



The Sycamore Islander

SEPTEMBER 2011 | VOLUME 90 NUMBER 9

President's Letter

Our next club meeting is Wednesday, September 14 at 8:00 p.m. Jane and David Winer will host the meeting at their home, 5927 Onondaga Road, Bethesda. The Old Timers' Potluck is September 28 beginning around 11:30 a.m. For more information see the announcement in this issue.

You may have noticed the ongoing work on the bridge over the canal. This needed and long overdue maintenance should be completed in a few more weeks. Until then the bridge is open weekends and after 3:00 weekdays.

We had quite a Fishing Derby last month. George Malusky did his usual fine job organizing this event. Almost everyone caught a fish and some quite a few.

Thinking about fishing, I am happy September is here. Bass try to fatten up for the winter. It is usually the best month of the year for fishing.

Occasionally a club member will ask about equipment needed to begin learning how to fish. A very nice rod and reel along with all the related gear you will need can be gotten for as little as fifty dollars—no more than a hundred. But you don't need to buy any equipment to begin. Use club equipment for a while and you will then have a better idea of what you want for your own.

There are several rods and reels hanging in the

screened-in porch that are ready for use and available to anyone. There are boxes of hooks, bobbers and other gear you can try. A minnow net is in the tool shed. You will also find artificial lures that you can use for casting and retrieving. The art of casting lures is not difficult and you will quickly learn by trial and error.

So, just come to the Island and give it a try. You can fish from a canoe or one of the docks. There is really nothing more relaxing (and occasionally exciting) than a few hours of fishing.

JIM DREW
President



JOE HAGE

Minutes for the August 10 Meeting

Members attending the meeting without a quorum on Sycamore Island, Wednesday, August 10, 2011, President Jim Drew presiding:

Jim Drew, Phoebe Hamill, Larry Miller, Iris Miller, Amrik Ohbi, Alan Gelb, John Noble, David Winer, Drew Walsh, Jane Winer

Joe Hage passed around an announcement for the “Help Joe Clean Up Our Adopted Mile of the C&O Canal Towpath & Trail” that will take place this Sunday morning, August 14, from 10 a.m.–noon. This will be the fourth time that Joe has promoted the activity—without drawing any help from Club membership. Announcements have not always made a timely appearance in the newsletter, so please remember: Clean-up takes place on the second Sunday of the month. Show up on the Island by 10 a.m.—Joe will direct from there. Bring a hat and a pair of work gloves.

Alan Gelb reports that assessments for Real Estate Taxes have come across his desk. Alan responded to questions from members about how Rupperts and Sycamore Island are assessed for, but he does not know how the county does their assessment—as far as Club real estate is concerned. The Island draws no water from the county, does not depend on county sewerage.

Alan noted that he does field questions from the county, from time to time; “Is Sycamore Island Club a rental establishment?” is one example. The Club has a tax exemption on “taxes as income” since we receive payment in dues only. There is virtually no income at the present time from money market funds.

On the subject of buildings and grounds, there was no new information about establishing winter bathrooms.

Jim Drew noted that comments on the Membership Committee report have been generally favorable. Drew Walsh noted that he was impressed with the thoroughness of Committee work thus far, thanks to Peter Winkler initially and Bill Marmon at present. We look for a final proposal and, in due time, will put recommendations regarding New Membership to a vote.

John Noble on the subject of Large Parties noted that September 2 and 3, Friday and Saturday, the Island will host a campout and Emily Glazer’s wedding.

David Winer’s Friday bike ride visits to the Island, should they go over the 10-person limit, do not require a vote from membership as such visits take place on a weekday.

Joe Hage reminded us that the refrigerator is operating below par and cool things in the box only to 50 degrees. We may want to look into a replacement.

Regarding questions about the state of the canal, it turns out that there is a breach in the berm above Lock 5, so Park Service does not want to let any water in. Monies and plans have been allotted for repairs to the canal and in particular for the metal bridge crossing the canal, but nothing has been done so far.

Jim Drew noted that a week from this Saturday, August 20, is the Fishing Derby. George Malusky coordinates. Fisherpeople, this is the most fun on the Island all year!

The Regatta is scheduled for Labor Day, Wednesday, September 5, and begins at 1:00 p.m. Vicki Judson, Cindy Bertaut, and others plan a barbecue at 5. Bring a dish to share.

By the end of the meeting, we were still 2 members short of a quorum. The meeting, which had taken place on the Captain’s Float, was adjourned at 8:39 p.m., just as the sun made its glorious way home.

Respectfully submitted,

JANE WINER

Acting Secretary



JOE HAGE



Zach Butler hauls in one his Catfish



Winner of the Most Fish Award, Charlotte Smith



Winner of the 2nd Most Fish Award, Zach Butler

ALL FISHING DERBY PHOTOS BY JOHN BUTLER

Annual Fishing Derby

As fall is beginning, I think back to a very hot day of summer. . . and the annual Sycamore Island Fishing Derby. After last year's rain delay, too many of us slept in too late on this particular August Saturday. The hot water was probably better for swimming than fishing that day. Also the previous day's heavy rain led to a water clarity that my spouse would call a nice cup of Midwest coffee. Us moon influenced anglers were also not sure of what possible luck we would face.

Needless to say the diversity of the species was limited viewing and catching for the anglers. It was heard that the proper name on this particular summer day should have been the Catfish Derby. This does some disservice to the handful of Bluegills that were caught. I think we may need a few more years to warrant the renaming. Needless to say, organizer George Malusky promises to demonstrate proper Catfish hook removal next year. I promise to be first in line and I think the hook in my forefinger should be dissolved by then.

As usual, George did a fantastic job of organizing, constructing unbelievable awards, and also providing sustenance for the anglers. "We come for the donuts but stay for the burgers and dogs," it was said.

The younger set again seem to have more patience than their elders and took home most of the prizes. Charlotte Smith took first place for "The Most Fish." She also seemed to lead in diversity by having a greater Bluegill to Catfish ratio. Zach Butler was in 2nd place in the renamed from "Biggest Fish" to "2nd Most Fish Caught" category. He managed to snag six Catfish



All the winners and George.

while his dad continued to complain about his hook-stuck finger. The "Smallest Fish Award" went to Ed and Sherry Fizdale. There seemed to be discussion about which one would fess up for this coveted award. The final award was the "Almost Fish Award" which went to youngster Brayden Castro. I don't think my photos do justice to the ones his proud dad took.

If you haven't attended one of the Island's Fishing Derbys, I can only say, you really should see what you're missing. The advice you'll get and stories you'll hear can only be matched at a tall tales festival. Thanks again to George for organizing this fun event!

JOHN BUTLER

Notes from the Island

Tuesday, August 2, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.67 Water Temperature: 90

There have been more improvements around the Sycamore Store. Best of all there is now a crosswalk across Macarthur Boulevard, which might make it safer to cross that raceway. They also installed solar panels on the roof of the store! A word of caution though, do not leave any valuables in your car while you are here. There have been a number of smash-and-grabs along Macarthur from Angler's down.

Still waiting for the fishing to pick up. The river is nice and warm and very low but the water is clouded by something, and the fish can't seem to find my lures. I guess there are just too many nutrients in the water and the algae is flourishing.

Tuesday, August 9, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.72 Water Temperature: 85

It has been a quiet month down here so far. August in D.C. and everybody scatters. It's been quiet but I have had a steady stream of swimmers coming down.

Just when I thought I had seen everything, I saw a ground hog in a tree! It was so strange when I looked out my window and saw this groundhog looking like a giant squirrel or some kind of northern hemisphere koala bear. I went to get a picture, and the fat marmot nimbly climbed down and disappeared. I had another unusual sighting. I see rat snakes all the time, but this one was in the clubhouse and crawling into a hole in the wall. It's nice to know that the walls of the clubhouse are lined with snakes.

I've been doing a lot of caulking and painting and I'm getting excited about finally tackling all of the painting that needs to be done around here.

I got out the secchi disc to check the rivers turbidity (just for you Kent). Last year on August 24, I could see six feet down into the river. Today I checked and the disc disappeared in just 20 inches of water. It must be an overload of nutrients causing an abundance of plankton. Further down river they are having trouble with toxic, blue-green algae. Thankfully, we don't have that here.

We have one great egret hanging around but nothing like last year when we would get groups of twenty sitting together in a tree.

Monday, August 15, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.92 Water Temperature: 81

I have good news and bad news. The good news is that they have finally started painting the metal truss bridge that spans the canal. The bad news is that the bridge will be closed from 7:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, for the next six weeks! I suppose that this won't affect most of you but it does pose some new and interesting challenges for me. I'll either have to break out my hip waders to get across the canal or I'll have to do all of my errands in the evening after the bridge is reopened.

I finally caught my first small mouth bass of the year! I had to go all the way up to Front Royal to do it but I finally caught some fish. The Shenandoah Riverkeepers were hosting a fishing rodeo on last Saturday so I went up to volunteer and to spend some time in the canoeing capital of Virginia. The Shenandoah is really low right now but on the south fork, the water was crystal clear and the fish could be seen everywhere, darting along the bottom. The water was clear where we were but apparently after the two forks converge, the water is plagued by the same green, cloudy algae that we have here. Everyone has been asking about it but no one has an explanation. There is also less of the star grass this year.

Monday, August 18, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.92 Water Temperature: 81

It's raining pretty good out there right now. Maybe it will wash away all of the slime on the surface of the water. I went over to take a dip earlier and, for the first time, I changed my mind. Besides the weird green color of the water there was this brown stuff collecting on the surface and around the dock. Usually, the swimming is so great at this time of year—how sad.

Don't forget, the annual George Maluski Fishing Derby is this Saturday, starting at 8:00 a.m.! The fishing can only get better, and as a sign of things to come, some bass and catfish were caught here yesterday afternoon!

Wednesday, August 31, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.8 Water Temperature: 78

A lot has happened since I last checked in. We had an earthquake and a "hurricane." The hurricane, thankfully, did not pack much of a punch and the Island fared very well. We did not lose any trees and there

were only a few small branches for me to clean up. I guess we were lucky, but if it misses us then it is sure to hit somewhere else. I feel so bad for all of those flood victims north of us.

The other major event that I need to mention is the 5.8 earthquake that we had last week. No, we did not have a tsunami on the Potomac. I was not even here on the Island when it struck but I did find a couple of pictures on the floor when I got home. I doubt if the main clubhouse shook very much, considering its strong steel construction. I happened to be on the front porch of Lock House 8 (I was painting the porch rail) when the quake hit. It was quite alarming to hear that 182-year-old structure creek and rattle and to feel the porch move.

The river is beginning to clear up a bit but the bass fishing is still the worst its ever been. Maybe September will bring us some good fishing.

On a humorous note, a young squirrel fell out of a tree and landed in the river. It was clinging to a small branch when it made a big splash in the water, right in front of us! It looked terrified but otherwise fine. It instinctively swam to shore and climbed the nearest tree.

JOE HAGE

Many of you were curious about my kayak trip to St. Catherine's Island so in addition to my normal caretaker's log, I've included some of our itinerary and a description of our trip.

Kayak Trip to St. Catherine's Island

July 13, 2011—Day 5

We woke up early to a beautiful day. The river was calm and glassy. The sun was low in the sky and was sending a golden hue across the landscape. The water was gently lapping at the rocks along the shore and an osprey soaring overhead completed the scene. It was one of those simple, early-morning moments that make you feel glad that you're alive.

We had another big day planned, of course. Our goal for the morning was to reach Fairview Beach and have lunch at Tim's II. We would then carry on to Caledon Natural Area, then to Mathias point on the Virginia side and finally, do a major crossing into the Port

Tobacco River and camp at Chapel point in Charles County Maryland. I did not realize it as we set off, but we were looking at a 22-mile day.

We got a good start, leaving Aquia Creek at 8:30. Before we left, I found some wire in the parking lot and was able to do a better fix on my foot brace and it seemed to hold when I pushed on it. I squeezed myself into my kayak and amazingly, it actually felt Ok to be back in my boat. I thought that after yesterday's torture I would never want to get back into my kayak again. There is nothing like a good night's sleep.

The tide was with us that morning and we made it to Tim's II in less than two hours. We were learning that when we traveled with the tide we could usually make about 4 miles an hour, but when the tide was against us, we struggle to make 2 miles an hour. We arrived at Fairview beach and the painted palm trees of Tim's II at 10:00 a.m. The place was deserted except for a waitress who told us that we had an hour to wait until we could order lunch. I really didn't mind doing some sightseeing in Fairview, but it was hard not to think about the fact that we were sacrificing two good hour of outgoing tide. The thing about it was, there just weren't very many restaurants accessible from the river, so if we happened to pass a riverside watering hole, we were sort of obligated to stop and take advantage. Plus, since Tim's II was on our itinerary, we had to stop. We were, of course, stubbornly committed to stick to our itinerary.

Fairview is a quiet town situated on the outside corner of a huge bend in the river. We followed a road up to a small bluff and the view was impressive. Being at the bend in the river like we were, we could see over 15 miles upriver and another 15 miles downriver. Fairview is a sleepy town now, but back before the Bay Bridge was built, this was a happening beach town, with slot machines and gambling tables. We finished our walk through town, waving to the locals on their golf carts and headed back to Tim's.

While we were having lunch, I called Dale Hook, our host from Pohick Bay that we never saw. I thanked her for looking out for us and I told her how helpful Alex had been. I asked her about the feral cats and she told me about the ineffectual catch-neuter-and release program at the park. She then told me about how the pay booth at Pohick Bay Regional Park had been robbed on the evening that we were there. Crazy.

We left Tim's II and we were headed to our next



JOE HAGE

break spot at Caledon Natural Area. (Caledon Natural Area was once the site of Caledon Plantation, established in 1659, by John and Phillip Alexander. John and Phillip would later go on to establish the city of Alexandria.) We were going against the tide again and it was pure agony. We didn't talk much, just cursed under our breath as we slogged along for another two hours. My legs were so claustrophobic and sore that I had to fight the urge to jump out of my boat and swim for shore. The monotony was broken when a Nordic Tug pulled up along side us and the skipper warned us of an approaching line of thunderstorms. We could see the clouds building to the north, but thankfully, it looked as if we would make it to Metomkin point at Caledon before the worst of the storm hit.

The point was a really pretty spot, with an inland pond and, miraculously, a roofed pavilion where we could shelter ourselves from the eminent downpour. I got ready for a long siege and took my food and water

from my storage compartments to the pavilion. While waiting for the storm, we walked along the driftwood-littered beach, feeling the power of the wind and listening to the waves crashing onto the shore. The sky turned black and it was exciting to watch the river change character. I did my first phone interview while we were waiting there for the rain to stop. Damien, calling from the Riverkeeper office, asked me a few questions that he would later put up on the website. I tried to sound clever but I think I pretty much muffed up the interview.

The rain was strong but short lived and, even though the wind was fierce, we did manage to stay pretty dry in our shelter. The skies began to clear and it was time to get moving again. It was now after 4:00 and we still had a long way to go. The tide and the storm had put us way behind schedule and I was beginning to wonder if we would make it to the primitive campsite that I had reserved. Funny thing, I had reserved the site for Thursday night and today was only Wednesday, oh well. We headed toward Mathias point where we had planned to stock up on water. I had been told Sycamore Island member, John Matthews, that we could get water from their house, which was high up on the cliffs of Mathias point. Considering everything, I was feeling pretty good but I was a little stressed-out because the pressure was on me to find the house and the much-needed water.

The sky was very active with the passing of storm clouds and the fast-moving clouds entertained me as we made the crossing in silence. Again, we managed to take different routes across this shallow bay and after another two hours of thankless paddling we found ourselves below the cliffs of Mathias point. It was now about 7:00 and I was starting to panic about finding our water stop. I strained my eyes in the fading light, searching for the landmarks that I was given to help us find the house. I knew the house was up there somewhere and if we took the time, I'm sure I would have found it. But the darkness was looming and with a long river crossing ahead of us, time was not a luxury that we had. It was suddenly feeling really late and I was beginning to think that maybe we should try to find the Matthews house and just spend the night in Virginia that night.

Whit was busy studying the satellite picture on his smart phone trying to figure out where we were. His silence made me worry that he was losing his patience

with me. I paddled close to shore to get a better look and was at a loss as to what to do next. Apparently we had passed the house. We could have gone back, but that would have cost us a lot of valuable time. I was determined to find the house but Whit, rightly so, didn't think we had time to find the house, get water and then make the crossing. This lack of communication was starting to get to me, but then I realized that Whit had spotted someone on a distant dock and he was headed there. In defeat, with a sense of failure, I followed Whit past a big river buoy to one of the many private piers jutting out into the river from Mathias Point. I was apologetic as we landed our kayaks on the rocky beach but Whit was focused on getting us some water and we didn't waste any time talking about my inability to find the house.

Again, we were incredibly fortunate to happen upon this nice gentleman standing out on his dock. Whit, with his friendly, central Virginia charisma, easily convinced the stranger to help us out and allow us to fill our jugs at his place. Luckily, Whit had the where with all to remove his mask before we approached.

Our host, a recent retiree, seemed excited to get some visitors and he asked us a lot of questions about our trip while we followed him up the stairs from the river. His place was beautiful, with a perfectly manicured lawn and everything in meticulous order. It was quite a contrast to the gritty existence that we'd been living for the last five days. We met his wife at the glistering, sliding glass doors and they graciously let us and our grimy selves come inside and fill our jugs at their kitchen sink. They pulled out a map when we told them of our evenings plans and from his window high above the river he pointed out across the river to our destination, a tiny speck on the far shore.

It was now close to 8:00 and we still had to paddle another five miles to reach Chapel point. I was worrying about crossing the river in the dark and I was about to suggest that we break out our headlamps but Whit just jumped into his boat and we were off. He was really good about not worrying. The storm clouds were way off in the distant south and strangely we were headed due north as we headed toward the mouth of Port Tobacco River. There was a colorful sunset happening on our left and a full moon rising up over the Morgantown power plant on our right. It was a rare and beautiful sight but I was only able to enjoy a little, as I really didn't want to linger out there in the middle

of the river, in the dark. Also, I was concerned about finding our campsite. Neither of us had been to our nest stop before and in the dark it would be challenging to find a safe harbor. I mustered up my strength and tried to make time. I assumed that Whit was close behind, paddling with matched urgency, but when I turned to look for him he was nowhere in sight. This was the first time that we were not in constant visual contact and I got a jolt of fear when I suddenly found myself alone in the dark on the massive river. I was a little frustrated that Whit did not seem to be in the same hurry that I was in, but I had to admire his commitment to getting the important pictures and doing the tweeting, even under these circumstances.

The moon was full and bright but it was of little use in helping us to decipher the shoreline and to find our campsite. My map had very little detail and Whit had resorted to using his smart phone again to see if the satellite picture could help us at all. The problem was that every time we stopped paddling to check the maps, the tide would carry us backwards, away from our goal. We crept along in the dark but, judging by the satellite picture, we had to go further up Port Tobacco River to find a usable beach. There were no signs to indicate that we were at any kind of a state park but the beach was big enough to pitch our tents, and since we didn't have any strength left to go on, we decided to crash there for the night. It was now 10:00 and I quickly got out the cooking stuff and made dinner and pitched my tent. There were more feral cats here and I was realizing that we seem to have a very serious cat problem along this river. We ate our dinner, sitting in the sand on the beach and looking up at the stars of the Big Dipper. Then, finally, we slept.

**The Oldtimer's Potluck
is postponed and will be rescheduled
when the bridge is opened,
tentatively Tuesday, October 5**

The Sycamore Islander

6613 80th Place
Cabin John, MD 20818

ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED

FIRST CLASS MAIL

Saturday Relief Caretakers September 2011		
	10 A.M.–2 P.M.	2 P.M.–DARK
SEPTEMBER 3	James Snow 703.751.4853	?
SEPTEMBER 10	David Lyles 703.536.8692	Peter Levine 301.229.2986
SEPTEMBER 17	Linda Blair 202.364.8747	Patricia Hartge 301.907.6657
SEPTEMBER 24	?	Ellen Kennedy 301.434.0680

Large Parties Scheduled



September 11, Alison Levine, 30 person family picnic

September 17, David and Lynda McCormick,
20 in meditation group, 2–dusk

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

September 25, The Kats Family, 15 for birthday party, 2–4

October 1, George and Marcia Loeb,
35 for Cub Scout Pack 1320, 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 3.