



Walking the Wildflowers

Photo by David Winer

The Sycamore Islander

May 2007

Volume 86 No. 5

President's Letter

The month of April was a good news, bad news month. First, the good news. After several postponements, the Club held the Spring Workfest on Sunday, April 22. The weather was glorious; the turnout was excellent; and the event was well organized and productive due to the organizational skills and hard work of Joe Hage, our supervisors and many members and waitlisters. If you are feeling remorseful about not attending, fear not; the Club is here to assuage your guilt. There is a long list of tasks and projects that were not completed and, in some cases, not even started. Let Joe know that you're looking to help out.

Now the bad news. Despite my best persuasive efforts in my April letter, we did not get a quorum for the April meeting, which means that at least eight families who have been on the waiting list for ten years are *still* in limbo. I would like to see a good turnout for the May meeting so that we can vote these families into the Club and take care of other business. With summer coming when more people are away, the May and June meetings may represent our last chance to conduct regular Club business for several months.

It also appears that the Club is having some difficulty with our system of relief caretakers. We are not getting enough volunteers and people who do volunteer sometimes have not shown up. Relief caretaking is an important part of our membership obligations. People on the waiting list are also welcome to take a turn at relief caretaking. It is a great way for waitlisters to get out to the Island on a weekend. Please call Maxine Hattery, our Relief Caretaking Supervisor, and volunteer. [Page nine for contact info.] If you get a call from Maxine, be generous with your time. Remember that the Club is a volunteer organization. Paying dues is not enough.

Hopefully, May will be a pure good news month. Before the May meeting, which will be held on the Island at 8:00 PM on May 9th, Larry Heilman, who is a PhD anthropologist and world traveler, will do a presentation on traveling in Morocco. This will begin promptly at 7:15 PM. Also, if the weather is good, we will fire up a couple of barbeques around 6:00 PM for a pre-meeting cookout.

I look forward to seeing you at the monthly meeting on May 9.

— 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. Telephone: 202/544-6027 or 202/445-5436 (cell).

The deadline for the June issue is Wednesday, May 30

A Guide to Sycamore Island Membership

By Tammy and Joe Belden

As membership chairs for Sycamore, we find that there is often some confusion regarding the various categories of membership, eligibility requirements, and club privileges such as voting, canoe rack, etc., associated with them. We offer the following summary to help clarify things:

Membership Limit – Sycamore membership is limited to 160 regular members. A member is a single person, a couple, or a family living under the same roof. Each club member so defined is entitled to one vote.

Couple divorced or separated – Members: Upon written request to the Membership Secretary, each individual may retain regular separate membership with full privileges. Each must pay full annual dues. The additional membership will count as an overage to the 160 membership limit until the next vacancy occurs. **Waiting List Applicants:** Each partner may remain a waiting list candidate. Application fee must be paid along with all other requirements for waiting list candidates.

Inactive Membership – Eligible: a) Members temporarily living outside the area for one year or more (Membership Secretary may grant conversion to inactive upon written request from the member); AND b) those who for personal reasons must reduce their commitment to the club for one year or more (member must make written request to Membership Secretary; Membership Secretary makes recommendation to the club; club votes at monthly meeting). Inactive members do not count toward the 160 membership limit. Upon written request to the Membership Secretary, inactive members may be restored to regular membership and carried as an overage to the 160 membership limit until the next vacancy occurs. Inactive members pay one-quarter annual dues, may not be assigned a canoe rack, must remove personal items from island, and are not eligible to vote. They may participate in club events and, if living out of town, may use the Island when in town.

Senior Membership – Eligible: Regular members in good standing who have maintained that status for 20 years. Membership Secretary may grant conversion to senior status upon written request from the member. Senior members do not count toward the 160 membership limit. Senior members pay one-half annual dues and have full membership privileges.

Honorary Membership – Eligible: a) Members in good standing for 25 years or more who have resigned from the Club; AND b) An individual who has rendered unusual and outstanding service to the Club. Honorary membership is considered upon written recommendation by another member and voted on in the monthly meeting. They have full privileges of membership and pay no dues. Honorary members do not count toward the 160 membership limit.

Service Membership- Service members have full membership and privileges during a specific contracted period. Regular membership is offered upon completion of the contract after a vote on such offer in a monthly meeting. Service members do not count toward 160 membership limit.

Former Club Members – Former club members who resigned in good standing and who seek reinstatement must follow the same procedures as a new applicant. However, the Club may vote to consider the application before any other pending applications.

Canoe Racks – Regular members, senior members, waiting list pass holders and honorary members are eligible for a canoe rack in the following priority: regular members, senior members, waiting list pass holders and honorary members.

Please feel free to call or contact us with any questions you may have about membership. Tammy and Joe Belden (202-882-2224; tamarabelden@gmail.com)

From Holly Syrrakos, Archivist

From the Archives

31 Years Ago at Sycamore Island

It is hard for me to think of 1976 as historic but it has been more than 30 years since the following entry made its way to the then-Island president, George Loeb. From the superintendent of the C&O Canal, it is a commendation of the Island caretaker and a member.

I would like to thank Mr. Peter Day [then the caretaker] and Mr. White for their efforts in averting possible multiple drownings at Brookmont Dam on Sunday, July 4.

Peter Day was involved with his duties when our Park Ranger staff requested his assistance in intercepting a large group of canoeists whose stated intent was to travel to Washington to view the fireworks. The canoeists were either ignorant of or undeterred with the danger presented by the Brookmont Dam or Little Falls. Peter was unselfish in his assistance.

Peter mobilized a small motor boat to search for the canoeists. Immediately upon entering the main river, he observed a lone, unrelated canoe approaching the dam. A frantic pursuit resulted in a successful intervention less than 100 feet above the dam and the redirection of this canoeist to the safer waters of the C&O canal.

Peter then assisted in contacting the large flotilla of canoeists, directing them to the canal and discussing the river hazards. In the same afternoon, Mr. White [a member] redirected two rafters into the canal from their intent to travel over the dam and falls to Washington.

None of the nineteen boaters involved wore personal flotation devices and large quantity of alcohol had been consumed by the single group of sixteen—factors that could have definitely led to a multiple drowning had the boaters run either Brookmont Dam or Little Falls.

We appreciate Peter's assistance and that of Mr. White. The cooperation displayed in preventing potential river tragedies was indeed an auspicious beginning to National Safe Boating Week.

Now that Spring is here and boating begins in earnest, remember to wear your PFD and stay away from Brookmont Dam. Enjoy the river.

Canoeing Class

Islander Frank Daspit will again teach his very popular canoeing class this year. The class will be held at Sycamore Island on Saturday, May 5, 2007 from 9:30 to 11:30 am. All members and wait listers from beginners to more advanced paddlers can attend. Teenagers welcome. There are plenty of club canoes available. No need to RSVP; just come to the Island. For more information, contact canoe supervisor Jim Drew at 202/462-3836.

2007 Island Calendar

Event	Date/Time	Contact	Rain Date
Canoeing Class at Sycamore Island. [p. 3]	Saturday, May 5 9:30 to 11:30 a.m	Frank Daspit and Jim Drew	
Downriver Canoe Race [below]	Saturday, May 12	Star Mitchell	
Summer Solstice BBQ, River Song Party and Sleepover	Saturday to Sunday June 23 to 24	Joe Hage, Whitney Pinger	
Fishing Derby	Saturday, August 18	George and Shelley Malusky	
Sycamore Regatta	Monday, Sept. 3 1:30 p.m. till dusk.	Sherry Pettie, Vicki Judson, Anne Waidmann	
Fall Workfest	Sunday, Nov. 4, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.	Joe Hage, Tryon Wells	Sunday, Nov. 11

52nd CCA Potomac Downriver Race, Saturday, May 12th : Volunteers Needed

The 52nd running of the CCA Potomac Downriver Race will be Saturday, May 12th. Due to construction at Great Falls, sign-in (of \$25) is 9 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. at Old Anglers Inn by the stairs and port-a-johns (sorry). Early registration, by May 5, is only \$15. Send pre-registration to Star Mitchell, Co-Race Chair, 8705 Hempstead Ave., Bethesda, MD 20817. For registration forms and more details, go to: www.canoecruisers.org or www.sycamoreisland.org

Take-out is Sycamore Island. Participants (racers, land workers, safety boaters) receive a T-shirt, lunch, and awards for the winners. Awards will not be mailed to those who depart prior to the awards ceremony. A shuttle van will be provided. Do not bring two cars! Boy scouts are providing the van and the boys will be there to carry boats to the river and out of Sycamore Island. So if carrying your boat is your worst problem, please do join the race!

I need VOLUNTEERS!! Land workers and safety boats are needed. No degrees are needed. So easy, cavemen can do it. Call Star Mitchell 301-530-3252 or starmitchell@verizon.net.

-- Star Mitchell

Wildflower Walk and Botany 2007

By Renee Dunham. Photos and Captions by David Winer

The Sycamore Island Wildflower Walk on April 14 was led by that great botany team John Parrish and RG Steinman. Their comprehensive approach to Spring is to invite all to see, smell, taste, and feel the unfolding of the flora about us. The cool, cloudy weather and tax preparation must have discouraged the usual number of revelers, for only six of us (lucky we) appeared at the Lock 10 parking lot: David and Jane Winer, George and Renee Dunham, and Carol & Rick Schleicher.

We cut into the woodlands a little downriver from Lock 10 and ambled upriver-ish on people trails, deer paths, and no paths, scanning for new finds or for some treasure spotted by John on a previous reconnaissance. Looking and listing the finds engendered guiltless, visual greed, whereby even the flowerless flora became part of the loot.



A cool thing, besides the weather, was getting down and dirty. We lowered our noses into blossoms to compare aromas. The Squirrel Corn had a sweet, spring aroma, whereas its near look-alike, Dutchman's Britches, appeared to have little fragrance at all. And of course we smelled the spicy fragrance of the yellow blossoms of the understory Spice Bush.

We tasted the sweet, slender Spring Beauty leaves and the pungent, succulent, oniony Ramp. Crouched in the flora, RG, peered through her hand lens at a Wild Ginger blossom and exclaimed, "It's so neat to see the little insects pollinating the Wild Ginger flower. I feel like I'm looking in on deep secrets." With RG's hand lens, we explored the private chambers of a number of other blossoms and found ants, spiders, and flies absorbed in their tiny worlds. Later the hand lens circulated for inspecting the diminutive, white blossoms of the Phacelia Dubia.



Another cool thing that happened is that David, assuming that we were going to Plummer's Island, headed in the direction of a possible crossing place. John did not plan to endanger our small group by hazarding the tricky maneuver across rocky outcrops in the river to the steep and slippery island bank, but David's approaching Plummer's with the attitude of Manifest Destiny turned John's mind to helping us over.

Plummer's Island was originally owned by the Maryland Botanical Society, but about twenty years ago the National Park Service took it under wing, allowing the Society to retain some rights of use. It is the most studied place in the nation for flora and fauna, providing a window over time to track changes in the flood plain. It is a rocky, luxuriant little island. A simple, one room, wooden cabin, erected at a high point, was used as a workshop and laboratory by naturalists. They must have loved their island as we love ours, for we counted six commemorative plaques fixed to the rock faces - each bearing the name, life span, and profession of a witness and recorder of the richness here - two naturalists, two biologists, an ornithologist, and a lichenologist.



On Plummer's Island, John spotted the rare Harbinger of Spring, the earliest to bloom, which blooms were gone by now. Honoring its courage, and knowingly anthropomorphizing, I respectfully address it in Latin: *Engenia Bulbosa*, I hope to catch you in flower next year. Another rare species, Twin Leaf, was found here in

a very lush patch, also well past bloom. We also saw Saxifrage, Star Chickweed, and Virginia Spiderwort. The Saxifrage and Star Chickweed were in bloom - white flowers - but it was a bit early for the Virginia Spiderwort. The awareness of was, is, and will-be blooming dramatized the continuous flow of life around us.

We lunched on a warm, rock high above the River, near a beautiful, blooming shrub - the Shadblow. We then descended to the upriver end of the Island, below the American Legion Bridge. Those speeding by in the rumbling, overhead vehicles could not hear, as we did, the Peregrine Falcon's shrill call. It's a real shame to have that Bridge overwhelm Plummer's Island as it does, and it is amazing that life nevertheless charges on here. I would like to learn what changes have occurred on this island over the decades.

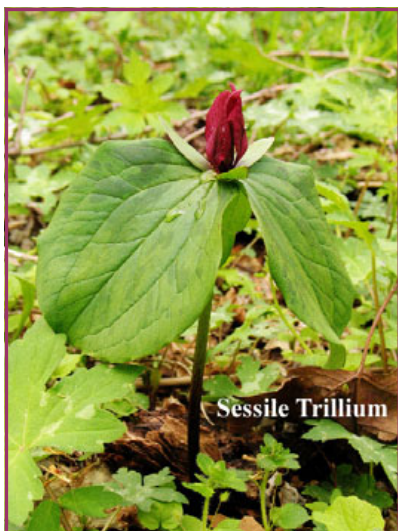
John pointed out the different climate and woodland microcosms we encountered. On Plummer's Island, for example, before the leafy tree canopy develops, the sun from the South heats the woodland floor and the rocks retain the heat. The flood plain enables the speedy decomposition of vegetation, providing rich nutrients in the soil. Hence, the great variety of flora on this Island. When we left this flood plain, we headed upland to woodland dominated by Oaks, Ash, Hickory, and Black Walnut. The woodland floor was profusely carpeted with adaptable Spring Beauties, tolerant of soil acidified by the slow breakdown of fallen leaves.

It was interesting that the Persimmon tree, Wild Ginger, and Sessile Trillium all had brown blossoms of a similar hue. It was surprising to find Virginia Bluebells in white as well as the usual blue and Violets in yellow, white, and the usual violet - the latter called Common Blue.

RG was dismayed to see that native Grape and Poison Ivy vines had been severed in a mistaken effort to protect the trees they grew on. But none of our native vines kill trees as they do not twine and wrap. Also Grapes and Poison Ivy are both native plants that provide important food for wildlife. The vines that do kill our trees are such invasives as Honeysuckle and Bittersweet.

There was a profusion of the white blossomed Wild Mustard. RG encouraged us to decapitate these rampaging invasives - no need to uproot. Topping them will prevent regrowth next year. RG also encouraged us to top the young Nettle plants - in this case for consumption. Beware its sting! Use thick gloves. Sorry, for those of you who dislike the Nettles, this will not prevent them from growing back next spring. Though an invasive alien, they are a useful plant. Jane Winer made an infusion of her Nettles and was astounded by the brilliant, dark, emerald green color of the tea. She will try dyeing fabric in it after stabilizing the color with vinegar. I steamed my Nettles, subduing it to delicious sweetness.

Summed up by RG: "That was a really great walk today. John and I were talking about all the great things we saw, and there were many. The acres of Spring Beauties were a balm to the soul, mixed in with all the Toothworts, Phlox, Bluebells, and Golden Ragworts."



In Touch With Joe....

First of all, I'd like to send out a big "Three Cheers" to everyone who made it to the Spring Workfest. We managed to have a very successful day despite my lack of true organizational skills. Thankfully, I had good help. We all owe a lot of thanks to Gordon and Linda Phillips, George Malusky, Chuck Pill, Karl Kosok, Tove Elfstrom, Dave Winer, Frank Daspit, and everyone else for making this a successful day. We actually had a lot of fun, too; and there was time to meet and catch up with other Club members on a beautiful day. We now have a new canoe rack, a new brick walkway, a new wooden walkway, a reinforced canoe shed, a painted and cleaned clubhouse and all our docks in the water. Let me know if you couldn't make the Workfest and are looking for a way to pitch in.



Photo by Norman Metzger

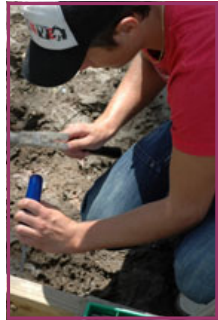
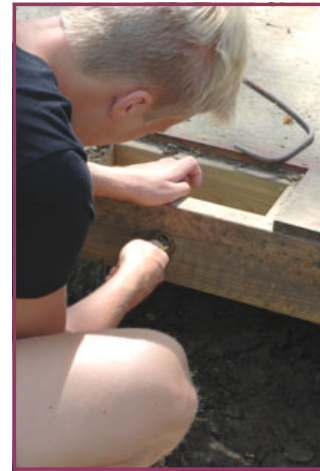
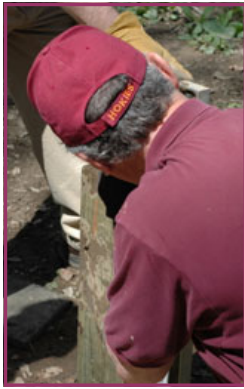
April was the month of blue bells and high water. It was also the month when the Island is transformed from a sunny Island of naked trees to a dark and shaded forest of green. The wildflowers bloom in April and the birds return to their nesting sites. The geese have laid their eggs and the warblers are vocally claiming their territory. The cormorants have also returned in large numbers. The blue bells are on their way out now, their blossoms falling as the trees fill with leaves. They endured snow and freezing weather in this most fickle of months but their beauty and allure were enhanced by their brief appearance and they leave us with a promise of return.

The high water of this past month has kept me busy with the usual preparations and clean-ups. Every flood has its unpredictable threats and this past one left me with no trail lights and a tow rope snagged high in a tree (daily log 4/20/07). I'm also trying, unsuccessfully, to convince Verizon that they need to reattach the phone line to the "new" (two years old now) utility poles and get that out of the flood zone.

On April 4th I wrote this on my log:

The sun finally came out late this afternoon and it inspired me to get out. I thought it would be fun to take a sunset run over at Turkey Run Park. I didn't think twice about jumping into a boat and paddling the 400 yards of river that separated me from the Virginia shore. I got into a canoe and had no trouble heading down river toward the foot of the Island with the 10 mph wind at my back. The last rays of the sun hit me in the face as I rounded the Island. The black silhouettes of the cormorants filed past me, their effortless flight gave no hint of the powerful wind they were headed into. The river had no visible signs of strong winds either, so I went for the other side. The wind was blowing from the west/northwest, straight down river, and when I was away from the shadow of the Island the 10 mph breeze became a steady 15-20 mph wind with sudden gusts of 30 mph. No whitecaps but a good steady train of one foot waves was knocking on my bow. I didn't debate it for more than a second: time to turn back. At this point, I was down river from the Island but only about 100 yards away. Sometimes a gust would come from an unexpected direction, pushing the canoe frantically into the waves, causing my heart to beat faster. I tied the long painter from the bow to my PFD; I didn't want my boat to sail away from me if I got knocked out by a wave. With slow and steady strokes and without panic I made it, eventually, back to the relative shelter of the slough. Winded (no pun intended) and a little sore in the shoulders, I paddled back to the Island in the fading light. Maybe another day I'll go for a sunset run at Turkey Run.

Scenes from the Spring 2007 Workfest



Photos by Norman Metzger

Cleanup Day on Sycamore Island

March 31 was indeed a beautiful day for gathering trash. Taking care not to squash the budding Virginia bluebells, Renee and George Dunham, with three like-minded friends, collected bits of plastic and twisted cans, bottles and balls and a 30 gallon drum. Jim Drew, by sea, pulled off the nasty plastic bags caught in trees overhanging the water (hence the epithet “Witches' Knickers”). On the 19th year of the Potomac River cleanup, we six filled eight large garbage bags with about 200 pounds of trash from both Sycamore and Rupert Islands. See the photo of our heroes, dwarfed by their loot. The irony of this is that we had so much fun finding trash. Better there were none. If the Alice Ferguson Foundation of the Potomac River Watershed Cleanup will have their hard work and environmental strategies realized, this River will be clean by 2013.



George Dunham and friends with loot
Photo by Renee Dunham

--Renee Dunham

Saturday Relief Caretakers May — June

May		
5	9-3	
	3-dark	
12	9-3	Tom and Mary Edsall
	3-dark	Tom and Mary Edsall
19	9-3	Patricia Harge
	3-dark	
26	9-3	
	3-dark	
June		
2	9-3	
	3-dark	
9	9-3	
	3-dark	
16	9-3	
	3-dark	
23	9-3	
	3-dark	
30	9-3	
	3-dark	

**** Caretaker Volunteers ****

To volunteer, contact Maxine Hattery at 202-362-1361 or hattery@aol.com

Large Parties

May 26, 12 to 3: Alan and Caroline Gelb will be hosting a wedding ceremony for between 50 and 70. Alan asks when was the last time a wedding was held on the Island?

June 3, 3 till dusk: Norman and Nancy Metzger will host a play reading group of up to 15.

Aug. 11, 1-6: Trish Hartge will host 22 guests.

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: johnnoble@comcast.net, phone: 301-448-8562



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FIRST CLASS MAIL

Sycamore Events

Canoeing Class — May 5, 2007 from
9:30 to 11:30 am

May Meeting — May 9, 8 p.m. At the
Island

Downriver Canoe Race — May 12.
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June Meeting — June 13, 8 p.m. At
the Island

N.B. General meetings are held at 8 p.m. on
the second Wednesday of the month.



Photo by Renee Dunham