



The Sycamore Islander

NOVEMBER 2010 | VOLUME 89 NUMBER 11

President's Letter

The selection process for future membership is getting much-deserved attention lately. As we approach a time when the waiting list is whittled down to zero, we must have in place a system for taking in new members. Actually, it behooves us to have this issue resolved earlier—soon—because even now we are receiving requests from eager would-be members asking to join the club. What can we tell them?

Nearly everyone agrees that we want to avoid waiting lists of years duration. However, we are currently without a plan beyond that of our closed waiting list. Peter Winkler, Membership Chairman, has started working on this task by recently convening the Membership Committee. At that meeting, diverse views abounded for establishing a new process. No surprise. We always express widely differing approaches to solving problems! Among the sub-issues the committee identified were the procedures for administrating details such as fees, applicant lists, record keeping, and the like. But the over-riding issue is how we should determine eligibility for membership. This is the most pressing matter before us at the moment, and one which must be resolved before tackling the mechanics of managing a membership system.

Fundamentally there are two divergent policies to be considered, although compromises between them suggest many possibilities. One is for a system which

inducts members without acknowledging the club's interests or considering the applicants' interests in the club. You will recognize that the way we have brought in new members for many years falls in this category. A distinctly different system could address club needs, applicants' interests, members' recommendations, or all of these. Amalgamation between both methods is feasible. For example, from a pool of applicants, we could fill membership vacancies in different proportions allocated to each policy.

These matters strongly affect the future of our club. Please be aware that your concerns can't register unless you participate. I recommend that you make special effort to attend upcoming club meetings. Also, the Membership Committee members need to hear your views.

The Club meets next on Wednesday night, November 10 at 8:00 P.M. on the Island. It's apt to be chilly, but we can look forward to the meeting room stove and hot beverages made in the kitchen. According to custom, the November meeting will be the last of the year on the Island itself. In December, again following custom, we meet in members' homes for election of officers, approval of the budget, and some holiday cheer. If you would like to host this festive business meeting on the 8th of December, please let me know.

DAVID WINER
President

Minutes for the October 13 Meeting

Attendees—On the Island.

A robust quorum was present, consisting of Gerry Barton, Sherry Fizdale, Renee Dunham, Marianne Ross, Jane and David Winer, Susana and John Membrino, Maria Stenzel, Bill Marmon, Jim Drew, John Noble, Sally Strain, Geoff Holdridge, Jeff Komarow, Drew Walsh.

Special Program

President Winer called the meeting to order at 7:40 P.M. The early start was to facilitate a special presentation by amateur archaeologist Doug Dubin. Dubin was invited to the Island by caretaker Joe Hage, to make an archeological survey. Joe recently found a well shaped but prehistoric spear “point”. Dubin identified Joe’s find as a Susquehanna Broadpoint made of a form of quartz known as rhyolite. Similar points have been carbon dated to the period 1200–500 B.C. Dubin explained that these points were likely used for gutting fish or for cutting. The bow and arrow were not introduced until much later, around 700 A.D.

Hoping to find more evidence of a prehistoric heritage on the Island, Dubin and Hage started excavating near where Joe found the point near the clubhouse porch. At about 30 inches down, fragments of “fire-cracked” rock, another well established sign of prehistoric life, were found.

But as they dug deeper, down 6.5 feet, no further evidence of life was found.

Dubin has written up his findings, but they have not yet been published on the website for his Palisades Museum of Prehistory, <http://www.pmop.org/>.

Reports

President Winer reported that lockers had been brought over to the Island, but are not yet fully installed. It was requested that the bench in the ladies restroom be returned.

John Membrino reported that he was open for bids on the orphan kayaks. If there are no bidders the kayaks will be disposed of since they are not high enough quality for club kayaks.

It was reported that the newly constituted membership committee met under chairman Peter Winkler. The committee is charged with coming up with recommendations for new member selection. Winkler plans to issue a call for comments and views on new member procedures. Winkler estimates that all Waiting List Members will be fully integrated into the Club as Members within two years.

Old business

None.

New business

It was decided to hold the fall work fest Sunday November 14, with the following Sunday, November 21, as rain date.

Communications

It was reported that the Park Service has started clearing debris from the Canal, but it was unclear when they would reach the huge blow-down near the Island. It was also reported that Park Service will be renting additional Lock Houses for overnight guests.

Meeting adjourned at 9:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,
BILL MARMON
Co-Recording Secretary

Saturday Relief Caretakers November 2010		
	10 A.M.–2 P.M.	2 P.M.–DARK
NOVEMBER 6	Ed and Margaret Tilghman 301.320.5846 emtilghman@gmail.com	Kathy Carroll 202.723.2233 kathy@kathleencarroll.com
NOVEMBER 13	Jerome Cramer jeromecramer@yahoo.com	Need someone for this slot.
NOVEMBER 20	Kevin and Carol Hearle 301.229.8230 ck.hearle@verizon.net	Bill Eichbaum 301.229.1713 eichbaumwilliam@hotmail.com
NOVEMBER 27	Jim Matthews 703.401.8742 j123mat@aol.com	Karen and Jim Foreit 202-237-2460 karenforeit@gmail.com

Dear Sycamore Islanders: Love Canoes and Canoeing?

How about 250 canoes and 500 canoeists, paddling 90 miles in 3 days together? Phil and I had this experience as pit crew for friends at the Adirondack Canoe Classic the weekend of September 10–12.

This was the 28th annual race on the “original high-way of the Adirondacks”—a string of lakes, ponds, rivers, marshes, and forests from Old Forge to Saranac Lake—for the canoeing hard core.

People of all shapes sizes, and ages from 6 to 70, from all over the Americas.

Many types of boats—Canadian voyageurs (war canoes) with up to eight paddlers (one included a dog in a custom-made life jacket); translucent kevlar canoes with feather-light paddles; handbuilt wood guideboats with brass trim (hybrids of canoe and row-boat); one and two-person kayaks; even one paddle-boarder who paddled standing up for all 90 miles. Since the course involved several strenuous portages, many carried wheels on board.

The pit crews’ job was to support our teams in all ways possible: to supply them with dry clothes, food, and other needs at the finish line each day, to drive the trucks and other vehicles with boats, supplies and gear to a new campground each night, to secure campsites, and to keep their spirits up by cheering them on at strategic viewing points en route.

This cheering was done with much enthusiasm, noise and ingenuity. As the racers passed under one bridge, some caught much appreciated refreshments being lowered on strings by their friends.



MARIANNE ROSS

Paddleboarder



MARIANNE ROSS

Voyageurs (war canoes)

At the campgrounds the conversation was almost entirely around boats and their paraphernalia, boat companions, previous races, and weather (which on this weekend careened from chilly/windy/wet to sunny/hot and back again).

But by early evening, as the sun set and stars appeared, the campgrounds were eerily silent except for the hooting of owls. After 30 miles of strenuous paddling, portaging, and cheering, everybody was too exhausted to party, and was asleep, needing to recoup energy for the next day’s exertions.

The finish at Saranac Lake was jubilant as the boats arrived in waves. After 28 years, the organizers had the routine down—every detail of life on the water had been taken care of for all participants.

Each racer received a participation pin; our team Adam and Josie received hand-made wooden plaques for 3rd place in their class; and Phil and I were rewarded with three memorable days’ immersion in the boat-obsessed life of the wild canoeists in the Adirondack waterways and forests, and handsome “pit-crew” T-shirts!

As I write this letter, sitting on the captain’s dock, in my mind’s eye I see 250 human-powered canoes churning downriver to the finish line . . . but no, just the still, deserted water and green islands of the Potomac, with several snowy egrets roosting in a tree on the Virginia side..

Happy boating!
MARIANNE ROSS
September 17, 2010

Notes from the Island

Friday, October 8, 2010

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.19 Water Temperature: 64

The river looks good again, meaning that it has cleared up quite a bit after last week's rain. The weather is warm and the river is clear so I'm tempted to go for a dip, but then I saw the water temperature. Not sure if I'm ready to jump into that cold river.

I just returned from a vacation in Austin. I had a great time and I was surprised at the number of beautiful rivers in east Texas. I paddled the flat waters of the dammed Colorado in the heart of Austin and I also spent an afternoon of whitewater fun on the Guadeloupe. I'll have to go back there for more paddling adventures.

Sadly, the person that we had lined up to be my substitute decided to blow us off.

Friday, October 15, 2010

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.1 Water Temperature: 62

It must be autumn. The buck on the Island has a full rack of antlers, the gold finches aren't gold anymore, and the heavy blankets are back on my bed.

Wednesday, October 20, 2010

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.89 Water Temperature: 60

There is a spot on the towpath, just down from here, where the trees open up and you can get a beautiful view looking up river. There is a good view of the Island there and it is a popular spot to watch the sunset. I knew all this but I was a little surprised when on Sunday, a towpath user stopped me on the ferry and kindly asked if I could pick up the trash that was at the foot of the Island. Seems there was a very big and bright, florescent orange traffic cone marring up the otherwise perfect natural setting. I had seen the eyesore days before but had forgotten about it, out of sight out



The last cormorant of summer

JOE HAGE



Rock, tree, sunset

JOE HAGE

of mind. I'm almost sure that it came down Cabin John creek from the beltway during that rain we had on the first of this month. I pulled it out of the mud and carried it up the hill yesterday, maybe, instead of trashing it, I'll take it back up to the highway construction site.

While I was at the foot of the Island moving traffic cones, I saw the majestic shape of a bald eagle flying up river towards me. As it came up river along the Virginia shore it was joined by another impressive eagle and the two of them flew in unison as they crossed the river towards me. I stood there trying not to move in the hopes I would get an even closer look at them when to my astonishment they were joined by a third eagle. Three fully mature birds with their stunning white heads and tails soaring directly over me at the foot of the Island! Then I saw a fourth bird. It was in the distance heading down river so I can't be positive, but I

think it was another eagle. This makes me think that it is mating season for the eagles (they lay their eggs in February) and maybe these guys are establishing the borders of their nesting territories. Oh, I also saw an American coot while I was down there.

One more cool bird sighting. I was running in Virginia at Turkey Run Park and as I came around the corner near the old river gage I scared up a group of morning doves. (They seem to flock together at this time of year) I stopped to watch them for a second when all of the sudden a huge hawk came swooping in from belt way my right! With its big wings tucked into a dive, it threw itself into the flock of prey. There was a crashing noise as the hawk slammed into the dead vines that covered the hillside, but I didn't see any feathers fly. The doves scattered. The unsuccessful hunted collected itself and flew off across the river. This

was no accipiter.(the kind of hawk you would normally see hunting other birds) My first thought was that it was a red shouldered hawk but this bird was so chunky that I'm guessing it was a broad-winged hawk.

Worked on the trail a little yesterday. One of the timbers was loose so I dug it out and repositioned it. Big improvement.

Friday, October 29, 2010

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.93 Water Temperature: 62

It's cold and windy today leaving no hint of the wonderful warm weather we've had here the last two days. The river warmed up to 66 degrees! That's a whole 10 degrees warmer than it was just a week ago. It was warm enough yesterday, in fact, for a couple of hearty souls to swim out to the rocks in the middle of the river.

I've said before that September is the best month to be here but I must confess that this past October has been exceptional as well. This past month has been like

a caretaker's dream, low river, nice weather and lots of color. I can't even describe some of the amazing views we've had. One day, strangely, a thick fog formed on the river just before the sun went behind the trees. It was a thick fog covering half the river, but it was low so that the colorful trees on the far bank were still visible. The low cloud seemed to appear out of nowhere and after thirty minutes it was mysteriously gone, only to return again from 6:00 to 6:30. I know that there is some kind of scientific explanation for this phenomenon involving dew points and water vs. air temperature, but in the light of the October sunset, it felt like magic.

I'm looking forward to seeing everyone at the work-fest on November 14. I have a great list of fun projects, including installation of the new lockers! We will also be raking leaves so bring your rake. It should be a fun day of work, food and a warm fire.

JOE HAGE



Archaeologist Doug Dubin gives a special presentation.

JANE WINER

To Autumn

JOHN KEATS

I

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run;
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm days will never cease,
For Summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.

II

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,
Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while thy hook
Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers:
And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
Steady thy laden head across a brook;
Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,
Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.

III

Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,—
While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,
And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
Among the river sallows, borne aloft
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft
The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

The Sycamore Islander

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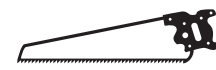


DAVID WINER



Workfest Planning Meeting!

Wednesday, November 10, 7:00 P.M., before the regular meeting.



Happy Birthday

to John Mathews!
Long-time Club Captain turns 90!

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 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 December issue is December 1.

Masthead photo by Joe Hage