



The Sycamore Islander

SEPTEMBER 2010 | VOLUME 89 NUMBER 9

President's Letter

We had a remarkable induction of new members at the August meeting. Remarkable first for the number of waiting listers converting to membership status: seven. But also remarkable for the backgrounds of these folks who had been waiting for around ten years—youthful and active in outdoor activities. We are an ideal club for them, and these new members shift our aging demographics toward the younger side—just what the club needs. Some of these families include young children who will be able to grow up with the advantages Sycamore Island offers. Taking into account the other new members this year, it seems that the “Class of 2010” will greatly facilitate our goal to take on members who are able to participate vigorously in the Club. We welcome them heartily. You will note brief descriptions in the August Minutes of this issue of the newsletter. Special thanks from all of us to Peter Winkler, Membership Chair, who performed so effectively in maintaining the waiting list, compiling personal information, and getting us to a vote.

September is an especially active month for club-sponsored activities at Sycamore Island. Immediately at hand is the Regatta on Labor Day, Monday, the 6th. Starting time is 1:00 p.m. As usual, this is a fun and games event for all ages of members, waiting listers, and their guests. Dinner after the games and contests. Cindy Bertaut organizes this one, with some new ideas for our entertainment. Vicky Judson has a hand in it too.

Then we have the long anticipated (postponed for unsuitable river conditions) Fishing Derby on Saturday,

September 18, starting early with donuts and coffee. George Malusky is in charge of the affair. Good bass fishing has returned after a slack period of ugly water conditions. You could consider the Derby as a kids' event or an adult party, but it's truly both. Waiting listers and their guests are included. Everyone has a great time at this one. Chow available and prizes. Nothing more need be said to get you and your fishing gear down there.

And a few days later our calendar has Old Timers' Day on Tuesday morning, September 21. Remember that everyone is welcome, and that the event title merely implies special honor for those members who have been with us for many years. The featured activity is a pot luck lunch. Other than that, the day usually takes on the flavor of a cocktail party without the cocktails—everyone enjoying the company and participating in the Island's normal activities as they prefer. Charlotte Brewer and Larry Heilman are seeing to this occasion.

Lockers are here. Captain Tryon Wells has acquired the long awaited new metal lockers which replace the old shabby ones discarded during the renovation. They will be available for assignment as soon as they are installed. Help! If you wish to volunteer in the installation tasks, call or e-mail Tryon (301.576.6339; tryonwells@verizon.net) to volunteer your services.

Our next club meeting is on Wednesday, September 8 at 8:00 p.m. Short printed notice, yes, but it's always the second Wednesday and can't be counted as a surprise! Looking forward to seeing you there.

DAVID WINER
President

Minutes for the August 11 Meeting

Attendees

David Winer, Jane Winer, Tryon Wells, Peter Winkler, John Membrino, Anne Waidman, Drew Walsh, Star Mitchell, Joe Hage Ann Marie Cunningham, and Vicky Judson

The Meeting

An informal discussion of Island matters (to wit, lockers) began while Jane Winer was valiantly recruiting one last member to come in order to have a quorum. Vicky Judson answered her call, and made it possible to conduct the very important business of approving new members.

Lockers

Captain Tryon Wells will be ordering lockers to install in the hallway across from the restrooms and day lockers to put in the restrooms. Some of the thoughts that were expressed:

- Ventilation is good
- Seeing inside the lockers isn't
- Keeping track of who has what locker and whether it is used is important
- Need to ensure that people who no longer use the lockers or are no longer members don't continue to tie up the lockers
- Possibly, there should be a nominal fee to help prevent unused lockers from accumulating?

Tryon Wells will order new lockers this month. Ann Marie Cunningham volunteered to write a procedure for identifying and maintaining an accountability for the lockers and their assigned members.

New Members

Membership Secretary Peter Winkler nominated the following applicants for membership.

Chris White and Tamara Zemlo are the parents of three children. The family lives in Mohican Hills and is active in community and civic affairs. Chris has his own apiary in their backyard. The entire family loves water-based activities, including swimming and canoeing, and they have been active Islanders while in waiting list member status. They thought the children's events at the anniversary celebration were so wonderful that they wish to become involved in children's educational activities at the Island.

Paul Hagen and Christine Jahke live in Palisades. Paul is an avid fisherman and birder, and has held leadership positions in various conservation and wildlife organizations. Both Paul and Christine are hikers and kayakers, and as waiting list members have been active in Island affairs.

Patricia and Bruce Benton live in Mohican Hills (to be near the Canal) and have four children. The family has traveled to exotic outdoor locations around the globe, and has even camped overnight on the Island. They love the Island and are very excited to become regular members.

Roman Kulbashny and Nancy Shute both have long and intimate acquaintance with the outdoors. Roman grew up in Kamchatka with live volcanos and grizzly bears, and enjoys biking, canoeing and swimming. Nancy is a journalist covering science and the environment. She has written for *Outside*, *Smithsonian*, and *National Geographic*, and is probably the only Club member or applicant to have sailed up the Bering Strait to the Arctic Ocean in a walrus-skin boat.

Thomas and Katherine Dyson are both Montgomery County teachers. The family goes to the Adirondacks every year to hike, canoe, and kayak. Thomas and Katherine had the unique foresight to apply for membership when they became engaged. They now have three children, the oldest of whom is seven.

Adrienne Allison grew up on Georgian Bay in Ontario, and is an avid canoeist and swimmer. A demographer, Adrienne served in Bangladesh with members Anne and Larry Heilman, who introduced her to the Island.

Daniel Stephens and Adrienne Little are also both Montgomery County teachers. Their children are 14 and 12. The entire family enjoys spending time hiking, biking, and canoeing at or near the Island. They also enjoy camping and their annual trip to Montana. Dan is a fly fisherman.

All were accepted into membership by a unanimous vote.

Minutes

Once the quorum was established, the minutes of the May meeting were approved.

Large Party

Anne Waidmann requested approval for a large party on Thursday, Sept 2, of 35 to 50 people as a pre-cele-

bration of the wedding of her daughter Birgit and Michael. Anne has met the requirements for hosting a large party. The party was unanimously approved, and best wishes were expressed for the happy couple.

Canoe Report

Five canoes are unclaimed. Next month, a decision will be made as to how to dispose of them. (Auction?)

Communication

Dave Winer reported that a reporter from the *Washington Post*, who said that they haven't done an article on the Island for a while, will be on the Island soon. There was a discussion about whether we want the publicity, about other lines that could be suggested to the reporter that would be interesting stories that would focus more on canoeing and the river with the Island as a minor footnote.

New Business

The regatta will be held on Labor Day. Cindy Bertaut will be chairing the festivities. Vicky Judson moved, and the meeting approved, that \$100 be appropriated for prizes, subject to the approval of the treasurer.

C & O Canal Volunteer Bike Patrol Recruitment

Want to have a real reason to ride your bike on the C&O Canal? If so, then join the C&O Bike Patrol. The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, National Historical Park is recruiting members for its highly successful volunteer Bike Patrol. Anyone with a love for cycling, the outdoors, the C&O Canal, and the well-being of visitors is encouraged to apply.

Bike Patrol members are furnished with all the necessary training to be effective stewards of the park. They are equipped with first aid kits, park information, and park radios or cell

phones to be used in emergency situations. Patrollers are also provided with uniform vests. Members are expected to provide their own bicycles and helmets and are asked for a time commitment of at least 40 hours of riding per year.

Bike Patrol members can ride and patrol anywhere from Georgetown to Cumberland, MD and also on the Capital Crescent Trail. They work with National Park Rangers and the U.S. Park Police officers to assist the park's more than 3 million yearly visitors. Members routinely answer questions, distribute park literature, and maps to visitors. Members usually carry extra water for dehydrated hikers. A bike maintenance class, a CPR class, and basic first aid are offered free for members to take, but taking these classes is only voluntary and not mandatory. Anyone over 18 can be a member. Many members are retired from previous gainful employment.

Members are thanked repeatedly for their work by great picnics and parties, recognition certificates, achievement patches and pins for their vests, water bottles, caps, jackets, fanny packs, t-shirts, and many other items.

Norman Liebow is our hard-working and dedicated Bike Patrol Coordinator. If you wish to join, send an e-mail to Liebow@comcast.net. Tell him Star sent you.

V. STAR MITCHELL





*Sycamore Island Fishing Derby
Saturday, September 18*



*Old Timers' Day
Tuesday morning
September 21*

Notes from the Island

Wednesday, August 4, 2010

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.62 Water Temperature: 88

I found a dead carolina wren in the club house by the pool table. I was up there cleaning up after the weekend visitors, (putting away the board games and covering the pool table), when I smelled something dead. I expected to find a dead mouse in the corner but it turned out to be an overly inquisitive bird that couldn't find its way out. I guess it starved to death.

My regular retirees are all out of town so these weekdays are even quieter than usual. I did get a group of fishermen out here yesterday and I'm please to report that they caught some bass! Ten good-sized ones they said. Others have been catching catfish on worms but this is the first sign that the bass fishing might be improving.

I found what looks like a small cactus growing on the Island. I'll investigate and get back to you about that one.

Saturday, August 14, 2010

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.98 Water Temperature: 85

We had to postpone the Fishing Derby. The river just seemed too muddy and full of trash to make a day of fishing sound like fun. The good news is that we have reschedule the Derby for Saturday, September 18. Be there or be square.

I guess the biggest news is the recent rash of thunderstorms that we've been experiencing. It's impressive when you get one-third of an inch of rain in twenty minutes. After the rain had stopped I could still hear the roar of little walhounding creek as it cascaded into the canal. I went over and gazed at the muddy waterfall pouring over the rocks. It was nice to see some water in the canal for a change, but the rising water put a group of young wood ducks into a predicament. These poor creatures had been flushed from their hiding place and it was all they could do to keep from being washed away down river.

The deer are loving the Island. I never see them but their hoof prints are everywhere and the mulberry tree continues to be slowly devoured. I said I never see them but I did have one late-night encounter. I was coming home and crossing the river in the dark when my headlamp caught a reflection on the opposite shore. I first thought that it was a bit of reflector tape on a canoe or

something but I quickly realized it was two green eyes shining back at me. This was new and I tried to guess which animal it was watching me. I got past the halfway point on the ferry and the creature didn't budge, two tiny circles in the dark staring straight into my headlamp. I assumed it was a raccoon perched partway up a tree but, when I had tied up the ferry and stepped onto the board walk, I found I was mistaken. There, to the right of the walkway, only ten feet away, stood a big buck! My light had trouble penetrating the wall of jewel weed that separated us but I could see the bristly fur of it's head and I could see it's antlers poking out above the tall jewel weed. I got nervous standing there eye to eye with this large beast and I reached behind me and picked up the plastic chair that was there. The animal just stood there motionless until I swung the chair at the weeds in front of me. That's when it took off, thankfully, it ran away from me and not towards me.

I saw our rolley-poley ground hog yesterday. Judging by its size, I'd guess that is not going to have any trouble surviving a long winter. That thing was so fat that it could hardly run.

The other creature I want to mention again is the great egrets. I've talked about the two or three great egrets that I've seen around the Island. I figured that they were the rare few that happened to make it this far up river. That theory was blown on Monday when I counted over 13 egrets just above Rupperts! I hope they set up a colony here and start a new rookery.

I caught a largemouth bass last Saturday. That's pretty rare here, we usually only catch smallmouth.

Tuesday, August 17, 2010

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.7 Water Temperature: 80

The water temperature was over 88 degrees on the 11th, but all this rain cooled it off and yesterday it was down to 78 degrees. What a difference ten degrees makes, the river actually felt cold when I jumped in last night. Its interesting to think how the rain delivers us these batches of cold water from the upper atmosphere.

The river is clearing up again. The trash is all gone and I can see my feet while standing in five feet of water. The water has cleared up so much that I am seeing fish swimming under the ferry for the first time this summer.



JOE HAGE

Friday, August 20, 2010

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.8 Water Temperature: 80

We had about three inches of rain on Wednesday morning and the river shot up a foot and a half. It got close to reaching four feet but it quickly went back down again. I wish the rain would come in smaller doses. These mega downpours cause so much erosion and they fill the river with so much sediment. Its disgusting to see the rain transform the river into sewer, an endless conveyor belt of refuse and debris.

Tuesday, August 24, 2010

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.8 Water Temperature: 80

I got a call from member Kent Halstead and he suggested that we get a secchi disk, a crude device that we could use to measure the turbidity of the river. Kent is an avid fisherman and therefore interested in the clarity of the water. Naturally he thought he could get the

needed information from the internet. But when he looked, he could find no data about Potomac River turbidity, that's when he called me. I think that this information could be very helpful for, not only fishermen but also, swimmers and paddlers. I'm going to work on making my own homemade secchi disk and begin to post my findings. Maybe our website will get a few more hits, especially if we're the only ones publishing a measurement of the turbidity of the river on the whole world wide web. The river is pretty clear right now by the way. I can see about three feet down.

Great Egrets! Last night as I went for a sunset swim, I counted 15 great white egrets. They were all perched together high up in a large tree just upriver from the old swing tree on the mainland. Even from that long distance and in the fading light, I had no trouble counting their stark white forms contrasting against the deep green background of the trees. 15!

Thursday, August 26, 2010

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.6 Water Temperature: 80

The river is sooo nice right now. A mild eighty degrees with a six foot visibility range. And the fish are biting.

We did it! We averted disaster and solved the mystery of the tripping breaker.

The mystery started not long after the new construction was done. Sometimes I would come home and find that the lights in the bedroom did not work. I soon realized that the lights were also out in the screen porch, the club bathrooms and the club kitchen. I checked the breaker box and found that one of the breakers had tripped. I would reset the breaker and all would be well again, for a while.

Then one day last week, when I tried to reset the breaker it would not work. It just kept tripping. I called in an electrician who figured that we had a bad breaker and he replaced it. I paid him \$50 bucks and the lights were working, until the next day that is. I immediately called and left a message for the electrician. That was Friday. I was away on Saturday so I revisited the issue on Sunday. I never did hear from the electrician.

I suspected that I had a short in the circuit somewhere, but the question was where. I started first to look at all the light fixtures and spent the morning pulling them all off the ceiling and checking the wiring. All looked fine so I started taking apart the switches next. I would periodically run up to the breaker box to see if my efforts were making a difference. Finally, I was able to keep the breaker from tripping but when I tried to turn on the light in the screen porch it tripped again. I decided to test it again, since when I hit the lights the last time I heard a loud popping noise coming from near the ladies room. Just then the Gelbs rang the bell and I asked for their assistance. When I did the test this time I had them watching for the noise by the bathroom. When I hit the lights I got the same popping noise but I also heard the exclamations of Alan and his son Robert. Not only did they hear the noise but they also saw very impressive sparks and rockets shooting out of the wall. Halleluiah, we had found the short in the circuit! It turns out that the new wiring was being pinched against the steel framing by the plywood wall-board. It was like a picture from the "Ten Leading Causes of House Fires" training manual. Thankfully we found the problem and after spending all day Sunday tearing apart the wall, doing the rewiring, and replacing a damaged switch, my lighting is now restored.



JOE HAGE

Now I have to put everything back together.

We had a real *National Geographic* moment last night. At sunset we paddled up to the tree where the egrets had gathered the night before, and just like clockwork the all came in to roost. When we had reached our viewing spot, halfway up Rupperts, there were a dozen cormorants high in a dead tree sunning themselves in the last of the suns rays but there were no egrets around. Then the white birds started arriving. First a single bird, then they started to arrive in twos and threes and it only took ten minutes for the tree to fill up with 16 great white egrets! Oh, and one great blue heron.

JOE HAGE

The Sycamore Islander

6613 80th Place
Cabin John, MD 20818

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FIRST CLASS MAIL



DAVID WINER

Large Parties Scheduled



September 11, Alison Levine,
30 person family picnic



September 25, Mac Thornton,
35 Cub Scouts, 3-7

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 October issue is October 4.