage, and Harvey Resnik.

Seven members gathered for the monthly membership meeting, three short of a quorum, so the meeting was not formally convened. However, those present took the opportunity to discuss some Club matters. Various ideas were discussed regarding how to obtain funds for the clubhouse renovation. Possible sources of loans were reviewed—a bank loan (not thought the best choice), a loan from members willing to provide money (to be repaid at going interest rates), or establishing a facilities fee similar that used by swimming pool associations. The best kind of loan, it was agreed, is one that puts the least burden on members.

A letter to Anne Marie from Gerry Barton was discussed. It concerned ferry operation: policy on closing and opening the island when flood levels rise and fall, the use of paid part-timers to operate the ferry weekends, safety issues, and member responsibility in observing club rules. The question of obtaining a de-fibrillator for the island, where to put it, and how to call attention to it was also examined.

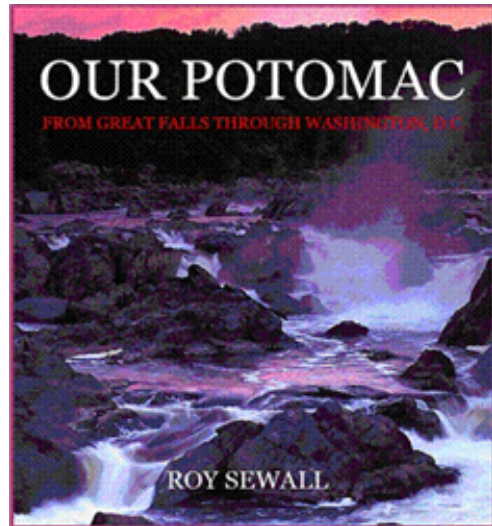
-- Carl Linden, Acting Recording Secretary

Sycamore Reads

***Our Potomac, From Great Falls through Washington, D.C.*, by Roy Sewall. Baltimore, Md.: Image Publishing, Ltd, 2005, \$42.50, 168 pgs. [The author is offering a 20 percent (\$34) to Sycamore members and wait-listers. For an order form, call or email him at 301-530-6720 or roysewall@mindspring.com.]**

In my more free-wheeling moments, I've sometimes thought of the Potomac as a metaphor for law firms. Starting, say, downstream from Great Falls, the river is challenging, often narrow, dangerous, swift, a danger to the unwary. That's not a bad description for public interest law firms that while typically small can, on particular issues, be ferocious and dangerous to even the strongest opponents. However, once the Potomac River cruises into Washington proper, it's much broader, showing a placidity that can be deceptive since underneath the smooth surface lies power. And that brings to mind the white-shoes, K Street firms that are very large and broad, civil in their dealings, but extraordinarily powerful and merciless on matters its clients want done.

Of course, the Potomac needs no help with stretched metaphors for its just claim as one of the world's great rivers. Islanders -- whether like me they experience reverie looking at the river on a spring or summer evening from the Captain's Float or others who canoe or kayak ambitiously upstream to test its changing ways -- know the beauty and even the grandeur of our river. And now that beauty and grandeur have been given in effect a festschrift in stunning photographs and crisp and often revealing prose by Roy Sewall in *Our Potomac*. Those of us who were treated to an advance preview by Mr. Sewall in a presentation he gave at Carl Linden's house last February know that to describe his photographs as stunning understates it. I would argue that you have not fully seen Great Falls or the Memorial Bridge, to take just two examples, until Mr. Sewall has shown them to you from unique perspectives or in the light of a (very) early morning. Nor have you really quailed at the risks expert kayakers take on when they point their boats almost vertically down a "beyond category" Potomac rapid. Nor have you fully seen the incredible life about us, until you've looked at, say, Mr. Sewall's photos of bales of turtles or of wildflowers in full glory, including the beautiful photos of Sycamore's Dutchman's Breeches and Virginia Bluebells. And of course the photo of George and Marcia Loeb, with Renee Dunham modestly in the background, pulling away on the *SS Sycamore*, is a special treat for us, including the captioned comment that "The club has an old-fashioned clubhouse, canoe shed, and daunting membership waiting list."



While Mr. Sewall tends with his photographs generously to the right or the aesthetic side of our brains, he doesn't neglect the left side. I, for one, learned a great deal from the text. I am surely baring my ignorance when I admit that I did not know, until Mr. Sewall told me, of Mary's Wall: A vertical, stone wall built to support the towpath where it rises some 55 feet above the water near Lock 17. Mr. Sewall's gifts include passing on information directly but often with a twist. He notes that two boat clubs that for the naïve seem quite alike in fact are meccas for "two different sports: The Washington Canoe Club's paddlers face forward in their canoes and kayaks, while the Potomac Boat Club's rowers face backward in their shells." I do take issue with his comment that Washington was built on ... swampland." Not so! There were marshes, not swamps; tidal and not standing water.

But that triviality aside, this is a remarkable book, and it is simply impossible for me to pass on its richness, the revelations of its beautiful photographs, and the understanding of our great river that it gives us as Mr. Sewall takes you on a special journey from its wild side at Great Falls to its seeming gentleness when it finally meets up with its smaller cousin, the Anacostia.

-- Norman Metzger

In Touch With Joe...

The nice weather and big crowds of June seem like a distant memory now as we look forward to the dog days of August. July was pretty quiet. We had the annual canoe-paddle-to-watch-the-fireworks, but since then we've had no large parties at all. The hot weather does bring out the swimmers though, and I can count on my regulars to start ringing the bell come late afternoon. The water was a relief from the heat in early July. But now even the water has gotten hot, (90 degrees!) and swimming isn't very refreshing. Yet, I have to be careful not to complain, the early hurricane season hasn't affected us too much and the river has been running nice and low, even if it is sometimes a little muddy.

I've never lived in the Tropic of Capricorn but after the past few weeks I think I have an idea of what it must be like to live in a jungle. The air doesn't move, the trees are full of sound, (day and night) and the wild flowers and vines are flourishing and threatening to cover everything. The invasive vines seem to be doing especially well. I've been quite busy keeping the kudzu, oriental bittersweet and porcelain berry in check. Pulling vines is thankless work, but it does have its gratifying moments. One day, I took the machete up the hill and rescued a sycamore by the parkway. It was being attacked by four different kinds of invasive plants. Invasive plants pose a real threat to the Island and have already done considerable damage to other islands in the gorge.

Yes, everything is growing like crazy. Even the sycamores, which earlier in the season were suffering from the symptoms of blight, seem to have recovered and have filled out nicely. The summer wildflowers are out and the insects are anything but lethargic. The ground hog is busy getting fat but mostly things have been quiet here. We did see a small group of great egrets one evening and I'm seeing the eagles more often now. The birding has been slow since the warblers finished nesting, but maybe that's about to change.

By the time you read this I will be in Michigan. I'm taking two weeks to vacation at a cabin on a lake near Traverse City. I've never been to that part of the country, and I hear it is beautiful. It should be an adventure. My last adventure was over the Fourth of July weekend. I went climbing at Seneca Rocks and after climbing each day we cooled off in a swimming hole on the north fork of the south branch of the Potomac River. I also visited Nelson Rocks, which is a private climbing area nearby, in W. Va. . At Nelson's they have a Via Ferrata or "iron road" which is a system of rungs and cables that make it possible for non-climbers to scale high walls. They also have a cable bridge connecting two huge rock formations. The bridge is two hundred feet long, one hundred fifty feet off the ground and very scary to cross. You should go there sometime!

We have three new windows in my living room and it is a wonderful improvement. John Matthews Jr. came down and with my help we took out the old windows and installed the new ones in an afternoon. Of course, Matthews Sr. was on hand to supervise. I also repaired some screen doors and I re-hung all the safety signs by the canoe dock so they are more noticeable and easier to read. The big project for this month will be building a new dock on the mainland and repairing the ferry, again.

I'll be back on the 14th. The relief caretaker's name is Dominique. I'll be volunteering at Lockhouse 8 on the 27th.

Summer at Sycamore and Nelson Rocks—Photos by Joe Hage



See <http://www.nelsonrocks.org> for more on this preserve, including the Via Ferrata and its the 200-foot long cable bridge, seen left and on the last page. That's Joe above. The web site offers a candid FAQ; for example:

Is the Via Ferrata safe?

No.

Mark your calendars now!

Sycamore Island's

FISHING DERBY

Saturday, August 20, 2005, 8:30 am to 12:30 pm

*All members, their guests and wait listers are invited
BBQ lunch will be provided*

Please join us for Sycamore's
4th Annual Fishing Derby.

All members, their guests and wait listers are
encouraged to participate in this
fun filled fishing event!

Bring your favorite fishing rods and bait. Prizes
will be awarded in a variety of categories.

A delicious lunch will be provided
specially prepared by Chef Malusky.

We hope to see you there!

*Please RSVP to the Malusky's at 301-871-1707 or shel-
ley_malusky@fc.mcps.k12.md.us*

Saturday Relief Caretakers August—September

August 6, 2005	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	Toby Smith	703-553-7732
	3:00 p.m. - dark	Louise Meyer	202-328-6834
August 13, 2005	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	Toby Smith	703-553-7732
	3:00 p.m. - dark	Judy and John Lentz	301-229-4968
August 20, 2005	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	Bob and Irene Sinclair	202-966-5204
	3:00 p.m. - dark	Norman Metzger	202-445-5436
August 27, 2005	9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	Bob and Irene Sinclair	202-966-5204
	3:00 p.m. - dark		
September 3, 2005	9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.	Toby Smith	703-553-7732
	2:00 p.m. - dark	Chris Grant	301-986-1084
September 10, 2005	9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.		
	2:00 p.m. - dark		
September 17, 2005	9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.		
	2:00 p.m. - dark		
September 24, 2005	9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.		
	2:00 p.m. - dark		

*** Caretaker Volunteers ***

To volunteer, contact Candy Means 301-320-5270 or candymeans@comcast.net.

Large Parties

No Large Parties reported for August.

A large party application form may be printed from the Club's web page at
<http://www.sycamoreisland.org/systems.htm>
 To request a form through the mail, call the Supervisor of Parties, John Noble
 e-mail: jnoble@shs.net, phone: 240- 747-4810, fax: 301-320-4216



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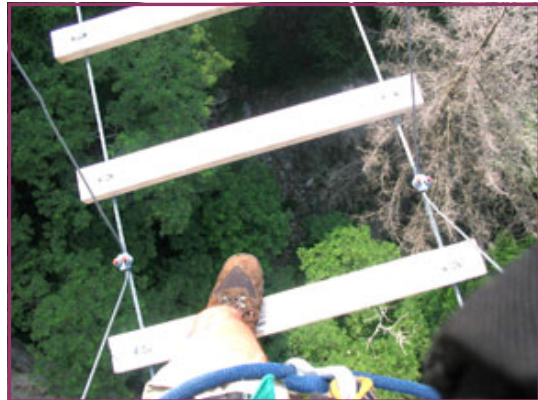
Upcoming Sycamore Events

August Meeting, Wednesday, August 10,
8 p.m. At the Island.*

Fishing Derby, Saturday, August 20, 8:30 am
to 12:30 p.m. [Page 8 For details.]

September Meeting, Wednesday, September
14, 8 p.m. At the Island.

* Island Membership Meetings are always on
the second Wednesday of the month.



Easy Does It: One hundred fifty feet up
on the Via Ferrata Bridge at the Nelson
Rocks Preserve, W. Va.

Photo by Joe Hage.