

THE VOYAGEUR



www.BlueRidgeVoyageurs.org

May 2008

THE PRESIDENT'S PUT-IN

We are fully immersed in Spring! The last couple of weeks have provided us with rains and many paddling opportunities. I hope everyone has taken advantage of this and gotten out.

Looking forward to the May meeting, we will have Louis Mataria as our presenter, with information on river gauges, safety, dowsing and other topics. The format will be a brief overview followed by interactive Q&A. Lou will be providing handouts for those present. Please mark your calendars for the 13th and come on out. If anyone has a trip or other presentation they would like to present to the group in 2008, please let me know.

Looks like this year will provide plenty of opportunities to get out and enjoy our rivers. Watch your email inbox for Jenny's weekly updates! I hope to see more of you on the water this season.

Jim

Big Pine Key, FL — 1 March 2008 by David Cottingham

Anne and I escaped DC and the winter doldrums without enough snow and headed to the Florida Keys where it was sunny and in the high 70s. While there we spent a wonderful afternoon paddling in the "backcountry" north of Big Pine Key. We contacted Bill Keogh of Big Pine Kayak Adventures (<http://www.keyskayaktours.com/>) and went on his "custom backcountry tour." Bill is the Ed Gertler of Keys kayaking. His book is THE guide for kayaking there. He's also an avid naturalist and all-round nice guy.

When I called to book the trip we talked about kayaks and what we wanted to do. He's got a solid fleet of plastic sea kayaks with rudders, not just the bulky sit-on-tops



that almost every marina rents. Bill mentioned sailing the kayaks and I was excited, having never done that. He assured me that the sails were simple to operate and enabled people to cover longer distances without paddling. That sounded good to me.

We met Bill at the Old Wooden Bridge Marina on Big Pine Key. Brown pelicans were everywhere eating fishermen's refuse and magnificent frigate birds soared above us. We were the only customers that afternoon on the custom trip. He limits these custom trips to no more than 4. Bill loaded our Perception Carolina kayaks onto his 24 foot skiff and off we went. As we cruised into the backcountry we

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FLORIDA KEYS (Continued from page 1)

entered Great White Heron National White Refuge, a large protected area just north of the lower Keys that is dotted with mangrove islets and shallow flats, and left the hordes of snow bird tourists behind.

Observing that Anne and I were interested in seeing birds, Bill pulled up several times to point out rookeries or isolated birds on sand flats. Reddish egrets danced in the shallows to frighten prey. Great white herons are morphs of great blue herons that are all white and distinguished from American egrets by their leg and foot color. Bill pointed them out quickly.

He determined the place to start by the wind. In a sheltered cove out of the wind, we unloaded the boats and set up the sails. The sails are V-shaped, about 3 feet tall, and strap onto the bow of the kayaks. Lines on each of the two booms (ok, I'm not a sailor and they may not be booms) allow you to adjust the sail to wind direction. They are remarkably easy to install and use.

The crystal clear water in the shallows was full of sponges, fish, sharks, and sea grass. Birds constantly sang from the mangroves. We adjusted ourselves into our gear. Bill pointed to an island about two miles away and said let's go over there because it usually has a lot of birds. As we paddled out of the sheltered cove, we popped up the sails and off we went. The powerboat remained and looked smaller as we sailed away. It only took a few minutes to learn the knack of adjusting the sails. We cruised to the island in no time. Had we paddled across the channel through the fetching wind, it would have taken far longer and probably worn us out. Once there, we dropped the sails and paddled through mangrove tunnels. Cormorants seemed to fill the trees. Their guttural sounds amused us. Bill said one of his clients described the sound as a child trying to burp the alphabet. That image stuck.



DEFINITELY NOT FLORIDA! *Star Mitchell, Helene Scalliet, Jane Collins, and Laura Hawley on a cold December day last year on the Potomac near Difficult Run. Photo by Risa Shimoda for her web site about women who kayak.*

We'd been away from the skiff for a couple of hours when Bill hatched the plan for Anne and I to continue to explore a three more islets while he paddled/sailed back to the powerboat and then drove it over to meet us at a designated island. Anne and I took off under sail. She was a little nervous because she knows that I'm inclined to push the limit of new-found low technology. It turned out to be unnecessary. We quickly and easily crossed two channels and circumnavigated two islets. As we waited for Bill to return, we slowly crept along one mangrove islet, seeing numerous mangrove snappers, barracudas, and sharks in the water and migrating warblers, cormorants, and pelicans in the trees. Bill arrived at the designated spot right on time. Paddling back to the powerboat into the wind had been more taxing than he'd expected. We loaded the kayaks and headed back into the setting sun and the marina where endangered Key deer loitered at sunset.

The entire afternoon was extraordinary. I can't imagine a better way to experience the backcountry of the Florida Keys. We saw only a couple or fishing parties the entire time. It was a true wilderness experience. As we approached the marina, a gaggle of Harleys roared across the bridge. I was ready to go back into the wilderness. I will go again with Bill the next time I'm there.

Big Walker Creek (New River Tributary), 6-7 March 2008

by Ron Knipling

In years past I have often passed up opportunities to paddle Class 1-2 streams in favor of more challenging ones. Such is the case with Big Walker Creek, a nice, medium-sized creek in Giles County west of Blacksburg, VA. We have family property in the area and several times I have foregone opportunities to paddle it, seeking more exciting rivers. In recent years, though, I've lowered my whitewater standards a bit and found that it broadens opportunities for new experiences. I've discovered many wonderful runs with great scenic value and, often, better rapids than I expected. On March 6-7 I ran two sections of Big Walker Creek, both with fine scenery and enough whitewater to be interesting. In Roger Corbett's VA book, Section 2 is 12 miles from White Gate to Poplar Hill. I got a shuttle from a local fishing outfitter (Tom Maynard, 540-921-4407), who put me in about two miles below White Gate, just below a 9-foot dam. The 10-mile run from there to Poplar Hill (Rt. 100) had some flat water but flows fast with a number of nice, long Class 2 rapids. This section has a remote feel even though it is never too far from Rt. 42, the shuttle road. I always use the Cacapon as a benchmark river, and this section is generally comparable to the Cacapon in size, difficulty, and scenery. Big Walker was running at 800cfs, which translated to about a foot above zero on this section.

The previous day I had run the next section down,

Section 3 (Poplar Hill to Bane) in Corbett's book. For this section, the 2000 edition of Corbett incorrectly states the distance as 17.5 miles and the time required as 6 hours. Actually it is 9 miles and 2.5 hours. The longer distance and time is actually Section 3 *plus* Section 4. Section 3 is pleasant, though only Class 1+ and not quite as scenic as Section 2. There is more open farmland, compared to the wooded setting of Section 2. Still an enjoyable run, perfect for a family trip. Another change to Corbett's book is the takeout — there is now a nice wayside park and take-out at Rt. 100 in Bane. I ran Section 2 at 1,000 cfs, about +1.5 feet on the creek. This section is perhaps comparable to the Cacapon below Rt. 127.

I don't really get down to our Giles County place very often, but there are other fine streams there and plenty of hiking as well. The New River dominates the local paddling scene, and is very popular in the spring and summer. Wolf Creek is a long, mostly Class 2 run like a smaller Bloomington. Sinking Creek is hard to catch but has a Class 2-3 section above Newport. Other boating liveries include New River Canoe Livery (540-626-7189) and Tangent Outfitters (540-626-4567). The AT runs through the area and the Cascades recreation area has a nice waterfall and streamside trail. The historic Mountain Lake resort and wilderness area are nearby. I should do a commercial!

Appalachian Trail River Ferry

by Ed Evangelidi

I once wrote an article about the Appalachian Trail along rivers. This month's *Appalachian Journeys* magazine has a write up about the Kennebec River ferry. It seems that after hiking over a thousand miles from Georgia and having the end in sight, the hiker faces the most treacherous river crossing of the trip, the Kennebec River at Caratuck. When the Appalachian Trail was first planned in the 1930's, there was a small hotel in Caratuck and the owner operated a ferry service there. However, a few years after the trail became popular, the ferry was discontinued but the trail continued to cross there. Hikers either forded the deep river or fashioned rafts (or took a 30-mile road detour). The crossing caused much concern to trail organizers, but a solution was not easily found. In August 1985, a woman hiker drowned while attempting to ford the river.

In 1986, a ferry service was established that would ferry hikers across during the peak season (May to September). An Old Town canoe with a white Appalachian Trail blaze on it was the official ferry. 19,000 hikers were ferried during the past 20 years. The contracted ferry service is being discontinued this year, but organizers hope to find an alternative ferry service provider before the hikers arrive again this year. Need a job?

Stony Creek, VA — 21 March 2008

by Ron Knipling

I nominate Stony Creek Virginia as the most underappreciated whitewater stream in the area. Hardly anyone paddles it, but it is an engaging and scenic run, just 90 minutes from DC. There are lots of access points and you have other paddling options in the area if the water is too low. If you like Cedar Creek or the Thornton, you'll like Stony.

On Good Friday, March 21, I ran Stony by myself with a bike shuttle. That's easy to do, as the road parallels the creek, and it's a pleasant ride. Stony was running at about +2"; a little low but plenty of water in the best rapids where the creek chokes down to wave trains. I left my bike near Edinburg at the confluence of Stony and the North Fork Shenandoah. You can use that same takeout for a run on the NF Shen above Edinburg, which is quite pleasant also (and with better rapids than you might think). I put in on Stony at a bridge just below Rt. 42 (Columbia Furnace). The 6-7 mile run has numerous Class 1-2 rapids, a few that might be Class 2+, and a 5' dam that is runnable after scouting (Class 3). There are houses and cabins along the way, but most are attractive. In one idyllic spot, a swinging footbridge crosses the creek and the historic Lantz Roller Mill is on river left. There were quite a few dodgeable strainers and a few places where I had to portage around downed trees or low-water bridges.

Cootes Store @ 3.3' (~400 cfs) is a typical zero for this trip, but I would also look at the Passage Creek gauge. Stony is midway between the upper North Fork and Passage. If upper Passage Creek is running (e.g., 125 cfs), Stony should be running. On this particular day, Cootes Store was considerably higher (3.7' or 600 cfs) but Passage was low (95 cfs). There is an old RC gauge on Stony under I-81, best viewed from the northbound exit ramp. You can walk up the ramp from Rt. 675. Visual inspection of the rapids is probably the best measure.

I'm not a religious person, but to me this was a Good Friday!



"Lost Paddle" Found! Barb Brown and Peter Bross with the famous paddle at the WVRC benefit Filmfest, 2 Feb 08 at Barb's home. At right, Courtney Caldwell exits his boat after paddling during the Elk River Festival weekend April 5-6 at Webster Springs, WV. [Photos by Beth Koller]



53rd Running of the Potomac Downriver Race, 17 May 2008

by V. Star Mitchell, Co-Race Chair

What race do you know of that has lasted consecutively for 53 years? The 53rd running of the CCA Potomac Downriver Race hosted by Sycamore Island will be Saturday, May 17th. **COME AND BE A PART OF MORE THAN A HALF-CENTURY OF LIVING HISTORY AND PADDLE THE RACE! JOIN THE FUN!**

The pre-registration fee is only \$15 if received by May 10th! Obtain a registration form from www.sycamoreisland.org or www.canoecruisers.org. Follow the instructions for mailing. At registration the fee is \$25. Tandem teams pay as individuals UNLESS they are a parent and child. A parent and child (under age 18) go for \$15 a boat pre-registered and \$25 a boat at the sign-in. Liability forms **must** be signed on race day.

The race begins at Rocky Island on the Potomac River just above Wet Bottom Rapid and goes for 7.5 miles to Sycamore Island. At the end of the race, a free T-shirt and a free lunch will be given to all workers and racers, and there will be a ceremony with awards and prizes for the winners. (If you DO NOT attend the ceremony, **do not** expect to receive the above! No awards will be mailed!)

Sign-in begins at 9 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. at Great Falls Inn (Maryland) followed by a mandatory meeting for all racers. If the river is over 5 feet, the race will start at Old Anglers Inn. This is a race for **anyone** from the pros to parent/child tandem teams, but this is **NOT A NOVICE** race. All participants should have experience in and be comfortable with up to **Class III rapids**. Any kind of a boat can enter provided it is **properly outfitted** with adequate floatation (air bags) and the paddlers (and all occupants of the boat) are **wearing** a helmet and a PFD (life jacket).

If you plan to paddle the race, **PLEASE PRE-REGISTER** to help with our head-count for how many T-shirts and lunches we need to order. Please DO NOT bring two cars to the race. Parking is a problem. A **shuttle** will be provided.

VOLUNTEER helpers are needed for **safety boats** and for helping at the registration at Great Falls and at the finish at Sycamore Island. Volunteers will receive the gratitude of the racers, a sense of participating in an important annual river event, a race T-shirt, and lunch. Anyone interested in helping out with this year's race should call Star Mitchell @301-530-3252 or e-mail starmitchell@verizon.net. **DO JOIN THE FUN!!**

“Water Trail Map” Available from Friends of the Rappahannock: Like most BRV'ers, I support many different river conservation groups and greatly appreciate all their work. One that has especially impressed me recently is the Friends of the Rap (www.riverfriends.org). They have a number of new programs underway to preserve the river and increase river appreciation among residents of the region. A Rappahannock Water Trail Orientation Center with riverside trails and campsites has just opened in Fredericksburg. They are active in regional land use planning and conservation easements, and have an ongoing calendar of river-related educational and community service events. A colorful, waterproof Rap Water Trail Map is now available from the Friends, and is free with membership. It covers the middle Rap from Kelly's Ford to Fredericksburg, as well as the lower Rapidan. It shows about 20 recommended campsites and other points of interest along these rivers. Bravo to the Friends of the Rap!

— Ron Knipling

For Sale: Whitesel Piranha OC-1. No damage, excellent condition, one of the last ones made. \$675 OBO. Ron Knipling, 703-533-2895.

Biking the Great Allegheny Passage, 25-26 April 2008

by Bob Youker

With the recent opening of the Big Savage Tunnel, the trail is now open all the way from Georgetown on the C&O Canal to Pittsburgh. The trail follows Wills Creek and the Casselman River from Cumberland west to the Yock and to Pittsburgh. April 25 and 26 a friend and I with my wife's shuttle did the first 50 miles from Cumberland. We started at the high point near Deal, Pa. and went west down along the Casselman River 25 miles to Markleton. Most of the rail trail is near the river with good views of the rock garden rapids. The trail surface is firm with very small crushed stone surface. We spent the night at the Casselman Inn in Grantsville, Md. and enjoyed the good food. The second day we started again at the high point (the Eastern continental divide) and rode east to Frostburg and Cumberland. The high point is on Rt. 2011 or McKensie Hollow Road. As an old railroad grade it is very gentle, but downhill is much nicer riding than uphill. There is now a state boat put-in at Markleton and the water level looked very good. The whitewater section starts at Garrett. For more information, visit, www.atatrail.org.

W.I.L.D. Idaho Program Offered, 15 June-3 July 2008

by Sean and Kristin Bierle, Alzar School

Hello! Our names are Sean & Kristin Bierle, and we are the founders of the Alzar School (www.AlzarSchool.com), a program that offers adventure expeditions for teenagers. This summer, we are offering a program in conjunction with Boise State University and would like to invite some of the teen paddlers from your club to join us.

The "W.I.L.D. Idaho 2008" program begins June 15 and goes until July 3. The cost of this 19-day program is \$1950, and includes all group and whitewater equipment, food, lodging, and instruction. It is open to any teenager between 14 and 18 years old. "W.I.L.D." stands for Whitewater Immersion & Leadership Development. It will give teenagers a chance to fully immerse themselves in whitewater, learning and practicing leadership techniques along the way. We think it is unique because it will combine whitewater kayaking and a service project with outdoor leadership training (students will have the chance to earn their ACA kayak instructors certification and LNT Trainer endorsement).

Students will get the chance to explore multiple river drainages. We are expecting to draw kids from all over the country. We expect to have a range of paddling skill levels, as the program is open to paddlers of all skill levels — from beginners to experts. We plan on splitting into groups to hit sections of rivers that are appropriate for the different groups. The nice thing about Idaho is there is something for everyone. There is much more information on our website: www.AlzarSchool.com.

This is a great way for kids to get outside this summer!

Harper's Ferry Outdoor Festival, 14 June 2008

- 10th Annual Tim Gavin Race
- Food
- Music
- Silent Auction

Visit www.harperferryoutdoorfestival.org for schedule of events, photos and additional information.

Passage Creek, 24 April 2008

by Alf Cooley

This was a Thursday Paddlers outing with Ron Knipling & Doug White — OCs, Jim Gross — C-1, Ken Cohen & Alf Cooley — K1s, on this most enjoyable of our local streams. Weather: sunny & warm — plenty of water, it having rained heavily on the 21st with a kicker on the 22nd.

Met at Four Points (ex-Holiday Inn), Manassas, at 9 sharp and were en-route again within minutes. Arrived Rt. 55 at 10, with Doug & Ron to rendezvous at 10:30; so after finding the brook at a juicy 10 inches on the RC gauge, headed up the mountain to drop the boats at the put-in. Ron came wheeling down from his cabin and after dumping the requisite gear at Elizabeth Furnace, we drove three cars to the North Fork Shenandoah take-out, Ron scooping up Doug at Rt. 55 en route.

The level as we boated under Rt. 55: 7 inches, which translates to 280 cfs. It was ideal, if easy is what you're looking for. Not one spill or even a close call along the way. Even at the Z-Turn Rapid, the stream's jewel, when I missed my line, I was simply slid unceremoniously down the slanting face of the rock making the Z's diagonal. No sweat.

The usual beauty of an April day in the mountains: dogwood and redbud aflame. Actually, Jim told us the plant in question was a flame myrtle. Of fauna: about 20 fishermen spread along the stream, a Canada which came screeching down from behind me to land and paddle down the rapids with us, and a most determined deer breasting the current to get to the right bank.

No landowners in evidence — all for the good in these parts. About four strainers, none in dicey parts. Two of these we cleared away — this was, after all, a Knipling expedition; the others were of over six inches in bole diameter, and so not amenable to our puny saws — but at this level, sufficiently flush with the water level that the kayaks and K1s could slip over the top of them.

Out by 2:30 and home by 4 PM. A beautiful day.

Membership Roster Updates

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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 BRV'ers. 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 BRV'ers. 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
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Deadline for July *Voyageur*:
Friday, July 4th

NEXT MEETING
Tuesday, May 13th