

The Sycamore Islander

June 2017 | Volume 96 Number 6



Photo by Joe Hage.



Joe saves the island from encroaching slime! Also: the race, high water, goose eggs and more!

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Dates to Remember

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June 25: **Islander Deadline**

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Large Parties

- **Jun 3:** David Hearn hosting 35 people from 12-6



Thanks to the many volunteers.

- **Jun 9:** Joe Hage hosting 30 people from 5-dark

Next Meeting

June 14, 8 p.m.

At the Sycamore clubhouse

Potluck dinner before the meeting,
weather permitting.

Meeting Minutes

New members, safe swimming and more!

Relief Caretakers' Schedule

Contact Madeleine Carter at madeleinecpcarter@gmail.com to volunteer

JUNE

June 3

9 a.m. – dark: Jennifer Hearn

June 10

9 a.m. – 3 p.m: Abigail Wiebenson
3 p.m – dark: Kerri Cox & Mark Wales

June 17

9 a.m. – 3 p.m: Meredith Griggs
3 p.m – dark: Sam Block

June 24

9 a.m. – 3 p.m: Susan Dunham & Dan Schember
3 p.m – dark: Lauren Bauer

JULY

July 1

9 a.m. – dark: Margaret Barry

July 8

9 a.m. – 3 p.m: **Need Volunteer**

3 p.m – dark: Elizabeth Taylor

July 15

9 a.m. – 3 p.m: Hayley Holdridge

3 p.m – dark: Alissa Stern and Louis Boorstin

July 22

9 a.m. – 3 p.m: **Need Volunteer**

3 p.m – dark: **Need Volunteer**

July 29

9 a.m. – 3 p.m: Kim & Dirk Suringa

3 p.m – dark: **Need Volunteer**

Contact Madeleine Carter at madeleinecpcarter@gmail.com to volunteer

Sixty-Second Potomac Downriver Race

By

V. Star Mitchell, Race Liaison

The race went off beautifully with the water level at 4ft. 5 inches. Thirty boaters ran the race. Many Sycamore Island people came to the Island to help—jumping in canoes to serve as safety boaters up-river, lugging food and trash up and down the hill, acting as gofers, Saturday caretakers hauling the ferry, serving food, moving chairs, and many, many other duties.

I must confess my derelict of duty—I did not keep a written list of the people. There were at least 5 waitlist people who came. Therefore, if I list the names I remember (which is eleven); I will surely forget some names. So this is a generic thank you to the many people that came and worked so hard. From the bottom of my heart, thank you for coming and helping! A special thanks to Joe Hage for all the many things that he did and for George Mulusky for the refreshments for the racers at the take-out.





Photos courtesy Susan Sherrod (first two) and Joe Hage (final)

[CARETAKER'S LOG](#)

Monday -- May 29, 2017

Water Level at Little Falls: 5.37 Water Temperature: 68

Happy Memorial Day!

The ferry is still closed and there's no telling when the river will recede enough to reopen. We'll keep our fingers crossed.

The tree that fell into the river just downstream of the ferry is now gone! We can now breath a sigh of relief that that strainer is no longer a menace. But the tree didn't go away on it's own and it took a lot of coaxing to get it gone.

It was last Sunday when I decided that something needed to be done with that fallen tree. The accumulating pile of debris was beginning to smell and when a carrion-eating black vulture started to forage alongside the goslings and ducklings I figured that the situation was getting urgent.



My hope was that if I could walk out onto the tree from shore, I might be able to cut it and free it from the roots that were still attached to the bank. Once the tree was cut, I thought, the force of the current would push the tree, and all of that trash would magically float away. I was pretty sure that I didn't want to stand out over the river cutting a log with our giant long-bar chainsaw between my legs so I used an ax instead. It was a little scary walking out over the water with the big ax in my hand but once I got into position the chopping went pretty well. Chopping an 18-inch diameter tree while standing over the river was a pretty manly way to remove the tree but sadly there came a point when I wasn't able to get a good swing.

There were some long-time members here at the time and Peter Friedman suggested that we use one of the antique saws from the clubhouse to cut the log. It was a little crazy, using a two-person saw, one person in a canoe and the other on the tree. It didn't work so well. Then young Joe Friedman used the one-person bucking saw and he was able to make some good progress with that. Sadly my strong helpers had to leave to catch an airplane and I was left on my own. I did my best to saw the log but the more I cut, the more the log pinched my saw. I decided to attach a come-along to the tree to help pull it open and allow me some room to cut. It was a lot of trouble getting the come-along in place but it didn't do anything. This was no wimpy tree that we were dealing with. It was after dark by this time and I had to quit.



The next day I went out there with a battery-powered reciprocating saw. It wasn't the best tool for the job but it felt a lot safer than being out there with a chainsaw. It took quite a bit of effort but finally I had cut the tree trunk enough to cause it to drop and separate. Thankfully there was a small sycamore tree there and I was able to grab it and hold on when the tree dropped. I had done all of the cutting that I was able to do and now the tree was out of reach. The only thing to do now was to wait and hope that I had cut it enough for it to break loose and float away when the flood waters came. Luckily for us, that's exactly what happened last night.

Saturday -- May 27, 2017

Water Level at Little Falls: 5.2 Water Temperature: 68

The ferry is closed today due to flooding. The ferry will remain closed until at least Monday morning.

Friday -- May 26, 2017

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.8 Water Temperature: 66

The river is going up and it looks as if I'll have to close the ferry later today. It's been a bad month for high water and ferry closings. The ferry has already been closed for 12 of the last 20 days and now it looks like we will be closed for these last days of May! Lets hope that things change for next month and we can get out there and enjoy the river.

The river did go down long enough for us to have the 62nd annual Down River Race, sponsored by Sycamore Island and the Canoe Cruisers Association. It was a great time with good weather and it was fun to have all of those hardcore paddlers here on Sycamore Island. This race has a long tradition and it has always been an exciting part of my life down here on Sycamore Island. I've missed the last three races so it was good to be back in the fold. I remember the 50th annual race when Angus Phillips [wrote it up](#) in the *Washington Post* and we had Bob Harrigan here, one of the original racers from 1956!

The preparations started last Friday when Gerry came down and we hoisted up the finish line across the river. Gerry did some other things to get ready. Later, the race organizer of the CCA, Howard Morland, came down to deliver the food and beverages.

On Saturday morning, we were up early moving tables and making lemonade for the racers. The relief caretakers were here, Eric and Audrey Lieberman, as was George Mulusky, our entertainment committee chair. Everyone was so nice and they all did a great job getting the Island ready for the onslaught of racers.



The first of the competitors arrived about noon. I heard that the fastest racers did the whole 7.5 miles in less than one hour! We were ready with the post-race cookies and the fried chicken lunch. Before long the Island was crawling with happy people all wearing identical t-shirts, day-glow race T's that were

given to all the racers and volunteers. Then it was time for the awards and the ice cream! Thanks to everyone that pitched in. The crew from the CCA did a marvelous job at cleaning up and putting everything away. Someone even took my recyclables up the hill! Thanks to George and Eric and Audrey for getting everything ready and being so good-spirited about it. Hopefully we'll get some more Sycamore Islanders in the race next year.

Wednesday -- May 24, 2017

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.9 Water Temperature: 66

My fundraiser and Blog, Canal BY Canoe, was featured in last week's Potomac Almanac! Here is the link to the print version.

<http://connectionarchives.com/PDF/2017/051717/Potomac.pdf>

Thanks for all your support to raise money to get kids into the Park!

Thursday -- May 18, 2017

Water Level at Little Falls: 5.0 Water Temperature: 60

The ferry is open!

The river went down a little faster than expected so we're open for business!

Yesterday was the day, the day that the momma goose finally gave up on her four eggs that she had laid back on March 20. I'm not sure how they decide that it's time to give up but when I went out there yesterday morning the eggs were in the nest all alone.

Wednesday -- May 17, 2017

Water Level at Little Falls: 5.3 Water Temperature: 58

The ferry is still closed today and tomorrow, but it's looking good for Friday and the weekend. The river crested at 6.54 feet and is slowly going back down.

A tree fell into the river just downstream from the ferry. It's not in the way yet but it has created a big strainer and it is catching a lot of flotsom, driftwood and trash. At this rate we'll soon have to clear a path for the ferry. Right now the edge of the pile is just a canoe's length away.

Having that strainer so close makes me a little nervous too, the strong current there could easily pin someone underwater. On the positive side, all of that debris has created a new place for the sanderlings and sandpipers to forage and we've been getting some close-up views of them.

Friday -- May 12, 2017

Water Level at Little Falls: 5.2 Water Temperature: 58

The ferry is closed...again. Can you believe it? The river didn't spend very much time below five feet and now we have to close the Island for another weekend!

BTW, since the river is so high, and getting higher, the CCA had to postpone the 62nd annual, Down River Race. The new race date is next Saturday, May 20, put it on your calendars!

No promises as to when the ferry will be running again. They are calling for another inch of rain yet, before it's all over.

Wednesday -- May 10, 2017

Water Level at Little Falls: 5.4 Water Temperature: 64

One of the most important jobs after a flood is to push the docks back out into the river, *before* the water gets too low. When the river goes up, the docks naturally float toward the middle of the Island. When the river goes down the docks are left high and dry, like beached whales, up on the bank. I try to stay ahead of the receding river but the river keeps dropping while I sleep so sometimes, like yesterday, I wake up to find the docks half grounded. I was afraid we were going to have to have another workfest just to push the big docks back out into the river but I pulled out the caretakers bag of tricks and I was able to get the docks back out without calling for the cavalry.



Big news, there was a humming bird at the feeder yesterday! I put up the humming bird feeders last week and this is the first time that I've seen the birds at the feeder. Lets hope they stick around. The other exciting bird that I saw was a indigo bunting. It's a spectacular, blue bird and I'm sure that I've never seen one on the Island before. This bird is more common at higher elevations.

Monday -- May 8, 2017

Water Level at Little Falls: 7.2 Water Temperature: 64

The river got up to 8.3 feet yesterday before it started to go back down. I was surprised at how high it got and how fast it was rising on Saturday. Mary and I had to hurry on Saturday afternoon as we prepared the Island for the flood. The dock on the Island was under water when we arrived so we had to deploy the ferry bench to act as a bridge from the ferry to the island. It was amazing to watch the stairs on the mainland quickly disappear under the muddy water as we tied up the ferry and raised the tow rope. We also had to free the ferry from a thirty-foot log/tree that was wedged against the safety chains. The other important job was to get some floatation under the ramp for the plastic dock. Without it, that heavy ramp would sink to the bottom.

It was quite the adrenaline rush being on the Island as the water quickly closed in around us and it was even more of an adrenaline rush canoeing across the channel to the mainland. It's a very short trip but we were glad to get out of the middle of the river with all of those big trees sailing by us.

There was a little excitement here last week, apparently I was a missing person for about twenty minutes.

There was a family of members here last Thursday and when they were ready to leave they rang the bell, but no one answered. They searched the top of the Island calling my name but they still got no response. After not finding me they began to get worried and decided to call the Club president and alert him and then they got panicky and searched my apartment, thinking that I may have suddenly fallen ill. Meanwhile, I'm down at the bottom of the Island, busily chopping stinging nettles, when my phone starts blowing up and I realize that something is up. When I got back to the ferry I felt like the prodigal son, and it was really touching to see how glad they were to see me, having come back from the dead and all.

I guess the wind was blowing in such a way that I couldn't hear the bell so I supposed I should have told them where I would be, so that maybe they wouldn't assume the worse. I am so touched by the concern for my health, but maybe I should tell you all that I had my one-year, follow-up cardiologist appointment this past week and the doctor said that my heart was beautiful and that my stress test was perfect (his actual words). So maybe we can dial back on the panic button a little bit. Thanks for worrying about me!

Saturday -- May 6, 2017

Water Level at Little Falls: 5.0 Water Temperature: 68

The ferry is closed today due to flooding. Ferry will remain closed until further notice, probably Tuesday.

Thursday -- May 4, 2017

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.1 Water Temperature: 68

We had Potomac catfish for dinner last night and it was delicious. The sausage had gone bad so we used it as bait and before we knew it we caught two nice catfish and we were eating fresh grilled fish for dinner. We made a bit of a mess getting them cleaned, but I think we satisfied our inner hunter-gatherer for a while. Plus, it's not smart to eat fish from this river everyday, especially catfish.

The goose that laid her eggs under the deck on March 20 is still out there

waiting for them to hatch. There must be something wrong, her eggs were supposed to hatch by April 20 and here it is May. The two other nests were successful and those geese are long gone, so we're a little worried about what's going to happen. How long will she wait before she gives up?

All photos by Joe Hage

Minutes for the May 10, 2017 Meeting of the Sycamore Island Club

Attendees: Larry Heilman, Star Mitchell, David Winer, John Noble, Meredith Griggs, Phoebe Hamill, Lucky Marmon, Bill Marmon, Sherry Fizdale, Tryon Wells, David Reuben, Ann Marie Cunningham, Gerry Barton

Vice-President John Noble called the meeting to order at 8:00 p.m.

The Minutes of the April meeting, published in the Islander, were approved unanimously.

Treasurer's Report: Club Treasurer Ned Goddard reports that the Club continues to stay on budget for both income and expenses for this time of year. He remains confident that we are on track to shore up our reserves per our multi-year budget plan.

Financial Report: Financial Secretary Sherry Fizdale reports that all but two checks have been received from members for 2017 club dues.

Membership Report: Membership Secretary Anne Waidmann submitted a report requesting that membership vote to accept three new members – Meredith Griggs, David Reuben (daughter Amelia), and John and Lila Stiff (daughters Dorothy and Eleanor). Letters of recommendation were read and attendees voted unanimously to admit all three applicants.

Meredith Griggs has been so active volunteering at work fests, recording secretary, and as relief caretaker, that many people thought she was already a member.

David Reuben learned about Sycamore Island when playing with Caretaker Joe

Hage's band. He is a water-sport enthusiast.

John and Lila Stiff are avid kayakers. John is a high school math teacher, while Lila has worked part-time at Politics & Prose book store.

Anne reported the following numbers in all categories of membership:

- Regular members: 158 (this will rise to 160 when the two outstanding checks are received.)
- Senior members: 79
- Inactive: 17
- Waiting List: 45
- Honorary: 14

Swimming Safety Report: Larry Heilman intends to have all swim safety equipment in place by mid-June. All his recommendations have been accepted by the Captain and the Deputy Captain. Poles, which had been on all platforms but disappeared, will be reinstalled. Signs displaying rules, regulations, and guidelines for using safety equipment will be posted. Included will be a posting advising members not to swim on the side of the island facing the towpath.

Relief Caretaker's Report: A big thank you to our April Relief Caretakers: Penelope Mitchell (two months in a row), Eric Simpson, David Lyles, Chris Maggio, Wayne Limberg, Anya Schoolman and Barry Lynn, John Cunningham, Jody and Bobby Benjamin (two months in a row.)

Old Business: The Work Fest was a big success. Special attention was drawn to the newly painted doors in the Club House. Thanks Jody Benjamin.

Star Mitchell praised the historical report on Canoe Cruisers that appeared in the April newsletter.

New Business: The Canoe Cruisers annual downriver race is this coming Saturday. Gerry Barton noted that the river is high, which could impede volunteers' access to the Island. No one knew how volunteers would be notified of the situation on the day of the race.

June Meeting: The next meeting will be held on the Island on Wednesday, June 14th. Weather permitting, come for a potluck dinner before the meeting.

Respectfully submitted:

Lucky Marmon
Co-Recording Secretary
