

# The Sycamore Islander

JUNE 2014 | VOLUME 93 NUMBER 6



## President's Letter

The next regular meeting will be on the Island on Wednesday, June 11 at 8 p.m. Come early, bring a picnic, and enjoy the Island at one of its most lovely times. Long hard rains in May crested at 11.7 feet (at Little Falls Pump station) and submerged our Island almost, but not quite, to the edge of the building. Rapid action by Joe minimized potential damage to canoes and docks. The newly-installed swim safety station at the Captain's Dock was washed away but will be replaced.

A new swim safety rescue surf board has been installed (for rescue purposes only and not for play). Swim safety is a responsibility for all members and must be taken seriously. Children must be supervised by adults. Any unsupervised children swimming should be asked by any member to get out of the river.

Membership Secretary John Noble conducted a new member orientation for nine new wait list members. Orientation is required for wait listers who want to purchase a wait list pass. Member Frank Daspit, a veteran of high level competition in canoe slalom gate racing, conducted a useful canoe techniques class,

which I was able to attend. Even as a fairly experienced canoeist, I learned a lot as Frank reviewed strokes like the "pry stroke," along with the "draw stroke" and others. Canoe lore oozes out of Frank, and members and wait listers should jump at the next opportunity to learn from this expert.

Caretaker Joe Hage and Mary Kearny completed their adventurous "Canal by Canoe" trip down the Potomac, with side trips to Canal points of interest. Joe will give a presentation about his trip at the June meeting.

We have a new law supervisor, Parker Moore, who replaces Maurice Tobin, who has "retired" after many long and helpful years in this post. Thank you Maurice! Parker Moore is a principal with the law firm of Beveridge & Diamond, a D.C. firm specializing in environmental issues. Before joining the law firm, he worked as a wetlands ecologist. He is a photographer and likes to take pictures of severe weather, particularly lightening shots.

BILL MARMON  
President

## Minutes for the May 14 Meeting

**Attendees:** Ned Goddard, Richard Lodish, Robin Richter, Jay Zimmerman, Ann Marie Cunningham, David Winer, Bill Marmon, Lucky Marmon, Sherry Fitzdale, Gerry Barton, Zach Paulos, Michael Paulos, Steve Newman, Marianne Ross, Dirk Suringa, Kim Suringa, Drew Walsh, Tryon Wells, Jim Drew  
President Bill Marmon called the meeting to order.

**Minutes:** The minutes for the April meeting were approved as published in *The Islander*.

**Communications:** Bill Marmon shared a picture sent by Caretaker Joe Hage of Mary Kearny, who has been canoeing with Joe from Cumberland, MD to Washington, DC. In the picture, Mary is sitting in the back of the canoe typing on her computer... probably adding to the lively blog about their trip.

**Treasurer's Report:** Treasurer Ned Goddard reports that the club has approximately \$138,000 on account five months into 2014, with any of the bigger expense items, such as our insurance policies, behind us. He has filed the club's form 990, an official statement of the financial condition of the club as public record, which we don't post or distribute to members (he will provide a copy to any member upon request). In 2013, income exceeded expenses by \$7,000—a profit for the year. In years past, our financial policy has been to use the profit to build a reserve that amounts to one year of club expenses—accomplished this year when our former treasurer transferred treasury responsibilities to Ned. This year's expenses are “tracking” on budget, with the maintenance line items for repairs and supplies currently available for items proposed by the club's captain. The policy has been to keep a healthy reserve that amounts to one year of club expenses. This year's expenses are on budget as is our capital fund, which is to cover repairs and supplies.

Tryon Wells raised the issue of pre-paying the loans plus 7% interest that were made in 2009 by members to finance the renovation of the club. The interest amounts to approximately \$29,000 over the entire ten-year period. Bill Marmon recommended that Ned Goddard, Jim Drew, and Tryon form a committee to discuss the matter and make a recommendation at the next meeting.

**Captain's Report:** Captain Drew Walsh reported that the Spring Work Fest was a success. Jim Drew suggested that the Work Fest be scheduled so as not to conflict with Easter and Passover.

Roofing work should begin within the next two weeks. A new ladder for the swim dock is almost ready. Drew wants to work next on building storage capacity in order to deal with some of the clutter.

The Bluebells have blossomed and faded away. As soon as they have seeded, the Island will be mowed.

Steve Newman has been working with others to develop a new system for anchoring the swim float. The proposed system, called SCOPE, will facilitate hanging on to the float in high water. It was agreed that the swim dock would be located approximately 20 to 25 ft. off-shore and at an up-river angle from the shore.

**Swim Supervisor's Report:** Swim supervisor Roger Herst sent a report noting that club is the owner of a new rescue surfboard. Other recommended safety equipment is now in place

**Membership Report:** The club members welcomed and voted into membership Kirk and Kim Suringa and their sons, John and William. The Suringas moved to Virginia from Florida in 1997, and immediately became involved in issues involving storm water management, the Potomac River, and the Chesapeake Bay. Joining Sycamore Island, where they have found a warm welcome, is a natural extension of their love of the outdoors and interest in environmental issues.

An orientation for new members and wait list members will held on the Island on Sunday, May 25th at 11:00 a.m.

Two waitlist members resigned. The Club now has 163 members, including an overage from the old wait list.

**Relief Caretaking Report:** Jody and Bobby Benjamin report that the following members and wait list members who volunteered to be relief caretakers during the last month: Tory Ruttenburg and Greg Ferenbach, Pat Roth, Kim and Dirk Suringa, Rachel Rudy and Nat Reid, Jonathan, Rose, Julie Saulnier and Mark Friedrichs, Alice Bullard and Jason Waite, Carol and Kevin Hearle, Sandra Young and Raj Purohit.

**Large Parties Report:** Party chair Jay Zimmerman reported an increase in applications for large parties

and for camping. He was asked by Cindy Bertaut to announce that her son was organizing a “water-gun party” on May 17th, from 11 am to 4pm. All members’ children are welcome.

Jay announced that the Canoe Cruisers Down-River Race would be held Saturday, May 17th. There was some concern about the heavy rain predicted for Friday the 16th, and the danger of high water for the racers. Jim Drew was seeking additional monitors to guide boats at the finish of the race.

**Old Business:** None

**New Business:** Bill Marmon announced that Maurice Tobin had resigned as legal supervisor. An ad hoc nominating committee recommended that new member Parker Moore take his place. Parker is a partner with Beverage & Diamond, the oldest environmental law firm in DC. Parker was unanimously elected. The next meeting will be held on the Island on June 11th at 8:00 pm.

Big thanks to Jane Winer for the mile-high stack of delicious chocolate chip cookies.

Respectfully submitted,  
LUCKY MARMON  
Co-Recording Secretary

## Greens Committee Update

We discussed the general issue of the Island’s changing shape over the years. Satellite images from 1988 through 2012 helped us to see that the upstream end of the island is losing ground to erosion, while the downstream end is growing, and that a channel is being cut on the northwest corner of the Island. This will eventually sever that corner from the rest of the Island.

We talked about how islands change shape over the decades and how many members of Sycamore Island love the relatively untouched aspects of the Island.

We also considered that, reportedly, according to the current laws in Maryland, if the Island erodes so significantly that the clubhouse is threatened we would not be able to move the clubhouse. Any rebuilding of the clubhouse must be on its original footprint.

In light of these considerations, we decided that slowing the process of erosion is desirable. We decided

that erosion could be slowed by planting more trees and a non-invasive ground cover (preferably an evergreen ground cover) upstream of the clubhouse. We also discussed the possibility of anchoring fallen tree trunks or placing boulders as an additional means to help retain the upper Island over the long run, but decided that further analysis of the river flow and currents must be undertaken before any temporary or permanent placement of such material be put in place.

In light of this discussion and our decisions about projects the following specific actions are planned.

1. Ann Lucy will reach out to the Potomac Conservancy to consult about their response to island erosion. We hope to learn from their experience.

2. Drew will take on a surveying and mapping project that identifies specific segments of the Island, so that we can more easily identify specific sites on the Island and study the effects of our “soil retention efforts” over time.

3. Jim Drew is leading an effort to have Islanders sign up to receive 10 trees for a small donations to an Arbor Foundation. The Greens Committee will coordinate a smaller tree planting project in areas to be determined.

4. Alice will organize a planting for October 2014. We will need a lot of people to help with this.

5. We will organize a team of volunteers to monitor the plantings, both to water the newly-planted trees and to inspect after periods of high water, to straighten plants that have been knocked over, and generally to tend the newly planted trees. If anyone would like to help organize this group of volunteers please let us know.

6. Alice will arrange to have a satellite photo of the Island enlarged and printed so that we can use this for the mapping project.

7. Drew will work on lining up river current experts, including member Davey Hearn, to help analyze other materials besides vegetation that might help retain the soil.

8. Drew will invite an arborist to the Island to provide advice on what type of trees will best be suited for planting near the back and as well as inside the existing tree canopy.

9. A late Spring / early Summer meeting will be put on the calendar soon to report back on our progress, further discussion, and plan our next steps moving forward.

ALICE BULLARD



DAVID WINER

Cut Lweaf Toothwort emerges.



DAVID WINER

Rare Twin Leaf is the flower du jour.



DAVID WINER

John Parrish finds an unusual specimen.

## Wildflower Walk

John Parrish and RG Steinman led the Island’s annual wildflower walk for an enthusiastic group along the Billy Goat Trail, Section B on April 5. Everyone reveled in this first opportunity in months to enjoy a sparkling spring day in the woods. As we have come to expect, our experienced leaders spotted and called out unusual wildflower specimens and other natural phenomena of interest. The lengthy stroll along the river and into the hillsides provided opportunities to enjoy and learn about many native plant species. But discoveries included other than plants—such as toads, as RG described, “in a frenzy of trilling and mating” as they deposited eggs in the canal. Thanks to John and RG for their generosity in sharing their understanding of fauna as well as flora.

DAVID WINER

## Canal by Canoe

Canoe the Potomac River from Cumberland, Maryland all the way to the mouth of Rock Creek in Georgetown? It was a no-brainer really. When Mary and I were trying to decide what to do for our vacation, I think we both knew what we wanted to do. We had done several shorter canoe-camping trips in the past and we always had a blast, so this idea of a two-week trip just seemed like the natural progression. We didn't have any trouble deciding which river to do either, the Potomac, of course.

It was definitely a busman's holiday, spending my vacation on the same river that I live on, but both Mary and I really like the idea of exploring what's in our own backyard. We are both very interested in learning more about the history of the Potomac River and the C&O Canal, and as amateur naturalists we were excited to watch spring unfold in the river valley. If you add to that the pure adventure of camping on the river and facing all of its challenges, then you can see why we just had to do it. Plus, George Washington did the same trip in 1754.

So, we had our trip planned and we started the fun of getting everything ready. As the date got closer we started to think that it would be fun to share our trip and make it more than just a camping trip. We thought that if we blogged about our trip we could get more people to take notice of this great resource we have. We also realized that it might be a great chance to promote one of our favorite organizations, The C&O Canal Trust. We weren't sure what their reaction was going to be, so I was hesitant to call. Thankfully, The Trust loved our idea and they even offered to let us stay in the renovated lockhouses. The trip was taking on a life of its own.

I can't begin to tell you everything about our trip in this short article but you can imagine the thrill of setting off from historic Cumberland with all that you need, just you, the canoe, and the river. We were hoping to explore the remains of the canal along the way but right away the river swept us far from the town and the canal. We weren't complaining though. We were enjoying the ride, slicing through mountains as we left the hills of the Alleghenys behind.

After a sobering night of rain and mud, where we were reminded of the importance of "expedition behavior," we awoke to a warm sunny day. We floated all the way to the Paw Paw tunnel that day. The Upper Potomac Riverkeeper, Brent Walls, joined us for part of the day and it was great to see the river from his perspective.

We didn't seem to have a lot of time for fishing or just goofing around. Every day we had to make our miles, plus we got hit with more rain. We did the Paw Paw bends in one day, and by the end of the fourth day, we were in Hancock. We were a little river-weary by then so we were glad to stay at the River Run B&B. I was a little worried about our stuff since we had to leave it at the river's edge about half a mile from the B&B, but nothing was touched.

On the fifth night we stayed at Lockhouse 49 at Four Locks, just west of Williamsport. This is a very cool part of the canal with four locks close together, cutting off a four-mile loop in the river. Some friends came out to stay with us there and we had a great time grilling in the backyard of the lockhouse. By now, I think Mary and I were getting into the rhythm of living out of a canoe.

The first dam we had to carry around was Dam Number Five, or the fifth dam that the C&O Canal Company built to feed water into the canal. (The dam below Sycamore Island is Dam Number One.) Our friends helped us get our gear around the dam and we hurried down to Williamsport in a light rain.

Day seven was Mother's Day and we worked through Big Slackwater, above Dam Number Four, on a hot sunny day. We carried the dam just before dark and we rode the waves below the dam looking for an island to camp on. We didn't make it all the way to our planned campsite that night, and it was too bad too. Apparently, one of the fans of our blog heard where we were supposed to be and biked out there to bring us treats. How sweet is that?

Another long, rain-speckled day in the canoe, but we did see a rainbow and thankfully the wind was at our backs for the first time. We camped at Huckleberry Hill and Mary made some incredible quesadillas that we grilled over the fire. We met our first hikers there. They started in Cumberland on the same day that we did, and they were walking!

The next day would take us past Harper's Ferry and our toughest whitewater of the trip. Mary checked the river gauges on her phone and it looked like we were going to get lucky. We didn't want to run the "Needles" or the class 3 "White Horse Rapids" if the river was too high, especially in a fully loaded canoe. Yet, we sure didn't want to make the super-long carry around the rapids either.

We had a perfect day to run the rapids, and after getting through the (very) scary parts we had a nice day of bouncing down the class two rapids all the way to

Brunswick. We ate a late lunch in Brunswick but we had to push on to Point of Rocks, where Lockhouse 28 was reserved and waiting for us.

We made it to the lockhouse (otherwise known as the stone tent, no water or electric) just before the skies unleashed yet another thunderstorm. But happily, we had friends waiting for us there and we had fun playing music, drinking beer and watching the rain. By now most of our clothes were either damp or completely wet. I tied a clothesline between the bedposts of one of the antique beds and we tried to dry out our stuff as best we could.

We met more towpath travelers and campers and the trail began to feel like a small town of its own, a place where everyone is friendly.

We set out on the eleventh day feeling a little beat down by the unrelenting paddling and canoe loading, not to mention our growing pile of yucky wet stuff. We had more rain overnight, and all our gear was covered in a fine glaze of sandy Potomac mud, but we were looking forward to an easy day. Then we looked at the radar and saw the predictions for the river level. The river was predicted to rise from 4 to 10 feet the next day!

One of the keys to a successful river trip is being able to change your plans, check your ego, and alter your expectations. When we saw the river level predictions, we did all those things fast and high-tailed it to safety. What was going to be a leisurely three-day paddle, we did in just one day instead. We decided we could make it to Great Falls before the storm hit, and someone could pick us up there. We stopped at Pennyfield boat ramp, but only to drop off the camping gear and the other stuff that we didn't need.

The sky was dark with clouds and we had our raincoats at the ready. It was getting late, but our unloaded canoe was much lighter now and we were confident that we could make it. It was a shame that we had to rush through this part of the river. It was a good level for exploring the side channels that are usually dried up in the summer.

Our friends were waiting for us at Great Falls, and they whisked us off to a well-earned dinner and brew. The next day was full of excitement as everyone went into flood mode. I hurried back to Sycamore Island to save the ferry, while Mary went back to Great Falls to retrieve our canoe.

We called our trip Canal By Canoe. We started at mile marker 184.5 of the C&O Canal, and we wanted to finish at mile marker 0 in Georgetown. Sadly, because of

the untimely flood, the river was too high and the canal was too low for us to reach our goal by water. We did go to Widewater, up near Old Anglers Inn, and paddled as much of the canal as possible up there.

On Sunday, our last day, we stuck to our schedule and carried the canoe down to the end, mile marker 0, so that we could snap a picture at the tide lock at the mouth of Rock Creek. We then repaired to Fletcher's Cove for a celebratory picnic in a great field of giant logs, awe-inspiring evidence of the power of the still-flooding Potomac. We were delighted to be joined by friends, family, and Islanders who'd been following our adventure, and happy to be back in our home stretch of the Potomac River.

We're still posting stories of our trip on our blog, <http://canalbycanoe.com>. Check out our site for more exciting adventures!

MARY KEARNEY AND JOE HAGE

## Notes from the Island

### Thursday, May 1, 2014

**Water Level at Little Falls: 8.4 Water Temperature: 55**  
The ferry is closed.

I guess that it isn't too surprising considering the amount of rain we had yesterday. Sadly, it looks like the ferry will be closed all weekend.

### Saturday, May 3, 2014

**Water Level at Little Falls: 6.7 Water Temperature: 60**  
The river is going down, but very slowly. It looks like the ferry may be closed through Monday. I feel so bad for the families that had birthday parties and camp out schedule for this weekend. You just can't depend on this river to cooperate with your plans. I guess the people that built the canal understood that.

The rain not only caused the river to rise but it also caused a major sewage spill with raw sewage pouring into the canal. The Crescent Trail was closed below Fletcher's and the manhole at our ferry landing was gushing waste water all day and night on Wednesday. The canal is now littered with toilet paper. Gross!

I reported it to DC Water and Potomac Riverkeeper and they came out and replaced the manhole cover.

I've been able to do some of the post flood stuff before I leave, like push the docks back out and shovel

the mud from the board walk. Members will have to put the club canoes back on the rack and return the life rings to their stations, and stuff like that.

**Saturday, May 17, 2014**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 10.1 Water Temperature: 65**

The ferry is closed and will be closed all weekend due to flooding. It sounds like a broken record of two weeks ago, before I went on vacation.

I had to cut my vacation short because of the flooding but I'm so happy I was able to get back to the Island in time to prepare for the flood. They say it's going to be a big one.

**Monday, May 19, 2014**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 7.7 Water Temperature: 65**

The ferry is closed and it looks like it might be Friday before we can open it again.

I left the Island on Saturday morning when the river was at 10 feet. The river crested yesterday at 11.7, so the flooding wasn't too terrible. I got back last night and everything looks pretty good. It's important to be here while the river is receding so that I can push the docks out as the water goes down and keep them from getting beached on the Island. If that happens, it's like a workfest all over again to get them back in the river.

**Thursday, May 22, 2014**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 5.4 Water Temperature: 65**

The ferry is closed and it looks like it will be closed until Saturday morning. The good thing is that it will be open for the holiday weekend.

Yesterday I worked on putting all the boats back in their places. I moved about forty boats from their racks on Friday and yesterday I put most of them back.

The red swimming float is going to need some help. It's beached on shore in a pile of driftwood.

**Friday, May 23, 2014**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 5.2 Water Temperature: 65**

It looks like the ferry will be open tomorrow, just barely at five feet. Please take down the "Ferry Closed" sign in the morning.

**Sunday, May 25, 2014**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 4.7 Water Temperature: 66**

Gearing up for a busy day on the Island. It's nice weather, plus there is an orientation, and some members

are coming to work on the swimming safety station.

**Tuesday, May 27, 2014**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 4.2 Water Temperature: 70**

The water is warming up the swimming is great, but remember the current is still pretty strong.

The new safety station, with its bright yellow rescue board, has been erected by the swim dock. The big yellow surfboard looks ugly and out of place but I'm sure everyone will feel safer for having it.

Unfortunately the swimming float is not yet out in the river and it looks like it's going to be a few weeks before it gets launched. Not only did the float get pushed up on shore during the flood, but Drew, the Club captain, has plans to redo the anchors. I don't know what the new plan is but the old anchors have been cut off.

Big and busy weekend. I pulled the ferry back and forth 38 times on Sunday and 18 times on Monday. That beats last year's Memorial Day Weekend total of 50. That's over three miles of pulling the ferry through the high water! The other important factor, last year the river was 3.6 on Memorial Day, this year it was 4.4, over double the volume of water! It's no wonder that everyone had trouble running the ferry this past weekend.

As usual, the birding is great at this time of year. There are many migrants and some nesting on the Island like the orioles and the prothonotary warblers. The roosting great blue herons can be seen every evening as the head upstream by the dozen.

It's still very muddy around here but we're slowly recovering from the flood.

**Wednesday, May 28, 2014**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 4.5 Water Temperature: 70**

That was a pretty strong storm that came through last night. I'm so glad I cleaned the gutters on Monday.

I also went around with the weed whacker and cleared all of the trails. It was amazing to come back from vacation and find that the jewel weed had completely taken over the Island, all the trails were obliterated. Happily, that jewel weed is easy to cut back. Once the rain stops, I'll start to work on the poison ivy again.

There is a dock washed up on the head of the Island, well, half a dock. Someone from the CCA recognized it as a dock that belonged to Calleva.

JOE HAGE  
Caretaker

# The Sycamore Islander

6613 80th Place  
Cabin John, MD 20818

ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED

## FIRST CLASS MAIL

Saturday Relief Caretakers <b>June/July 2014</b>					
JUNE	9 A.M.–3 P.M.	3 P.M.–DUSK	JULY	10 A.M.–3 P.M.	3 P.M.–DUSK
JUNE 7	Please Volunteer	David and Sharon Gustafson	JULY 5	Please Volunteer	Topaz Terry and Melanie Clark
JUNE 14	Topaz Terry and Melanie Clark	Madeline Carter (Graham)	JULY 12	Please Volunteer	Please Volunteer
JUNE 21	Russ Shaw (Stutman)	Greg Kats	JULY 19	Please Volunteer	Please Volunteer
JUNE 28	Susan Dunham and Dan Schember	Please Volunteer	JULY 26	Please Volunteer	Please Volunteer

To volunteer as a substitute caretaker, please email your choice of day and shift to Jody Benjamin, [benjafamily@gmail.com](mailto:benjafamily@gmail.com).

### Large Parties Scheduled



June 10, 11am–6pm,  
Lucky and Bill Marmon, birthday party, 20 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](mailto:cbeehler@comcast.net).

The deadline for inclusion in the July issue is June 28.

Masthead photo of Prothonotary Warbler by Bruce Beehler