



The Sycamore Islander

JULY 2010 | VOLUME 89 NUMBER 7

President's Letter

This Summer

The party's over, as the expression goes, but the fun continues. I'm referring of course to the humongous 125th Anniversary and Renovated-Clubhouse party in May. Soon after that we had two successful events—the canoeing instruction session and the bicycle ride. The month of June and early July have been quiet regarding club events, but members are enjoying the spiffy house and grounds, and the new swim float (replaced from the last flood loss). Fishing has not been notable but should pick up when these heat waves abate. They must! The current drought has the river at very low levels and several weeks of hot weather have provided wonderful swimming conditions.

Speaking of Swimming

The river has been for swimming ever since the Club was founded. Our Swimming Supervisor, Larry Heilman, recognizes the attractive conditions we have at the Island in the summer and offers some timely guidelines about safety in this issue of the newsletter. Along this line of thought, also in this issue you will find the wording of the “Swimming is at your own risk” sign placed near the swimming dock. Please be aware of the recommendations and precautions these notices carry. Especially make your guests aware that this is not a guarded swimming pool and they must recognize the risks of swimming in the river.

Events Ahead

George Maluksy plans a Fishing Derby this summer. Look for his announcement and be thinking of the great times we have had at the Fishing Derby over the years. It's not just for ardent fishers, but for all. Little kids, big kids, and grownups go for this one.

Plans are also afoot for one of our Old Timers parties. Every time we have one, members raise the question about what “old timer” means. Well, it's not important. Everyone is welcome, and the main idea is to get folks together to enjoy the Island. Long time-members renew acquaintances and tell stories of yore. These parties are always on a weekday, a time when mostly retirees are available, but please note that we want newcomers and young folks to come down for the fun too.

Meeting Matters

Next club-wide meeting is Wednesday, July 14 on the Island at 8:00 P.M. We expect to hear a report from our Membership Chair, Peter Winkler, about what's happening with the committee that is planning how to take in new members. The charcoal grills will be going. Many of us find the pre-meeting gathering around the picnic tables most enjoyable. Please attend and help make us a quorum, which is sometimes difficult in the summer travel months.

DAVID WINER
President

Notes from a Friendly Get-Together June 9, 2010

Jane and Dave Winer, John Membrino, Alison Levine, Penelope Mitchell, Tryon Wells, Jim Drew, Larry Heilman, Joe Hage and Ann Marie Cunningham gathered first at the picnic table for a tasty repast, then moved into the clubhouse for a conversation about Club activities.

Peter Winkler will have a meeting this month of the Membership committee to begin the discussion of how to open the waiting list up to new applicants next year. The goal is for the committee to present a proposal for a vote by Club members in time to begin the application process in January.

Tryon Wells, our Captain, spoke of the new lockers. He will be ordering inexpensive metal ones, mostly six feet tall, although some that will be two or three feet. There apparently is a daunting array of types of latches to choose from. The lockers will be located in the hallway outside the bathrooms. He is looking into placing cubbies in the restrooms, although there is little space in the ladies' room.

Joe Hage is painting the ceiling in the hallway near the bathrooms.

John Membrino reported being amazed at the turnout of novice and experienced paddlers for Frank Daspit's canoe safety class. There was lots of enjoyment and learning on the river that day.

The orphan canoes and kayaks are seeking lost owners. If no one claims them, they will be put up for adoption.

The recent drownings in the Potomac near Difficult Run led to a discussion about the actual regulations on swimming, and what the Park Service does to enforce them. Watch for an article by Larry Heilman and Bill Marmon on this topic.

The Old Timers (and apparently, they aren't necessarily old, nor are they necessarily long-time club members) usually have a get-together on the Island each fall. Charlotte Brewer has organized it in the past, and will be contacted to see if she is interested in doing so again.

Former caretaker Doc and his wife Phyllis started a tradition of hosting a Solstice Party with the help of George and Marcia Loeb. Unfortunately, it will not be happening again this year, probably because so much energy was put into the wonderful anniversary celebration. In order to prevent other beloved events like the

Fishing Derby and Regatta from falling by the wayside, Dave Winer and Jim Drew will contact past organizers in hopes that they will be willing to do so again. There's also the possibility of Alan Gelb leading a cookout, camping and breakfast on Rupperts expedition. If you have a particular interest in these or other new activities, please contact Dave Winer.

The group of friends sorely missed the ritual of adjourning the meeting. Please come to the next one, so that we won't miss out again.

Respectfully submitted,
ANN MARIE CUNNINGHAM

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 the river may be unfit for swimming after heavy rains because of the run-off upstream.

The following are guidelines for your consideration:

- Swim at your own risk.
- Avoid swimming alone.
- Parents are responsible for their children.
- Members and guests should only swim from the swim float if they are able to swim to and from the float without stopping.

It can be tempting to allow non-swimmers or children to play in the water if they are using flotation devices, 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, quickly try to place something that provides flotation support close to him or her. Swimming to aid or rescue can be dangerous and should be avoided unless you are trained in lifesaving.

The Club keeps a canoe or other boat close to the swimming dock to assist rescue of boaters or swimmers in distress.

Enjoy the river!

LARRY HEILMAN



OBJECTS

"To support, defend, and advance the fundamental principles of government enunciated by Thomas Jefferson.

"To provide a Club House with suitable surroundings and comforts where members may assemble, discuss and promote Jeffersonian philosophies, to the end they may become controlling in Federal and State Governments."

**INVITES MEMBERS OF THE SYCAMORE ISLAND CLUB
TO THE JEFFERSON ISLANDS CLUB'S
ANNUAL CRAB FEAST
ON ST. CATHERINE'S ISLAND, AVENUE, MD 20209**

Sunday, July 25, 2010
12:00 Noon to 5:00pm

The members of the Jefferson Islands Club share a love of Potomac River islands, and invite members of the Sycamore Island Club to the highlight of the summer social schedule, the JIC Annual Crab Feast. Southern Maryland steamed crabs will be served and, for the non-shellfish lovers (and the still-hungry), a complete luncheon of Southern Maryland specialties will be served from 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. Full bar is included, as well as trip to the Island, swimming pool, Island trails, etc. Reservations may be made prior to Friday, July 16, 2009 by mailing this form and your check to:

The Jefferson Islands Club
Attn: Colleen Thompson Wise, Manager
37434 River Springs Road
Avenue, Maryland 20609

After Friday, July 16th, late reservations may be obtained by calling the Club's answering service or by faxing this form to (301) 769-2141. The price of tickets will go up 50% after Friday, July 16th. **NOTE:** You may change your number of reservations after July 16th without paying the higher price if you have already reservations. No cancellations after Friday, July 23.

Please enter my reservation for the JIC Crab Feast as follows:

_____ Adults @ \$60. each	_____
_____ Ages 12-20 @\$20. each	_____
_____ Ages 6-11 @\$10. each	_____

TOTAL ENCLOSED \$ _____

Name: _____ Date: _____
Phone: _____ Email: _____

Any questions, please contact Jefferson Islands Club President, Jeff Glassie, who lives just down River from Sycamore Island in Brookmont, MD at 301-320-7865 or jeff.glassie@comcast.net. Check out www.jeffersonislandsclub.com for information on Jefferson Islands Club.

Unclaimed Canoes and Kayaks—Final Notice

There are still a few canoes and kayaks on the ground with no apparent assignment in the canoe shed. Members are reminded that all boats stored on the Island must have an assigned space in the shed. If you are uncertain whether you have an assigned rack in the shed, or if you are the owner of one of the craft listed below that are outside the shed, please contact the canoe supervisor, John Membrino, at 301.229.1154. A final cross-check of canoes and rack assignments will be made this month, and then any unauthorized canoes and kayaks left on the Island will be auctioned off or disposed of. The orphans are:

- red kayak—marking: Ohio watercraft 1965
- two-toned light blue/cream kayak: MD 8669 V
- birch-pattern canoe: AF GT5544M783
- green Coleman canoe: “backyard boats” decal
- Grumman canoe: “Mooslammo”
- aquamarine Cobra Navigator kayak.

55th Potomac Downriver Race

Sycamore Island (host of the Downriver Race) celebrated its 125th anniversary this year. On May 22, 2010, the Downriver Race celebrated its 55th anniversary, which began fifty-five years ago when some Sycamore Island people and their friends had the first race. Some time after the race, these men decided to establish the Canoe Cruisers Association of Greater Washington, D.C. and that was the beginning of the CCA. As far as we know, this race is the oldest continuing river race in the United States. This year the race was USA Wildwater approved. Thus, our race is nationally recognized.

Forty-nine hardy boaters turned out to compete in the race. The total number of boats in the race was 44. Four racers were over age 70; the oldest, age 82, was Bill Carr, the father of Sycamore Islander Molly Carr and father-in-law of Mac Thornton. Bill has run the race 40 times!

Seven of the racers were under 18—ages 17, 16, 15, 14, 14, 13, and 11. The 17-year-old was Thomas Esch (son of Islander Victoria Judson). The racer who drove the longest distance to run the race was Jeffrey Hinkins from Richmond, Virginia. The fastest overall time went to Adam VanGrack 00:58:20 in a K-1 Long. The slowest overall time was earned by Jason Powell 02:34:18 in an

oc-2 (Jason’s tandem partner abandoned him at the put-in and thus he had to paddle a tandem boat solo). All race results can be seen at: www.canoecruisers.org

In previous world competitions, local Davey Hearn had won big, beautiful, and expensive trophies, and this year he donated some of those trophies to our race. In Whitewater Slalom, Davey was a two-time World Champion (1985, 1995). He was a three-time C-1 Whitewater Slalom Olympian (1992, 1996, 2000). In 1979–89, the U.S. C-1 Whitewater Slalom boaters (led by Davey Hearn and Jon Luginbill) dominated the World Circuit. The racers were then part of the CCA Racing Slalom Division. Davey’s wife Jennifer had the back of the trophies engraved for the proper awards for our race. People seemed to like receiving recycled trophies from such a great and famous paddler (going green).

There were three generations of Hearn in the race, Carter (grandfather), Davey (son), and Jesse (grandson). Grandmother Hearn paddled as well, and Davey’s wife Jennifer won the trophy for Fastest Woman in the race. All Hearn placed first in their respective category.

George Malusky was at his usual station—the finish line with cookies, lemonade, and water for the exhausted and dehydrated paddlers. Four Sycamore Island Safety Boats (Jim Drew, leader; Richard Burns; Vicky Judson; and Kent Marcoux) sat upriver to give directions to racers. This hardy crew remained upriver until the last boater (who took 2 hours) arrived! John Stapko was on the Island taking care of odds and ends. Phoebe Hamill was responsible for collecting racing bibs from the racers upon their arrival. Paul Stanten, Kathleen Hooke, and Wayne Limberg served as the caretakers for the day. There may have been more Islanders there who did not get on my list, and if so, I thank you for whatever assistance you may have given.

Upriver (in the meat of the rapids), CCA provided 11 safety boaters and 14 land workers for Great Falls put-in and Sycamore Island take-out. One crucial part of a race is timers. CCA provided 5 timers and our Gerry Barton stepped in to assist with the timing.

As always, Joe Hage “walked the second mile” over and over to help make this race a success. Joe made new directional arrows and put them up on the river, put up the finish line banner (no easy task), set up the PA system for the awards ceremony, helped set up the electrical lines for the timers at the rivers edge, helped me “slup” loads of sodas, ice cream, and other items to the Island days before the race, and came by my house and

picked up a ton of items and “slugged” these things down to the Island. Joe stayed onboard on Saturday (his day off) and worked his buns off. Of course, Joe is a member of CCA and serves on the CCA Board. Like Sycamore Island, the CCA is so lucky to have him with all of his expertise and ingrained work ethic.

My many thanks go to Adam VanGrack, our BCE Vice-Chair, for all of his help and advice. In April, Adam took First Place Overall in the Cheat Canyon Downriver Race in West Virginia—the largest white-water race in the U.S. On June 13, Adam won 2nd Place in the Kayak Open Class competition in a Slalom Race at the Feeder Canal in Bethesda.

My thanks go out to everyone who gave their time and volunteered and contributed to the success of the race. Also, I am so grateful to the people who included an extra tax- deductible donation on their registration check. The race nearly always goes in the red (and did this year).

Our local Potomac River race is a mighty fine race, paddled by “hair” boaters, as well as intermediate boaters. The nice thing about our race is if your boat is properly out-fitted with flotation and air bags and you

are wearing a PFD and helmet, you have an opportunity to win an award in your category and your age class. If you missed the race this year, I hope that you will join us next year for an event that is made superb by all of you great volunteers. And last but not least, my many, many thanks to all of the people that came and competed in the race.

V. STAR MITCHELL

Swimming is at your own risk.

This is a wild and sometimes hazardous river which varies greatly in conditions of water level, current, temperature, floating objects, and objects under the surface. There are no lifeguards or other protection for swimmers. Diving in the river is especially dangerous. Never dive.



SUSAN SHERROD

Jesse and Davey Hearn

Notes from the Island

Saturday, June 12, 2010

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.4 Water Temperature: 78

I'm sorry I haven't written more in the log lately. I've been very busy doing some major projects down here.

We finally got the locker room ceiling done, I don't think it had been painted since '36. We also put some finishing touches on the mens room. Of course I'm still laboring away on the exterior painting. It's a slow process scapping and burning all the siding but I'm counting on the high rewards of a lasting paint job.

I acquired some free lumber that we carried down here last night. I've decided to use it to build a small porch off of my new bedroom back door.

I spent some time clearing trails as well. Many of the trails were still overwhelmed by the fallen trees of last winter.

The grass is growing too so we had to cut the entire field and finish picking up the last of the debris from the flood back in March.

The river is a little murky still and we're still waiting for the fishing to improve. I spent five hours fishing last Saturday and only caught one bass.

I finally got a good look at the muskrat. It swam past me as I was sitting on the swim float. It didn't notice me as it busily dug at the bank for food.

Thursday, June 17, 2010

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.2 Water Temperature: 78

It's a beautiful day. It's a perfect day for painting, but sadly I'm out of commission. It seems I've injured my ankle and I have to stay off my feet. The doctor says I strained my tendons and ligaments somehow, maybe from standing on a ladder for hours. It also means that I will be needing some help with the ferry.

All of these gully washers are keeping our river from clearing up. I'm waiting for clear water before I go fishing again.

I saw a cuckoo down by the captain's float, a striking bird with a curved beak and long tail.

The Island is getting some good use lately, in between the thunderstorms that is. Besides the crews of swimmers, we've had a few parties too. We had a big party here on Tuesday evening, complete with an old fashioned "country boil." Tomorrow there will be a kids' birthday party here and on Monday a group will be celebrating the Summer Solstice.

Thursday, June 21, 2010

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.0 Water Temperature: 80

Happy first day of summer! This is the season to be on the Island!

The river is down to 3.0 feet and it's taking a little to get used to the return of the low water. We haven't seen the river this low since way back in early November, that's over seven months ago!

My sprained ankle is slowly getting better. I've been working hard at being sedentary and thankfully I've had a lot of good help over the weekend to help with the ferry. I'm still trying to not use my ankle today and since I didn't hire a replacement I may need help today as well. I've been camping out in the chair by my front door, reading and watching all the goings on. In my stationary position, I've had the perfect vantage point to watch the Carolina wren as it diligently looks after its young offspring. This crazy pair of wrens decided to build their nest inside my box of screws at knee level on a shelf in the screen porch. Every five minutes or so an adult wren will slip through a small tear in the screen and feed a beak full of bugs to a small head in a box. Nonstop activity until the sun drops, and then the wrens are quiet. Of course, once the sun is back up, the wren will again live up to its nick name of "rooster of the Island."

It won't be long before the young wrens are out of the nest and on their own. The prothonotary warblers are done with their nest in the bird feeder, and I think our young eagle across the river should be ready to fly any day now.

This news did not make it into the *Islander* for some reason but I'm planning to have a few friends over on Friday afternoon/evening. I guess you could call it a large party. FYI.

Thursday, June 29, 2010

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.0 Water Temperature: 86

The river went all the way down to 2.8 feet on Sunday night but the heavy rains yesterday have brought it back up to 3.0 again. This is still very low and it is a little worrisome since its only the end of June and we're headed for a drought already.

I've been conditioned to fear floods and I find myself hoping that I never have to face them. They are a major inconvenience and they can be costly and dangerous. While all of these things are true I think I need to change my attitude towards floods. In India and in



JOE HAGE

The adult dobsonfly is about four inches long including the mandibles.

ancient Egypt, for example, the annual flooding was a welcome and necessary part of daily survival. Crop yields could be predicted by the height of the river during annual floods and groundwater stores could be quickly replenished during the wet season. Here on the Potomac it's the same thing and it is making me realize that drought, and not flooding, is the biggest threat to life on the Island. It would be so much harder, if not impossible, to live here if there was not a good well and a ready supply of fresh groundwater. That's why this recent bit of record-setting weather has got me a little nervous and has me (almost) hoping for a good summer flood.

I was rounding the pedestrian bridge yesterday afternoon when I heard the commotion of five or six blue jays squawking from the red maple there. Somehow, by the sound of their calls, I could tell they were in a panic and not just having a friendly blue jay chat. I figured they must be squawking at a predator or other intruder. My first thought was that it was a hawk and sure enough, on the ground below me, at the base of the tree, there was an immature red-tailed. It was awesome to get a close look at this bird and surprisingly it

didn't shy away. I knew it was a red-tail by its deep orange tail feathers. Some of the tail feathers were different with white and brown bars across them; that's how I knew it was not fully mature yet. Maybe its lack of experience can explain why it didn't seem the least bit afraid of me. I walked down the ramp and over to the tree. I had fun getting very close to it before it lifted itself off to a low branch on a dogwood. I took one last good look at its mottled plumage and headed off down the path.

We have refrigerator problems. The fridge up in the clubhouse kitchen is not very cold, 44 degrees. The freezer seems to work fine but the fridge just won't get any colder, not in this heat wave anyway. I unplugged the unit and made sure it was all frost free. I removed the back cover and vacuumed out the fan and condenser but it didn't seem to make much difference. The fridge is also infested with large black ants so I took everything out and scrubbed it, inside and out. I'm afraid there may be something seriously wrong with our refrigerator.

JOE HAGE

The Sycamore Islander

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Cabin John, MD 20818

ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED

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CAROL BEEHLER

The Sycamore Islander is the monthly newsletter of the Montgomery Sycamore Island Club. Every attempt is made to publish the *Islander* before the second Wednesday of the month and in advance of the monthly meeting. Articles, photographic essays, drawings, announcements, letters to the editors—any materials of interest to the membership and waiting list—are welcome. Text and graphics may be sent as email attachments to:

Carol Beehler
cbeehler@comcast.net.

The deadline for inclusion in the August issue is August 2.