

THE VOYAGEUR



www.BlueRidgeVoyageurs.org

July 2009

THE PRESIDENT'S PUT-IN

BEST SPRING RAIN SEASON EVER! OK, perhaps I exaggerate a little, but the best in quite a few years. Only now are we flocking to the Lower Yough and Potomac for our water fixes. Let's hope this is a trend in the right direction.

I would like to thank Court Ogilvie for presenting the Grand Float trip at the May Meeting. The presentation was impressive and very professional looking. I see a future for Court in Hollywood! Thanks again Court for the hard work you put into your DVD's. Looking forward to the September meeting I still have not confirmed our presentation, but rest assured it will be a good one. If anyone has a trip or other presentation they would like to present to the group in 2009 or beyond, please let me know.

Now for a new subject. Your current crop of officers: the Prez, VP and Trip Coordinator, are well into their second terms and are ready to move on. Please consider volunteering for one or all of these positions for 2010! Contact Rick Koller to put your name in the hat. Volunteers are what makes it work, and some new blood can provide new ideas for the club.

Jim

Keith Merkel models one of the many uses for duct tape — see May Voyager.



2009 BRV Moonlight Picnic

LOCATION: The usual **Violette's Lock/Virginia Canal Loop**, off River Road, north of Potomac, MD.

DATE: **Saturday, August 1, 2009**

TIME: Meet at Violette's Lock parking lot at **5:00 PM**. Canoe/kayak departure at approximately 5:30 PM; return to Violette's Lock approximately 10:30 PM (or whenever you like).

BRING: Food (see below), blanket/chairs as desired, water, bug repellent, flashlight(s).

FOOD: Bring a dish to feed at least eight people, as follows:

A-G: salads, uncooked veggies, fruit dish

H-N: desserts, snacks

O-Z: pasta, casserole, cooked veggies, rice, etc.

Be sure to bring serving utensils for your dish, if needed. BRV will provide chicken, drinks (soda, wine and beer — approximately two per person).

COST: **\$5** for adults, **\$3** for children 2-12 years old, **free** for those under 2.

RSVP: BRV Board members will be contacting all DC-area members. RSVP to your caller or to Lou Campagna at 301-929-0136 by **Thursday, July 30th**.

CAMPING: It is permissible to camp at the picnic site, so if you would like to do so, bring your gear. There are usually some who camp, so you won't be alone.

PARKING: Parking at Violette's Lock is unrestricted, but there is little police surveillance. This has not been a high theft location in the past, but please do not leave valuables in your vehicles!

Upper Shaver's Blitz, 10 May 2009

by Keith Merkel

Ned Howenstine and I got lucky today. Yesterday (5/9) a bunch of us ran the Dry Fork. It was a very nice run but Ned and I wanted something a little more juicy for today. There had been some rain late Saturday afternoon as we were loading up after our run, but it didn't seem like it was enough to bring Upper Shavers up or anything else in that league that was close by. We discussed boogeying down to the Williams which should have had enough water from rains earlier in the week. But we thought we'd check Upper Shavers first just in case and possibly save us some driving. Well, the Shavers Fork starts way south of Elkins, south enough in fact that it must have caught some of the heavier rain that was to our south on Saturday. When we checked the paddler's gauge on the old Rt. 33 bridge in Bowden (near the fish hatchery), we found that it was at 3 feet around 6 PM on Saturday. After dinner and a long discussion in Elkins, we decided to camp at the Stuart Recreation Area near that old Rt. 33 bridge. That way we could do a quick visual in the morning to see if the level had gone down since 3 feet on that gauge makes for a beefy run on Upper Shavers. In the morning, the level had in fact come down to a more reasonable 2.8 level. By the way, the Stuart Recreation Area has a wonderful campground and Ned's senior status got us a very nice site for \$9.50. The only problem is you have to get there before 8 PM because that's when they lock the gates.

This was my fastest run on Upper Shavers yet. We put on around 10:40 AM and got off in Bemis at 2:45 PM for a run time of 4:05! We didn't stop to scout or play anything much to Ned's chagrin. Ned had run Upper Shavers once many years ago, but didn't remember much about it. I had run it maybe 6 - 8 times and much more recently and I still remembered the big drops. We carried the High Falls of the Cheat and the nasty railroad falls just before the second bridge below the High Falls. We boat scouted everything else including the long class 4 about a half mile below the High Falls and the big ledge below the railroad falls that people are now calling Mule Hole. The nasty class 4 below High Falls was particularly entertaining. I eddied out on the left at the top of the rapid and looked back to see Ned hesitating a ways back

upstream. I then looked down the rapid and, since it didn't look any worse than I remembered, I proceeded to eddy hop down the rapid from one side of the river to the next, avoiding nasty ledge holes in the process. When I looked back in each eddy, I could see Ned following me down one eddy behind me. He later confided in me that he wished he had taken a look at it first so that he knew what he was getting into. But we got down safely with no problems, one of my most fun moments on the run. Other fun moments were in the ledges above High Falls. I remembered there being one big ledge above the falls. There were in fact about 4 big ledges and at this water level they were quite intense, comparable I'd say to the big ledges on Kitzmiller at around 4.6 - 4.8 feet.

With our early exit at Bemis, we had plenty of time to stop in Elkins for a steak dinner and get home by 10 PM. Being it was Sunday, Ned had to go in to work the next day so he got home in time for a good night's sleep. But he told me afterwards that he had nightmares about the class 4 rapid below High Falls and didn't sleep well at all. Poor Ned, you should stop worrying about what might have happened if one of us had gotten stuck in one of those ledge holes.

A major problem with this run is determining if there is enough water to run it beforehand. Both the USGS Cheat Bridge and Bemis gauges which bracket the run are not being reported these days. There is a rumor that one can find the Cheat Bridge gauge reading on some web site, but no one could tell me the web site address. Therefore, I and some others are now using the Bowden reading on AW or USGS. We had 1,260 to 1,165 cfs at Bowden during our run. It was 1,630 cfs at 6 PM Saturday when the Rt. 33 bridge read 3 feet and 1,290 at 8 AM Sunday when it read 2.8 feet. We checked the bridge gauge again around 6:30 PM Sunday and it was 2.5 and that looks to be 1,075 cfs.

Cahil and others ran Upper Shavers in late April on Monocacy's Week of Rivers. The first day he calculates that the level was 1,080 cfs and he thought he wouldn't want it much higher. I felt the same way about our level of around 1,200 cfs. The following day they ran it again at 780 cfs and reported that it

was close to minimum. From these reports and my runs I would use the following guideline of 700 cfs as minimum and 1,600 cfs as a maximum. I'm not sure I'd run it much above 1,300 cfs myself. Experts (crazies) could probably run it higher than 1,600.

Please note that the old Rt. 33 bridge is about 20 miles below the McGee Run put-in. Also, it takes at least 2 hours to drive from that bridge to Bemis, leave take out vehicles and change, and drive the 1 hour shuttle to McGee Run. Therefore, if the water is falling, you'll have less water when you get to the put-in. If it looks like there is barely a channel to get through at the bridge in Bemis, that is minimum. At the put-in, you really have to work hard to find a channel down the river at the minimum level.

However, when the river is near the maximum level, there should still some rocks showing, especially along the banks, at the put-in. On our latest run at 1,260 to 1,165 cfs, there was a distinct channel in the middle of the river at the put-in. I would say if you don't have to dodge at least some rocks at the put-in, you probably don't want to head downriver. The river necks down quite a bit at a number of the rapids, especially the ledge drops and the class 4 below the High Falls, so if you can't see the bottom of the river at the put-in, it will be quite hellish downriver.

BRV Canada Trip 2009 by Mike Gilchrist

The BRV Canada 2009 trip will overlap or combine with the Three Rivers Paddling Club, depending on who all goes and whether we set up split trips some days to provide a hard/easy option.

Itinerary as planned for now:

Saturday Aug 8: Black River, Watertown NY

Sunday Aug 9: Ottawa Main channel.

Monday Aug 10: Gatineau Festival Section (Maniwaki)

Tuesday Aug 11: Rouge Seven Sisters Section.

Wednesday Aug 12: Middle or Lower Mattawin, both if we split the trip by difficulty.

Thursday Aug 13: Neilsen or St. Catherines Section of the Jacques Cartier, possible split trip.

Friday Aug 14: Tewksbury section of Jacques Cartier.

Saturday Aug 15: Malbaie (22 miles Class III/IV section or Malbaie ledges)

Hard rivers are Middle Mattawin, Neilsen, and Malbaie ledges.

I plan to lead the B group or run shuttle on some/all of the hard rivers.

Most respondents so far can go for one week. Cahil and I can stay longer. For a more relaxed trip, plan to spend a couple of drive days up and back.

So far Cahil Converse, Mike Gilchrist, and Lee Belknap are coming from the BRV, and Jeff Prycl, plus two are coming from the Pittsburgh group. (Well. Lee is a "friend of the BRV.")

Please let me know if you want to go to Canada!

Lower Stony River, 6 June 2009

by Keith Merkel

On June 6th, Ned Howenstine (K), Joe Sullivan (K), David Kogut (OC1), Pete Dragon (K), and myself (K) met at the Myersville McDonald's to dither about what to run that day. While there had been plenty of water earlier in the week, our options were reduced by this Saturday to only a handful of class 3/4 rivers. We decided to check out the Upper Stony River in WV which flows out of the Mt. Storm reservoir and power plant operated by VEPCO. I figured the level would be in the 300 - 400 cfs range which would have made for a good run. It turns out that the Stony was around 330 cfs that day.

After setting up shuttle vehicles at the Rt. 50 bridge takeout, we headed up to the put-in. Earlier in the week, I had seen a warning posted on AW's site about VEPCO calling police to chase down a group of boaters running Upper Stony. They eluded the police. I had assumed that perhaps they had trespassed on the dam itself, not having had any access problems on that river several years ago. Well, I soon found out differently. When we arrived at the put-in, there were blue No Trespassing signs everywhere. It would be very hard to convince anyone that you hadn't seen them if they caught you running the river. Being the wimps that we were, we hightailed it out of there and proceeded to set up shuttle to run the lower Stony into the North Branch of the Potomac. By this time it was already noon, so we had to hurry to pull this off.

Earlier in the week, Rick Koller

had told me about finding a takeout on river left in the Potomac State Forest in MD. I didn't have any other details except thinking that he had told me he could see the mouth of the Stony from the take-out. Well, we spent an hour driving there and trying to find a take-out from which we could see the mouth of the Stony. Turns out there is no such place. We first drove to a spot where one of the park roads loops down to the North Branch but at a point about 1 to 2 miles above the Stony (where there was a bit of a climb up from the river to the road). Getting desperate, we back tracked up the mountain several miles and drove down one more park road along Laurel Run to where it dead ends. After fording Laurel Run, Ned found a trail that goes about 200 yards down to the North Branch right where there is the remains of an old cement bridge consisting of two bridge pilings and one span between them on river left. Turns out that this is a bridge that used to cross the river at a town labeled Schell on page 27 of DeLorme's WV mapbook. This takeout is below Rattlesnake and the two big ledges below Rattlesnake or maybe two miles below the mouth of the Stony.

We finally got back to the rest of the group waiting at the put-in about an hour and a half after we left or about 1:30. We had a great run down the lower Stony and the North Branch. Our only difficulty involved a couple of strainers we had to contend with on the Stony. The following is the warning Ned wrote about the strainers that I

posted on the AW page for the lower Stony River:

“On June 6, 2009, with the Stony gauge at about 330 cfs, our group encountered a very dangerous strainer situation in a rapid approximately five miles into the run. This is a mile or so after an earlier river wide log/strainer that we portaged on river left. The extreme danger of the five mile strainer exists because there are two separate strainers in the same rapid and the second strainer cannot be seen from above the rapid. The first strainer in this rapid is a large tree visible from upstream that obstructs most of the river, blocking about 3/4 of the river starting on the river-right bank. The second strainer is downstream of the first strainer in a channel on river left. This river-left channel flows around the left end of the first strainer but is extremely dangerous because most of the current follows along the river-left bank into a 1-2 foot drop where the second strainer is located. This second strainer is difficult to spot and can only be seen by getting out of your boat above the rapid and scouting from the river-left shore. What also makes this situation dangerous is that the river-left channel appears to be a potential way to avoid both strainers by following the small part of the current that does not flow down the river-left shore but instead flows sharply to the right just above a boulder that guards the right side of the drop with the second strainer. However, this part of the channel is narrow with swift current. It is also shallow and has

several exposed and partially exposed rocks, making it impossible to take effective paddle strokes. On our trip, four strong paddlers attempted this route and all had major problems. All hung-up on rocks and two were almost pulled into the second strainer backwards. After our run we talked to another group who had run this section ahead of us (see the June 8 post). One member of their group got caught in the upper river-right strainer and was held under water for some time. (Although he survived, I did not hear how he got off the strainer). That group told us they had tried unsuccessfully to remove the upper strainer. They did attach a silver foil streamer to a small tree on river right about 6' above the ground near the first upstream strainer. This streamer is visible from upstream and the first strainer itself is visible from well upstream. There is an easy carry around both strainers on river left."

When we got to the North Branch, it was booming. It was just under 5 feet when we got there and much bigger than some of us had wanted. This was why we had spent so much time trying to find a take-out at the Stony's mouth, so we could avoid such big water. This was much bigger than David had signed up for in his open boat. It was also much bigger than I had dressed for thinking I was doing an easier run down the Upper Stony. But, I have to give credit to David and the group: we made it down in fine shape except for one kayaker swim between Rattlesnake and the next big ledge.

Rick now claims that he never saw the mouth of the Stony and the access he found was the same Laurel Run access that we wound up using. It turns out that other boaters know of this takeout as well, as is indi-

cated by the following shuttle description in AW's Comments for the lower Stony that I have revised:

"SHUTTLE: One aspect of this run is that if you don't know where to take out, you must run 10 miles of the Kitzmiller section of the North Branch to reach your shuttle car. However, there is an obscure takeout for the Stony about two miles below its confluence, provided you know how to get there. This access is on river left at Laurel Run, across the river from the "town" of Schell:

- From the Rt 50 bridge over the Stony, head west to Gormaniana and turn right onto 560.
- Turn right onto White Church - Steyer Road (sign for Laurel Run/Wallman recreation area).
- Veer left onto Audley Riley Road. Road turns to gravel and you enter the state forest.
- Veer left at split and follow gravel road to dead end turnaround next to Laurel Run. You are about 2/10ths of a mile from the North Branch Potomac. To get to the river, ford the creek at the fiber optic cable right of way and walk down to the river. There you'll see old bridge abutments and the cable right of way posts as indicators of the takeout, which is shown as Schell on page 27 of DeLorme's WV mapbook. *NOTE*: It is advisable to walk down to the river and take serious note of where the trail to the takeout is — this is NOT a good area to get hopelessly lost in."

All in all, it was another great run. We didn't finish until 7 PM. We gathered at the Mountaineer Cafe just south of Keyser, had a great dinner, and socialized there until they closed at 10 PM. For those of us that then drove home, it was a late arrival, well after midnight.



Keith Merkel at Suck Hole, Top Yough (l), and running Wonder Falls on the Big Sandy (r)



Spring 2009 Retrospective (photos by Beth Koller)

This page, clockwise from below: Mike Martin at the Hopeville Canyon takeout, Sheila Chappelle on Gladly Fork, Daryl Hall on the Williams Fork, Dick Pierce on Hopeville Canyon, Kim Buttlemann (Week of Rivers). Opposite page, clockwise from top left (all from the Week of Rivers): Jenny Thomas, Steve Ettinger, Chris Esswein, Courtney Caldwell.





UPCOMING TRIPS

Jul 18	Lower Yough ⁽¹⁾	HI	Jennifer Plyler	301 445-4815*	pls98@verizon.net
Jul 25	Dealer's Choice	HI	Jennifer Plyler	301 445-4815*	pls98@verizon.net
Aug 1	BRV Moonlight Picnic	PN	Club Officers		
Aug 1	Lower Yough ⁽¹⁾	HI	Jennifer Plyler	301 445-4815*	pls98@verizon.net
Aug 8-15	Canada (see page 3)	A	Mike Gilchrist	703-931-2430	msgilchrist1@gmail.com
Aug 6-9	Cheat/Lower Yough ⁽³⁾	HI/A	Wes Mills	703 866-9815	wesmills1@cox.net
Aug 15	Lower Yough ⁽¹⁾	HI	Jennifer Plyler	301 445-4815*	pls98@verizon.net
Aug 22	Little Falls	I	Ed Grove	703 533-8334	eddyout@erols.com
Aug 29	Lower Yough ⁽¹⁾	HI	Jennifer Plyler	301 445-4815*	pls98@verizon.net
Sep 5-7	New River Rendezvous	A	Ernie Katz	703 356-7105	erniekatz3@verizon.net
Sep 12-13	Lower/Upper Gauley	A/E	Court Ogilvie	703-528-5185	courtogilvie@yahoo.com

Notes:

*please call before 8 PM

1 For all Yough trips, please contact the trip leader no later than Wednesday preceding the scheduled weekend trip. This should allow sufficient time to reserve boat permits.

Difficulty Level: Novice (N), Practiced Novice (PN), Lower Intermediate (LI), Intermediate (I), Advanced (A)

About the Blue Ridge Voyageurs (BRV)

The **BRV** is a voluntary association of experienced paddlers from the Washington, DC area. Club benefits include: trips for all skill levels (most at intermediate and advanced levels); BRV website and hotline for information and pick-up trips; *The Voyageur*, published 6 times a year; club roster, published yearly in March; holiday party; conservation projects; moonlight paddles & picnics; big trips to the Smokies, Canada, Europe, and Western rivers.

Meetings: BRV will hold meetings from 7-9 pm on the following dates in 2008: January 23, March 11, May 13, July 19 (Moonlight Picnic), September TBD, November TBD, December TBD (Holiday Party). Meetings are followed by beer and pizza at a nearby pub. Location: Tysons-Pimmit Regional Library on Leesburg Pike (Rt. 7) in Falls Church, VA. The library is on the east side of Rt. 7 about 0.6 miles south of I-495. Or, from I-66, take the Rt. 7 West exit and go about 0.6 miles west on Rt. 7. It's on the right.

BRV Website: The BRV website (<http://www.BlueRidgeVoyageurs.org>) provides information on trips, meetings, and other club events.

2008 BRV Officers: Jim Pruitt, President; Lou Campagna, VP; Jenny Thomas, Trip Coordinator; Clark Childers, Treasurer; Frank Fico, Newsletter Editor; Kathleen Sengstock, Conservation.

2008 Board of Directors: Gus Anderson, Bill Collier, Ed Grove, Ron Knipling, Rick Koller, Wes Mills

The Voyageur: Newsletter of the Blue Ridge Voyageurs

The Voyageur publishes information on club events, conservation and safety news, the club trip schedule, and other news of interest to BRVers. Publishing **trip reports** is a particularly important newsletter function. Trip Coordinators are requested to write up all club trips - particularly trips to unusual or especially interesting rivers. Trip reports and other articles are accepted in any form: via electronic mail (preferred; send to fico1@netzero.com), on disk, typed, handwritten, faxed or over the phone. For trip reports, try to include the following information (if applicable): names of participants, relevant NWS gauge readings of nearby rivers, description of the water level on the river (e.g., minimum, moderate, maximum, or number of inches above or below "zero"), weather conditions, hazards, difficult rapids, info on put-ins or takeouts, distinctive scenery, and overall difficulty in relation to rivers well known to BRVers. New information about the river (e.g., new hazards) is particularly important. **Photos** are also published. Send prints to the webmaster or e-mail digital photos to the newsletter editor.

Address changes: contact Frank Fico, 1609 Autumnwood Dr., Reston, VA 20194-1523, (703) 318-7998, fico1@netzero.com. The annual roster will be kept current via updates published in each issue of *The Voyageur*.

Membership applications/renewals: submit to Frank Fico. Must renew by February 15 each year to be listed on club roster and continue receiving *The Voyageur*.



The Voyageur

c/o Frank Fico
1609 Autumnwood Drive
Reston, VA 20194-1523

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Deadline for September *Voyageur*:
Friday, September 4th

MOONLIGHT PICNIC
Saturday, August 1st