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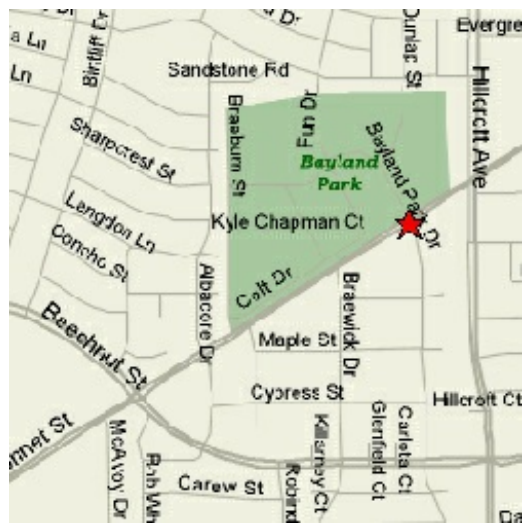
Houston Canoe Club *WaterLine*



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Some 50 to 75 active river rats meet at 7pm on the second Wednesday of each month at the Bayland Community Center, 6400 Bissonnet Street, Houston, Texas 77074. The meeting is run by volunteers who stumble through an agenda composed of stories of recent trips, descriptions of upcoming trips, paddling related programs, paddling tips, and the introduction of visitors. Gear heads prevail and discussions about all aspects of paddling assure an all around good time. Visitors are very welcome.

The meeting begins at 7 PM at Bayland Park, 6400 Bissonnet, in the community building. The park is located just west of Hillcroft on Bissonnet.



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Danger at Cottonseed

(from Dianne Wassenichs email)

Now for the whirlpool situation. A dangerous one has formed at Cottonseed Rapids, which is between Westerfield crossing and Scull Crossing. The rapids are really an old dam spillway that was blown up in the 1940's and back then concrete slabs and rocks were left in the river, near an old cotton gin on County Rd. 103. It is a favorite site of watchers of the Water Safari, you may recall.

The gravel has washed out from under one of the long concrete slabs, so the river with full force is rushing under this slab and causing a big sucking whirlpool. When I saw it last week a big piece of debris, a plank with nails sticking out of it, was lodged in it. You can see the water boiling up from under the concrete slab, just downstream, so you can tell how much force the water has, as it rushes through that cavity. You would not be able to fight it. If there is any obstruction like debris under the slab, or rocks that might catch you, you would be caught underwater by the whirlpool and would not be able to surface. You would not likely just blow through the hole under the concrete.

The river bends toward this whirlpool, so tubers would be directed straight to it. A skilled boater might be able to avoid it, but tubers are sitting ducks. Nearby landowners are getting warning signs up that people need to exit the river and walk along the island to avoid being sent into that whirlpool. We are trying to get a sketch of the situation up at Westerfield with a warning sign and we will be warning the Eskimo Hut and Don's Fish Camp people of the situation.

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We have contacted GBRA, Texas Parks and Wildlife, the Corps of Engineers, and continue to try to make a plan for a fix. Texas Rivers Protection Association is also working with us on this and we'll keep you posted. We know that permits would be required to fix this, and so we are asking these agencies for some direction on that.



The Waugh Drive Bat Colony

by Louis F. Aulbach

There is a noticeably pungent odor along the Buffalo Bayou at Waugh Drive. The acrid smell of ammonia is especially strong on the jogging path under the bridge. It is there that you will find Houston's foremost colony of bats.

Since at least 2003, and possibly earlier, a colony of Mexican Free Tail bats have taken up residence in the Waugh Drive Bridge. The original, long span bridge was built between 1922 and 1924 to replace an earlier low water crossing. It was named for Private Tom T. Waugh who died in World War I. His father, T. L. Waugh was city's street and bridge commissioner.



The Waugh Drive bridge at dusk. Photo by John Chamberlain.

The current bridge is a modern structure with a box beam design using large concrete slabs with beams separated by expansion joints. The expansion joints are 3/4 to 4 inches wide and 16 inches deep, and those cracks provide an ideal nesting place for the bats. The bridge, which spans the length of the bayou gorge, provides ample room for the 250,000 to 300,000 bats who make up the colony.



Mexican Free Tail bats of the Waugh Drive colony in the expansion joint of the bridge structure. Photo by John Chamberlain.

Although this colony is much smaller than the 1.5 million bats of the colony in Austin, the Houston Waugh Drive bats are unique in that they apparently do not migrate. Mexican Free Tail bats (*Tadarida brasiliensis*) usually arrive in March and return to Mexico in November. The Waugh Drive colony is here all year around.

The best time of year to see the bats is in July and August. The bugs in Houston are at their best in late summer, and the bats have had their "pups" so both mothers and babies are foraging for mosquitoes and begins under the bridge. For the next hour or so, bats can be seen swarming under the bridge. However, unlike the dramatic exits of other colonies, such as those in Austin or at Carlsbad Caverns, the Waugh Drive colony does not exit in a black cloud against the dimly lit sky. Rather, these bats head right down the bayou toward downtown, catching food on the wing that inhabits the trees and brush on the banks of the bayou.

The best place to see the bats is at the Waugh Bat Colony Observation Deck on the south bank of Buffalo Bayou at Waugh Drive and Allen Parkway. The deck, donated by the Lyondell Chemical Company and dedicated in May, 2006, provides a convenient spot from which to await the bat activity each evening.

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Houston Canoe Club
WaterLine



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Welcome New Member!

HCC wants to welcome our latest member, Hayley Forshaw, to the club. Be sure to join us on the rivers, lakes, gulf, or creeks. That's what all this club "stuff" is about'

Hayley Forshaw
14627 Bramblewood
Houston TX 77079

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Wracked Racks

by Natalie Weist

I had a weird problem with the Thule racks on my minivan while returning from a trip to Florida in December.

You may recall we had some terrific high winds at that time in late December. Sitting on those racks was my faithful green canoe; and IH10 was our route. Those winds came very strongly from the south, and with the canoe tied on the roof, it provided a big target for those high winds. I started hearing the racks making a lot more noise than usual; arrived home late at night and was amazed the next morning when I started taking the canoe down.



The photos show the front rack, and the back rack.



As you can see, the bar slid as far across as it could – perhaps if the canoe hadn't

been tied off center so the ties were outside of the supports, the bars may have come completely out of the brackets. Thank goodness for end ties – I consider this another good reason to put those endlines on and not use the crossties alone.

Happy travels!

Natalie Wiest
HCC Paddler

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Equipment that Fails on the River

By Cecilia Gill

Welcome to "Backwater Backwash", a random and incomprehensible collection of thoughts, observances and experiences in no particular order, so that it makes absolutely no sense at all.

This past Memorial Day weekend, we did our annual Sabine River Barge thing. This wonderful contraption consists of two canoes held together with poles, covered with a deck and a canopy, and a Mercury 2.5 powering it. What a way to paddle! OK, Joe actually paddled his kayak. The idea behind the barge, especially for the Labor Day weekend trip, is a sort of Safety and Support Boat. But that is not what we're here to talk about today...



What prompted this tale is an incident that occurred while on the river, that could never possibly happen with a paddle craft.... (or could it?) The incident I speak of is this: a tiny piece of equipment, instrumental in making the propeller actually spin, broke. **This tiny thing is called a "shear pin"**

Without the shear pin, the motor spins free while the prop just kind of flops around, and you have totally lost power and can in no way control where the boat goes or which one of those nasty looking tree stumps you are going to crash into. It was exciting! But, we managed to get the boat to the sand bar and change out the tiny shear pin and toddle on down the river lickity split.

Now, why am I telling a PADDLING club about a MOTOR problem? Because it reminded me of an incident on the San Marcos River that happened to me a very long time ago. I stopped just before Cotton Seed to check conditions (I was new... had no idea how to roll or anything yet) before I attempted such a daunting run. I decided I was stupid enough.... I mean brave enough... to run it, and jumped back in my little kayak, pulled the spray skirt on and took off. I managed to get past the worst of it, when suddenly I seemed to just totally lose control and spun around. One side seemed to go through the water easier than the other. I'd heard of the ferocious "paddle snake" before. Maybe they were real! I couldn't figure out what the heck was going on! I went in weird little circles, crashed into a rock, managed to not flip (yet) and then noticed this odd looking thing float past me, semi-submerged, just as I finally flipped and had to pull the skirt off and do an escape.

After I dragged myself and my boat out of the water, I looked at my paddle and saw what the heck had happened. **That odd looking thing that floated past me, semi-submerged, was the blade off of my paddle.** About then, some nice fellow happened by in his kayak. I asked him if he could retrieve my paddle blade for me. Once he stopped laughing, he found it, and managed to get it back to me with only minor difficulty.



Fortunately, I had plenty of duct tape, and used most of it strapping the errant blade back onto the shaft, not indexed correctly, of course. I ever so carefully paddled, mostly trying to only use the good blade, hoping and praying the entire time until I made it back to Skulls Crossing and from there, home. Once I was home, I had a friend who actually knew what he was doing index and repair it properly for me.

The whole point of these stories is this: Sometimes, when you least expect it, just as you think you're home free, your equipment fails and you find that the river thinks you

should go some completely different way than the way you were heading. Sometimes, its like the river planned for these things to happen. Sometimes I think the river just got bored and wanted a good laugh.....

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Tidying up the Medina River

by John and Anne Olden

We're lucky to have river gauges to know when there's enough water to make the drive to Bandera worthwhile. Fortunately, there had been rain in the Hill Country in the weeks leading up to the cleanup. The Medina goes down quickly, but at 385 cfs on the gauge there was enough water. HCC was assigned to clean a four mile section from Peaceful Valley Road to Ranger Crossing, the first roadside park. However, the five of us – the Peerys, Oldens and Joe Clemens – decided we wanted to paddle more than four miles. So on Saturday morning we quickly completed cleanup registration in Bandera City Park, then left for Camp Bandina Crossing. This would add four more miles to our day.



Joe manages to carry trash even in a touring kayak

We didn't clean this first stretch, which was assigned to another group. The Medina has clear water, with tall cypress and other trees shading much of the river. Although wide in places, the river has an intimate feeling. With no other people around, we had the quiet all to ourselves. However, don't become complacent. The next bend may have a narrow chute with trees or stumps in the river. At one such place we encountered **a small tree completely bent over into the river.** We were able to eddy out above it and walk our boats past.



The low water crossing at Peaceful Valley Road was the beginning of our cleanup section. There is very little trash in this river. Debris is generally from a flood sweeping away items left seemingly well above the river. This means large items like pieces of metal buildings and parts of boats. Shortly below Peaceful Valley Road is Stewart Falls. This four foot drop on river left has changed. There is a large debris pile at the top right of the falls. Nevertheless, Cliff and John ran the falls successfully, dropping into the very aerated water below. The righthand channel is now considerably wider, but there was not enough water to paddle over the drop at the end of it. **Joe, Marilyn and Anne paddled down the right channel, then walked their boats over roots back down into the river.**



The family which owns the land here has put in considerably more concrete on river left, presumably in an effort to stop erosion of the left bank. However, the river is clearly working on a new channel to the left of its present course. The river continues to surprise with turns and trees in the way. Cliff is a serious cleaner and captured a very large piece of metal which he folded to carry on the front of his canoe. By the takeout we had about five bags of trash, a six foot length of PVC, a golf club and **Cliff's metal sheet.**



We showered at the Pioneer RV park where we camped, then walked under the bridge to dinner in the park. There was brisket, ribs and chicken, homemade salads, fresh fruit and delicious brownies, accompanied by water, wine or beer. After dinner the Mesquite Trio plus bass entertained. Awards were given for most outrageous trash found on the river. Among the items contending were an old floor buffer, part of a rear projection TV, and a large torpedo-shaped pontoon. First prize went to Spring Woods Canoe Group from Houston, led by Susan Eda and Pat Isley. They collected an entire aluminum boat and carried it on two canoes lashed together. Quite a feat!

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Medina River Clean Up: Section 8

(sounds like a military charge of insanity, huh?)

by Cecilia Gill

I probably shouldn't brag, because the next time I hit a tiny little riffle we'll all go in the drink, but I am rather proud of myself.... so here goes!

This past weekend we (my boys, ages 6 and 3 and I, age, well, a true Southern lady never tells her true age!) anyway, we went to Bandera to do the Medina River Clean Up. I SPECIFICALLY requested the slowest, calmest section since I would be paddling my big expedition tandem canoe alone with 2 small children. I was referred to Section #8, between Ranger Crossing and the park at Hwy 16 where we were all congregating and all the festivities were going on. We got our teeshirts and bags, were fed breakfast, then I met the section leader and we did the shuttle.



Morgan and Lonnie help with the cleanup

When we got on the river, the water was moving, but nothing I couldn't handle. We got the boats in the water, the boys in the boat, then me in the boat. Fantastic. It was nice. A lovely river. Shortly after we started off, we hit some rather harsh riffles.... bordering on whitewater. OK, I can handle that. We're fine. Then, the riffles had some white caps on them... OK, OK, I managed. The river got narrower and started twisting and turning fairly tightly. The current got swifter. There were trees, rocks and strainers coming up. Oh, look! **There's some actual for really real whitewater going on here!**



I had to do some major maneuvering, and my whitewater skills came into play. I'm rusty, but maybe not as rusty as I thought....? We came through it all right, and the boys had a blast. They thought we were at a water park, except that they were wearing helmets and in mommy's canoe. I eddied out and waited for the rest of the crew to show up.

Finally, one guy did. He smiled to see us perfectly OK and waiting. I think he might have been a little impressed. My guess here would be that no one took into consideration how much a river can change after a good rain...and I've never been on the Medina before. I was told that because of the rain we wouldn't have to walk our boats. That much was true.....

Long story short, I think that the crew was at first concerned that I was paddling a big expedition canoe alone, and to top that off, with 2 small boys in the front of it. When they saw that I can indeed handle myself and that the boys enjoy this sort of thing, I think they were relieved that we didn't end up being nothing but problems, like I'm sure they might have thought in the beginning.

What I encountered on Section 8 of the Medina rivaled all the rapids that I have ever encountered on the San Marcos.... and to think, I've been hesitant to take the boys down the San Marcos in the canoe! Hah! I might portage Cottonseed, simply because of all the horror stories I've heard about it lately, but that's about it.

Now that I'm bragging on myself, the next time we're on a barely moving flat water paddle, get ready to laugh.....

It was a lovely trip down a beautiful river on a nice day. There was a wonderful hot shower waiting for us when we got back, followed by a great BBQ dinner and tasty brownies. There was music and a general air of celebration going on. They had the coveted "Bent Paddle Award" for the strangest thing pulled out of the river. I kind of missed out on who... or WHAT won, since Lonnie and Morgan were tired and ready to go after that wonderful meal. Later I was told that someone from Houston won it for a bashed up boat they found. There was other interesting things pulled out of the river. A bathtub, an ice maker, a floor polisher, a pontoon (I wanted that....) a golf club and a hockey stick. For whatever reason, Morgan's box springs that he found weren't there, but that's OK. We left before the contest anyway. Someone else found a pop up tent that wasn't in the contest for whatever reason.

Just had to share! I got a few, but I didn't get a whole lot of pics. I have a digital camera, NOT waterproof. I have a marine case for it. The problem is that the camera has to be on the entire time its in the case. What a stupid design.... I will be getting a waterproof digital camera soon. I hate going on these great adventures and not being able to bring back all the pics I'd like to because I'm afraid to get the camera wet, and I don't keep it in the marine case because I'm afraid the battery will have run out so that I can't get any great shots anyway. And I don't have back up batteries because this battery is very hard to find, and costs about \$75 when you do find one. Waahh!

So for our next planned adventure (the Sabine River Memorial Day Weekend Trip) I will have a camera that I can take all sorts of great pics with and share them! For once! It's nice to be able to tell a tale, but its even better to be able to SHOW it!!!

~~</>~~

SYOTR!

Cecilia

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San Bernard's Can You Dig It 2

by Cecilia Gill

Today, Lonnie, Morgan and I went to the FOR (Friends of the River) San Bernard "Can You Dig It 2" Event that Mark Andrus passed on to the club. It is an effort to publicize the fact that the San Bernard River mouth is clogging up with sand and that the fish and other wildlife can't get from here to there any more, barring flooding and storm surges.



I have something to say about MapQuest, and its not particularly flattering... but that is for another time. Suffice it to say that thanks to the wonderful dirctions I got from MapQuest, we went the wrong way down 2004 off of 288, and didn't figure it out for quite a while.....

Anyway, we finally found the boat ramp at the end of 2918 and met a man with a shallow draft speed boat at the dock. He suggested we let him give us a ride, since that's what he was there for anyway, and not try to fight the wind paddling there. I was outvoted two to one before I even put it up to a vote.... The boys loved the idea of getting to ride on a big boat.

After a fast ride there, and only one turn around to go back and get a toy (that floats, thank goodness! Wanna bet next time I tell Lonnie to hold on tight to something he'll listen?), we got to the sandy beach where he let us off. I met the coordinators of the trip, Roy and Jan Edwards, who gave Lonnie and Morgan little buckets and shovels to play with.

We played both in the river and in the gulf. It was pretty neat being able to play in the river, walk a couple hundred yards across a sandy island, and go play in the surf. We had a great time!

Then, everyone lined up, stretching from the river to the gulf, and started digging with little toy shovels and real shovels while a reporter took photographs and a small plane flew over head, also taking pictures. They let us keep our toy shovels and buckets.

After playing in the surf for a little longer, we decided it was time to pack it in and go,

so we went back and rode the same shallow draft boat back to the dock. Lonnie got to sit with the driver (Captain) of the boat and "help" him drive. We thanked him and left for home.

Except for the part where MapQuest messed us up, and the fact that Morgan has a partially sunburned hand and looks like someone just slapped the fire out of his upper cheek and temple, (sunburn...I didn't get the little wiggle worm covered with sunscreen as well as I hoped I had...), it was a lovely, sunny day. A great time was had by all!

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Clear Creek Reconsidered

by Natalie Weist

It had been quite some time since I had paddled the upper reaches of Clear Creek, and I had the opportunity to do so right before Christmas. My companions for this trip were several novice paddlers and an out of town acquaintance who used to live here and wanted to see part of her old stomping ground from the water.

We scouted Randolph Park (off FM2351 where it crosses Clear Creek) for a putin, but decided it would be easier (a relative term!) from Bicentennial Park and got on the water by 11 a.m. after running a shuttle and dropping vehicles at Countryside Park where Bay Area Boulevard crosses the creek. As you can see by the first photo, the creek is quite narrow in those upper reaches .



It was a perfect day for December paddling; just warm enough, just cool enough. We did, however, encounter a downed tree completely across the stream. This could be very dangerous at higher water levels – if it is still there. We managed to get boats over the barely submerged trunk of the tree and I'm still amazed I managed to do the pulling/pushing standing on the trunk, balancing on a limb over deep water, and not going into the drink despite several close calls.



The downed tree

My recollection of a trip on the section several years back was that it seemed incredibly long. On that trip, we had paddled on to Challenger Seven Park. I'd hoped that taking out at Countryside Park would make the distance paddled more manageable. Well, I miscalculated on that – and I hope my librarian colleague Karen Wielhorski (library director for Univ. of Houston/Clear Lake) isn't forever angry at me. That's her on the yellow sit-on-top (and her husband on the other).



She and several others were really tuckered out by the time we got to Countryside Park about 4 p.m. I didn't see and am not aware of better intermediate takeouts. The crossing of Hwy 528 is a possibility, but scouting it from the road, the nice grassy bank on the south side goes up to the road – but traffic is moving very fast and heavy there, and there is no place to pull off the road unless you want to go over a high curb. On the north side, there is a private community park with a long walk to/from the water.

Countryside Park continues to be a favorite putin/takeout spot. There are nice restroom facilities there, picnic tables, paved parking, and a circle quite close to the water that make loading or unloading boats relatively easy.

Several months later I got to see another segment of Clear Creek from a very different perspective – from the barges of the Clear Creek Environmental Foundation. With Rex Ward, the “Keeper of the Creek” at the controls of one boat, and myself and several others riding in the second one. We chugged upstream against a heavy current (for Clear Creek) thanks to heavy rains the preceding week. The departure point was Walter Hall Park here in League City, where highway 3 crosses Clear Creek. This is another very user-friendly putin with an even easier launch and parking for canoeists – but beware the high speed water craft in warmer weather. Considering the number of

wake board jumps we saw on this stretch, it must be pretty wild on these warm days. In any case, I always enjoy seeing the creek from other folks' perspective; and no tired muscles this time. We saw several nice restoration projects along the way and it was a pleasant day also for being on the creek, although you can see from the jackets it was a bit cool then in mid-March.



Clear Creek is in my relative backyard, or more accurately, my backyard drains to the creek, so it's nice to have a body of water so close by to paddle and enjoy.

See ya on the water!

Natalie Wiest
League City Resident, Clear Creek Watershed
HCC Paddler

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Lake Charlotte Going to the Dogs

by Natalie Weist

Well, I guess the presence of one dog on one kayak doesn't entirely mean the place is going to the dogs, but it is an interesting adventure.

Some weeks back, I put a last minute note out on the HCC List about a trip to Lake Charlotte, as a replacement for the cancelled Women's Trip. Only Linda Day, and her dog Chipper, took me up on it so we had a lovely float through the swamps.

As you can see, Linda has a unique doggy carrier for Chipper, a 10 lb. toy poodle. Mighty spiffy doggy PFD as well, which she demonstrated as an effective dog carrying device.



The water was quite high, at 10', so finding the passages was sometimes rather challenging as one could paddle almost everywhere and not see any dry ground. I exhibited what has become a too-frequent navigational derring-do; my map of the area got left at home on the kitchen table; and my GPS (and you know I'm an inept operator...) was right next to it in the cabinet! Luckily, since we decided to try some of those tricky Miller-Mud Lake connections, Linda had her GPS with her, and it had several critical points already loaded on it. Too bad the maps lacked detail. I can state now that I was thoroughly lost way back in the swamps but serendipity came along at just the right time and I recognized that we were in Lake Pass - having missed Miller Lake entirely in our wandering about the swamps.



Here we are emerging from Lake Pass into Lake Miller. You can see from this photo that Chipper never doubted that the right path lay straight ahead – right on through the duckweed and thickets!



For those who would like to find the Miller marker at Lake Miller, here's what you are looking for: As usual at this water level, the only dry land we saw on our trip was this shore of Lake Miller.

Ellen was my canoeing partner. Somehow in all the years we have paddled together I have failed in my educational mission; she seems to be taking fewer and fewer paddle strokes as we go along. With winds reaching 20 mph on the Ellington gages, this made for an excellent cardiovascular workout for moi as we headed into the winds, or directly across them. We all had a marvelous trip – I never tire of paddling into the swamps in this region. It's always beautiful and there is always something new and different to see, and new routes to be discovered.

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