



The Sycamore Islander

July 2008

Volume 87 No 7

President's Letter, July 2008– Jeff Komarow

-After the Island was flooded in May, the severe thunderstorms in June did some significant damage to the Island. Three huge walnut trees at the head of the Island were taken down by one of the storms as well as a large old tree near the rear of the Clubhouse. We may need to organize a mini-workfest sometime in July to clear out the trees and do other repairs, **so stay tuned.**

Waiting List Members: I have been remiss in not welcoming the Waiting List members to the Club, but let me welcome you now. We did not have a formal acceptance process for waiting list members, but we will include the names of waiting list members in the August *Islander*. All waiting list members retained their places on the waiting list, and these memberships will be converted to regular memberships in turn as regular members become senior members or resign. Meanwhile, you should start using the Club if you haven't already done so. You have the same rights, privileges and obligations as regular members. This is your club too. I hope that you will take ownership and become involved in the club life.

New Member Orientation Successfully Held: The new member orientation that was postponed in May was held on Sunday, June 29. Thanks to the efforts of Tammy and Joe Belden, co-membership secretaries, the orientation was a great success. We had a fine turnout, the weather was dry enough to walk the Island, and the attendees asked a lot of good questions.

It's never too early (or too late) to get involved: One of our new waiting list members, Alison Burns, has agreed to take over as Relief Caretaking Supervisor. This is a reminder that experience is not necessary for most of the officer/supervisor positions in the Club (including, most especially, the President). Bring your enthusiasm and contact me if you are interested in working on club issues. Besides the officer and supervisor positions listed on the website, there are a number of committees that could be formed to focus on particular issues, such as how the Club should select new members once the waiting list is cleared out? There also is an environmental committee that needs to get off the ground.

New Swim Float: If you've been down to the Island in the last two weeks, you know that the swim float was lost in the flood and has been replaced by a new one. The Club owes Tryon Wells our thanks for taking the initiative to build the new one, along with help from Joe. Read the June caretaker's log for more details.

Construction Update: We are still waiting for Montgomery County to approve our application for a building permit. We do not have any reason to believe that there are any problems. We would like to get the permit so that we can get a start date from the contractor.

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 August issue is Wednesday, July 30th.

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

Monday-- June 9, 2008

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.1 Water Temperature: 75 degrees.

It's been a crazy month so far with these almost-daily rainstorms and fluctuating river levels. The bad weather has made it impossible to plan events down here and three large parties had to be cancelled. Luckily my power came on in time for Mike Gelb to have his Graduation party here last Friday. Those Gelbs really know how to party and everyone seemed to be having a grand time.

Don't miss the special presentation that I've arranged for Wednesday evening before the meeting. I've invited a couple of local historians to talk about the Potomac River Company (George Washington's company) and early navigational techniques on the river. I understand it's going to be a high quality presentation, complete with projected ariel photos of the river. The presentation starts at 7:00 or you can come early and join us for a picnic.

Tuesday-- June 10, 2008

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.8 Water Temperature: 75 degrees.

The storm we had last Wednesday did more damage here than I realized. I was busy clearing the trails around the head of the Island when suddenly there was no trail to clear, it had been obliterated by a fallen black walnut tree. I was marveling at the new opening in the canopy when I noticed that two other huge walnut trees had fallen as well. These three trees were gigantic, probably eighty feet tall, and as they lay on the ground their length covers three quarters of the width of the Island. I think the head of the Island can rightfully be called a true disaster area.

I have to cut the "grass" now, no more excuses. I couldn't cut it in April because of the bluebells and I couldn't cut it in May because of all the rain and flooding. There was a raccoon walking around by the zipline yesterday, in broad daylight. Rarely do I see them in the daytime.

Sunday-- June 22, 2008

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.8 Water Temperature: 80 degrees.

The so-called Solstice Sleepover turned out to be a big Sidwell Friends graduation party. I've never seen so many teenagers here before. Nobody spent the night and to be honest there was relatively no Club participation. Nobody camped out. I'm not going to do the Solstice Sleepover next year and I think if Whitney wants to have a party she should schedule a large party through the large party coordinator like all the other members. I am also wondering why another large party (Norm's play reading) was schedule for that same day since the rules state that there can't be more than one large party per day. Having too many people on the Island, I'm realizing, puts too much of a strain on the Island, the ferry, and the unfortunate person who happens to be relief caretaker. I want the island to be a happy experience for everyone and I'd hate to see someone leave the Island unhappy.

Yesterday was very busy but last Sunday was a killer as well, I counted over eighty visitors to

Yesterday was very busy, but Sunday was a killer as well. I counted over eighty visitors to the island.

I put up a list of chores that need to be done around the Island. I thought it would be a good idea to give people the opportunity to pitch in and help the Club, but so far my list has been ignored. I thought this was a volunteer club.

Tryon Wells took it upon himself to build and launch a new swim float. I was very impressed by his determination and energy. He carried all the lumber down the hill by himself, plus the floatation. He did draft some young Club members to help him carry down the heavy concrete anchors. I helped him put the thing together and yesterday Dave Winer, Eric Simpson, Drew Walsh and Tryon got the float into the river. Thanks Tryon, you're awesome, and just in time for Whitney's party.

You might not recognize the Sycamore Store anymore. The painters have been working there for the last two weeks, the sign is gone and the familiar white clapboard house is now yellow. I think they're fixing it up to sell it.

Friday-- June 27, 2008

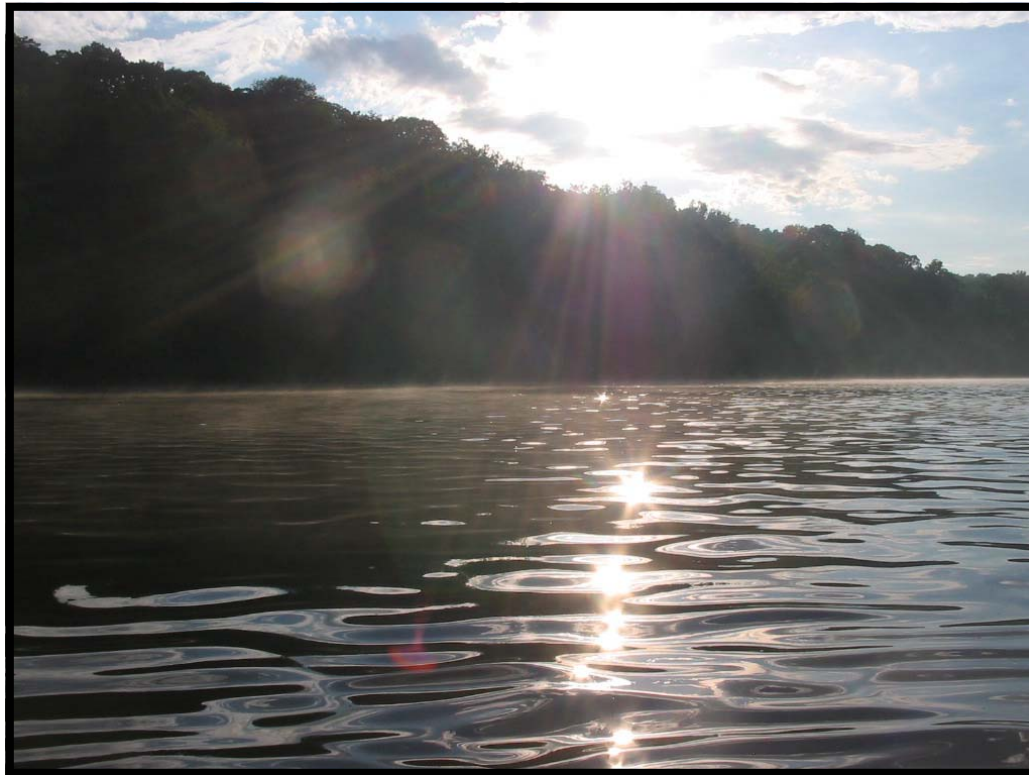
Water Level at Little Falls: 3.3 Water Temperature: 85 degrees.

The young eagles have fledged and are now able to freely leave the nest. I lost track of what happened to the nest after the big storm we had, but I like to think that both of the offspring survived. I paddled over there recently and got pretty close to one of the young eagles, it flew away as I approached and I said my goodbyes.

The squirrels found a way into the club kitchen and made quite a mess. I knew they were looking for a way into the house when I noticed that those little devils had chewed through the screen door that I just restored. The squirrels were foiled by the grate I put on the door but not before they chewed off all the newly painted molding. They then discovered that they could chew through the window screening in the kitchen. This morning I heard a raucous upstairs. I ran upstairs in my bare feet to discover two squirrels having a ball in the clubhouse. I must have looked pretty funny chasing those squirrels around the room with the broom and throwing ping-pong paddles at them but eventually they found their way outside. I closed all the windows to the club kitchen and surveyed the damage. It seems there was a bag of corn chips left on the counter that the squirrel found irresistible.



Photos by Joe Hage



Meeting Minutes, Sycamore Island June 11, 2008

Location—Sycamore Island Club House

Meeting was called to order by President Jeff Komarow at 8:30 p.m. after a very interesting program on early navigation history of Potomac River (see below)

A quorum was present with the following members present: Ann Marie Cunningham, John Cunningham, Alan Stone, John Membrino, Susanna Membrino, Elaine Schuler, Barbara Torrey, Carl Linden, Jane Winer, David Winer, Marrienne Ross, Larry Heilman, Johyn Lentz, Tyron Wells, David Whitman, Patty Whitman, Jeff Komarow, Jim Drew, Judy Lentz, Peter Winkler, Gordon Phillips, Linda Phillips, and Bill Marmon.

Minutes of the April meeting were approved by unanimous vote. (May meeting was cancelled because of high water.)

In the absence of the Treasurer, Jeff Komorow reported that the Club was in “good fiscal condition.”

Captain’s Report—Tryon Wells reported that the swimming float was lost in the second big water this spring, and that plans were underway to construct a replacement.

Construction of new clubhouse and manager’s quarters—Ann Marie Cunningham reported that the Clubs application for a building permit was filed five weeks ago with Montgomery County and that site and zoning elements have been approved. A number of other elements in the approval process remain “pending.” County originally advised that full approval would take at least six weeks.

Canoe master Jim Drew reported that six births for canoes or kayaks are available for members.

Jeff Komarow reported that a new Volunteer Caretaker Scheduler is needed. Interested applicants please contact Jeff.

Discussion and New Business —Larry Heilman initiated a discussion about “closing” the Island during high water in view of confusion that occurred in the May Down River Canoe Race. Race organizers had intended to use the Island as the terminal point of race, for timing equipment, and for picnic and awards. Because of the very wet conditions and high water Jeff Komarow and Captain Tryon Wells told race officials that it was unsafe for large numbers of people to use the Island. The picnic and awards ceremony were moved to the parking lot area off the island. (Timing equipment and computer were set up on the island).

Tryon Wells explained that the Club rule is as follows: **The Ferry Stops operation when the water reaches 5 feet at the Little Falls Station**, which is the height at which the

river is deemed “dangerous” to small boats by authorities. The Island, however, is “never closed to members” if they want to access it under their own power.

Jeff Komarow reminded the meeting of the Summer Solstice party on June 21, when the Island will be open late with bonfires and permitted camping.

Tyron Wells reported that paper copies of the Islander are now being sent to about 60 persons and that a glitch that delayed the mailing of paper copies has been fixed.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:13

The Meeting was preceded by a barbeque, well set up by Joe Hage, and a fascinating slide and lecture program on “Fish Weirs and Navigation” on the early Potomac River gorge area by Greg Beaudoin and Tabitha Eagle.

The speakers reported on their extensive research on the early efforts of the Potomack (sic) Company, founded by George Washington, in the years 1785 to 1828, to facilitate navigation in the Potomac River by building sluices within the river. Purpose was to enable large keeled and flat bottom boats to go both ways on the river through the falls areas.

While the Potomack Company was never successful in providing a truly satisfactory path within the river, it did erect manmade sluices and converted fish weirs (stone funnels built by Native Americans to trap fish) into navigational aids for early barge traffic.

The speakers showed photographs taken at helicopter view that reveal, during low water periods, the remains of these man-made stone walls.

Submitted by Bill Marmon

From Holly Syrrakos, Island Archivist

76 Years Ago

From the July 1932 Sycamore Islander

The July, 1932 *Sycamore Islander* presented a new look. It is the first issue with a banner head, or what some folks call a masthead. And, the newsletter was filled with little bits: a report on July 4th watermelon eating; new screening on the sleeping porch; water from the well determined safe for drinking, and; reports from upcoming and past regattas. The Club was also paying off the building loan notes held by members.

The longest article was a trip report of a paddle upriver to Bear Island, in a strong wind. Our two heroes, the editor Rodger Gessford and friend Cole, struggled against winds as strong as a hurricane (so they said) and did pretty well until they punched a hole in their canvas canoe. They did manage to patch it by standing on a rock and melting marine glue into the hole. Never daunted, they spent the night on Bear Island and paddled back to Sycamore the next day. And here is part of their story.

“The next day, while Cole and I were trying to catch catfish below Buzzard Shoot, we were startled to see a canoe approaching, steered by a gentleman addicted to the latter-day custom of wearing bathing trunks without the shirt but who clung to the fine old custom of wearing a stiff straw hat during the summer months. He also wore eyeglasses and had a lady in a bathing suit in the bow of his canoe.

They went up toward Buzzard Shoot and just a few moments later the canoe came shooting back, upside down, with the gentleman swimming after it and trying to catch it. He had an extremely annoyed look on his face but still retained his glasses and stiff straw hat. The lady was back on the rocks, quite unconcerned. We offered assistance to him but he would not even let us hold his hat. He managed to get the canoe righted and then the lady came swimming down. She asked him what had happened to the canoe and we thought that his explanation would be a good alibi for Sycamore Islanders who turn over in the rapids.

In very clear and concise Bostonian accent, he explained that each cubic foot of water weighs sixty-two and one-half pounds and that naturally fourteen cubic feet were bound to turn the boat over. However, he didn't state how the fourteen cubic feet of water got into the canoe and the lady, apparently also from Boston, did not inquire, accepting his scientific explanation as quite sufficient.

Cole and I are still wondering who let all those cubic feet into the boat.”

July and August are a fine time to canoe the Potomac. If all those cubic feet of water wind up in your boat, it's a fine time to swim as well.

Guidelines for Swimming at Sycamore Island

Swimming in the Potomac River off Sycamore Island on a hot summer day can be a marvelous adventure. However, one must always keep in mind that the river can be dangerous especially if not treated with respect. For a number of years the river has been declared clean and safe for swimming. However, there have been articles in the Washington Post that suggest that after heavy rains, because of the run-off upstream, the river may be unfit for swimming.

The following are guidelines, not rules, for your consideration:

- You swim at your own risk.
- It is strongly recommended that you swim in pairs.
- Parents are responsible for their children.
- Swimmers should only swim off the swim float if they are able to swim to and from the swim float without stopping.
- It can be tempting to allow a non-swimmer person or child to play in the water if they are using a flotation device, but it is inadvisable and potentially very dangerous. DO NOT assume a flotation device is a substitute for the ability to swim.

If you see a swimmer in distress, first throw the person the life safety ring, which is attached to the dock or in the canoe on shore behind the dock. If you must use the canoe to help a distressed swimmer, again first give the swimmer a life safety ring, which you will find in the canoe. As a last resort, you should attempt a swimming rescue.

Enjoy the river!

New Swim Float Launched, reported by Tryon Wells

As Joe mentioned a month ago in his daily log, last year's swimming float anchor system held our swimming float in place (and even under water!) during the first flood of the season. Unfortunately, before the water level dropped enough to put an additional cable on it (an ambition generated by the alarming thought that we had lost the float in the first flood, while it was merely under water?!), the river produced a second flood, which actually did carry away our swimming float. Grrr...

Once it was clear that the swimming float wasn't going to pop up again after the latest flood, the specialty materials were ordered (flotation, dock ladder, steel plate) that would enable us to re-build the swimming float. The last of these arrived on Tuesday, June 17, and were taken down to the Island. Then it was off to Home Depot for lumber, wire cable, concrete, fasteners and the rest. When all the parts were finally assembled on the Island, the float was re-built to the specifications in the accompanying diagram. It was launched on Saturday, June 21, just in time for the Summer Solstice party. (Yeah!)

This time, the float is not only anchored with two 85-pound concrete anchors, but the upstream anchor is additionally tethered with another cable that comes to shore and is wrapped around a large Sycamore tree. Unless the wire cable fails, we should be able to keep this swimming float around for a few years.

Sycamore Island Swimming Float Diagram and Specifications (Underside)

Frame and Decking

- (7) 2" x 6" x 8'
- (1) 2" x 6" x 10'
- (2) 5/8" treated plywood
- (1) Box of 3 1/2" deck screws (frame construction)
- (1) Box of 1 1/2" deck screws (plywood decking)
- (1) "Single T Female" steel plate w/flange for attaching wire cable to float (Merco Marine - H-SF)
- (4) 2 1/2" x 3/8" bolts w/nuts and washers (for steel plate)

Ladder

- (1) Howell 3-step dock ladder (Overtons)
- (4) 2" x 3/8" stainless steel lag screws w/washers

Flotation

- (4) 2' x 4' x 12" Float Drums (Merco Marine - F2412)
- (28) 4" x 3/8" hex lag screws w/washers

Anchors (2)

- (2) Eyebolt w/nut and washer
- (2) 5-gallon bucket
- (2) 80-pound bag of Sakrete
- (10) cable clamps
- 200 feet of 1/4" wire rope cable

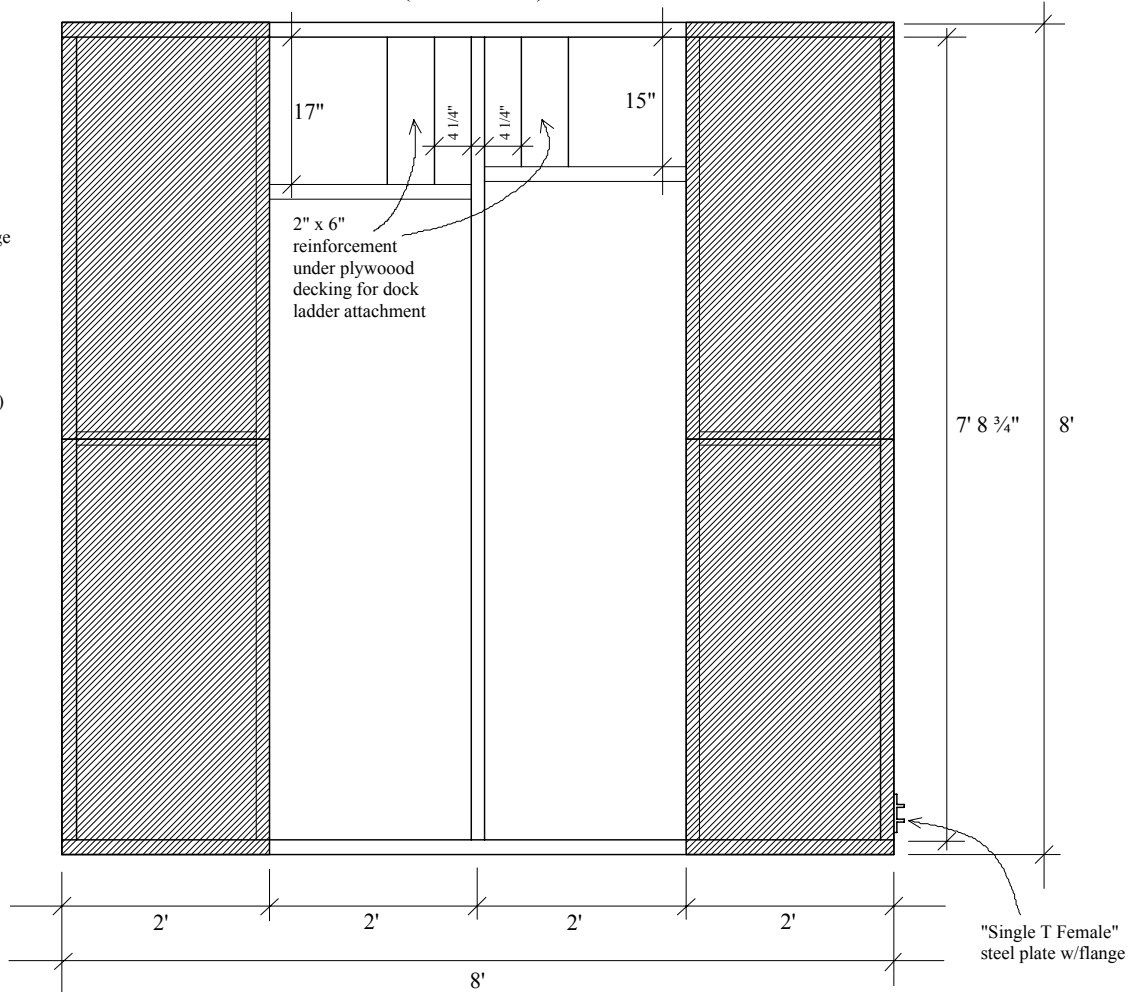


Photo by Dave Winer

THE CCA POTOMAC DOWNRIVER RACE, MAY 17, 2008

By V. Star Mitchell

The 53rd running of the Potomac Downriver Race was full of many pre-race headaches for me. Because of the heavy spring rains this year, the river was running at very high levels. Experts like Davy Hearn (former Olympian), Carter Hearn, Adam VanGrack, and Gus Anderson (who was playing in the river on Friday) were following the river gauge and giving me advice. They said the river would be at 6 feet on Saturday and, though that level was high, we decided to go ahead with the race rather than postpone it for sometime in the future.

Normally we think of five feet on the Brookmont Gage as the cut-off for recreational boating. I have been told the 5-foot figure came from John S. Thomson. When asked by the press, “At what level is the river dangerous?” John thought a few minutes and said, “Oh, I’d say 5-feet.” That level stuck, and rightly should, even though there are all kind of “hair” boaters out there today paddling the river at much, much higher levels.

There were several concerns we had for holding the race with the river at 6 feet. First and foremost, was consideration of the safety of all involved. So, we were careful to screen anyone who showed up to make sure they were experienced enough for the swift water and the absence of eddies. In addition, Adam VanGrack put up two large orange signs at the sign-in table that said, “Warning! The River Level is High (Above 5 feet). Only EXPERIENCED Whitewater Paddlers Should Race this Year!” Finally, we had each racer sign not only the usual Liability Waiver but also a second Liability Waiver on which he or she actually wrote the water level in a blank space and acknowledged that he understood the danger and skill needed for this high water level.

With our minds at rest about boater safety, we wanted to stick with the May 17 date if possible because we had a land-use permit from the Park Service for our registration table for that date and parking permits from the Park Police for Sycamore Island. In addition, the date was cleared for use of the Island. Since safety boaters, twelve land workers, seven race timers, photographers, and thirty pre-registered boaters, and more boaters were planning to register on race day, finding another date and rescheduling this race would not have been easy.

Our hearty Islanders Larry Heilman and Bill Marmon went down to the Island bright and early to get an Island canoe. With the ferry not running, Joe managed to get them across the river in a canoe so they could pick up their chosen Grumman canoe, haul it up the hill, load it on their car, and head for Old Angler’s Inn, the traditional race start when the river level is at 5 feet or higher.

There were thirty-three paddlers in the race—fifteen less than last year, no doubt due to the high water. Our “boys,” Larry and Bill were not daunted by the 6-foot water level. They took their positions in their trusty Grumman (now donning a center airbag), dug their paddles in, and headed for the Sycamore Island finish line.

Joe got our race timers over to the Island (via canoe) and provided them with a table and electricity for the indispensable laptop computer. Joe then departed the Island leaving the ferry

safely locked on the Island side. After that (when needed) our race timers ferried themselves in a canoe back and forth from Island to shore. (Please remember that each and every one of us that was there is an expert boater.)

Race finishers took out on the canal side and carried their boats up to the grassy area by the parking lot. When I arrived, our faithful Entertainment Supervisor, George Malusky was sitting on the steps on the canal side stocked with cookies and bottles of water waiting for the arriving racers. Lucky Marmon was standing on the steps waiting to see “her Bill” (and Larry) power across the finish line. Also, when I got down to the Island parking lot, Carl Linden was there helping to park cars and unload my van. Carl and George helped carry many a heavy boat up the steps and trail to the Clair Barton Parkway.

Under the trees with deep dry leaves beneath them, we set up two tables, hung our CCA banner, set up a few chairs, and loaded the table with hot chicken, potato salad, broccoli slaw, sodas, and yes, even ice cream kept cold with dry ice in a cooler; and we waited for the racers to come in. The day was sunny and bright, BUGLESS, and a gentle, warm breeze kept us comfortable. Racers spread out on the grass and stuffed their tummies.

Alas, the strong and vigorous Larry and Bill arrived with a record time of 54:28, placing them FIRST in their category! There were NO flips or spills for ANY of the racers and that is a first-time record! Everyone agreed that the Potomac at 6 feet is easier than the Potomac at 4 feet. That is because the river has a lot of water, but the rapids flatten out, drops disappear, and there are no rocks to dodge. However, a 6-foot level is NOT for any novice boaters!

Four strong, skilled children paddled the race: Jesse Hearn age 9, Gavin Ross age 12, Danny Kaufman age 14, Ian Ross age 15, and though no longer considered a true child, Sean Havens age 18. Ian Ross and his father Jim Ross won as the Fastest Overall Time for a Tandem Canoe with a speed of 37:00.

One paddler of note was Robert Brown, age 24, a wounded veteran from the Iraq War. Robert, who had been taught to kayak by Team River Runners (our local boater volunteers group) <http://www.teamriverrunner.org/welcome.php>, had been shot in the knee in an ambush and still carries a bullet in his knee. Though he now walks with a cane, Robert proved to be a fast and capable K-1 paddler, finishing first in his category! We are very proud of Robert, and many thanks to our boater volunteers who are giving these injured soldiers a new sport and a mentally up-lifting adventure.

I am so grateful for the help from our Island members George and Carl and most of all it is so wonderful to see Islanders that run the race. Congratulations to Larry and Bill! What troupers! You go guys—keep on trucking!

For more details of all racers’ times go to <http://www.canoe cruisers.org/> or <http://www.sycamoreisland.org/>.



Racers getting ready to put in. Foreground, Olympian Davey Hearn, son, Jesse Hearn and wife, Jennifer. Background, Larry Heilman and Bill Marmon. Photos bt Star Mitchell.



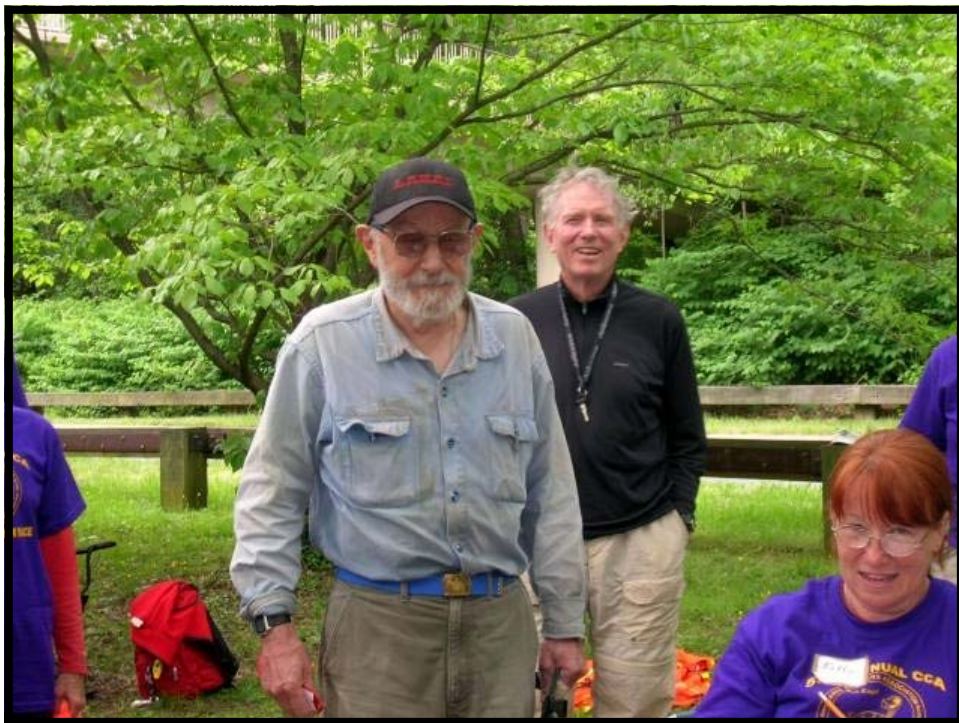
Larry Heilman and Bill Marmon just crossing the finish line.



Future Olympians: Jesse Hearn (9), Gavin Ross (12), Ian Ross (15), Danny Kaufman (14).



Robert Brown receives his first place award. Photos by Star Mitchell.



Bill Carr, age 80, oldest racer (father of member Molly Carr), Larry Heilman and Cathy Collins.

Saturday Relief Caretakers- July and August
Please sign up as soon as possible

Date	Hours	Caretaker	Number
July			
5	9-3	Charlotte Brewer	
	3-dark	Meryl Silverman & Mark Carlin	
12	9-3	Mac Thornton & Molly Carr	
	3-dark	Julia Smith	
19	9-3	David & Kathleen Holdridge	
	3-dark	Carole Trippe & Kit Bigler	
26	9-3	Ellen & Norman Eule	
	3-dark	Penelope & Robert McNulty	
August			
2	9-3	Stephen Wolk	
	3-dark	Eric Simpson	
9	9-3	Richard & Alison Burns	
	3-dark	Paul Lang	
16	9-3		
	3-dark		
23	9-3		
	3-dark		
30	9-3		
	3-dark		

****** Caretaker Volunteers ******
To volunteer, contact Alison Burns at 202-362-6654
or riburns@att.net

Sycamore Bulletin Board:

New Relief Caretaking Supervisor– Alison Burns

202–362-6654 riburns@att.net

We would like to thank **Maxine Hattery** for all her past work in this regard!

Large Parties:

No large parties were reported for July

A large party application form may be printed from the Club's web site at <http://www.sycamoreisland.org/systems.htm>

**Or contact Supervisor of parties, John Noble, 301-448-8562
johnnoble@comcast.net**

July Meeting: July 9th

The July meeting will be held on the Island on Wednesday, **July 9th at 8:00 P.M.** Come early if you'd like with a picnic dinner. A couple of barbecues will be set up and ready for grilling.

Island Chores need doing:

Joe has made a list of chores that need doing on the island. Please volunteer to do one or some when you next visit the island. Let's all share some of the work!!

A Reminder: All members bringing more than 10 guests must make a request ahead of time for a Large Party.



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

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Sycamore Events

July Meeting : Wednesday,
July 9th at 8:00 PM on Sycamore
Island.

August Meeting : Wednesday,
August 13th at 8:00 PM. on the
island.



Photo by Joe Hage