

# THE VOYAGEUR



[www.BlueRidgeVoyageurs.org](http://www.BlueRidgeVoyageurs.org)

November 2009

## THE PRESIDENT'S PUT-IN

As we drift into the fall season, with mellow waters and gorgeous colors on the trees, many are thinking about winter, with skiing and hiking etc. I recently enjoyed a pleasant float on Violette's Lock with great fall colors and a nice sunny day; if you get the chance, get out and enjoy the fall colors!

I would like to extend a thank you to Mark Wray for sharing his adventures on the Appalachian Trail with us at the September meeting.

Looking forward to the November meeting, we will have Keith Merkel showing us slides from his trip to Iceland this year. The promo for this show, drum roll please: "Keith and Carolyn will be presenting a slide show on their trip to Iceland this past summer. Come see what wonderful and amazing sights can be seen in this small island nation. There will be pictures of fantastic waterfalls, glaciers, mountains, waterfalls, hot springs, lava fields, waterfalls, thermal pools, rivers, and waterfalls as well as slides showing many of the activities one can do while there. It promises to be an informative and beautiful presentation."

Please note, the next meeting is Monday, November 16<sup>th</sup>. I would like to remind everyone that due to economic conditions the library now closes at 8pm, so please do your best to get there early. Stay tuned for the Bob Maxey show — with slides from the National Parks in Nepal, New Zealand and Australia, coming soon to a meeting near you.

And for 2010, the slate of new club officers is:

President – Rick Koller

Vice President – Mark Wray

Trip Coordinator – Mike Martin/Daryl Hall

I look forward to seeing everyone at the Holiday Party!

Jim

## 2009 BRV Holiday Party

LOCATION: Dominion Hills Recreation Center  
— 6000 Wilson Blvd., Arlington

DATE: **Saturday, December 5, 2009**

TIME: 5:30-11 PM

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

**A-E main meal side dish**

**F-J salad**

**K-R appetizer**

**S-Z dessert**

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

COST: **\$10** for adults, **\$5** 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 by **Thursday, December 3**.

VOLUNTEERS are needed to help set up and clean up — contact Lou to offer your assistance.

**DID YOU KNOW...**the next set of US quarters will feature national parks, national monuments, etc. Some of the local coins expected and their coinage dates: Gettysburg (2011), Fort McHenry (2013), Smokies (2014), Shenandoah (2014), Blue Ridge Parkway (2015), Bombay Hook NWR (2015), Harpers Ferry (2016), Frederick Douglass National Historic Site (2017). No idea yet as to what these coins will look like.  
— Ed Evangelidi

## Buffalo National River, 28 June—2 July 2009 by Frank Fico

After a string of seven years of big Western river trips, the ever-increasing level of kid activities finally precluded us from heading west this past summer. Specifically, Jamie's choice to try out for the high school volleyball team was the limiting factor this year, with clinics at the end of June and tryouts beginning in early August. But we still wanted to get away for a short river trip in the ten days or so that we had available before camps started up in July.

We had always wanted to take our dog Abbie along on a big trip, as she had become a fixture on our Smokehole campers and local river day trips (and trips away from home in general). But most of the permit-controlled rivers out West don't allow dogs, primarily due to their potential impact to wildlife. We had briefly considered the Buffalo National River in the Arkansas



*The put-in at Gilbert, loading our four boats.*

Ozarks way back in 2002, when we ended up doing a spring break trip to the Rio Grande in Big Bend National Park. After some on-line research, we found that the Buffalo

has stretches that are runnable well into summer, requires no permits, and allows dogs. This information, coupled with the fact that we had never been to the Ozarks and they were less than a two-day drive away, led us to target the Buffalo for our 2009 summer trip.



*Ginny and Bridget in the twin Tomcats.*

The undammed Buffalo National River is 153 miles long, with the upper whitewater sections only runnable in the early spring. Our trip window of late June/early July limited us to the lower, flatter river sections. However, the lowest 29 miles of the river before it empties into the White River have been additionally protected as the Lower Buffalo Wilderness Area. Despite the lack of whitewater, the fact that this portion would be relatively free of day-trippers and fishermen made it appealing to us. We had enough time for five days on the

river, so we planned a trip to cover the lowest 54 miles of the river, starting at the Gilbert access. We figured we could average slightly over 10 miles per day, even with low water and slow current.

Ginny DeSeau joined us again this year, and she worked out the logistics to fly to Fayetteville, AR and rent a car to meet us at the put-in, which we could then use to run our own shuttle. We carried her Tomcat inflatable kayak and paddling gear along with us in our Highlander, which also carried Bridget's Tomcat, our big camping canoe and Twister sit-on-top kayak. Bridget and Ginny paddled their Tomcats the whole time (and Abbie was a standard fixture at the front of the canoe), but Jamie, Kerry and I rotated between the canoe and the Twister. By the trip's half-way point, we had settled into our comfort zones with Jamie in the stern of the canoe, Kerry in the bow and me in the Twister.

We stayed at a motel in Mountain Home the night before putting on the river, then met Ginny around mid-morning at Gilbert. After running shuttle and loading our gear, we didn't get underway on the river until about 2:30. There were some rental canoes on the river, but not that many considering it was a Sunday. We found a nice sandy camp after paddling an uneventful 6.5 miles. The only whitewater encountered was at a spot about halfway where the bridge piers of an abandoned railroad crossing created a class 1 riffle.

The next day ended up being our longest, 17.5 miles paddled. We got on the river about 10, and paddled a few miles to the Maumee



*Abbie in her standard bowsprit position.*



*Skull Rock and the beach at Buffalo Point.*

access points, where we noticed a marked increase in the number of rental canoes. Apparently, the 10-mile stretch from Maumee to the Rt. 14 bridge is one of the most popular day trips. Apart from being the lowest section of the river with easy access before the wilderness area, this stretch features good scenery, with high limestone bluffs at the outside of each bend and crystal clear water. One bend in particular reminded me of where we camp on our annual Smokehole trip, but this stretch of the Buffalo has much milder rapids.

The painted gauge on the Rt. 14 bridge pier read 3 feet (The online Harriet gauge varied between 190-260 cfs over the five days of our trip.) We continued past the bridge and the wide beach at Buffalo Point, a recreation area within the National River that included a campground and a network of hik-

*(Continued on page 4)*

*BUFFALO* (Continued from page 3) ing trails. My goal was to camp along the river near Panther Creek, where we could hike the next day. I was hoping we could find a suitable camp there; luckily, we found a fairly good site immediately opposite the mouth of the creek [see photo at right].

The weather up to this point had been excellent, with warm, sunny days and cooling down nicely at night. Jamie and I had been sleeping outside without a tent, but we had to quickly set ours up in the pre-dawn hours of day three, as thunderstorms moved through. We waited out the rain, then set out on a hike up Panther Creek by mid-morning. Initially there was a small water flow, but it soon became a dry creekbed that made an excellent hiking trail until we reached a park-maintained trail after about half a mile. We followed that trail another mile to the Indian Rockhouse, a large overhang in the



*Camp 2, below Buffalo Point, opposite the mouth of Panther Creek.*

limestone that was reminiscent of the cliff dwellings at Mesa Verde, but without the primitive structures. We spent some time exploring the small passages in the back of the large main room, then hiked back down the creek. I took a detour to

follow the trail up to a quarry used by the CCC when constructing the original state park that had been located here, and to a viewpoint atop the bluff from where I could see our camp.

When I returned to meet the others back at camp, we discovered our camera was missing. To save time, I quickly retraced our hike while the others started downstream. After an unsuccessful search, I returned to camp, waited out another thunderstorm, then took the Twister and caught up with the others about four miles downstream. (We called the Buffalo Point ranger station after taking off the river, but no cameras had been turned in. Fortunately, it was an older digital camera, and most of the trip photos had been taken on Kerry's newer camera, which she still had.)

We reached Rush Landing soon after the reunion, and filled our water containers at this final access



*One of countless swim breaks over the course of the five days.*

point before the wilderness area. The last of the day-trippers were taking out here. We paddled another mile (for a total of 6.5 miles on the short day) to find what proved to be our best campsite at a large sand bar labeled Big Bottom on the map, fronting a nice, long rapid that Kerry and I floated through with our life jackets. (The river was a bit too low for this to be enjoyable — wish we had our trusty inner tube!)

Day four found us back on the river by 10. The limestone bluffs grew ever higher, and the lack of noisy river traffic improved the atmosphere even more. The girls were generally out in front in the canoe, and Jamie did a good job reading the proper channels to take to avoid grounding. Swim breaks right from the boats were frequent, and Abbie often took advantage of them to make a beeline for the nearest sand bar, where she would race up and down to expend energy. We set up camp on a high sand bar just downstream of Middle Creek after covering 14 miles for the day. We all enjoyed the deep swimming hole fronting our camp before dinner.

The final day left us nine miles from the take-out. We enjoyed the final set of highest bluffs, and noted several excellent campsites for next time. We lunched at a sand bar opposite Elephant Head, one of the few named rock formations. We started to encounter power boats coming upstream when we were at least two miles from the mouth of the river, and passed a couple elaborate, “boater RV” camps. Apparently, the restrictions as part of the wilderness

area are ignored by the sizable power boating community, and not enforced by the NPS.

I noticed something else too, which was much more ominous. The current had completely slackened over a mile above the mouth, the river widened, and the shoreline took on an unnatural configuration. We were unmistakably paddling in a flooded river channel, and that meant that a large amount of water was being released from Bull Shoals Dam, about 15 miles upstream on the White River, and it was backing up the Buffalo.

When we finally reached the White after a mile of the most arduous paddling of the entire trip, my fear was confirmed. Our vehicle was parked over half a mile up the White River, at the public boat ramp. We had checked with the outfitter located in Gilbert, and he had said the dam hadn’t been releasing, and even if it was, experienced paddlers could still make it upstream to the take-out.

It was clear that our fully loaded boats were not going to make it up the swollen White. I got back into the

stern of the canoe, and we ferried across to a mid-stream island, with a small channel running through it. We went up the channel to where we could see across to the far side of the White, and saw a private landing there. We decided to pay the landing fee to take out there, while I took the Twister and attained along the bank up to our car. I made it, but it took all my attaining skill in a highly maneuverable kayak to do it.

Although certainly not the same as a Western desert canyon experience, we enjoyed our trip on the Buffalo National River. I’d recommend especially the wilderness section to anyone who is looking for a multi-day, warm weather, lazy float trip that is a reasonable distance from the DC area.



*Group photo at our final camp.*

## ROSTER UPDATES

Terry Irani  
14816 Clavel Street  
Rockville, MD 20853  
301-871-6663 H  
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Jennifer Plyler  
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## Patapsco River; by Rick Koller

Participants: Rick Koller, Lou Campagna, Mike Martin and Daryl Hall, all OC-1's

Mike Martin was the brainstormer behind this trip with a Friday mass email to rally the paddling community for a Sunday jaunt. I actually forget when we did this trip (Geezer Factor), and I'm fairly sure Lou won't even remember we ran the river! Anyway, it was a few weeks ago after a deceptively heavy rainfall that turned out to be very localized. We originally met at the Manassas rendezvous point for an exciting (we thought) Blue Ridge creek run or a Smoke Hole trip. Unfortunately, the gauges indicated less than inspiring runoff for the creeks and Smoke Hole was deemed too far a ride for our late meeting. Thus, out came the guide books and the predictable dither. We settled on a section of the Patapsco that Lou, Daryl and I had not run. It was relatively close and a brew pub was located not far from the takeout, a definite attractive element in the decision process.

According to AW: "You can start with a steep carry down at Woodstock Road, (just off Rte 99) but to avoid nearly five miles of mostly flat water, put in below Daniels Dam (at the end of Daniels Rd., just off Old Frederick). To trim another couple of mostly flat miles out, begin even further down at the Hollifield bridge, which Old Frederick Road goes over. You'll still have a good four miles down to Ellicott City, and six beyond that should you choose to continue to Elkridge." We put in at Daniels Dam and took out at Ellicott City just below an old flour company.

I for one was surprised by the beautiful wooded valley corridor we paddled through; it was a part of Patapsco State Park and really quite scenic. There were no other paddlers and it was a beautiful day, so we lazed along on the flat water an hour or so enjoying the fine day. As with most river trips I've been

on, there are particularly odd or memorable sights and incidents, and this was no exception. Along the river bank we happened upon some sort of a shrine, perhaps a fisherman's attempt to placate the Angling Spirits. It was a collection of multi-armed semi-naked Hindu goddess figures, arranged on a large rock on the shoreline. They were all about 9 inches in height, mostly intact but with a few missing arms and heads. And there in the midst of these craven images was also a lone jolly Santa. A somewhat unusual river scene.

Then came the Union Dam, which is an abandoned concrete monolith. Mike mentioned that he'd heard it was due for destruction sometime in the near future. This thing is a pain to get around. There is a runnable route around the far right of the dam where the riverbank has washed out, but this was full of wood and not a feasible line. So we opted for a carry over the dam on the far left. After this portage the river began to pick up some rapids and the paddling became more interesting. There were several class twoozy and threezy drops to negotiate and it was a nice way to finish up the trip. Lou had a couple close calls here but fought like a tiger and survived. The rest of us were relaxed and unintimidated by the whitewater.

We finished up the trip and proceeded to the real reason we chose the Patapsco: the Ellicott Mills Brewing Company. There we indulged in some food and good beer including a brew called Weizenheimer that featured Curly Howard of the Three Stooges as a namesake. Those of you who know Mike well are aware of his manic favoritism toward the Three Stooges and so of course we all got a glass of the Stooze favorite. A great day and trip. Thanks to Mike for the inspiration.

## Cleared: Passage & Stony Creek Strainers by Ron Knipling

Every year or two I get inspired to do some "river service," either strainer clearing or RC gauge painting. On September 15, a warm, summery day with Passage Creek running at a year-low 3.5cfs, my only plausible rationale for getting on the creek was to cut some strainers. (I'll paint next time.) In two Passage runs last spring, the worst strainers were at the start of the braided section below the Fish Hatchery. One was at the initial left turn into the braid, and another was about 200 yards further in a narrow sluice. A kayaker took a bumpy swim at the second spot during one of the spring trips. Armed with my trusty 36" bow saw and nip-

## Blue Ridge Voyageurs Membership Form

*Whitewater paddling is a risky outdoor sport. BRV is not responsible for any individual's decision to participate in the sport, or for his or her decision to run any river or section of river.*

**Annual Dues:** \_\_\_\_\_ **\$15.00 (newsletter sent via postal mail)**  
 \_\_\_\_\_ **\$12.00 (newsletter emailed in .pdf format)**

### Optional Contribution to BRV River

**Conservation/Access Fund:** \$5.00 or \_\_\_\_\_

**Total Amount Enclosed:** \_\_\_\_\_

Make checks payable to BRV. Mail to BRV Membership, c/o Frank Fico,  
 1609 Autumnwood Drive, Reston, VA 20194-1523.

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Phone w/area code: (h)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_ **(work or cell)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please check if interested in:** \_\_\_ **helping with moonlight picnic** \_\_\_ **providing a meeting program**  
 \_\_\_ **helping with holiday party** \_\_\_ **leading trips** \_\_\_ **conservation/river maintenance**

## Final (Scheduled) Trip for 2009

Nov 7-8	Tohickon	I	Courtney Caldwell	703-802-0155	<a href="mailto:Courtney.Caldwell@LFG.com">Courtney.Caldwell@LFG.com</a>
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pers, I hiked downstream from the Fish Hatchery and cut out these two strainers. The bow saw is one of the greatest tools ever invented, especially for a person who doesn't like the noise, fumes, weight, and hazards of a chain saw. I also walked a little further downstream to where the creek goes around a blind bend to the left, then right, coming out to a long and wider straightaway. After returning to the Fish Hatchery, I walked upstream to the dam, and did a little clearing of the left-side dam bypass channel. If there's enough water in the channel, you should be able to enter it on the extreme left and scoot through.

Next stop was Stony Creek above Rt. 42. The worst strainer was just below the put-in near where Rt. 675 leaves the creek and heads up the mountain toward Wolf Gap. Also nearby is the defunct Rodney & Theresa's General Store. The half-mile or so below the put-in has the best rapids of Stony (though the whole creek is enjoyable). But this best section also had its most dangerous strainers. A rocky island about ¼ mile from the put-in had logs blocking routes around it on both sides. The blockage at the bottom of the narrow right-side chute was treacherous. Once you committed to the right side, aborting that choice was difficult, as I found out in my last run down Stony in May of last year. Paddling tandem with my son Jesse, we barely made a must-make ferry to avoid it. Anyway, the log pile is gone now, at least at this writing.

Another Stony strainer was a couple of miles further downstream, about 50 yards below a crumbling 3' dam. The log pile had partially cleared itself, but I cut a few logs to break it up some more and hopefully prevent another accumulation. Alas, this and the other locations on both creeks are natural choke points where strainers may well reappear. It's to be expected. Strangely, there was a touch of regret after cutting out these strainers. Strainers are actually part of the fun and mystique of small-stream paddling, even though they can kill you.

## 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 2009: January 28, March 10, May 20, August 1 (Moonlight Picnic), September 8, November 16, December 5 (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.

**2009 BRV Officers:** Jim Pruitt, President; Lou Campagna, VP; Jenny Thomas, Trip Coordinator; Clark Childers, Treasurer; Frank Fico, Newsletter Editor; Kathleen Sengstock, Conservation.

**2009 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](mailto: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](mailto: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 January *Voyageur*:**  
Friday, January 1st

**NEXT MEETING**  
**Monday, November 16th**

**RENEW NOW for 2010:** If your mailing label says 2009, use the membership form included on page 7.