



The Sycamore Islander

OCTOBER 2012 | VOLUME 91 NUMBER 10

President's Letter

The next club meeting will be **October 10th at 8:00 pm at the home of Larry and Anne Heilman, 46 Grafton Street, Chevy Chase, Maryland.** To get there take Connecticut Avenue to Chevy Chase Circle and off the Circle take Grafton Street west for one long block to 46 Grafton.

The iron bridge over the canal will be out of commission for a number of months. After having just received a once-in-a-century refurbishing last year, a large tree fell on the bridge last month. An iron truss under the bridge is apparently bent and may have to be replaced. For occasional reports on the repair process and for other Island news, check out the Caretaker's Log by Joe Hage on the club website, www.sycamoreisland.org.

It is still easy enough to get to the Island. Captain Drew Walsh organized a group of dedicated Islanders who spent a day building a really fine homemade bridge. It spans the canal across from the ferry landing. Boards, ladders, rope, and ingenuity resulted in a bridge that Indiana Jones would think was a piece of cake to walk across, as will most Islanders. You can also park at Lock 6 or 7 and walk to the ferry from there.

Fall may be the most beautiful time of year on Sycamore Island. The sun is bright, the air is crisp, and the colors are amazing. Like a thousand peacocks, the trees along the river are beginning their annual celebration. Paddle a canoe up river and see the show.

With leadership by Drew Walsh and Ann Lucy, the club's environmental committee has been busy. Among

other activities, you can see new tree plantings beginning to appear on the Island. Contact Drew or Ann to get involved. Looking ahead, the fall work session, for all members and wait listers, will be Sunday, November 11th.

Please contact me or Vice-president Bill Marmon if you want to serve as an officer or supervisor next year or if you want to suggest someone.

JIM DREW
President



Damaged bridge

DAVID WINER

Minutes for the September 12th Meeting

In Attendance: John Noble, Bill Marmon, Joe Hage, Whit Overstreet, Tryon Wells, Sherry Fizdale, Bill Marmon, Lucky Marmon, Jim Drew, Tryon Wells, Ann Lucy, Drew Walsh, Dave Winer, Jane Winer, Louise Meyer, Larry Heilman, Gerry Barton, Mary Kearney.

Our pre-meeting treat was a slide show and talk by Joe Hage and kayaking partner, Whit Overstreet, who in August departed Sycamore Island for a nine-day, 165-mile trip down the Potomac. The pair canoed 3½ miles from Sycamore Island to Fletcher's Boat House where they switched to sea kayaks and headed down the river, at first hugging the Maryland shoreline to avoid the wind. For this year's trip, the two kayaking veterans did more pre-planning which obviated difficulties such as fighting tides and portaging to remote campsites. This time out, the team was able to secure a convenient, first night camp site near the shore on land owned by the Alice Ferguson Foundation. They made their goal each day in time to set up camp and chow down. . . albeit often on oatmeal, coffee and canned fruit. A little fishing produced few rewards. . . 5 silver fish all tolled. On one rainy day they took refuge in Captain Billy's restaurant and camped near Aqualand and later in an old CCC shelter on the beach. From there they were treated to a superb view of the storm passing on the other side. The sound of trains lugging their coal was offset by nature's wonders—soaring eagles, as many as thirty a day, and cliffs filled with fossils and shark teeth. On the sixth day, as they headed for Westmoreland State Park on the Virginia side, a dozen eagles flew up into a kettle while other birds of prey filled the sky, hunting for food. Next came long days of paddling to Coles Point Marina, and Smith Point, then finally, a grueling 11-mile paddle to Point Lookout State Park at the mouth of the Potomac. What a trip! And what a great presentation! Thanks Joe and Whit. And congratulations.

The meeting was called to order by President Jim Drew. The minutes of the August, 2012 meeting were approved.

Communications: None

Treasurer: No report

Financial Secretary: No report

Captain: Captain Drew Walsh asked Dave Winer to dis-

cuss the state of the ferry. Dave reported that the ferry needs to be drained and patched. Drew said that he will meet with Davey Hearn, Joe Hage, and Gerry Barton to look at the ferry and give advice on patching it. The landing steps also need repairing.

Drew noted that the club's generator should be placed above the flood plain, possibly in the tool shed. There was some discussion of the large quantity of gasoline the island would need to store in order provide power during a two- to three-day power outage. This could present a fire hazard. Drew felt it was not necessary to store more than 5 gallons, enough for several hours, and that the generator should be turned off when not needed.

The Work Fest will be held on November 11th. Joe will keep members posted on the various jobs to be done.

New stairs for the tool shed: It was suggested that the stairs be moved from underneath the shed to one of the sides, thus freeing up space for more flooring and enabling the door to close and keep out rats. Hopefully, there will be a design ready by the Work Fest and participants can help to move the building materials onto the Island.

The Bridge: A large tree landed on the new bridge crossing the canal. The bridge itself withstood the assault, but some parts, such as the trusses and some of the railing, need repairing. Drew will try to get the Park Service's timeline for repairing the bridge. Meanwhile, the Fishing Derby was canceled. (Other events threatened by the bridge closing will now not be affected due to the existence of new makeshift bridge.)

The Old Timer's Party will take place on Oct. 9th.

Membership: Membership Chairman John Noble reported that as of this meeting there were 158 regular members, Inactive 15, Honorary 16, Waiting List 77. Next month, additional persons from the waiting list will be invited to join the club. One member requested inactive status, which was granted. Another member who was dropped from membership in 2010 for non-payment of dues requested reinstatement, but was denied due to failure to respond to dues notices. It was noted that the Membership Chairman could make decisions on such matters without being voted on at a monthly meeting. John Noble also presented a list of regulations concerning Inactive Membership. These can be found on the Club website.

Committee Reports: It was noted that Canoe Supervisor John Membrino cannot attend meetings because of his work schedule but is doing an excellent job.

Relief Caretaking: Sherry Fizdale suggested that everyone in each member's family should be required to attend an orientation. She has witnessed too many incidents where a relief caretaker leaves early and doesn't monitor the ferry and cases when persons eager to pull the ferry across have no idea how it operates. In addition, she has seen a number of club members and their guests misjudge the difficulty of swimming in the river and needing help. Larry Heilman, who has spent considerable time and energy working on swim safety issues, added his thoughts on swim safety devices and their inadequacy. It was suggested that a committee figure out a way to get information to our membership on handling canoes, kayaks, and the ferry, as well as swimming in the river. John Noble, Sherry Fizdale, and Larry Heilman should be on the committee.

New Business: Joe Hage suggested that it might be to the club's advantage to have him certified as a canoe instructor. He will look into the details of obtaining certification and present them at the next meeting.

Thanks to Tryon Wells for hosting the meeting. The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
LUCKY MARMON
Co-Recording Secretary

Island Access

The Park Service has sealed off entrance to the damaged bridge with heavy fencing, including barbed wire, to keep off climbers. Captain Drew Walsh organized a work party September 23rd to fashion a bridge across the canal upstream of the impasse.

I took pictures of the new structure as it neared completion. This new plankway turns out to be a very serviceable means of getting across—very impressive. The crew started by pounding 2 x 4 posts five feet into the canal mud and then built the structure from there. The planking is heavy and inflexible. People on the towpath started using it before its completion. By the



DAVID WINER

time I left, there was a rope railing strung between the posts and makeshift ladders on the canal banks. Access from the regular trail is quite rugged and not for the faint of heart.

The members pictured at work are Drew Walsh, Geoff Holdridge, and Geoff's two young sons who were actively participating in the carpentry. Jim Drew and Gerry Barton also pitched in on the project..

DAVE WINER

OLD TIMERS PICNIC

PUT IT ON YOUR CALENDAR!

**OCTOBER 9, 11:00 A.M.
ON THE ISLAND**

RAINDATE OCTOBER 16

OLD TIMERS, GOODTIMERS, BOLDTIMERS. . .
. WE DON'T KNOW EXACTLY WHAT TO CALL
THOSE OF US SEEKING A MID-WEEK GET-
TOGETHER TO TALK ABOUT OUR SUMMER
ADVENTURES, TRAVELS, AND HOPES FOR
THE FALL. EVERYONE IS WELCOME. IF THE
SPIRIT MOVES YOU, BRING A STORY, A
JOKE, A POEM, AN OBSERVATION TO
SHARE.

And, oh yes, food. . . a dish to share as well.

CONTACTS

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ACCESS TO THE MAKESHIFT BRIDGE IS
DIFFICULT AND REQUIRES DESCENDING A
STEEP HILL. THOSE NEEDING LEVEL
GROUND SHOULD COME VIA LOCK 6 OR 7.

Relief Caretakers Needed

October 24–November 1

Please contact
Sherry Fizdale
202.460.8833 • sherry@fizdale.net
to volunteer for a shift

Notes from the Island

Friday, September 7, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.1 Water Temperature: 82

There hasn't been much activity on the Island since Monday, but boy what a time we had that day. It was of course Regatta Day and we had a good turn out of competitors. The egg toss was my favorite event but the canoe race around the Island was a lot of fun as well. This year we had to compete with some real challengers, National Champion Davey Hearn and Family took first place. It only took them 6:25 to paddle around the Island!

There is actually a rule on the books, Standing Rule 2-C, which states "No person shall enter the club house or kitchen while wearing a dripping bathing suit." Rule or no rule, if you need to use the bathroom, dry off first. It's not that difficult.

There are a couple of other rules that I'd like to remind everyone of. Rule 2-A: All club facilities shall be left, after use, clean and in their proper places, including dishes, kitchen equipment, game equipment, and furniture. Rule 2-E: No persons under twelve years of age shall use the pool table except under the immediate supervision of a responsible adult; any person using the pool or ping-pong tables shall return covers, balls, cues, bridge, rack and ping-pong paddles to their proper places.

Monday, September 10, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.1 Water Temperature: 77

Well, it wasn't called a *derecho* but we got some horribly strong winds here on Saturday. How strong does a wind have to be to blow a heavy wooden Adirondack chair off of the captain's float and into the river? The wind also caused a huge oak tree to fall across the trail and onto the metal bridge. Thankfully the bridge is not completely crushed but it will need a lot of attention. Right now it is very difficult to crawl under the big trunk and past the hole in the deck, but it is passable, but only barely. We did lose power for a few hours after the storm (reminder that we still need a generator down here) but the good news is that the tree narrowly missed pulling down the power line that supplies the club. We are fortunate that it wasn't any worse but it still complicates things down here. With the bridge being blocked we may have to move the monthly meeting and the fishing derby that is scheduled for Saturday



JOE HAGE

Canoe race with Jennifer, Jesse, and Davey Hearn in the lead.

is in jeopardy as well. It also makes it hard for the caretaker to come and go. I guess I have to decide whether it's worth it to build another temporary bridge.

I didn't happen to be on the Island when the storm hit but I was close by. We had decided to ignore the looming clouds and paddle a canoe up to Cabin John Creek. Our plan was to go to the crab feast at the Clara Barton Community Center, so we were going to paddle to Cabin John Creek and then walk up the hill to the community center. We made it as far as we could up the mouth of the creek and stashed the canoe. We were picking our way up the creek on foot when the wind hit. The sound of it alone was frightening enough but when the huge branches started sailing through the air we quickly rushed for the shelter of a high bank. Thankfully the wind did not last long but then the rain hit. We made our way back to the canoe and used it as a shelter from the rain. It was wet and cold but we were in good spirits. We sat huddled under the canoe waiting for the rain to let up when a new problem arrived. The buckets of rain were collecting in the creek and soon the creek began to rise. At first it was interesting

to watch the rocks in front of us slowly disappearing but soon the entire character of the creek began to change. Before long there were branches and bottles and other debris floating down stream and the gravel bar where we had been walking was gone. Soon the rocks that had impeded or progress up the creek were a class two rapid and the muddy beach where we parked our canoe was getting smaller and smaller. After a while the rain let up but there was no way to keep going to the community center; the small creek with gravel bars had turned into a raging river with high banks. We carefully launched the canoe and let the rushing current carry us back into the river. The rain was still coming down but the wind had shifted so that it was now at our back and we paddled back to the safety of the Island. I was pretty cold by this point and I was hoping for a hot shower but the power was out and there was no water to be had. I did the next best thing and that was to jump into the river—at 85 degrees it felt very warm compared to the air temperature which had dropped from almost 90 degrees to about 65.

Wednesday, September 12, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.9 Water Temperature: 74

Good news, both of the Adirondack chairs that flew into the river on Saturday have been recovered and are back on the captain's float!

The Clean Water Act is 40 years old!

More exciting news. I've been selected to be a presenter at the 2012 Forum for the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay. The forum is at the National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, West Virginia on September 28, 29, and 30. This is a great opportunity for me (and the club) to network with other conservation groups and to promote the Sycamore Island mission of enjoyment and preservation of the Potomac River. Check out, www.alliance-forthebay.org

Monday, September 17, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.7 Water Temperature: 73

There is a barrier on either side of the canal bridge and a sign that says "BRIDGE CLOSED" but this has not stopped the legions of towpath users from getting to their favorite linear trail. The fallen tree that was across the bridge was removed last Thursday but there is still a giant root ball in the middle of the trail. Between the barriers and the root ball, it's like an obstacle course getting down here. The bridge inspectors came by earlier but I don't think that they are going to tell us anything that we don't already know: parts of the bridge will need to be replaced. The problem for us is that they will probably keep the barriers up and the bridge closed until all that work is done.

There is a mist on the river this morning, a not too subtle indication that summer is coming to an abrupt end. The Equinox is this Saturday! Keep an eye out for the migrating warblers.

The fishing has been exceptional and it's fun to know that the bass are just waiting up there above Ruppert's Island. Speaking of fish, there has been a large school of small carp hanging out next to the captain's float. The water is so clear now that its like looking into an aquarium!

Friday, September 21, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.8 Water Temperature: 71

The bridge is completely impassible now. Yesterday NPS put up large sections of chain link fence with barbed wire on either side of the bridge. Between that

and the fact that there is still a huge tree across the trail, I think I'll start biking down to lock six and park my van down there. Bummer.

The river went up to four and a half feet on Wednesday. It's back down below four feet now but it is all muddy, it looks like the fishing might be over for the year.

Monday, September 24, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.5 Water Temperature: 69

I heard some bad news on Friday about our bridge over the canal. It seems that the tree did more damage than we thought. According to the Federal Highway Administration, the structural supports below the bridge are damaged and they have basically condemned the bridge until repairs are done. I think we all know that repairs on the bridge are not going to start tomorrow so it seems safe to say that the bridge will be out for a long time.

The good news is that there is now a homemade bridge across the canal! Our Captain, Drew Walsh, led a small group of dedicated and creative volunteers yesterday and they made a fine bridge over the swampy prism. The bridge is narrow but sturdy.

The other good news is that the park service removed the tree and rootball that were blocking the upper part of the trail. So now, getting to the Island is like it was last year when the bridge was closed. In order to get here you have to come down the switch-back trail to the broken metal bridge, when you come to the orange barricade follow a trail that goes off to the right. Follow that trail upstream and over the fallen logs until you pass the green sewer top. The bridge is on the left. Good luck and watch out for poison ivy.

There were a couple of brave souls that went swimming yesterday but the water temperature is dropping and soon the swimming season will be over.

I saw my first migrating grebe of the season. I think it was a female horned grebe. Also, while we were working on the bridge we saw a small eel swimming in the shallows of the canal. It is rare to see an eel and we got a great look at it.

It's a bit of a challenge to get here but it is a great time of year to be outside. Plus, now all the bugs and spiders are gone.

JOE HAGE



Canoe Race on Regatta Day



Ferrying over to the Island on Regatta Day



Cooking



S'Mores!

Regatta Day

Photos by Marcia Loeb

The Sycamore Islander

6613 80th Place
Cabin John, MD 20818

ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED

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MARCIA LOEB

Three-legged Race on Regatta Day



MARCIA LOEB

Egg Relay on Regatta Day

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 November issue is November 2.