



The Sycamore Islander

APRIL 2012 | VOLUME 91 NUMBER 4

President's Letter

The club's monthly meeting is Wednesday, April 11, at 8:00 p.m. on Sycamore Island. The waiting list lottery drawing will be held at 7:30 p.m. right before the meeting. It will be conducted as described at last month's meeting by membership secretary John Noble and vice-president Bill Marmon. Members are urged to come early and observe.

Lottery winners, and others, will be able to receive a wait list pass to use the Island this summer. They can do so by attending an orientation program to be held on May 6 at 10:30 a.m., and by paying the wait list pass fee.

The Spring Workfest is Sunday, April 22. Every spring all club members and wait listers come together and prepare Sycamore Island for the summer. The workfest begins at 9:00 or so with coffee, doughnuts, and turkey bacon. We put out the docks and floats, do painting and brick work, give the clubhouse a spring cleaning, and do many other tasks. Captain Drew Walsh and caretaker Joe Hage will have a long list of jobs for both young and old. The noontime Potluck Dinner is the highlight of the day. Entertainment

supervisor George Malusky will grill excellent burgers, hot dogs, sausages, and chicken. Drinks and plates, etc., are provided. Everyone brings a dish to share—deserts, salads, side dishes, casseroles, deserts—bring your favorite.

The Ferguson Foundation's annual Potomac River Clean-up is April 14 on the Island starting about 9:00 a.m. This is a very good thing to do. We are a private site participant with Renee Dunham coordinating.

Looking ahead, the State of the River Program, arranged by Paul Hagen, will occur during the club meeting on May 9. The Potomac Downriver Race is May 12. Sycamore Island is the finish line. See Islander Star Mitchell for race information (starmitchell@verizon.net). Plan now to be in the race !!

The Environment Committee is circulating member's views on the erosion issue. Some give a fascinating historical overview. To get involved with the Committee contact grounds supervisor Ann Lucy or captain Drew Walsh.

JIM DREW
President

Minutes for the March 14 Meeting

The meeting was called to order by President Jim Drew on a warm spring evening on the Island.

Attendees: Jim Drew, David Winer, Jeff Komarow, Sarah King, Andrew Shipman, Jane Winer, Robert Benjamin, Jody Benjamin, Larry Heilman, John Noble, Diane Noble, Jim Drew, Sherry Fizdale, Phil Ross, Trip Reid, William Marmon, Ann Lucy, Star Mitchell, Geoff Holdridge, Bill Eichbaum, and Tryon Wells were present.

The February minutes were corrected to indicate that in the section on Membership there were five applications in the “younger” pool. The minutes were then approved.

Communications: Jim Drew reported that his daughter gave him his first granddaughter.

Treasurer’s Report: Alan Gelb reported via Jim Drew that there is nothing new or unexpected regarding finances.

Captain/Caretaker Report: The water is back on in the bathrooms.

Relief Caretaking: Sherry Fizdale sent an email to members who have not served as relief caretaker in the last year. The website always has the current status on relief caretaking.

Roofers will come on Thursday and Friday to repair the flat roof. Grass seed will be sown when night temperatures will be above 50 degrees. The water has been turned on and the insulation removed from the bathroom. The captain is looking into framing out and hanging windows in the shed.

The workfest will be on April 22; rain date is April 29.

Large Parties: Jody Benjamin reported that the Queen’s Jubilee has been canceled. Bill and Lucky Marmon will have a party on April 14. Chris White, a volunteer firefighter, requested permission for a large party or 35 or more people from the Glen Echo Fire Department on May 19. A concern about the capacity of the septic system was expressed. Chris will be reminded of rules such as no alcohol and that he is responsible for operating the ferry. The request was approved. Someone suggested that the rule requiring that members support the club through volunteer activity be excusable. The person making such a request must make it to the club at a meeting.

Environment/Grounds Committee: A first meeting was held on the Island on February 25th. Key issues are: invasive plants, erosion at the upstream end of the Island, damage from beavers. The committee expects to form task forces to develop a timeline and plan for addressing these concerns. During the workfest, one task will be to wrap trees to protect them from beavers. Perhaps an article will appear in the *Islander* identifying the “invasive of the month” and ways to eliminate it.

Membership Committee: John Noble presented a report on the current status of membership, the old waiting list, and new applications for membership. There were vacancies, due to regular members becoming senior members and one requesting inactive status. The members voted to welcome the following applicants from the old waiting list into membership:

- Benson Ginsburg
- Andrew Young
- Laura Young
- Richard Boltuck
- Brian Singer and Rachel Forman
- Page and David Dekke

The old waiting list has 10 applicants interested in becoming active members.

John also reported that a former member was dropped from membership three years ago because of non-payment of dues. He has been in Saudi Arabia “fighting the war on terrorism.” A motion was made and passed that he pay his back dues, then apply for inactive status until he returns.

There have been 66 applications for the new waiting list (10 under 40, and 56 who are 40 or older). Bill Marmon reviewed the procedure for the lottery, which will be conducted at 7:30, prior to the next meeting on April 11. Poker chips will be used to represent applicants, and will be sorted according to age of applicant; i.e., “under 40” or “40 and over”. Poker chips will be selected alternately from each group. When the chips in one group are depleted, chips in the other group will be selected until all are selected. Those who are within the number needed for a maximum of 60 on the waiting list will be notified.

Dave Winer proposed a change that if one age group doesn’t have enough applicants, that the club continue to accept applications in that age group. The Special Membership committee had considered such a possibility and rejected any such accommodation.

New Business: Ann Marie Cunningham introduced a motion that reads, “For the remainder of 2012, Section 1.a. of the Standing Rules be amended to read, “Beer or wine may be consumed on the Islands after 6:00 p.m., provided that it is not consumed to an extent that the person becomes intoxicated; nor shall any person come to the Island in an intoxicated state. Any person who violates this rule may be asked to leave Club property.” Several members commented on the proposed change. Jim Drew suggested that this raises some complicated and possibly controversial issues, that it be discussed at the next several meetings, and voted on after that.

The meeting was adjourned. The next meeting will be held on the Island on April 11.

Respectfully submitted
ANNE MARIE CUNNINGHAM
Co-Recording Secretary

Alcohol on the Island, Past and Future

In 1885, the Sycamore Island Pleasure Club was formed. The founding father who was the namesake for Ruppert’s Island was the owner of a saloon. There was a licensed bar on the Island, and the profits were kept in club hands. About 1914, liquor was banned and women were admitted. Coincidence? John Thomson’s “Sycamore History in Brief” really doesn’t say, but it’s still a very interesting read.

I’m certainly not suggesting we establish a bar on the Island, but I do believe that wine with a picnic dinner would enhance our enjoyment of the Island. I’m proposing an experiment for the remainder of 2012, where we allow wine and beer to be consumed in the evening. This would provide an opportunity to see whether our members would act responsibly, as I expect they will, or whether it would detract from a safe and enjoyable experience. In late fall, we would have an opportunity to determine whether to implement a permanent change, possibly with restrictions or even penalties. Perhaps we’ll decide that we need a rule like the one enacted in 1887, “No member when intoxicated shall make use of a rowboat: if doing so he shall be fined no less than Ten dollars (\$10) for each offense, the fine to be paid within thirty days unless he shall be excused from paying said fine by a vote of 2/3 of the members present at the meeting.”

My amendment is: Through December 31, 2012, Section 1.a. of the Standing Rules be amended to read, “Beer or wine may be consumed on the Islands after 6:00 p.m. by persons of legal age, provided that it is not consumed to an extent that the person becomes intoxicated; nor shall any person come to the Islands in an intoxicated state. Any person who violates this rule may be asked to leave club property.”

Our president, Jim Drew, suggested that this amendment is likely to generate a lot of interest and possibly controversy, so there will be an opportunity to discuss this amendment at the next meeting, and that a vote will not be held until some future meeting. I look forward to hearing your thoughts.

ANNE MARIE CUNNINGHAM

Spring Workfest

Just a reminder that the Spring Workfest this year is Sunday, April 22. For those who get there early, George Malusky will be cooking up his famous turkey bacon in the morning! Joe Hage is anxious to get things in order. The list of work includes:

- Returning all docks to the river
- Removing vines from trees and wrapping with wire
- Helping George with food and grill
- Cleaning clubhouse and bathrooms
- Wiping down screen porch
- Washing windows
- Painting table in clubhouse
- Repairing trails and steps
- Dismantling old canoe dock and tree house
- Removing trash
- Collecting firewood
- Repairing screen doors on deck
- Framing openings for new windows in shed
- Cleaning and checking club canoes for repairs

Half the fun is sampling the various dishes members bring to enjoy along with the hot dogs, burgers, and chicken from the grill. As always, there is something for everyone to help prepare the Island for the season!

DREW WALSH

Membership Secretary's Report

Current membership information as of April 2: The Financial Secretary reports regular membership has dropped to about 145 (our ceiling is 160). The 10 applicants on the current active waiting list are recommended for regular membership by vote at the April meeting. They are:

- Penelope Mitchell
- Jennifer Urquard and Michael Edwards
- Kevin and Carole Hearle
- Thomas Barry
- Kaitlin Barry
- Gretchen Sinclair and Joseph Stauton
- Goeff Holdridge and Bonnie Roberts
- Corrine Roosevelt and Michael Colon
- Ellen Kennedy and Kent Marcoux
- Drew Walsh

The three-month window for new waiting list applications closed March 31. We received 122 applications: applications from age 39 or under, 28; applications from age 40 or over, 94.

It is expected that up to 60 of the above applications will be selected by lottery managed by Bill Marmon immediately before the April monthly meeting. Those selected will comprise the new waiting list.

JOHN NOBLE

57th CCA Potomac Downriver Race

What race do you know of that has lasted consecutively for 57 years? The 57th running of the CCA Potomac Downriver Race hosted by Sycamore Island and co-sponsored by Potomac Whitewater Racing Center will be Saturday, May 12. Come and be a part of one of the greatest and longest running whitewater races in the nation! Join the fun!

The pre-registration fee is only \$20 if received by May 7. Obtain a registration form from www.sycamore-island.org or www.canoecruisers.org. Follow the instructions for mailing. On race day the entrance fee will increase to \$25. Tandem teams pay as two individuals unless they are a parent and child (under age 18) who are permitted to pay as one individual. Liability forms must be signed on race day.

The Maryland Canoe & Kayak Racing Series event begins at Rocky Island on the Potomac River just above Wet Bottom Rapid and continues for 7.5 miles to Sycamore Island. The race also will be a USA Wildwater Ranking Race. At the end of the race, a free T-shirt and a free lunch will be given to all workers and racers and there will be a ceremony with awards and prizes for the winners. (If you do not attend the ceremony, do not expect to receive the above! No awards will be mailed!)

Sign-in is 9 a.m.–10:30 a.m. at Great Falls Inn (Maryland) followed by a mandatory meeting for all racers. If the river is over 5 feet, the race may start at Old Angler's Inn. And if the river is over 6 feet, the race may be postponed. Notice regarding any changes will be posted in the CCA, PWRC, and Monocacy Canoe Club websites.

This is a race for any whitewater paddler from the pros to parent/child tandem teams, but this is not a novice race. All participants should have experience in and be comfortable with up to Class III rapids. Participants may enter with any type of a boat provided it is properly outfitted with adequate floatation (air bags) and all occupants of the boat are wearing a helmet and a PFD (life jacket).

If you plan to paddle the race, please pre-register to help with registration and planning. Please do not bring two cars to the race—parking will be difficult and a shuttle will be provided.

Volunteer helpers are needed for safety boats and for helping at the registration at Great Falls and at the finish at Sycamore Island. Volunteers will receive the gratitude of the racers, a sense of participating in an important annual river event, a race T-shirt, and lunch.

Anyone interested in helping out with this year's race should contact Star Mitchell at 301.530.3252 or e-mail starmitchell@verizon.net. Do join the fun!

V. STAR MITCHELL, CCA Downriver Race Chair
ADAM VAN GRACK, PWRC Chair

Potomac River Cleanup date correction

The April 12 date given in the March *Islander* for the Potomac River Cleanup is incorrect. The correct date is Saturday, April 14. We will start trash pickup on the Island at 9 a.m. and move later to Rupert's Island to finish at noon or earlier. (See March article for more information.) Community service credit is given to school age children for their participation. Please call Renee Dunham if you plan to participate, 202.686.6451.

Notes from the Island

Friday, March 2, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 6.0 Water Temperature: 45

The river is rising and the ferry is closed!

Monday, March 5, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 6.6 Water Temperature: 45

The ferry is closed!

The river hasn't dropped at all today! I guess with all of this rain in the watershed, it's going to take a while before we can operate the ferry again.

I took advantage of the heavy rains last week and paddled the Middle Patuxent River for the first time! Even though it is called a river, it is barely bigger than Rock Creek and it is only runnable after a good rain, like the one we had last Wednesday. It was a warm sunny day and a glorious trip through some surprisingly beautiful country. We had to scout one rapid at the beginning, just below Route 32, and we had to get out and carry three times on account of fallen trees across the river. We also decided to portage around a huge class IV rapid that is right after the confluence with the Little Patuxent. I say decided but there really was no choice, it was either portage or die. Then we did the last little class II back to our car. It was a fun, three hour paddle that landed us in Savage Maryland, right at the remains of Old Savage Mill. We went to find some lunch and before we knew it we were eating lunch on a deck, three stories up, looking down on the river we had just explored. Great day!

Tuesday, March 6, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 5.9 Water Temperature: 45

The river is receding but the ferry is closed again today.

Some of the bluebells are getting pretty tall and it looks like they came up two weeks earlier than in 2010.

Friday, March 9, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.8 Water Temperature: 45

The river is down and Mame is running again.

Monday, March 12, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.3 Water Temperature: 45

Here we go, another spring and the beginning of another season on Sycamore Island. The new, warmer weather is bringing the members out and it was good to see a few Islanders here yesterday

Friday March 16, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.9 Water Temperature: 58

I'm not a biologist, nor am I an expert on bluebells but I feel obligated to give my best estimate as to when the "Sycamore Island Bluebells" will be at their peak.

Considering that we just had a little rain and that the week's temperatures are supposed to be in the seventies, I think that March 23–26 will be the best time to visit the Island to see the bluebells. Right now the Dutchman's breeches are in full bloom as are the cut-leaved toothwort.

Monday, March 26, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.2 Water Temperature: 62

The bluebells are still in full regalia, so don't miss your chance to witness this once a year event!

There are at least two active goose nests on the Island, each with six eggs apiece. There is also a pair of phoebes building a nest in the rafters of the tool shed. The roosting cormorant showed up last week too and that means that the migratory fish are also running.

Wednesday, March 28, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.72 Water Temperature: 58

First let me announce that Whit Overstreet and I will be speaking at the Bailey's Crossroads REI tonight at 7:00. We'll be doing our last presentation about our "Island to Island trek down the tidal Potomac".

This has been a great spring so far, and I feel like I'm really making the most of it this time. So many times it seems that spring is so short and it just sails right past me. It's hard because the wildflowers stay in bloom for such a short time and the bird and fish migrations are usually over before you know it. That is why I am so glad that I took the chance to hike on the Billy Goat Trail last Thursday. It was an incredible show of a forest floor carpeted in every kind of spring wildflower that you could name. We even saw a few exquisite little grape hyacinths. It was stunning, yet not unmatched. We had hiked at Scott's Run on the Virginia side on the previous Saturday and it was just as awesome.

Then, on Friday morning we were down at Fletcher's cove to witness the Potomac River's annual spawning-fish migration. Every year a tide of anadromous fish, like herring and Shad migrate up the river to spawn. The first physical barrier that they reach is at Little Falls, which make Fletcher's the perfect place to catch them, as they get concentrated below the falls. The fish



Toad Shade Trillium and a non-purple variant (right), very rare.



JOE HAGE

are running early this year because of the unseasonably warm weather, usually the fish don't run until mid April. But that didn't seem to matter to the large number of eager fishermen that played hooky on Friday to join us in the fishing bonanza. We caught herring, a dozen American shad, a few big catfish and the prize of the day, an 8-10 pound rockfish!

I love spring!

I usually don't take a canoe out on the river when the water level is above five and a half feet, especially when the water is cold, but earlier this month I had a compelling reason to take the risks.

The late John Matthews used to tell me, back when he used to come down here everyday, that when the river is too high to paddle the main channel one could always scoot up the side channel that runs next to the canal.

Usually the water in this "side channel" is too low to paddle, but since the river was up I decided to go and explore. I also have a theory that this channel was not sculpted by nature but was a man-made canal. I wanted to check it out to see if it might have been used to navigate the river before the C&O Canal was built, back in the 18th century.

We all know that George Washington improved the river for navigation and built many "skirting" canals around the major rapids like Little Falls and Great Falls. My theory is that this skirting canal, that runs from Minnehaha Creek up to Cabin John Creek, was used to avoid the three difficult rock ledges that are immediately upriver from the Island.

I paddled upriver hugging the Maryland shore. I passed Ruppert's Island and entered the large channel that led me past lock house 7. The channel narrows and comes to a dead end where Minnehaha Creek

enters the river. There is a huge gravel bar there and the river was not quite high enough to paddle past it.

Once past the gravel bar, however, I could see a long corridor of flat, still water running parallel to the C&O, invitingly heading upriver to Cabin John Creek. Here is where I think that the skirting canal was built. This would have been the second skirting canal after Little Falls and the second one as you head upstream from Georgetown. The amazing thing that I noticed was that not only was this a safe way to pass the rapids, somehow the water in the "canal" was flowing upstream! The river was around 5.5 feet that day and at that level the water from the main river was higher than the water in the canal and gravity was carrying the water into the skirting canal and pushing it back upstream.

Instead of staying along the mainland shore, I decided to go to the left and hug the Virginia side of Cabin John Island. This part of the river also seemed altered by the hand of man. I was in the main stem of the river but I was sheltered from the strong current by a long line of trees that were growing from what seemed like a man-made dike. I continued my circumnavigation of the Island and soon I entered the mouth of Cabin John Creek. It was incredible—as I headed up the creek, I reached a fork; to the left was the creek flowing from under the C&O and to the right was an easy passage that paralleled the C&O and led me back to the mouth of Minnehaha Creek where I started.

Today, the "canal" is only watered when the river is high, but I suspect that it was different when the river was used for navigation in the 1780s. Back then, there would have been feeder dams to divert river water to the Maryland side and I believe that the water from the creeks was also diverted to add water to the skirting canals.

Maybe I'm wrong about my canal but it is amazing to think about the old days when men pulled boats full of goods past our Island and up to the far reaches of the Potomac. It's also fun to think about what it must have been like down here before they built the C&O canal.

Thursday, March 29, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.5 Water Temperature: 58

The roofers (Patch Roofing) have just finished the second flat roof. They did the easier roof above the club kitchen two weeks ago and yesterday and today they worked on the more difficult roof above my kitchen. The second roof was harder to do because they had to work around the giant heatpump that sits up there. It feels good to get rid of all of that shoddy work that was done here before and I'm very pleased with the workmanship that was done this time. I'm confident that now I will stay dry and that we won't have to redo those two flat roofs for a long time. I guess I can repair the water damage in my kitchen now.

Paddled up to Ruppert's and walked around. Soon that island will be a mess of poison ivy and stinging nettles so I wanted to take a look before it was too late. We saw one goose nest, dug up some ramps for dinner, and discovered the biggest patch of squirrel corn (a type of wildflower) I've ever seen. We also came across a big patch of wild ginger in bloom. I know that all of those wildflowers are going to bloom every spring whether we're there to enjoy them or not but I sure am glad that I went over there to witness the show.

Walking around Sycamore Island today I counted 161 toad shade trilliums and ten of them were of the strange, rare, non-purple variety! In past years I'd only see 3 or 4 of those wildflowers on the Island. Maybe I just wasn't looking. Also, a word of warning, it looks like it is going to be a good year for poison ivy; it's popping up everywhere.

Saturday, March 31, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.2 Water Temperature: 56

I recently noticed that the trash can that was at the lower parking lot on Clara Barton Parkway has been removed. I guess it has to do with budget cuts. I'm afraid that will lead to more littering and probably means that some poor guy just lost his trash-collecting job.

Speaking of littering, and maybe there is a 'cause and effect' here—some concerned citizen has posted signs at the top of the hill to encourage people not to litter.

"Make today a brighter day, throw your litter and garbage away" is how it reads.

One more littering note, Can someone explain to me why someone would put dog poop into a plastic bag and then leave the bag on the trail, day after day? Makes no sense to me.

Tuesday, April 3, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.2 Water Temperature: 60

Very sad news. Longtime Brookmont resident Carl Linden died last night at Washington Hospital Center. Carl was the president of Sycamore Island when I was hired nine and a half years ago. He had celebrated his eighty-second birthday with friends and family last June and had successful open heart surgery at the Cleveland Clinic but was in the midst of procedures for aortic repair.

All Brookmonters who love the canal owe a debt of gratitude to Carl as one of the leaders in the ultimately successful fight to save and preserve it.. When Justice William O Douglas challenged the editors of *The Washington Post* to walk the 180-mile length of the canal with him to see why it should be saved rather than paved over for a highway, he inspired Carl to begin many long years of work for the canal. Carl served as president of the C&O Canal Association for many years and frequently joined the trek that took place every ten years in honor of the original pivotal event.

After earning his BA and PhD degrees in Russian studies at Harvard University, Carl was an intelligence officer in the United States Air Force and later worked at BBC World Broadcasting and the CIA. From 1971 until 2004 he was professor of Political Science specializing in Russian studies at George Washington University. He was author and co-author of nine books including *Khrushchev and the Soviet Leadership*, *Marxism in the Contemporary West*, and *The Soviet Party-State*.

He is survived by his six children Derek, Laila, Per, Neil, Leif, and Gage. In addition, he is survived by three grandchildren Lara, Karl, and Gemma.

There will be a viewing at Joseph Gawler and Sons, 5130 Wisconsin Avenue, on Saturday, April 7, from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. A mass and reception will be held at Our Lady of Victory, 4835 MacArthur Boulevard, on Monday, April 9, at 11:30 a.m.

JOE HAGE
Caretaker

The Sycamore Islander

6613 80th Place
Cabin John, MD 20818

ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED

FIRST CLASS MAIL

Saturday Relief Caretakers April 2012		
	10 A.M.–3 P.M.	3 P.M.–DARK
APRIL 14	Edward Tilghman	PLEASE VOLUNTEER
APRIL 21	PLEASE VOLUNTEER	Patricia Benton
APRIL 28	PLEASE VOLUNTEER	PLEASE VOLUNTEER

Large Parties Scheduled



Sunday, April 1, noon to 4 p.m., Schubert family,
15 people, memorial picnic

Saturday, April 14, Bill and Lucky Marmon, party

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.

Text and graphics may be sent as email attachments to:
Carol Beehler, cbeehler@comcast.net.

The deadline for inclusion in the May issue is April 30.

JOE HAGE



Trout lilly

Masthead photo by Joe Hage