



Staging on Turners Creek Wharf photo by Rich Stevens

## Timeless Beauty and a Timeless Place

By Ralph Heimlich

There are places on the Chesapeake Bay that combine the best of natural history with the best of human history, and many of these are best savored from the seat of a kayak. I took a large group of beginning and experienced paddlers (I could say "old" but most of use were "old" regardless of our experience in a kayak) on a tour of such a place on a warm day toward the end of July.

Turners Creek and other creeks tributary to the Sasfras River on Maryland's middle Eastern Shore are native habitat for one of North America's most spectacular wild flowers, the American Lotus (*Nelumbo lutea*). Every year in late July and early August, these creeks are choked with large aquatic plants, rooted in the muddy bottom, that stretch 6 feet across and float large round lily pads on the surface. Rising from the middle of these are stalks reaching 1 or 2 feet above the water's surface holding large, creamy white or yellow water lilies that are 8" to 10" across with vivid yellow styles in the center. After blooming, these turn

into the classical seed pods containing seeds known as "macoupin" or alligator corn to the Native Americans.

We gathered on an early Sunday morning at the Turners Creek wharf and staged our boats on the parking lot to launch from the ramp at high tide. There is a porta-potty on the wharf, along with the 19<sup>th</sup> century granary building, the last remaining example of the many grain shipping depots along the creeks and rivers of the Eastern Shore that moved the produce of the land to steamboats. There are also restrooms in the Lathim House, another historic structure just up from the wharf. Parking is up the hill about 200 yards. Also up the hill about a half mile is Knock's Folly House, a Federal style three story brick house which is open for tours, and further up the road, the Kent County Museum.

The group numbered 21 paddlers, including a mix of beginners and more experienced paddlers including Sue and Rich Stevens, Mary Lynn Skutley, Steve Bethke, Rosemary Wallace, Megan and Mike Ward, Geoff Ultsch, Bill Harman, Ed Santelmann, Bill McAllister, Michael Naito, Vickie and Bill Smith, James Harris, Mike Cohn, Linda Witkin, Brent Cogswell, Kasenia Lantsky, and Bela Mariassy. After a pre-launch briefing that laid out the course and crossing procedures, we launched this fleet into Turners Creek's quiet waters and paddled into the lotus-choked mouth of the creek, amongst the lotus.

While the lotus flowers are beautiful and exude a subtle perfume that is redolent of tropical climes, the lotus pads are also interesting. The pads are covered with a micro-ribbing that scientists have found to be highly water repellent (superhydrophobic) and result in a self cleaning effect that is important to the health of the plant in silty and stagnant water (see [http://www.stle.org/assets/news/document/TLT\\_02-09\\_cover\\_story.pdf](http://www.stle.org/assets/news/document/TLT_02-09_cover_story.pdf)). The "quicksilver" appearance of water beading on the pads is evidence of this "lotus effect". Materials scientists are using biomimicry to design surfaces that are self cleaning and shed water better.



American Lotus (*Nelumbo lutea*) photo by Rich Stevens

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*Turners Creek (Continued from page 3)*

After a half hour of photography, admiration and clowning around, I marshaled the group to paddle out across the mouth of Turners Creek and upriver along the southern shore of the Sassafras River. With such a large group, we spread out a bit, so it was good that there was not much boat traffic this early in the morning. One of our participants on a SOT was having difficulty keeping a straight track, and one of our more experienced paddlers Bela Mariassy in sweep soon realized that this would slow the group down too much. He radioed ahead and hooked the SOT up to a tow to help the paddler maintain her heading. We paddled around Shrewsbury Neck, nearly to the mouth of Freeman Creek before attempting a channel crossing. The channel downstream from Georgetown's many marinas is one of the busiest on the Sassafras, so I wanted us to have a clear view up and down river. I split the group into two for the crossing, with experienced paddlers in both groups leading the maneuver. We carefully scanned for boat traffic, then lined up abreast and paddled deliberately across the channel. Bela passed the tow to Steve Bethke for the crossing, but that was a bit of a challenge keeping the second group together.



The lotus fairy (Sue Stevens) photo by Ralph Heimlich



"Quicksilver" water beading on a lotus pad photo by Ralph Heimlich

Mount Harmon at World's End is a timeless tobacco plantation built in 1730 and restored by Mrs. Harry Clark Boden IV in the 1960s according to descriptions in her ancestor's girlhood diary describing an enchanted childhood at the old manor. Mount Harmon, now administered by Friends of Mount Harmon, Inc., is listed on the National Historic Register, is an official Chesapeake Bay Gateway Network site, and is located along the National Scenic Byway, and encompasses more than 200 acres including a two-mile entry driveway of Osage Orange trees, a formal boxwood garden, outbuildings and a Discovery and Exploration center. Our docents guided us through the rooms of the manor house, a three-story, five-bay, brick double pile structure containing a mixture of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century English and American antiques and quaintly opulent 1960's bathrooms and kitchens (Mrs. Boden intended to live in the house, but did only briefly). We also toured the restored separate kitchen building and the formal boxwood garden and serpentine walls. Mount Harmon hosts an annual Lotus Festival on August 4<sup>th</sup> that features a number of activities and an opportunity to view the American Lotus blooming on both Foreman and MacGill creeks bordering the plantation (see <http://www.mountharmon.org/index.html>). Thanks to Debbie Brown for arranging our tour.

We paddled up the shore of Knight Island (which isn't actually an island), the site of the Firestone (tire) family estate and their Trumpy yacht "Tireless" (see <http://www.eastcoastyachtcruises.com/yachts/tireless.php>). Bald eagles and Great Blue Herons cruised over us as we paddled along. Crossing the mouth of Back Creek, we confronted the wooded north shore of the creek, found the "Prize" house (which was named for the tobacco press which "prized" the tobacco leaves into the huge hogsheads for shipping) and looked for Mount Harmon Landing at the beach to the right of a wooden footbridge over the mouth of a small pond. We landed in shallow water and tied up our boats on a gravelly beach that showed signs of damage from the recent *derecho* storm. I hoofed it up to the plantation house in my wet paddling gear along a trail littered with downed tree branches and found our docents and arranged for our tour after we ate and changed clothes.



Our docent explains the colonial kitchen photo by Rich Stevens

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## CPA Schedules Beginner Paddles For the Year

By Maywin Liu

For those new to kayaking or looking for leisurely trips, CPA is introducing a new Beginner Paddler Series. Note: If you are interested in going on one of these trips, contact the trip leader (contact info on the calendar, link below) at least two weeks before the trip. Several of these have been cancelled due to apparent lack of interest, only to have people call a day or two before the trip to be disappointed.

Participants will be led on trips of 3-8 miles in scenic locations from peaceful lakes and reservoirs to Eastern Neck on the Bay to rivers and estuaries along the Eastern and Western shores of the Bay. The Series will run from May through October. Some of the trips launch from sites that offer rentals if you have not yet purchased a kayak. Many of the trips are combined with special features such as kayak nature photography, a Gear Day lunch stop, historical guides, and lotus blossoms and fall colors viewing. For those who have not done a wet exit or are not comfortable with rescues, most trips will offer the opportunity to practice. Have fun kayaking while improving your skills and confidence with friendly, experienced paddlers who enjoy sharing their love of the sport. For those looking to purchase or upgrade their kayaks, this is a good opportunity to compare the performance of different kayaks and possibly try out a few.

Date	Location	County	Estimated Distance	Trip Leader/Contact	Notes
4-Aug	Tridelphia Lake	Mont. Co	6	John Garon /Sue & Rich Stevens	
11-Aug	Mattawoman Creek lotus viewing	Charles Co		Mike Cohn	* not posted per Mike
12-Aug	Jug Bay to Mt Calvert Historic Manor	PG CO	8	Jenny Plummer-Welker & Greg Welker	
20-Oct	Fountainhead Park & the Occoquan	VA	4	Jeff Walascek / Jim Zawlocki	
21-Oct	Upper Chester River Landing	Kent Co	8	Ralph Heimlich	

Please consult [the CPA calendar](#) for details of this Series and for all the other trips and events scheduled.

### Turners Creek (Continued from page 5)

After our tour, we changed back into (wet) paddling clothes and reembarked at low tide. We paddled back downriver along the north shore to Ordinary Point, site of a colonial inn (or ordinary). We regrouped for another channel crossing, this time with much busier boat traffic to contend with. Paddling back along the shore, we turned into Turners Creek and landed at the now-exposed beach on the east side of the wharf. Our cohesive group quickly carried all the boats up from the beach to a grassy area, retrieved our cars and leisurely loaded up.

A group of 12 of us reconvened in Chestertown at the Fishwhistle Restaurant (<http://www.fishandwhistle.com/>) for a late afternoon repast and libation. I don't think the waitstaff had had such a lively bunch to lunch in quite a while. The knowledgeable beeristas among us (Mike Naito ran breweries in California and Bangkok and Bill Smith and others are home brewers) cross-examined the poor waiters on the draft offerings. Brunch (Linner? Drunch?) over, we drove off to see how bad the Sunday Bay Bridge traffic would be.



Crossing the Sassafras Channel photo by Rich Stevens

Pictures at:

[https://picasaweb.google.com/CommodoreRich/MtHarmon2012\\_07\\_29#](https://picasaweb.google.com/CommodoreRich/MtHarmon2012_07_29#)

And [https://picasaweb.google.com/102459087707170525949/TurnerCreek\\_MountHarmon#](https://picasaweb.google.com/102459087707170525949/TurnerCreek_MountHarmon#)