



Whack! Whack!

Photo by David Winer

# *The Sycamore Islander*

*May 2006*

*Volume 85 No. 5*

## **President's Letter**

The Island and land along the Potomac and the Canal are in full bloom. The blue bells have largely come and gone, but many wildflowers are still in bloom. The rain held off long enough to get in the annual wildflower walk on April 23. Sycamore members RG Steinman and John Parrish led us on a fun and informative walk along a portion of the Billy Goat Trail near the Mardsen Tract, a bit beyond the end of the Clara Barton Parkway. [Page eight has more.] The Club thanks RG and John for making the walk a great success.

Islanders also owe a debt of gratitude to Tryon Wells and others who designed and built our new canoe dock. It is built in sections so that the task of hauling it out of the water for winter storage won't be such a chore. Thank you for a job well done. [More on page nine.]

As for chores, by the time you read this, the Spring Workfest will have been completed, and the Island will be spruced up and ready for the peak season. I am confident that we will have had a big turnout for the event since the telephone tree that Jim Drew and Gerry Barton put together sent out the clarion call for participation.

We did not have a quorum for the April meeting since the second Wednesday fell on the beginning of a major religious holiday, and your President was not sufficiently on top of the situation to realize the conflict and change the date. The May meeting will focus on issues relating to the renovation of the Caretaker's Quarters and the Clubhouse. Unfortunately, we have not made as much progress in finalizing the plans and a budget as I had hoped.

Remember that the canoeing class is scheduled for May 6<sup>th</sup>. The class will have something for novices and experts too. There is no better time than now to take advantage of the recreational activities and serenity of the Island. See you at the regular monthly meeting on the Island at 8:00 pm on May 10<sup>th</sup>. I checked and there are no holidays this time.

— Jeff Komarow

***The Sycamore Islander*** is a monthly newsletter of the Montgomery Sycamore Island Club. 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](mailto:normanmetzger@verizon.net). Telephone: 202/544-6027 or 202/445-5436 (cell).

**The deadline for the June issue is Wednesday, May 31.**

## “Minutes” for 12 April 2006

There was not a quorum present, so no Club business was transacted.

--Sherry Pettie, Recording Secretary

## 2006 Sycamore Events Calendar

Event	Date/Time	Contact	Rain Date
Canoeing Class at Sycamore Island.	Saturday, May 6, 9:30 to 11:30 a.m.	Frank Daspit and Jim Drew	
Potomac Downriver Race	Sunday, May 21	Star Mitchell	
Summer Solstice BBQ, River Song Party and Sleepover	Saturday, June 24th, 3 pm till dark	Joe Hage, Whitney Pinger	
Fishing Derby	tbd		
Sycamore Regatta	tbd		
Old-Timers Potluck Picnic	tbd		
Fall Workfest	Sunday, Nov. 12, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.	Joe Hage, Tryon Wells	Sunday, Nov. 19



Photo by David Winer

## **From Holly Syrrakos, Archivist: 75 Years Ago At Sycamore Island From the May 1931 *Sycamore Islander***

In an effort to attract new members to the Island, the Club launched plans for a number of Spring and Summer events.

“The first affair is the big party at the club. The festivities will start promptly at 6:30 PM with a Roast Beef dinner which will be followed by some moving pictures and then dancing from nine to twelve. Come up early Saturday afternoon and bring your guests. Maybe we can get up a ball game for the men and possibly croquet or pitch horse-shoes for the ladies or go canoeing. The cost is only seventy-five cents per person.”

Later in the issue those attending are reminded to “bring as many guests as possible and also your own knives and forks.” The Entertainment committee also planned three canoe trips for May and June, guided by Club members called “the White Water men.” Potomac Canoe Trip No. 1 from the Island to Three Springs (and return) was set for a Sunday in May.

“Stops for rest will be made at White Rock and Smokestack, and the guides in charge of each party will help all boats over the small rapid just below Three Springs. Bring your own picnic lunch. The entertainment committee will furnish coffee and the fire for cooking. On leaving, the party will go out to the center of the river where an idea can be obtained of Long Boat Shoot through Cabin John Rapids. It was built in the time of Washington as part of the old Potomac Company’s canal.”

Potomac Canoe Trip No. 2, in early June, was to go from the Island to Telegraph Wires Spring and return.

“Stops for rest will be made wherever necessary and the guides will help all boats over the rapids at Long Boat Shoot. The entertainment committee will serve lemonade and have a cooking fire at the Telegraph Wire camping grounds. This is a very interesting trip as you will see the Virginia side most of the way up and on the return trip the guides will follow the course the old river boats used over 130 years ago. For those who have never been up the rapids this affords a wonderful opportunity to see this part of the river and to feel the rush of the canoe and get the thrill in the shoots and runs. It is advisable that not more than 3 travel in each boat.”

“Overnight Trip No. 1” was the third trip. It began at “the Angler’s Club” and went up to Bear Island “about 1-1/4 mile below Great Falls” where everyone camped so they could canoe the Potomac River Gorge.

“The morning will be devoted to the gorge, Sandy Landing, the canal and locks built in the time of Washington, Wet Bottom Shoot and the Giant Pot Hole. All that wish will be taken through Buzzard’s Shoot, or the big “S” shoot in the center of the river. A stop will be made at Calico Rapids. These are considered the most dangerous from Great Falls to Sycamore. The passage past Calico is made down Gravelly Beach shoot, which is not dangerous. The last half of this shoot is through a section of the first canal built in this country. A stop will be made at the mouth of Scott Run to see the Scott Run Falls. The next stop will be made at Stubble Field Falls. The guides will take no responsibility for those shooting the falls.”

Sounds like fun, doesn’t it? And I encourage everyone to take the risk at Stubblefield.

## "Why Are We Leaving Them In The Mud?"

By Gerry Barton

*[Editor's note: A reconsideration, as suggested below of what was already approved by members, requires agreement by two-thirds of members present at a regular meeting. Also, the "one-level" plan, in which the caretaker's quarters (bedroom kitchen, living room, etc. are all on the second floor) was explicitly considered and rejected for several reasons: (1) the caretaker should not be tempted to stay on the Island when there is a likelihood of flood, (2) the one-level quarters were too small, (3) there were noise and privacy concerns about having the bedrooms adjacent to the main club room, and, (4) the most critical space to protect for obvious reasons was the kitchen, which indeed in the approved plan will be on the second floor.]*

At our April Island meeting we didn't have a quorum but a question was asked, "Why are we leaving them in the mud?" This was not the first time I have heard a remark like this. Many Sycamore Islanders are dismayed with the proposed modifications to the Clubhouse when they discover that the Caretaker will be left to sleep and bathe in the downstairs quarters. We missed something in our planning. Much time and effort has been spent but that doesn't mean that we have the best solution. The improvement of the caretaker's quarters has been in the planning stages for about five years and we need to get it right this time.

All of us need to realize that with the In-The-Mud plan we are not improving the caretaker's conditions. We wondered how we missed this; possibly because we didn't have the caretaker's living conditions in mind when we voted last year. Over the years there have been floods resulting in mud under the floor and infestations of insects and critters in the living quarters. Just in the last week of April 2006 we had another flood scare. Before we invest in something that doesn't improve the conditions of the caretakers and help to recruit new caretakers, we need to consider more carefully what we are doing. We need to reconsider before we spend the money on an impractical place to live.

When we voted last year there was an alternate plan which placed the bedrooms upstairs in the rear of the Clubhouse where the women's locker room is now located, with the bathroom in the rear of the present Club kitchen. This alternate plan moved the caretaker out of the mud on the ground level. However, this plan was vetoed.

Several persons are quite concerned that the original mid-twentieth century atmosphere of the main floor of the Clubhouse will be destroyed with the proposed modifications. The plans call for the removal of the women's locker room wall thus extending the main room to the rear windows. I read a communication from a former president who does not understand why we are not moving the caretaker up. Although he disagrees with the prior decision of the Club, he would live with it. Another person said that this is the time to stop this unwise course of action. It is better to forego the money spent on architect charges now than to proceed with construction and regret it with each flood that dumps more mud into the Caretaker's bedrooms and bath. The regret will last for perhaps 50 to 100 years each new flood occurs.

There are alternatives:

1) One person has been advocating going to the County with the Wiebenson plan for a separate raised building upstream from the current caretaker quarters. We have this plan and if it is rejected by the County we would then have the option of requesting a variance. We cannot request a variance if we do not submit the plans.

2) We can change the In-the-Mud plan to the alternate proposal that retains the footprint of the Clubhouse and puts the Caretaker bedrooms and bath above flood-level in the current women's locker room. The current construction estimates range from \$200,000 to \$300,000. There are funding proposals to be voted on at the May meeting. Imagine the money each of us will spend only to "leave them in the mud."

If you share the concerns of a number of Islanders that the Club should accomplish its original aim of raising the Caretaker quarters above flood-level, then please come to the monthly meetings and share your thoughts. All Islanders are welcome at the meeting: Regular, Honorary, Senior, and Wait List. You can contribute to the future of your club. Meetings are held the second Wednesday of each month at 8:00 PM.

## 51st Running of CCA Potomac Downriver Race Sunday, May 21, 2006

By V. Star Mitchell, Downriver Race Co-Chair

The 51st running of the CCA Potomac Downriver Race hosted by Sycamore Island will be Sunday, May 21st. Come and be a part of a half-century of living history and paddle the race! Join the fun!

The pre-registration fee is only \$15! Obtain a registration form from the CCA website at [www.canoecruisers.org](http://www.canoecruisers.org) and follow the instructions for mailing. Or see next page. At registration, the fee is \$20. Tandem teams pay as individuals UNLESS they are a parent and child. A parent and child (under age 18) go for \$15 a boat pre-registered and \$20 a boat at the sign-in. Liability forms **must** be signed on race day.



The race begins at Rocky Island on the Potomac River just above Wet Bottom Rapid and goes for 7.5 miles to Sycamore Island. At the end of the race, a free T-shirt, cap, logo, and a free lunch will be given to all racers, and there will be a ceremony with awards and prizes for the winners. (If you do not attend the ceremony, do not expect to receive the above!). This is the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the CCA and, thus, there will be a few extra perks.

Sign-in begins at 9 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. at Great Falls Inn (Maryland) followed by a mandatory meeting for all racers. 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, but this is not a novice race.

All participants should have experience in and be comfortable with up to Class III rapids. Any kind of a boat can enter provided it is properly outfitted with adequate floatation (air bags) and the paddlers (and all occupants of the boat) are wearing a helmet and a PFD (life jacket).

If you plan to paddle the race, please pre-register to help with our head-count for how many T-shirts and lunches we need to order.

Volunteer helpers are needed for safety boats and for land gofers (“land engineers”; however, no degrees needed). You will receive all of the perks the racers receive and be a part of an historical event. Please call or e-mail Star Mitchell @ 301-530-3252 or [star-mitchell@verizon.net](mailto:star-mitchell@verizon.net).

## Racer Registration Form For Potomac Downriver Race 2006

Please fill out a form for each racer and make sure to complete all fields.

PLEASE PRINT

Racer's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Male/Female: \_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State & Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's Name & Consenting Signature if Entrant is Under 18:

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Emergency Contact for Racer: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone of Emergency Contact for Racer: \_\_\_\_\_

Special Medical Note Regarding Racer: \_\_\_\_\_

Please Check the Appropriate Boat Class:

K-1 Plastic _____	OC-1 Plastic _____	RACER'S BIB NO. _____
K-1 Fiberglass _____	OC-2 _____	
Wildwater _____	C-1 Plastic Decked _____	
Slalom _____	C-1 Decked _____	RACER'S CLASS _____
Rodeo _____	C-2 Plastic _____	
Other _____	C-2 Decked _____	

(Final Classes will be determined at check-in.)

Please Specify Make & Model of Boat: \_\_\_\_\_

All paddlers must wear helmets and life vests. Also, each boat must have enough flotation to protect the paddler, the equipment, safety personnel, and bystanders who may offer assistance. Judges at registration will determine whether each boat and paddler has the necessary safety equipment.

Entry Fee for Pre-Registration \$15. Enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Check No. \_\_\_\_\_  
Registration at Race \$20. \_\_\_\_\_

Please enclose your check payable to the CCA and mail to:

**Star Mitchell, Race Co-Chair**  
**8705 Hempstead Ave.**  
**Bethesda, MD 20817**

# The Spring 2006 Workfest

Pictures by David Winer (mostly)



Super Root Photo by Jane Winer

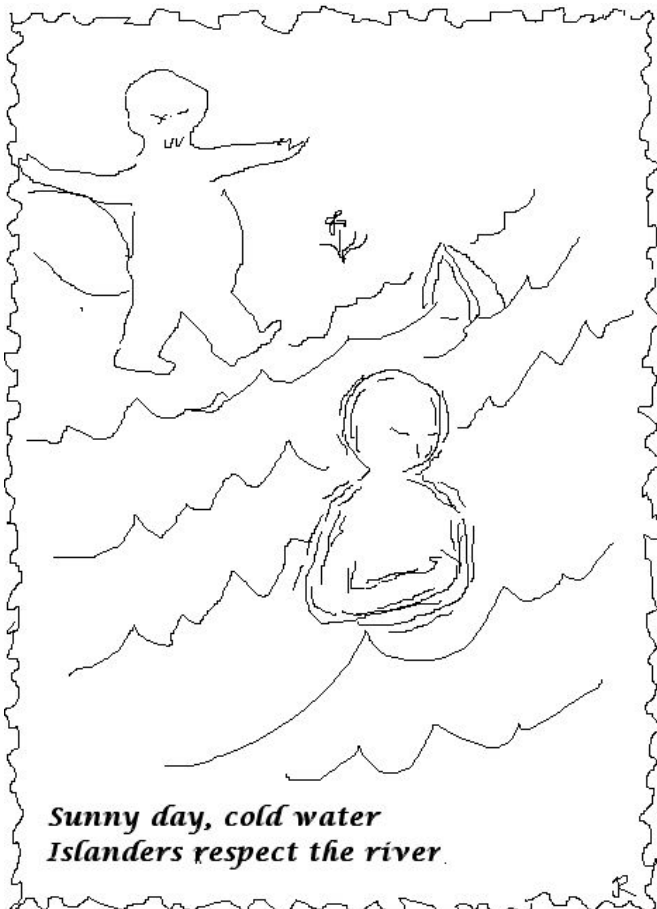
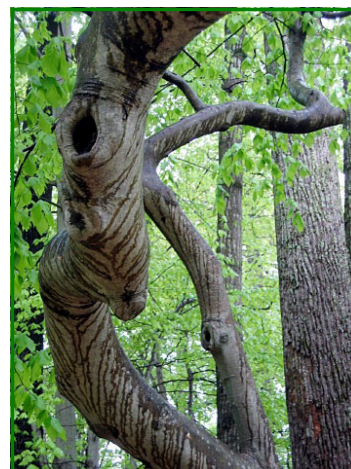
## Scenes from the Annual Wildflower Ramble

On a fine April morning with only an occasional encounter with dampness (i.e. rain) a group of Sycamoreans and friends were once again led by very knowledgeable and enthusiastic members John Parrish and R.G. Steinman on the annual wildflower ramble and occasional clamber, this time through the middle section of the Billy Goat Trail. We saw, sniffed, and occasionally tasted the wonderful plants – few showy but all intrepid -- that are part of what makes the Potomac shore so fascinating.



Above right: The “Zebra Tree..” Right: John and RG explaining and finding.

Photos by Jane Winer and Norman Metzger



*Ruppert*

*—Created by  
Johnna Robinson*



## Building the New Canoe Float

By Tryon Wells

Ahhh... another fine job for the captain: Refurbish or build anew Sycamore's old and slowly rotting canoe float. With float-building comrade-in-arms Tove Elfstrom absent on family business in Scandinavia, it might have seemed a good excuse to let things slide but, with expectations running high at the last monthly meeting, the project moved into high gear when the ordered flotation drums first arrived at the Captain's house.

Q. Hmmm, what to do?

A. Get them all down to the Island and out of the driveway, ASAP!

Q. But if we have a flood, won't the flotation drums float away?

A. Yep, better build the canoe float NOW, before any unpredictable spring-time high water.

And so it was off to Home Depot for the lumber, screws, bolts and nuts. Then many trips down the hill with supplies, and tools and the canoe float vision: Instead of building one float or two, build five float sections and then tie them together. This would have the distinct advantage that each float section could be easily handled by only three or four persons and would thus be easier to take in and out of the river at the workfests. At this point ex-mechanical engineer David Winer was brought in for consultation and the details of assembling the floats began to suffer revision.

Actually, almost all of David's recommendations were implemented and what turned into the float-building team of David Winer and Tryon Wells (with several guest appearances from Joe Hage) eventually produced five pretty good-looking and extremely stout floats (there won't be any annual repair of these floats for a while).

Then came the engineering question of the whole project: How to tie the floats together. It was agreed that we didn't want anything sticking out of the sides or the end of the canoe float that would scrape against canoe hulls when docking. Sliding a long steel rod through all five floats was considered, which morphed into a steel cable tightened by a turnbuckle; but nothing seemed to be easy to re-assemble every year and still be pretty strong. Finally, David suggested that John Stapko weld eight washers to large bolts which we would then use to bolt together each of the float sections.

John Stapko immediately and with gusto took up the challenge; and dismissing the washers as too small, welded the bolts to larger plates of steel. Back at the floats, we drilled holes for the bolts and Johnna Robinson gooped-up the steel plates and bolt-heads with black tar roofing cement to prevent rusting.

The final moment was at hand. Would the protruding bolts in each float section match up to the drilled holes that they were intended for? With some trepidation we floated each float-section in turn and maneuvered each bolt into its matching hole. Success!! We tightened the nuts on each bolt as tight as we thought it could take and finished by screwing down our plywood deck hatch-covers. The absolutely final chapter happened later on Sunday when David Holdridge and some the Orientation staff helped attach the old ramp to the new float and re-tied the cables. (I'm so sorry, Tove, to have hogged all the fun this time, but maybe we can re-build the Captain's Float next year.)



Photos by Jane and David Winer

## In Touch With Joe....

I apologize if my article this month isn't up to par. The article was due on Wednesday and here it is Saturday morning and I'm just writing it now so I'm in a bit of a rush. I've been so busy for the last couple of days that I haven't been able to sit down long enough to write anything. I feel bad for keeping Norm, our great editor, waiting. Maybe next month I'll actually get it to him on time. [Editor's note: Hah!]

The problem started on Tuesday when I decided to pull the ferry out of the river. I knew that I had a busy week ahead. With two large parties coming to the island on Thursday and the Workfest on Sunday, I had to do something about my overweight and water-filled pontoons. It was very difficult to pull the ferry back and forth and it was frightening to see the pontoons completely submerged when the ferry was loaded with visitors.

You can probably imagine that pulling the ferry from the river is not an easy thing; but if the river rises high enough it is easy to float the ferry onto shore and that's what I did. Well, almost. The river crested at 6.2 feet on that Tuesday night but to get the ferry where I wanted I needed another six inches of water. It was a strange moment that night, for the first time I was hoping the flood-waters would get higher. Unfortunately I was stuck with a ferry that was only halfway out of the river. I wondered briefly about my sanity, but decided I had reached the point of no return so I pushed on, motivated by the thought of a sinking ferry. I grabbed a winch out of the shed and, with a chain around a big sycamore tree, I hoisted the ferry on to the bank. Half the ferry was on land and half was still sticking out over the river like a diving board.

Working from a canoe as the river slowly receded, I drained and patched the boat. In the past I've used a small pump to pump the water out of the pontoons but since I had so little time I couldn't be bothered with that and I simply drilled a hole into the bottom of each pontoon. One pontoon drained briefly but the other shot forth a stream that lasted over half an hour; there was at least twenty-five gallons in there! I sanded and patched the pontoons with epoxy, the kind that cures underwater, and fashioned some bumper extensions that I hope will protect the pontoons from further damage. With the help of Hilary Thomson I was able to slide the ferry back into the river. It turned out to be a good thing that the ferry was only halfway out as it made it easier to get it back in. I'm happy to report that the ferry is fixed. I hope it lasts.



Photo by Kelsey Hage

Before I go I have to thank George Malusky, fishing guru and Island grill master, for taking the girls and me fishing. We were finally able to take him up on his generous offer to take us to Fletcher's for the annual shad run. He rented a boat, we caught huge fish, and even my reluctant teenage daughters said they had a lot of fun. Thanks George!

## Saturday Relief Caretaker May — June

May 6, 2006	9:00 a.m. - 3:00	Christine Henny	301-229-7113
	3:00 p.m. - dark	John Cunningham	703-876-9165
May 13, 2006	9:00 a.m. - 3:00	Norman Eule	301-320-3669
	3:00 p.m. - dark	Beth Barlow Grant	202-234-7547
May 20, 2006	9:00 a.m. - 3:00	Margaret Barry	301-229-5351
	3:00 p.m. - dark	Patricia Hartge & Son	301-907-6657
May 27, 2006	9:00 a.m. - 3:00	Debra Friedmann	301-365-4140
	3:00 p.m. - dark	Gordon Phillips	301-405-0347 (W)
June 3, 2006	9:00 a.m. - 3:00		
	3:00 p.m. - dark	Ann & Witt Farquhar	301-320-4042
June 10, 2006	9:00 a.m. - 3:00	Howard and Susan Weiss	301-320-3766
	3:00 p.m. - dark		
June 17, 2006	9:00 a.m. - 3:00		
	3:00 p.m. - dark		
June 24, 2006	9:00 a.m. - 3:00		
	3:00 p.m. - dark		

### \*\*\*\* Caretaker Volunteers \*\*\*\*

**To volunteer, contact Maxine Hattery at 202-362-1361 or [hattery@aol.com](mailto:hattery@aol.com)**

### Large Parties

03-May	8:30-5pm	Kathy Sessions	Mtng. Environmental Hlth Funders	12
19-May	4:30-dusk	Barbara McCoy	NCRC End of Yr. Staff Party	30
07-Jun	noon-5pm	Alan & Caroline Gelb	Faculty Party for Son's Grade	35
11-Jun	3 pm-dusk	Norman & Nancy Metzger	Playreaders	15

**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](mailto:jnoble@shs.net), phone: 240- 747-4810, fax: 301-468-6433**



## *The Sycamore Islander*

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### **Upcoming Sycamore Events**

Canoeing Class, Saturday, May 6 (see p. two)

May Meeting, May 10, 8 p.m. At the Island.

June Meeting, June 14, 8 p.m. At the Island

*Full listing of 2006 Sycamore events on p. two.*



*Phacelia purshii* , from the Wildflower Walk  
Photo by Jane Winer