

The Sycamore Islander

JUNE 2013 | VOLUME 92 NUMBER 6



Minutes for the May 8 Meeting

Attendees: Drew Walsh, Richard Lodish, Jay Zimmerman, Gerry Barton, Miriam Pemberton, Alan Pemberton, Bill Marmon, Jim Drew, John Noble, David Winer, Lucky Marmon, Tryon Wells, Star Mitchell, Ann Marie Cunningham, Joe Hage, Sherry Fitzdale

President Bill Marmon called the meeting to order.

Minutes: *The Islander* was not distributed in time for the May meeting. The minutes for the April meeting were distributed in hard copy and were approved. The motion to amend standing rules regarding smoking in the clubhouse will be addressed at the June meeting. The deadline for *The Islander* is the Friday before the first Wednesday of the month. Submissions not received by that date will not be included.

Communications: None

Treasurer's Report: None

Financial Secretary's Report: None

Captain's Report: Capt. Drew Walsh reported the following. The swim safety committee is still working on putting the safety equipment in place. The ferry cable will be replaced. Joe has worked hard to replace rotted boards on the canoe dock and on the club house deck. Dave Winer has worked on completing two rolling benches in the tool shed. Gerry Barton has worked on this project as well, topping off the tool shed project with a door knob.

Membership Chairman's Report: John Noble submitted a written report. No one showed up for the May 5th orientation meeting, probably due to lack of publicity. Ten waiting list members have not yet attended an orientation. One member became eligible for senior status, leaving room for a new member. One wait list family that had become eligible for membership has moved out of town and declined membership.

Catherine and Robert McNish and Shira Stutzman/Russell Shaw will be eligible for membership and upon presentation of letters of recommendation will be voted into membership at the June 12 meeting.

Miriam and Alan Pemberton were approved and welcomed as new members.

Tryon Wells will be distributing an up-to-date membership roster within the next few weeks. Those 60–70 members who receive an online *Islander* will receive their roster online.

Thirty-seven applicants purchased wait list passes this year.

Large Party Chairman's Report: Party Chair John Zimmerman reported that John Noble will be hosting a party for the Triathlon Club. There will be an open-water training swim on May 9th. Members are welcome to participate.

Caretaker Joe Hage reported that there have been an increasing number of requests for camping overnights. There was some discussion about amending the large party rules to include a one-week notification requirement for these events. While no rule was put in place, John Zimmerman, Supervisor of Camping and Large Parties, would appreciate being advised about these plans one week in advance.

Swimming Supervisor: Larry Heilman is stepping down from this position, effective May 1. Bill Marmon made a motion that Larry be commended for his yeoman service in this very difficult job. He applauded Larry for his hard work and dedication to make our Island safe for children, adult members and their guests. The motion was carried unanimously and with applause. Possible candidates for this job were recommended.

Old Business: Ann Marie Cunningham reviewed for attendees the request by the U.S. Geological Survey to install on the island gauges and other equipment that would measure pollution in the Potomac River. She recapped the presentation made by USGS rep. Joseph Bell at last month's meeting recorded in the April minutes. Since April, Bell has conferred with his USGS colleagues and has scheduled a visit of his team to the island on May 20th. He will submit a proposal to the special committee headed by Ann Marie. The committee will make a recommendation to the membership about whether to go forward with the project. It is understood that the Island Board could decide to terminate the project at any point.

New Business: Star Mitchell talked about the Canoe Cruisers race scheduled Saturday, May 11th, and

expressed concern about the high water levels predicted for that day. In all likelihood, the Island would be closed. She had decided to move the celebratory party off island to the grassy knoll near the highway and requested help.

VP Sherry Fizdale who also serves on the safety committee suggested that children of members who come to the island without adults be required to attend a safety orientation. It was decided to continue this discussion at the next meeting.

It was also recommended that the Large Party Chairman suggest to hosts of a big party or a gathering for children that a qualified individual or individuals be designated or hired to supervise the swimming and boating activities of their guests.

The next meeting will be on the Island on June 12th at 8:00 pm. Come early! Picnic! Enjoy!

Respectfully submitted,
LUCKY MARMON
Co-Recording Secretary

CCA Downriver Race 2013

The CCA Downriver Race was held May 11, 2013. The river level was 7 feet 4 inches and dropping. Twenty-one hardy boaters ran the race in twenty boats. All racers were in kayaks except Davey Hearn and son Jesse (age 14) who paddled a C2, Carter Hearn (age 80 our oldest racer) and David Goodwin paddled a C1. Wild Water K1's were paddled by Ben Collins, Justin Shockey (age 14), and Adam Van Grack.

Our second oldest racer was Sycamore Island's own feisty Larry Heilman (age 78) whose "bucket list" was to paddle the Downriver Race in a kayak (he has paddled the race before in a tandem canoe usually with Bill Marmon). Larry succeeded in achieving his "bucket list" wish and completing the race without any mishaps and announcing, "The river is flat and easier at this level than at lower levels." Our kudos to Larry!

The Fastest Overall Time was earned by Adam Van Grack at 34:24, 2nd Fastest Overall Time went to Ben Collins at 36:12, and Justin Shockey (age 14) took 3rd Fastest Overall Time at 37:00. Fastest Kayak was awarded to Glorieax Quentin at 39:58, 2nd Fastest Kayak was bagged by Stephanie Goodwin at 40:51, and



Larry Heilman after completing down river race in high water May 11 with race organizer Star Mitchell

3rd Fastest Kayak was taken by Carlos Ifarraguerri at 41:14. Stephanie Goodwin won Fastest Female at 40:51, 2nd Fastest Female at 41:44 was Jennifer Hearn, and 3rd Fastest Female at 43:12 was Kathleen Brecks. Fastest Solo Canoe at 43:52 was David Goodwin and 2nd Fastest Solo Canoe was Carter Hearn at 44:39. Fastest Tandem went to father and son Davey Hearn and Jessie (age 14) at 41:31.

Without volunteers there would be no race. We were very grateful to all of our volunteers and particularly to Joe Mornini who through Team River Runners brought Wounded Warriors to run the race. Joe, also, brought a big, blue full-sized school bus for his Wounded Warriors and at the end of lunch and awards he provided us with a great shuttle in the big, blue bus.

Without Safety Boaters there could not be a race. Although some did not actually paddle due to the high water, I want to thank: Gus Anderson, Bill Delanoy, Mark Eakin, Jeff Fox, Jim Long, Jim Mallard, George Missios, Ron Ray, and Kathleen Sengstock. Also, I want to thank the racers that ran the race for a race time,

then put on safety vests and paddled back up the river to assist as Safety Boaters. Those racers were Adam Van Grack, Ben Collins, Carter, Jennifer, Davey, and Jesse Hearn.

Due to the high water, we did not land on Sycamore Island, but had our lunch and awards ceremony on the large grass patch by the Clair Barton Parkway. As always, Sycamore Islanders (who started this race and have hosted it for 58 consecutive years) turned out to help make the race a success. Cub President Bill Marmon and Cindy Bertaut stood on the river's edge with a bull horn to warn paddlers that they were approaching the island. Faithful George Malusky was on the side of the canal with drinks and goodies for the paddlers to consume, John Stapko (CCA & island member) served as a caretaker from the canal side. Drew Walsh (island Captain) dropped off a HUGE ice chest filled with ice at the parking lot so we could ice down our many sodas. I'm sorry to say, but the biggest mishap of the day was that I dry iced our ice cream, it froze harder than a brick bat, the ice cream scoops of many years decided to break in half, and trying to scoop brick bat ice cream with a plastic spoon was an impossible job even for these tough paddlers.

I am grateful for the help from our new Co-Race Chair, Howard Moorland, a number one helper with no title (Olympic Champion #1 and river level expert—soon to be a Sycamore Island member) Davey Hearn, and last but not least (actually he is rather large in size), Adam Van Grack, President of Potomac Whitewater Racing Center.

V. STAR MITCHELL
Downriver race chair

Swimming at Sycamore Island

Swimming in the Potomac River off Sycamore Island on a hot summer day can be a marvelous adventure. However, this is a wild and sometimes hazardous river with conditions that may vary greatly from day to day in terms of water level, current, temperature, floating objects, and other objects under the surface. One must always keep in mind that the river can be dangerous, especially if not treated with respect.

For a number of years the river has been declared clean and safe for swimming. However, there have been



DREW WALSH

New water safety stations installed

articles in *The Washington Post* that suggest that after heavy rains, because of the run-off upstream, the river may be unfit for swimming.

The river is within a federally controlled area, and the Park Service has jurisdiction. It was announced in the *Washington Post* in 2010 that it was illegal to swim in the river. However, when the Deputy Director of the Park Service was contacted, he stated that though it is illegal to swim off the banks of the Potomac River, it is legal to swim off Sycamore Island in view of the fact that it is private property. The article in *The Washington Post* was published after two people had drowned in the river. Presently the rules for swimming, kayaking, and canoeing are under review.

The following are guidelines for your consideration:

- You swim at your own risk.
- Avoid swimming alone.
- Parents are responsible for their children.
- Members and guests should only swim off the swim float if they are able to comfortably swim to and from the Swim Float without stopping.
- Never dive head first into the water, nor should you jump into the water for you can never anticipate what is below the surface of the water. It is recommended

- that you slide into the water from the Swim Dock.
- It is inadvisable to swim in the in the channel between the Island and the mainland. Because of the swift currents that run through the channel, it can be extremely dangerous.
 - It can be tempting to allow non-swimmers or children to play in the water if they are using flotation devices. This is inadvisable and potentially very dangerous. You should NEVER allow a non-swimmer or a child to use a flotation device.

WE ARE ALL LIFEGUARDS

We have no professional lifeguards on the Island to insure swim safety. Consequently, each of us may be pressed into the role of a virtual lifeguard who must to respond to an emergency situation. If you see a swimmer in distress, consider using the equipment on the nearest of the 6 Swim Safety Stations located on the Island in the following order:

- Blow the whistle sharply 3 times.
- Reach for the distressed swimmer with a pole.
- Throw the distressed swimmer a ring life saving device attached to a rope.
- If there is no other alternative, swim out to the distressed swimmer. Swimming to rescue a person in distress can be dangerous and should be avoided unless you are trained in lifesaving. Even if you trained in lifesaving and a strong swimmer, you should take a red flotation device with you to give to the swimmer in distress.

The club keeps a canoe close to the swimming dock and a rowboat close to the Captain's Dock to assist in the rescue of boaters or swimmers in distress. It is strongly recommended that you familulize yourself with the equipment on the Swim Safety Stations. Children should never be allowed to play with the swim safety equipment. If equipment is missing, it should be reported to the caretaker or substitute caretaker.

Report all swim incidents in the Swim Safety Log located in the clubhouse.

Enjoy the river and respect it!

LARRY HEILMAN
Member of the Swim Committee

Notes from the Island

Tuesday, May 7, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.5 Water Temperature: 66
Well things are really picking up down here, and over the weekend the Island actually resembled a canoe Club. We had lots of people picnicking, new members pitching tents, and young kids learning how to hold a paddle. The bird world is also extremely active and there are breeding pairs of birds all over the Island. My favorite is the prothonotary warbler nest inside the bluebird house. We have several Canada goose chicks scuttling around with their parents but there are a surprising number of geese still sitting on their nests.

The fishing hasn't really picked up yet but we had some fishermen down here to try their luck. I did see some bluegills by the ferry landing and we all marvel at the huge carp, visible in the newly watered canal.

I put up the new zip-line and it's fun to see how quickly the kids all gravitate towards it. I haven't put up the slide on the dock yet but I'll get to that as the swimming season nears. It's still a little cold for swimming.

I also had to replace the steel cables that hold the ferry line. We noticed that the old lines were getting rusty and frayed so I took down the rope and replaced them. The trickiest part is getting the ferry rope nice and taut again.

I did some more carpentry work. I had to replace some boards on the porch landing and one of the steps at the ferry landing had to be fixed.

The bluebells are faded now but everything else is growing like mad. I've been using the weed wacker to keep the trails clear and I've got the mower all ready to go when the rain stops.

Thursday, May 9, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 6.2 Water Temperature: 66
The Ferry is Closed. The river is shooting up like a rocket and it looks like the ferry will be closed all weekend.

It's been an interesting morning. When I got home at 9:00 this morning the river was about six inches below the dock. By the time I had made some coffee the river was six inches over the dock. I drank half a cup and ran out to raise the ferry rope and secure the ferry before everything got submerged.

It was funny, I moved the chains to one corner of the ferry so the it was pointed straight into the current and when I unhooked it from the Island the thing took off



JOE HAGE

Hemlock flowers. Beware, all parts poisonous if ingested.

across the river. I was in a canoe by that time and the pilot-less ferry was racing across the river, coming close to running me down. I jumped back on and redirected it back to the Island shore where I fastened it to a tree to keep it from going anywhere.

I spent the rest of the morning moving and tying down all of the grills, tables, canoes and anything else near the water's edge. I also had to tow a canoe over to the mainland so Star could have access to the Island during the Down River Race. That's right folks, they are still planning to have the Down River Race. It will be a quick race this year with the river at about 7.5 on Saturday.

Friday, May 10, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 8.8 Water Temperature: 66

I may have seen the river go up that fast before but yesterday was a pretty quick jump. On Wednesday night the river was at 3.9 feet on the Little Falls gauge, by Thursday night it was at 8.9 feet!

I actually thought that the river was going to get about two feet higher than it did. Usually, if the gauge in Paw Paw W.V. reads 22 feet on Wednesday night then I would expect 11 feet here at Little Falls on Friday night. I guess it just goes to show you can't always predict what this river will do next.

The river crested this morning but with more rain expected it doesn't look like the ferry will be open for a while.

Thursday, May 16, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.9 Water Temperature: 64

The river is down and the ferry is back in action. I can't say that the river looks very inviting though. Still brown and moving fast.

All the docks are back in place, I had to shove them out as the river dropped to keep them from getting beached on the Island.

The swim float will have to re-positioned. The high water forced it downstream a bit. Personally, I think we

should wait until the river is three feet or lower before we try to put it back where it was. Just easier that way, plus no one is swimming yet anyway.

Friday, May 31, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.6 Water Temperature: 76

It's been a great month down here on Sycamore Island and we rang in the summer season in style over the Memorial Day weekend. The place was crawling with Sycamoreans and their fortunate guests and it was so cool to see all of the canoes and kayaks off the racks and in the river. We had babies on blankets and kids on the zip line and people throwing horseshoes and Frisbees. The swimming has started so the joyful sounds of swimmers could be heard coming from the swim docks. We even had a large-scale water war on the Island. I think we can say that it's officially summer. It's wonderful to see the familiar faces again, not to mention all of the super-nice new members.

You will be happy to know that Drew Walsh and Bob Whalen have installed the new safety equipment on all of the docks. It is a much-needed improvement that probably should have been done a long time ago. Please "Think Safety" and make sure all the equipment is in place before you leave the dock. Thanks, and kudos to the safety committee!

The snakes are out and we've had some exciting episodes of snake sightings. The geese are mostly gone

from the Island now but the baby eagle across the river is big enough to see in the telescope. The birding slows down in June but we do see the humming birds at this time of year and I hope to see the black-billed and the yellow-billed cuckoo. I saw a meadowlark when I was down in the northern neck of Virginia on Wednesday!

Like I said before, the Island was really busy over the holiday weekend and for the first time I decided to keep track of the number of times I pulled the ferry back and forth. All day on Sunday and all day on Monday I put a notch on the sign-in sheet every time I pulled the ferry. By the end of two days I (with a tiny bit of help from others) pulled the ferry to the mainland and back 50 times! I decided to measure the distance from the mainland to the Island, something else I had never done before. I measured it today and the distance is 157 feet. So that's 157 feet one way and then another 157 feet on the way back. That's 314 feet each trip, times 50 trips, that's 15,700 feet. Divide that by 5280, number of feet in a mile, and it looks like I pulled the ferry just 140 feet short of three miles! That's like pulling the ferry up to damn near lock ten!

JOE HAGE
Caretaker

Saturday Relief Caretakers June/July 2013					
JUNE	9 A.M.–3 P.M.	3 P.M.–DUSK	JULY	10 A.M.–3 P.M.	3 P.M.–DUSK
JUNE 8	David Powell	Penny and Bob McNulty	JULY 6	Please Volunteer	Please Volunteer
JUNE 15	Please Volunteer	Please Volunteer	JULY 13	Please Volunteer	Please Volunteer
JUNE 22	Susan Dunham and Dan Schember	Eric Simpson	JULY 20	Please Volunteer	Please Volunteer
JUNE 29	Penelope Mitchell	Please Volunteer	JULY 27	Please Volunteer	Please Volunteer

To volunteer as a substitute caretaker, please email your choice of day and shift to Jody Benjamin, benjafamily@gmail.com.

The Sycamore Islander

6613 80th Place
Cabin John, MD 20818

ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED

FIRST CLASS MAIL



Large Parties Scheduled



Friday, June 14, 1–5 pm,
Cecily Abram, 21–35 guests

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 July issue is June 28.

The President's Letter will reappear in the July issue.

The next meeting will be on the Island on June 12th at 8:00 pm. Come early! Picnic! Enjoy!



Great blue heron

BACKYARD BIRDSCAPES