



The Sycamore Islander

June 2008

Volume 87 No 6

President's Letter, June 2008

May was as rainy a month as we've had in the area in many years. Due to high water on the Potomac, we cancelled the May meeting and the new member orientation. The water level at Little Falls stayed stubbornly over 5 feet, and the Island was mostly closed for the latter part of May. Hopefully, June will bring better weather, and we can get those canoe muscles back in shape.

Construction Update: Our permit application has been filed. We expect to have the permit in hand sometime between the end of June and July 15. We are talking to the contractor about when he can start. The Building Committee, Treasurer and other officers will be looking at the finances to decide on when we will need to borrow the money authorized by the vote

Supervisor of Relief Caretaking Needed: Maxine Hattery, who has been scheduling relief caretakers for several years, has decided it is time to give someone else a chance. Scheduling the relief caretakers is not difficult as there usually is a deep pool of volunteers, and Maxine will show you the ropes. This is a good job for a new member because you get to meet a lot of the other members. Please call me if you are interested (202.492.2003).

Articles for the Islander: We are always looking for articles to include in the Islander. If you have taken an interesting trip or have some information/events to report on relating to the Island or the Potomac River basin, be sure to get in touch with our editor, Amanda Cannell (acannell@norwoodschoool.org.)

June Meeting Date: The May meeting will be held on the Island on Wednesday, **June 11 at 8:00 P.M.** Come early with a picnic dinner. A couple of barbecues will be set up and ready for grilling. We need a quorum to fill the regular member vacancies.

-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, Amanda Cannell, 5901 Cranston Rd, Bethesda, Md. 20816. 301-229-8658. Text and graphics may be sent as email attachments to acannell@norwoodschoool.org.

The deadline for the July issue is Wednesday, June 25th.

In Touch with Joe....Notes from his Island Journal

Tuesday-- May 6, 2008

There is only one eaglet left in the nest now. That happens sometimes, either the other chick just fell out of the nest or it couldn't compete with its older sibling and just became too weak to fend for itself. This will allow the parents to focus on only one offspring, almost guaranteeing its survival. The surviving chick is now as big as it's dad.

A Fish Crow came looking for warbler eggs this morning and was met by a mob of protective parents. The crow came down river to the Island side just as I stepped onto the ferry. The Prothonotary Warblers were the first to attack and the crow flew over me and perched above the ferry in the mainland side. That was when the orioles came onto the scene and suddenly there were six brightly colored birds swirling around the solitary black crow. I cut up most of the fallen tree and a friend and I stacked the wood under the stairs. Thanks for the help. There is still plenty of tree to work on if you happen to be down here. The meeting is on the 14th.

Wednesday-- May 7, 2008

The river isn't going down very fast, but it is getting warmer. There should be some excellent canoeing days right around the corner. Hey that rhymes!

The wind today was a little hazardous, blowing up stream and causing some waves. The waves were bad enough in fact to flip a member and his guest right into the river. They managed to get rescued by their fellow paddlers, but they were helpless to save the heavy fiberglass Coleman canoe as it sank to the bottom of the river. I thought it strange that the boat just sank. Maybe we'll find it after the river goes down and the water clears up.

I startled a mother Wood Duck and her young brood today as I paddled around the bottom of the island. The tiny ducklings must have just emerged from their nest and they squeaked in terror as they motor-boated for shelter. The worried parent, meanwhile, was putting on an award-winning performance, faining an injury to lure me from her chicks. I took the bait and paddled after the mother for several minutes as she continued her awkward dance across the water's surface.

Sunday-- May 11, 2008

The latest birds to arrive on the scene are the cuckoos, humming birds and in the evening I can watch the night hawks feeding over the river. The young eagle is now big enough to be seen with the naked eye from the Island.

There was no caretaker here again yesterday afternoon, for whatever reason. Luckily the Island wasn't too busy after three when the morning caretaker left. Thanks to the members that so willingly filled in and ran the ferry. Club member Cindy Bertaut was here with her son and some of his friends when I returned to the Island yesterday. Her son and his friends were in the middle of an intense water battle when I arrived and I was thrilled when they said I could join

in. We had a blast soaking each other with water balloons and high-powered squirt guns, but then, alas, someone's dad was on the way to pick them up and the fun had to end. By the way if you ever need a professional photographer, Cindy showed me her pictures and they are just fantastic!

Wednesday-- May 14, 2008

The river started to rise on Sunday evening just before dark. I decided I'd better get things ready for the high water before I went to bed and I'm so glad I did. When I got up Monday the river was two feet higher, the dock was submerged and trees and other debris were moving down river at a fast clip. I had already released the ferry and I had raised the bell rope and the ferry line, I then had to flip all the club canoes and move the tables and grills to higher ground. I went off to the Children's Inn and when I returned that afternoon all the lower steps on the mainland were submerged and the river was a massive, high-speed conveyer of fallen trees. I paddled over to the Island and realized I had to take down the bell rope and raise the ferry rope up as high as I could, the river was expected to reach over ten feet. I secured everything on the Island and decide to go up to Great Falls to watch the river's fury from there.

Thursday-- May 15, 2008

It was a short walk from the canoe to my front door yesterday as the river peaked at 10.74 and most of the island was covered in water. It was fun walking around in my waders through the submerged field and paddling a canoe down the trail to the tree house, which now looked more like a dock. The zip line, if you were brave enough to do it was now a ride over open water with fish swimming below!

The river has receded enough for me to go and reflip the boats. I have to flip them back before the next rain comes and fills them up with water. The job was made more difficult by the fact that a few tree trunks and other debris had collected there at the canoe rack. I moved what I could by myself but one tree trunk was just too big to budge. I also began shoving the docks out so they don't get stranded on dry land, I hate when that happens. Hopefully the swim float will reappear once the river goes down again.

Thank you to everyone that offered me a place to stay during this recent flood, I really appreciate all the generosity. The truth is I love the isolation and quiet that a flooded river provides, and I like the excitement as well.

Friday-- May 16, 2008

The ferry is closed today and judging by the predictions it looks like the ferry will be closed for several days. Strangely the Down River Canoe Race has not been cancelled. Star Mitchell says that she will go ahead with the race despite the fact that the river will be over six feet and the ferry will be closed. Good Luck.

Friday-- May 21, 2008

Due to high river levels the ferry will be closed from now until Monday morning the 26th of May, thank you.

Friday-- May 28, 2008

Things are slowly getting back to normal here after the mini flood we had, the river went up to 10.74 feet! Most of the Island was covered in knee-deep water, which means lots of mud and washed-up debris to clean up. We also had to reattach the bell rope and shovel the mud from the walkway.

I've got good news and bad news. The good news is that I was wrong about the eaglets and, after my latest observations, I realized that there are in fact two baby eagle still sitting in the nest. The bad news is that the river has receded and there is no sign of the swim float. I'm afraid that it has been a victim of the flood.

We've had a pretty wet May: 21 of the last 29 days before Memorial Day had river levels above five feet (the level at which we close the ferry).

I guess the groundhog(s) survived the flood. They have just finished digging a brand new escape hole that allows them to emerge from their burrow under the cover of the first canoe rack.

More Otter sightings on the river; A kayaker called me while I was in Florida to tell me that he saw an otter swim past him as he was surfing a wave near Anglers and another friend of mine, Duncan Thomson, sent me this yesterday.

"While enjoying a canoe trip on the Potomac the other day, I had the good fortune to see what I'm pretty sure was a river otter. Here's the details...



Photo by Joe Hage

On Monday, May 26, feeling the urge to get away from city and suburbia, I decided to load up my canoe and head for the Potomac river. Not wanting to do a lot of driving, I decided to make it a local trip. After consulting with my friend Joe Hage, caretaker of Sycamore Island, I opted to put in at Carderock. I would have liked to make the more exciting run all the way from Old Angler's Inn through the rapids at Yellow Falls and Stubblefield, but being on my own, and with the river high and cold, that seemed to entail a little more risk than I was willing to take. So, leaving my bicycle with Joe on the island, I drove up to Carderock and put in there. As I was just about a hundred yards above the American Legion bridge, close to the Virginia side, suddenly, with a big splash - as if intended to attract attention - a critter jumped out of the water, rolled, and plunged back below the surface. It was about 150 to 200 feet away from the canoe, and I didn't get a look at the head, just the belly, back legs, and tail. The fur on the belly was yellow-brown. My first thought was "beaver," since I've seen beaver several times on the Potomac. But there's no way it was a beaver - they don't roll like that, and the tail was quite different. It must have been an otter! I was very pleased to have seen it, and paddled in the general direction of where it had surfaced. It didn't come back up, and as I drifted down under the bridge, I thought I had seen the last of it. But then, about the same distance away from me as before, it jumped out of the water again - too quick for me to get a good look at it. It must have been drifting down with the current at the same rate as me. It broke the surface a couple more times, further away from me, but still drifting downstream at about the same rate. Despite occasional gusts of wind that wanted to push me back upriver and over to the Virginia side, I had a very enjoyable float the rest of the way down to the Island. Then, riding my bike back up the towpath to get my car, I happened upon a Great Blue heron sitting in the sun on a block in the middle of the canal, just sunning itself and preening. I stopped a bit away from it and watched it for a while, thinking how lucky I am to be able to share the place where I live with such a variety of other creatures! It's a very good sign that they can survive."Pretty cool huh?

Saturday-- May 29, 2008

It's going to be a busy month ahead, so be prepared for crowds. I already have five large parties scheduled for this month, including our annual Summer Solstice Sleepover on the 21st. The sleepover should be a lot of fun and its open to all members and wait listers too. In the morning I serve coffee and pancakes.

There are many snakes about. Someone yesterday reported a 7-foot black snake near the canoe dock and there are water snakes swimming by the swim dock. Poor young Anthony Pill had a northern water snake fall right on his head while he and a friend were canoeing under a low-hanging branch. How they managed to keep their cool and not jump into the river I'll never know, but they managed to wait for rescue and left the snake by itself in the canoe. The captive snake was then escorted back to the canoe dock where we identified it and let it go. There is one poisonous snake that we have to worry about and that's the copperhead. They have a distinctive, diamond-shaped head that is all one color. Copperheads don't seem to like the water so if you see a snake swimming towards you, chances are, it is not a poisonous snake, if that makes you feel any better.

Don't forget to come to the meeting on Wednesday the 11th of June. We're going to have the grills going early, around 5:30 and at 7:00 we have a very special presentation about Potomac River navigation back in the 18th century.

-Joe Hage



Photo by Joe Hage

From Holly Syrrakos, Island Archivist

76 Years Ago

From the June 1932 Sycamore Islander

In 1932, the Club had a problem that is almost inconceivable to us 76 years later. The *Islander* began, “*The most important problem before the Club these days, which problem no one, including your editor, seems to be doing much about, is the problem of getting new members.*”

Hard to believe, but the editor goes on for almost a page. “*Almost everyone now agrees that there is a depression and most of us who are now at Sycamore also agree that we’re badly in need of members around the age of twenty; young lads such as we all were about ten years ago; lads who have no families to raise and who can devote unlimited time to doing things at Sycamore without worrying about second trust payments or whether the grass should be cut this weekend instead of being permitted to grow while we come to Sycamore.*”

There was also consideration of the economy at the time. “*In these times the twenty dollar initiation fees seems to be quite a drawback as a lump sum payment and I’m wondering whether we couldn’t take about five or ten dollars down and a note for the rest. It’s well known that W.C.C. [Washington Canoe Club] let down the bars on initiation fees last summer and boosted their membership tremendously although we have no present knowledge as to how many stuck with the Club.*”

The effect of the Depression is noted again, later on in the *Islander* when the editor writes, “*A number of members have become in arrears in dues because of present business conditions, most of whom did not wish to entirely sever their connections with the Club and none of whom the Club wished to expel for non-payment of dues, since their present financial difficulties can hardly be said to be the fault of the delinquent members.*”

May of 1932 also witnessed a flood, the level of which I cannot discern. However, it was high enough to wash away the outhouse and surface of the tennis court. The platform tenters sustained considerable losses including Carl Stodder, “*whose [gold]fish pond floated away.*” There was more.

“*We also have a new caretaker, Pete, as a result of the flood. Our previous caretaker had never seen a highwater before and became highly indignant when the Potomac perpetrated one on him. From all reports, he overlooked tying the ferry to a tree when the water rose and so striped off all his clothes and waded in to hold it when it broke away from its moorings. According to his accounts there were seventy-five people on the towpath who refused to come to his assistance but other sources state that there were two ladies and three children over there watching his plight. At any rate, Boots Johnston, the Stodders and Whipple came along late in the afternoon and tied the ferry to a tree while the caretaker clothed himself. He asked to be relieved of this job immediately and will probably never trust another river. However, we are indebted to him for doing what seemed best to him in the way of saving the ferry.*”

With the advantage of hindsight, it seems obvious that institutional flexibility allowed the Club to survive both the Depression (about which we will likely hear more) and high water—about which we will certainly hear more.

Welcome New Sycamore Island Members:

Elie and Lesley Rogers have lived in an old farmhouse in Colesville, Maryland, for more than 30 years, and both enjoy gardening. Elie is a retired journalist, who worked more than 25 years as a photo editor at National Geographic magazine. Lesley still works there as director of the magazine's research division. Their daughter, Daria, 25, is a graduate student in philosophy at Stony Brook. Their son, James, 20, is living at home, working and trying to find himself. Elie and Lesley hope that their canoe and kayak will now be used more often than in recent years, but even if not, they expect to enjoy the tranquility of the island from time to time.

Roger Berliner and Susan Dillon have lived in Potomac since 1988, and have been on the waiting list for many years. Roger is currently serving on the Montgomery County Council as the councilman from District 1, which includes Potomac, Bethesda, Glen Echo, Cabin John, Chevy Chase, and other nearby communities. He also has a private law practice representing counties and alternative energy companies in their concerns about federal regulation of energy. Susan is a lawyer who stayed home to raise children for 17 years and is now back working fulltime as a fundraiser for Search for Common Ground, an international nonprofit working to transform the way the world responds to conflict. Still living at home is Owen Berliner, a 17-year-old junior at Walt Whitman HS. Realistically, he will probably not spend much time on the Island, much preferring Bethesda, his room, and the computer to most other forms of entertainment.

During the summer, our daughter, Jesse will return from St. Mary's College of MD, and is likely to come to swim and kayak off the Island, in hopes of encountering Madeline Elfstrom, who was her best friend for several years at the Washington Waldorf School.

Roger in particular is looking forward to full membership, to give him access to a canoe for fishing in the Potomac, and peaceful respite from political life. Susan is looking forward to the calming quiet of the river after work in the summertime. We are ready to do our part with occasional stints as ferrymen and at the work fests, which have been a lot of fun in the past.

Scott and Jasemine Chambers moved to the Glenn Echo Heights area from Kensington in the fall of 1995. They have three daughters, Meredith Chambers, who is a junior at Bucknell University in Pennsylvania; Aidan Chambers, a junior at Walt Whitman High School; and Delaney Chambers, an eighth grade student at Our Lady of Victory School, a small parochial school in Washington, D.C. Scott and Jasemine came to Washington to do research at the National Institutes of Health, but eventually left science research to become patent attorneys. Scott is the head of the Intellectual Property (IP) section at Patton Boggs, LLP and Jasemine is a Senior Attorney at the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office where she handles International IP policies and legislation. The Chambers family enjoys camping and canoeing as well as activities such as fishing.

Peter Heller and Leslie Harris: Peter, a recent retiree from the International Monetary Fund (where he worked for almost 30 years), is now a Senior Adjunct Professor of International Economics at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. He has two children, Nathaniel and Katherine, both grown and, as with their father, working in the sphere of economic development (Katie at the World Bank). Leslie is a well-known potter in the Washington area, with a daughter and two grandchildren in the Long Island area. Both Peter and

Leslie are ardent gardeners and for years have enjoyed walking on the Canal. Peter also enjoys kayaking at an amateur level.

Jamie and Catherine Resor : The Resors have lived in the DC area for over 20 years and in Glen Echo for 10 years. Jamie works for a solar energy company and Catherine for the Land Trust Alliance. Previously he worked for the World Wildlife Fund and she for the Nature Conservancy. Originally they are both from Connecticut. They have three children, ages 13, 11 and six. The family loves the outdoors. As new club members, they hope to enjoy more canoeing.

Howard Shapiro and Shirley Brandman: Howard and Shirley live in Bethesda and have been in the area since 1993. Shirley is an elected member of the Montgomery County Board of Education. Howard is a litigation partner at the law firm of Wilmer Hale. She grew up in Queens, New York, and he is from Glen Rock, New Jersey. They met in law school. Their two children, ages 12 and 17, attend Pyle MS and Whitman HS. They like to come to the island on Friday nights with a good book and a pizza.

-Tammy Belden



Photo by Joe Hage

Saturday Relief Caretakers- June and July

Please sign up as soon as possible

Date	Hours	Caretaker	Number
June			
7	9-3	Joe Belden	
	3-dark		
14	9-3		
	3-dark	Carol & Bruce Beehler	301-229-1973
21			
28			
July			
12	9-3	Mac Thornton & Molly Carr	
	3-dark	Julie Smith	

****** Caretaker Volunteers ******

To volunteer, contact Maxine Hattery at 202-362-1361

or hattery@aol.com

Tell: 202-362-1361

Sycamore Bulletin Board:

Large Parties:

June 6 Alan and Caroline Gelb will host Mike Gelb's graduation celebration from 5 pm on with 37 persons.

June 10 Gordon and Linda will host 18 girl scouts for their troop picnic from 3:30 to 6:30.

June 13 from 9 to 3 Michael Colon and Corinne Roosevelt will host a birthday party of 21-35 guests.

June 21 from 3pm to dark Norman and Nancy Metzger are hosting 10 to 15 play readers.

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

Annual Solstice River Song Party;

Saturday June 21 3pm until dark Join us for the Annual Summer Solstice River Song Party. Enjoy the Island during the afternoon, BBQ and Potluck in the early evening, bonfire and sing-a-long at twilight. Do you play guitar? Know any songs about Rivers? Bring them and Sing them! Bring food to grill and food to share. All Islanders, Waitlisters, and their guests are welcome. Sleepover/Camping optional.
Reminder: The Island is Alcohol Free. Please remind your guests of this policy.

Relief Caretaking Supervisor needed:

Call Jeff Komarow to volunteer
202-492-2003



The Sycamore Islander
6613 80th Place
Cabin John, MD 20818
ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED

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

FIRST-CLASS MAIL
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
BETHESDA, MD 20817
PERMIT NO. 1172

FIRST CLASS MAIL

FIRST CLASS MAIL

Sycamore Events

June Meeting : Wednesday,
June 11th at 8:00 PM on Sycamore
Island.

July Meeting : Wednesday,
July 9th at 8:00 PM. on the island.

Relief Caretaking Supervisor Needed

Call Jeff Komarow
202-492-2003

Solstice Sleepover-June 21st



Photo by Joe Hage