

# THE VOYAGEUR



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

Summer 2015

## THE PRESIDENT'S PUT-IN

Hope all are well in Paddleworld, and it's nice to have the warm waters back to crash and burn in. The club is cruising along as usual; we should have some interesting presentations from folks after this coming summer expedition season. The next event is the annual summer moonlight picnic on Sat. August 1 [see details on page 7]. Mark Wray will be organizing again and will be posting reminders and requests for help as we get closer to the date. See you at the picnic.

Rick

## Potomac River, North and South Forks of the South Branch by Bob Maxey

Glen Johnston and I had planned to paddle one day over the second weekend in April. Rather than dithering over which river to paddle we decided to go for two days. Fortunately for us there had been significant rain in the South Branch basin. Joining us were Keith Merkel, Jo Cox, Jenny Thomas, Kim Buttleman, Karen Egbert, Jon Hitchings and Ned Howenstine. I had paddled the Moorefield River Gorge twice 25 years ago and remembered little about it. The 1985 flood had changed this river considerably by dumping large amounts of cobble and boulders into it. Over time this debris was moved downstream leaving the channel pretty much the same today as it was before the flood. Our run was at 2.8 feet on the Brandywine gauge.



The small riffles in the first half of this run give the paddler no hint of the rapids in the second half. There are three or four rapids that contain VW Beetle-sized rocks. These are Class 3 or 4, depending on the volume of water in the river. One of these rapids is above one that I call "Double Ledge." Ned and Keith had fun play-

*(Continued on page 2)*

*Ned Howenstine entering "Double Ledge" on the Moorefield River.*



*Ned Howenstine surfing "Double Ledge" on the Moorefield River*

*S. BRANCH* (Continued from page 1) ing in Double Ledge. Not me, since I was warm from the beautiful sunshine and I did not want to chance getting wet. Next were more of the large rock rapids. Scouting helped for better runs through these rapids, but Keith finds them more exciting without scouting. The last rapid should be scouted since there could easily be strainers trapped by the rocks. Keith found a route through the left center. This route is not obvious when scouted from the right side, especially since the paddler must pass underneath two telephone-pole-sized logs. This is

really the only route since other parts of this rapid require intricate turning.

Understanding the locations of the forks of the South Branch requires a lesson in geography. The North Branch (which contains the Kitz-

forks are beautiful, but the Moorefield Gorge is unquestionably the most isolated. Other than farms, there is little evidence of human activities in this valley. The combination of this isolation, the difficult rapids, the clear, cold water and a beautiful spring day were a

millar and Bloomington runs) joins the South Branch about 40 miles below Cumberland. The South Branch has three forks: the North Fork (which flows past Seneca Rocks and flows through Hopeville Canyon), the main stem of the South Branch (which flows through the Smokehole Canyon), and the South Fork, also known as the Moorefield River. All three



*Kim Buttleman in one of the large rock rapids on the Moorefield*

great gift for us after the long winter.

We had dinner in Franklin at the Star Hotel and Restaurant. The menu has a good selection of food and beverages. Keith dropped out of the trip at this point; the rest of us headed over North Fork Mountain and on to Seneca Rocks where we camped along Seneca Creek. After breakfast Jo headed home and on to New York for her work.

The lower half of Seneca Creek could have been paddled, but we chose instead to run Hopeville Canyon. The Cabins gauge had a level of 6.3 feet for our run. I have run this gem of a river many times over the last 30 years. The rock scenery is magnificent. This day was even warmer than the previous one: a beautiful spring day with a high near 70. We all had great runs. At this water level the noise of the rapids and of the side streams entering the North Fork are deafening and pleasant.



*Ned Howenstine on broken-out dam rapid at end of Hopeville Canyon*

We set up our cars so that the take-out was opposite the Smoke Hole Caverns. Thus, there are several more fun rapids than ending where the river is close to the road. Ned, Karen and Kim ran the Class 3 ledge at the normal takeout. This trip was a good prelude to the West Virginia Week of Rivers one week later. Seneca Creek at a high level was bodacious! Hopeville Canyon at a lower level was beautiful, but not as memorable as our earlier run.

### **Potomac River Cleanup Success**

*[from the April edition of the Potomac Riverkeeper Network's electronic newsletter]*

On Saturday April 11, hundreds of volunteers from different organizations came out to support and clean up the Potomac River in the Alice Ferguson Foundation's Annual Potomac River Cleanup, part of its Trash Free Potomac Watershed Initiative. Potomac Riverkeeper Dean Naujoks represented PRKN at the cleanup with volunteers from the Alice Ferguson Foundation, Canoe Cruisers Association, Monocacy Canoe Club, Blue Ridge Voyageurs, Seneca Creek Watershed Partners, Muddy Branch Alliance, Calleva Outdoor Education and Montgomery Parks. Together, the volunteers collected 11 bags of trash, 5 bags of recyclables, a mini refrigerator, a barrel, fish hooks and more.



*Kathleen Sengstock represents the BRV*

## 20th Annual Smoky Mountains Week of Paddling, May 9-17

by Richard Hopley

**Open Canoe:** Dan Bertko (MA), Kim Buttleman (VA), Richard Hopley (NC). **Kayak:** Lee Belknap (NC), Karen Egbert (CO), Jon Hitchings (CO), Ned Howenstine (VA), Keith Merkel (VA), Len Rice (VA), Jenny Thomas (MD). **Non-boating:** Lois Carra (MA).

We had a very small group this year; seventeen people signed up originally, but one dropped out a month before the trip and five more dropped out in the week before the trip started. I missed seeing the friends from the DC area who dropped out, but it was a lot easier to manage shuttles and restaurant seating with such a small group than the 15 or 16 people we usually have on this trip. The eleven of us who participated live in Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, Massachusetts, and Colorado.

We've had good years and bad years with respect to rainfall, and this was not a good year, but when people plan their vacation time four or five months in advance we have to take what we can get. This time we had a dry week following a wet week and preceding another wet week. We rendezvoused the first night, Saturday, May 9, at Hot Springs Campground, Hot Springs, NC.

### Sunday, May 10: Big Laurel Creek, -4"

Ned and Len hadn't arrived yet, so there were only eight of us on the creek. Big Laurel is one of the most popular Class III/IV creek runs in the Southeast and we were

very lucky that this held at a minimal boatable level until we got there. The put-in for Big Laurel Creek is three or four miles up the highway from the campground, and joins the French Broad River three miles upstream from the campground, so we took out in camp and had a quick ten-minute shuttle to recover put-in vehicles. Nice.

Everyone agreed that we would not want to do it any lower, but we had no mishaps and everyone also agreed that we were glad we did it. Once on the French Broad, we split around the two island groups, half of the group running Kayaker's Ledge at the first island group, and half running Frank Bell's Rapid at the second. We went to the Smoky Mountain Diner in Hot Springs for dinner, but it was closed, so we went to the upscale Iron Horse Restaurant facing the RR tracks in Hot Springs and had a mighty fine dinner.

### Monday, May 11: Nolichucky River, 1250 CFS

Dan took the day off to repair damage his boat sustained on Big Laurel, and Len had still not arrived, so we were eight boats again. I called ahead and reserved two shuttle drivers from The Nolichucky Gorge Campground and we drove from Hot Springs to Erwin, TN, in my van and Lee's van. I was apprehensive putting on, and even more so after Entrance (AKA Railroad) because I was paddling my new Esquif l'Edge half canoe (this tiny creek canoe handles very differently from a real canoe, and in big water I haven't yet figured out how to ferry properly). And sure

enough, I let myself be intimidated into lifting over the entrance to Quarter Mile, which left me on the wrong side of the river. I failed the ferry, got rocked, and swam. Ned got to me and pulled me into an eddy just yards above Murphy's Ledge, where I would have joined my boat in its 45-minute recirculation, and probably not survived. Thanks again, Ned! Another boater flipped at the very top of Quarter Mile, but managed to get to the right side and swim the standard line over Murphy's Ledge. Fortunately we had no further untoward events, and got to the takeout minutes before a massive cloudburst. Lee's driver had parked his van back from the river under the trees at the takeout, but my driver had thoughtfully left my van a very short carry from the river. What my driver didn't know was that he had parked my van upon about twelve inches of mulch, and after 3/4 of an hour of 50-foot-visibility downpour (with occasional periods of hail), so after the rain let up and we finished loading and changing, when I started the van it immediately dug in up to the hubcaps. Took another 45 minutes to dig out, with the help of Don, the campground manager, and his son, so we were two hours later leaving the takeout than we had planned. We wound up eating at the mediocre Azteca Mexican restaurant in Erwin and got back to camp late.

### Tuesday, May 12: French Broad River, 1640 CFS

I took this day off to put my boat back together after half of its outfitting had been ripped out during its

3/4-hour beatdown the day before. While unloading boats at the put in I was standing atop my four-step ladder and couldn't quite reach a rope on top of my van, so I hopped a bit and grabbed it, and came down on my chest on the camera in my breast pocket. OUCH! I organized the shuttle so that two would have their car at the short take-out at Stackhouse and everyone else would have their vehicles at the NOC takeout in Hot Springs. There was no carnage, but Jenny was sufficiently worn out that she was happy that she and Kim had elected to take the short take-out -- after all, they had just seen the lower section on Sunday below Big Laurel Creek. We got an early start on the trek down to Long Creek, SC, and stopped for dinner at Kostas Family Restaurant in Dillsboro. It ain't the defunct Dillsboro Smokehouse, but it is a darned good place to eat if you're in the area at dinnertime. I had called ahead to reserve a group campsite at The Chattooga River Resort and Campground, and we rolled in just as dusk was fading to full dark. This place is only six or seven minutes away from the US-76 bridge, where we take off Section III and put on Section IV, so it is remarkably convenient.

### **Wednesday, May 13: Chattooga, Section III; 1.68' (USGS gauge)**

Len arrived at camp early in the morning, so we were finally at full complement of ten boaters. Dan's wife Lois drove their Sprinter van to the take-out, so mine was the only vehicle we left at the put-in. The water was pretty low (I consider 1.6' to be boating zero) but everything was boatable; there were a few hang-ups in the shoaly

bits, but no-one had to get out and walk. We put on at Earl's Ford, the upper put-in, because those first three miles are possibly the most beautiful part of Section III. This morning, with every stroke, my chest hurt where I had landed on my camera the day before; it had not bothered me overnight, but I seriously considered taking out at Sandy Ford and walking/hitching back to get my van, but I made the selfish decision to be the weak link in the group and go all the way. Glad I did, because it was the last boating I did all week. We had a couple of short swims at Second Ledge (not including me, I'm glad to report) but I was still afraid of my boat so I (and most of the others) carried around Bull Sluice. That evening we drove into Clayton, GA and ate at la Cantina, a much more satisfactory Mexican Restaurant.

### **Thursday, May 14: Chattooga, Section IV; 1.64'**

1.64' is low for Section III, but Section IV is much more channelized, and boatable well below 1'. I ran shuttle with Lee, Keith, Ned, and Len, to leave their vehicles at Tugaloo Lake (the traditional Section IV takeout) but everyone else left their vehicles at the put-in. This was because the others would take out at Camp Creek, on the Georgia side of the river, just above the Five Falls, which is a very, very long shuttle. We were able to finesse the shuttle because Dan and I were not boating and I was able to fit the remaining five and their boats in/on my van. Dan took a long bike ride and Lois was able to relax in camp and walk down to Long Creek with her easel and paints. I went to Clayton, got updated gauge read-

ings, and had an egg-salad sandwich, chips, and chocolate malt at the Clayton Pharmacy's lunch counter -- not to be missed if you are in Clayton at lunchtime. We had to pass through Clayton on the way back from the Camp Creek takeout, so by pre-arrangement we met up with the Lake take-out group at Mama G's Italian Restaurant. From the restaurant I phoned the Nolichucky Gorge campground to reserve space for the next night.

### **Friday, May 15: Chattooga Section III & 3/4; 1.63'**

This time everybody decided to take out at Camp Creek, so we ran no shuttle; everyone left their vehicles at the put-in and got on the river early, and they were all freshly familiar with the run, so they were quick. I made a brief stop at the library to update my list of gauge readings, and Lois and I met everyone at the Camp Creek takeout. We re-united everyone with their vehicles, and I gave everyone directions to the Nolichucky Gorge Campground, where we all rendezvoused by 6:00 PM. We drove into Johnson City in my van and Lee's, and had a bang-up dinner at The Firehouse Restaurant, a barbeque and rib joint in a converted firehouse, complete with a 1920's-era fire truck and waitstaff dressed in turnout gear.

### **Saturday, May 16: Nolichucky River; 970 CFS**

I was tempted to revenge-boat this, but my bruised ribs were still killing me. Lois and I drove everyone to the put-in, and I headed home from there. I have heard no dire reports, so I assume everyone had a good day on the river.

*(Continued on page 7)*

## South Fork Shenandoah River

by Bob Maxey

South Fork Shenandoah River, Good's Mill (Rt. 684) to Burner's Ford (Rt. 664), Front Royal gauge reading of 1.7 ft. Ernie Katz (K1), Larry Gladieux (K1), Kim Buttlemann and Jenny Thomas (C2), Lynn Sencindiver and his friend Al Hammer (C2) joined me (K1) on this 9 mile trip. I first ran this river over 40 years ago, while I was still in college. It is still a beautiful river and is good for canoe camping, suitable for my nephews Evan and Kerry when they were just six and four years old. The access at Rt. 684 is private, so Jenny and I spoke with the owner, Betty Stickman. We enjoyed visiting with her and she remembered a previous time I put-in on her property, so we obtained her permission to use her property again.

Randy Carter described the South Fork of The Shenandoah as: "Beautiful scenery, the river winds in and out between the Blue Ridge and the Massanutten Mountains. First it appears to run under the Massanutten, and then swings away to later bump up against the Blue Ridge. The distant mountain scenes, the low banks, and the beautiful blue-green water make this exceptionally beautiful canoeing." While still accurate, there has been development along this river since those words were written. There are noticeably more private homes and campgrounds on river right. The left bank is less developed since much of it is in the George Washington National Forest. Recent forest fires have left large un-vegetated scars on the Massanutten Mountain revealing large rock cliffs that I have never noticed before. The meander bends in the river can easily be seen from Kennedy Peak on the Massanutten Mountain and numerous places on the Massanutten Mountain East Trail.

The rapids consist of occasional shoals and one that used to strike fear in canoeists, Compton's Rapid. For us, it was a trivial run and not even worth scouting. At higher levels it probably merits a scout for the canoe camper. Our trip took four hours and I hope I return soon for another float trip and some summertime swimming.

## Esquif Canoes is Back in Business

by Scott MacGregor

*[posted May 4 2015 to Canoeroots e-magazine at [www.rapidmedia.com](http://www.rapidmedia.com)]*

Esquif Canoes announced this morning that they are back in business and will resume manufacturing canoes in their Frampton, Quebec factory. After filing for bankruptcy in March, president and founder of Esquif Canoes Jacques Chassé told Rapid Media last week that the creditors have agreed to a buyback proposal of the company's assets.

In 2013, PolyOne, the US manufacturer of Royalex, announced that it would no longer be producing the popular canoe hull material thereby cutting supply to Esquif. Eighty percent of Esquif Canoes were manufactured using Royalex. Manufacturers stocked up on Royalex sheets for the 2014 season but the increased consumer and outfitter demand due to the threat of scarcity diminished inventories by last fall. Although Rapid Media has reported that Chassé had been working on a replacement for Royalex; without a material to make boats, Esquif had a serious cash flow problem.

"We needed a solution, but the research and the development required to manufacture such a highly-specialized technical material requires much time and resources. We ran a bit short on both!" explains the company founder. "Fortunately, we proved that Esquif was viable and that we are now ready to initiate the manufacturing of the new T-Formex that will replace Royalex".

Esquif intends to operate a sales branch dedicated to T-Formex. The company will not only build its own canoes from this new material, it plans on selling the sheets to other canoe builders who also have been left in

the lurch.

"The market's interest for such a product is significant and many customers have already placed an order for the specialized plastic," says Chassé.

In a telephone conversation with Rapid Media publisher Scott MacGregor, Chassé said that he expects T-Formex to be ready by the fall and canoes ready to paddle for the 2016 season. In the meantime, production of Esquif's composite and rotomolded polyethylene boats will begin immediately. Chassé also said that there is a limited number of whitewater solo canoes still available.

## ROSTER UPDATES

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## 2015 BRV MOONLIGHT PICNIC

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

**DATE:** **Saturday, August 1st, 2015**

**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:** **\$10** for adults, **\$5** for children 2-12 years old, **free** for those under 2.

**RSVP:** Mark Wray will be sending an email reminder the week before. Please respond to the email or give Mark a call at 703-222-4842 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.

**PARKING:** Parking at Violette's Lock is unrestricted (except that you will need to get a permit for overnight parking), 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!

*SMOKIES (Continued from page 5)*

Every year I swear this is the last time I will go through with organizing this trip, then by midwinter I so miss my DC-area friends again that I put the trip back on the MCC and BRV schedules. Let's do it again in 2016!

*[view photos from this trip at [www.kanubic.net](http://www.kanubic.net) — Ed.]*

## 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 4 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 dates to be scheduled in the following months: January, March, May, September and November. 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. In addition to the regular meetings, there is a club Moonlight Picnic on August 1st and a Holiday Party in early December (TBD).

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

**2015 BRV Officers:** Rick Koller, President; Mark Wray, VP; Bob Maxey, Trip Coordinator; Clark Childers, Treasurer; Frank Fico, Newsletter Editor; Kathleen Sengstock, Conservation.

**2015 Board of Directors:** Ginny DeSeau, Ron Knipling, 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, though via electronic mail is preferred; send to [fico1@netzero.net](mailto:fico1@netzero.net). 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 — 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.net](mailto:fico1@netzero.net). 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 Autumn *Voyageur*:**

Friday, September 4th