

# The Sycamore Islander

July 2018 | Volume 97 Number 7



Photos by Joe Hage

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**July 11: Monthly Club Meeting**, 8 pm on the Island

**August 8:** Monthly Meeting (second Wednesdays), 8 pm

## Relief Caretakers' Schedule and Online Sign-Up System

To sign-up to be a Relief Caretaker (any Saturday), you can access the "Sign-Up Genius" app from the [SycamoreIsland.org scheduling webpage](http://SycamoreIsland.org/scheduling_webpage) (or by clicking the Relief Caretaker Schedule and Instructions icon on the Club's home page). Click on the link to the app. There are simple instructions and the app will send you reminders. [You can also sign-up by contacting the Relief Caretaker Coordinator, Madeleine Carter, at [madeleinecpcarter@gmail.com](mailto:madeleinecpcarter@gmail.com)] The app provides a calendar that indicates ALL of the Relief Caretakers that have signed up (through August). Relief Caretakers signed up for the coming month are:

### July 7

9 am to 3 pm: Vanessa Von Bernuth  
3 to 9 pm: Lauren Brandt

### July 21

9 am to 3 pm: Eric Aaserud  
3 to 9 pm: Chris Maggio

### July 14

9 am to 3 pm: Alissa Stern and Louis Boorstin  
3 to 9 pm: Fred Pinkney

### July 28

9 am to 3 pm: Angela Hirsch  
3 to 9 pm: Jan & Richard Pappalardo

**Still Need a few volunteers during August**

**Thank You to all those who signed up for May, especially those who actually served (when the Island was open)!!**

## Message from the President

Our island has experienced an unusual number of high water events this Spring, with the two highest floods occurring on May 20 (9.8 feet) and June 5 (12.38 feet). The river at these levels carries approx. 8 times as much water as our normal levels of under five feet. If you were not able to see it firsthand, it was impressive and scary and amazing... all due to Mother Nature!!

I want to expressively thank our wonderful Caretaker and others for getting the Island ready for each of these extreme events, shepherding us safely through the crises, and leading the fantastic clean-up efforts to restore the Club to proper functioning. I would also like to thank all of the members, waitlisters, and other folks who helped clean up, de-mud, repair, and restore the canoes, docks, shed, and walkway. A true team effort – thank you!!

Richard Bertaut, President

## Update on Club Archives

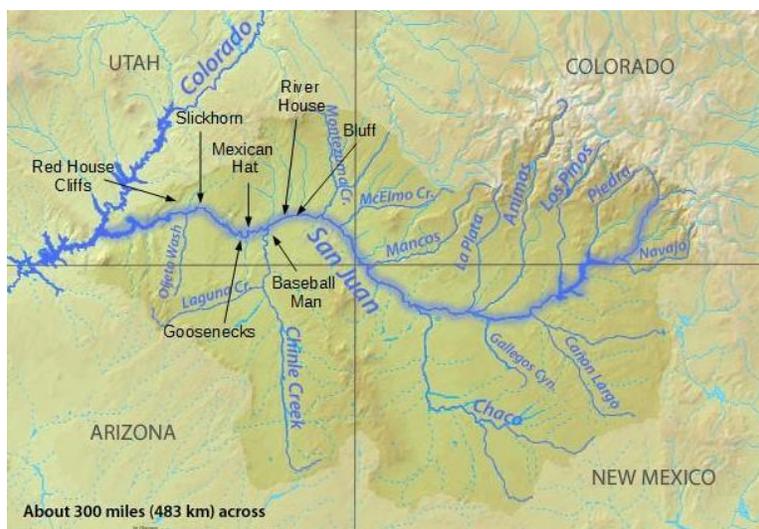
By Karen Possner, Archivist

Sycamore Island has, for many years, stored its most important documents at the Historical Society of Washington, D.C. As a rule, anyone may search through the club's collection by just showing up or by making an appointment. During the on-going renovation of the Society's home at the Carnegie Library, all documents were relocated temporarily to the Newseum, where our access has been somewhat limited. The Society has recently announced that, as of June 29th, all library services will be suspended until the end of the year while the Society packs its collections for its return to its newly-renovated space. This restoration will ensure that our club's collection will have a permanent home in a state-of-the-art facility that will continue to safeguard our documents. In addition, longer hours will provide visitors with greater access. K.B. Possner, archivist

## Canoeing the San Juan River

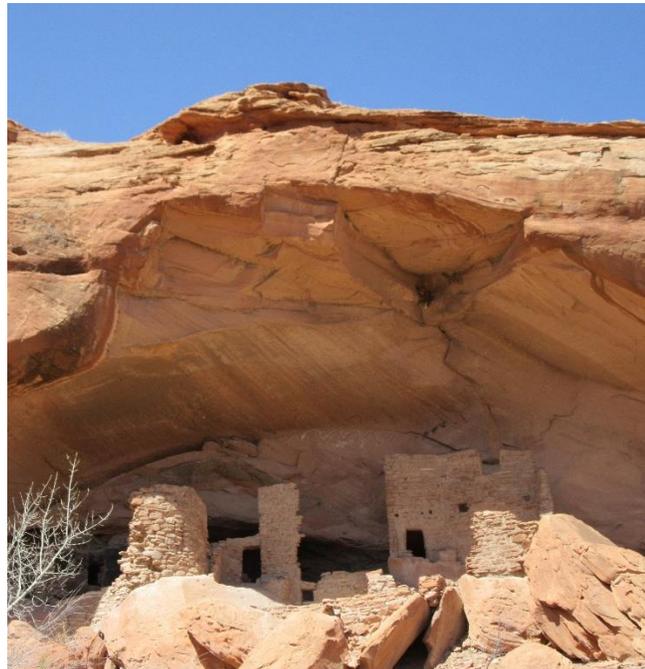
By John Cunningham

Last spring, Ann Marie and I did an eight-day canoe trip on the San Juan River. We had paddled it once before, in 2006.



Fed by snow melt coming down from the Rockies in southwestern Colorado, the San Juan dips down into New Mexico near Shiprock, swings up into southern Utah, and then heads west toward Lake Powell. Heavily laden with silt, it flows through the Colorado Plateau, a vast uplifted area know for its brilliantly colored rock layers and spectacular geologic formations. The San Juan is also at the heart of the Puebloan culture and remains of this ancient civilization abound along the river, including pictographs, petroglyphs, and cliff dwellings. Our trip took us through the Bears Ears National Monument, which has been much in the news.

Our gateway city was Grand Junction, Colorado. We met up with our guides and fellow paddlers and proceeded to the little town of Bluff, Utah. A Navajo guide joined us there. Greatly experienced on the river, his job was to row a raft filled with water jugs, food coolers, and other gear. We put in the river at Sand Island, about three miles downstream from Bluff. The San Juan is the fastest flowing river per mile in the United States, and it was running high for us. In this upper section, it cut through beautiful sandstone cliffs stained with “desert varnish,” which are dark stains created by moisture seeps. At mile 3 below Sand Island, we saw the “Moki Steps,” an ancient path of toeholds in the rock created to allow access to the river. Just below mile 6, we stopped to explore “River House.” This is an extensive cliff dwelling with fourteen rectangular rooms for living and food storage and two circular kivas. It is estimated that River House was inhabited between A.D. 700 and 1300. The inhabitants were primarily farmers, cultivating the land along the river. There are many pictographs and petroglyphs.



Photographs by John Cunningham, including Desert Varnish and River House.

At mile 8, we stopped to hike up Chinle Creek to see “Baseball Man.” This is a human figure behind a shield with patterns that (to white people) resemble a baseball. The figure is a petroglyph. The shield, added much later, is a pictograph.



Between miles 9 and 20, the San Juan becomes narrower, swifter, and rockier as 800-foot high canyon walls close in. Some significant rapids present themselves, including Four-Foot Rapid, Eight-Foot Rapid, and Ledge Rapid. All can be run fairly easily. Gypsum Rapid at mile 27 is another matter and is a reminder that rivers are living things that change. On our previous trip eleven years ago, the path through Gypsum was river left over a significant drop, and then a hard right turn at the bottom. Now, however, a rock slide had made the left side impossible for a fully loaded canoe. The only way down was a narrow chute on river right. We got hung up on a rock, but otherwise escaped unscathed

After the tribulations of Gypsum, it was nice to pull off the river at the little town of Mexican Hat and walk up the hill for some ice cream. This is the only river trip we've ever been on where a mid-trip ice cream break was possible!



At mile 29, two miles below Mexican Hat, the San Juan goes back into a narrow canyon and meanders through long "gooseneck" curves. The first gooseneck downstream from Mexican Hat is called Mendenhall Loop, named after a gold prospector who arrived in 1893. His abandoned cabin is still there. At mile 44, the Honaker Trail offers one of the few routes out of the canyon. It switchbacks up until it reaches the rim 1,200 feet above the river. The views are spectacular.

Twin Canyons at mile 48 used to be a flatwater area, but now there's a rapid. Again, rivers change. Government Rapid at mile 64 was created by a rockslide and is difficult under the best of circumstances. We ran it on our previous trip but more rockslides had closed that route off. Our group lined our boats through. But – there are no

portages on the San Juan (always nice!).

Slickhorn Canyon at mile 67 is a special treat. A short distance up from the river, there is a series of cool, refreshing slickrock pools, with ferns and other greenery. We spent a good amount of time there, just relaxing and enjoying ourselves.



Below Slickhorn Canyon, the effects of Lake Powell take over the river. In 1984, this gigantic reservoir reached full capacity, nearly up to Slickhorn. When the San Juan met this slackwater section, it deposited tons of sediment. The original channel was buried and the San Juan changed into a wide, slow, shallow river. The current shifts and it's easy to lose sight of the best path downriver. Over these last 15 miles or so, the height of the canyon walls gradually declined until we reached open terrain again at the Clay Hills Crossing take-out at mile 83, where our Navajo guide presented Ann Marie with a souvenir necklace he had made. The beautiful Red House Cliffs overlook the parking area. There was an 11-mile drive on a dirt road before we got to pavement. We had to drive slowly, but that just gave us more time to look at

Monument Valley off in the distance. A wonderful end to a wonderful river trip.

## CARETAKER'S LOG

**Friday-- June 1, 2018**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 5.1    Water Temperature: 68**

The ferry is closed and will reopen on Tuesday June 5 if the river goes down.

**Tuesday-- June 5, 2018**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 12.38    Water Temperature: 68**

More rain and more flooding. I used to be such an optimist.

Actually we are very lucky in many ways. The flooding today is bad but it could have been worse, like we've seen in years past. I don't want to jinx it but the river has not gotten into the building in 22 years.

This current flood is mostly just an inconvenience and a drag because of all the work it's going to take to get the boats bailed and back on the racks. Plus, we'll have to restring the bell rope and the ferry rope, again. I was forced to cut both lines when a giant tree got snagged on them. And of course, there will be mud. Let's hope we get a few sunny days to dry things out.

It was pretty crazy yesterday, getting ready for the flood. I don't know why it always seems to flood when I go away on vacation and I was up in Ohio on Sunday when they confirmed the flooding. We rushed back on Sunday night but the rain was horrid so we stopped near Pittsburgh. By the time we arrived at the ferry landing it was after one o'clock on Monday afternoon and the river was over ten feet. Mary was with me to send me off but she stayed on the mainland. It's a little intimidating when you stand at the steps and it seems like the river is at eye level and the ferry rope is six inches above the river, but no worries, I've done the crossing many times in high water and it's never as bad as it looks.

I bailed out the canoe that I had locked up on the steps, loaded my supplies, and shoved off. I paddled straight out past the Sycamore before I turned the canoe to face upstream. The current was very fast but I was able to paddle across and get behind the eddy created by the ferry that was secured on the island and floating up into the trees. I shouted to Mary that all was well as I steered the canoe into the shade of the Island and up toward the board walk.

We knew the river was going to go up before I left town, so many things, like the ferry, were already prepared for the flood. What I didn't do before I left town, since I really didn't think it was going to flood this bad, was tie down all of the boats. So, when I looked across the flooded lawn, my heart sank at what I saw. Two dozen canoes and kayaks floating from the bottom racks of the canoe shed and from the Club canoe racks, all floating around upside down and slowly heading for the main stem of the current on the far side of the Island. The funny thing was, we had just untied and restocked all of the canoes and kayaks on Thursday after the last flood we had. This is the kind of thing that happens when you get two floods in two weeks.

I quickly put on my waders, grabbed a whole bunch of rope, and jumped back into the canoe. I had to work fast because I could tell that the river was getting higher by the minute. I managed to lasso all of the boats and tie them off to trees. Then I went along and secured all of the boats on the second rack. By now the water was crotch-high and I took off the waders and jumped into the water to tie down as many boats as I could before the current got too strong.

That's when I heard the bell start to ring and I knew that the ropes were in the river and in the path of all of that flood debris roaring downstream. It didn't take long and before I knew it there was a huge tree stuck on the ferry rope and pulling it like an archer's bow. I paddled across the Island and worked my way around all of the floating trees and reached up and cut the ropes. That's twice in two weeks that I had to take down the ferry rope. Unheard of.

The last things I had to rescue were the bird feeders and I think the birds really appreciated that. They don't seem to mind that the feeder is so close to the house now. I guess we all have to adapt to the high water, and the tiny Island.

The song birds are not the only ones keeping me company. Our baby deer is still here, and I saw the mommy deer too. I scared up the turkey again and the great blue herons are now fishing by the shed and by the deck!



**Sunday-- June 10, 2018**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 5.1    Water Temperature: 68**

We're going to open the ferry today so that we can have the orientation for the new members. The orientation has already been postponed once because of flooding, so we're going ahead with it today, and the river was nice enough to recede just enough, for us to have the event. Thanks river!

We might be closed next week so please come down today to help us put the canoes and kayaks away before I have to rehang the "ferry closed" sign. Thanks!

**Monday-- June 11, 2018**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 5.2    Water Temperature: 68**

The ferry is closed, again. What a bummer!

It looks like the rain has stopped falling upstream, but there is a bunch of water headed our way from Cumberland MD. The gauge at Paw Paw, WV, is cresting now (7 PM), so we'll get our crest in 36 hours. Around midnight tomorrow night.

Then we have to wait for it to slowly go down. Maybe Friday or Saturday.

**Wednesday-- June 13, 2018**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 6.6    Water Temperature: 68**

The river seems to be going down and things are starting to dry out around here. The recent floods have left the Island looking like scorched earth and it's going to take a lot of work to get things back to normal around here.

We did not lose any boats but there is no more yellow slide for the swim float and the "Calleva" dock that was marooned at the top of the Island has floated away too. It's funny, that dock arrived here during the flood of May 20, 2014 and was here for exactly four years to the day. Sadly, the dock that I made last year for the fish camp was not tied down well enough and was washed away as well.

The worst damage was to the canoe shed. Two gigantic Sycamores fell and one of them took out half of the roof of one of the sheds. One of the main supports was snapped by the tree and the shed will need to be rebuilt. The other sycamore fell across the trail to the bottom of the Island and that will need to be cut as well. So far, I haven't heard any plans to hire help, but I think we may need to get a builder and a tree-cutting expert down here.

We were lucky in that when the tree hit the shed it only crushed two boats. One was an old fiberglass kayak that was nice but had not been used in decades. The other boat was an aluminum canoe and it took a direct hit from the tree. Both of those craft will need to be taken to the dump.

It took a few hours and some hard work but I got the ferry rope and the bell rope back up. The ferry rope I used is a temporary one that was donated by Geoff, our tree expert. I will be stringing a new rope that I bought, once the river settles down. I've started to clear the other boats from the damaged shed and I've started sawing away at the branches and broken parts of the shed. It's slow going but I'm starting to get things cleared away so we can use the sheds again.

We are definitely going to have to organize a work day to fix this place up. Hopefully the river will go down and we can get a group of volunteers here on this Sunday.

The monthly meeting will be held at John Nobles house tonight at 8:00. I'm not sure I can make it. Canoeing home in the dark in high water isn't really my thing.

**Friday-- June 15, 2018**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 5.5    Water Temperature: 68**

The ferry is closed today but we are planning to have full service tomorrow. The water will be

high, so please help the relief caretakers if you can. Also, please come down on Sunday between noon and 3 and help us to clean up some of the extensive flood damage and get the canoes back on the racks. Thanks.

**Thursday-- June 21, 2018**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 4.2    Water Temperature: 77**

Happy Summer Solstice! Normally it would be time to celebrate all of the river fun at Sycamore Island but sadly, it keeps on raining, and the river is still muddy brown and we may have to close the ferry because of more flooding.



Photos by Mark Friedrichs

Thanks to all of the enthusiastic volunteers that we had here on Sunday. We really got a lot done. So much in fact that I couldn't assign the chores fast enough. We accomplished a lot but there is still more work to be done. I want to take the damaged canoe and sheet metal to the scape yard but we need to remove the rest of the damaged metal roof before I make that trip. Also, I fired up the chain saw and now there are many cut-up logs that need to be moved and stacked. There is trash scattered everywhere, here and on the upper Island, and that will need to be collected and added to the pile that we will have to take to the dump. We also need to remove the old bolts from the salvaged parts of the canoe shed so that we can reuse them.

Turning my attention to the lawn. Now that it's not raining and the river has gone down, maybe I can catch up on the grass-cutting. It's getting pretty bushy out there, and yet some areas are still too muddy and soft to push the mower through.

**Friday-- June 22, 2018**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 4.8    Water Temperature: 77**

We're open on this rainy Friday and some folks are here for a first-day-of-summer, wet canoe trip. It's smart to come here today, rain or no rain, because it looks like the ferry may be closed all weekend on account of the high water.

**Saturday-- June 23, 2018**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 5.3    Water Temperature: 77**

The ferry is closed today.

## The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same. . .

From the September 1922 Sycamore Islander, Vol. 2, No. 4 — [as discovered by Karen Possner, Archivist]

“A keen study of politics at Sycamore brought us to the conclusion that there are three political parties on the Island, except when there’s a wo[rk] fest. The First Party is composed of those who never do any work on the Island: they’re absent when a wo[rk] fest is due; the Second Party is composed of those who claim that we “don’t work as hard as they used to”; and the Third Party is made up of those who do the work.”

## Minutes for June 13, 2018 Meeting of the Sycamore Island Club

**Attending:** Ned Goddard, Florian Kogelnick, Anne Waidmann, Richard Bertaut, Angela Hirsch, Mark Friedrichs, David Winer, Sherry Fizdale, Marianne Ross, Margaret Bakry, Tryon Wells, Laurence Heilman, Gerry Barton, Stan Fowler, John Noble, Cecily Abram, Judy Lentz

Meeting called to order at 8:15 pm by Club President Richard Bertaut.

Last meeting minutes approved.

**Treasurer’s Report:** Ned Goddard reported: Club liability insurance policy paid, water craft, i.e., ferry liability policy just received and will be paid, Club has \$170,000 in bank, expect customary spending between now and end of the year \$50,000, thus leaving a balance of \$120,000. Ned provided his objectives as Treasurer: Be vigilant, spend defensively to avoid expenses from negligence of maintenance, and make upgrades, such as replacing old furniture. Expects expenses from the recent high water, such as fallen tree clean-up & removal. Anne Waidmann added that the Treasurer will reimburse Island support purchases such as snacks for orientations. Other member comments: Do we have a long term capital budget? No, as needs arise, we fund it through a special funding that is developed. Will dues go up when the building fund assessment ends? Not expected to go up.



**Captain’s Report:** Stan Fowler recommended a thank you letter to the Park Service for quickly creating an alternate route to the Island from MacArthur Blvd., despite Park Service maintenance staff is 50% less than it used to be. He also noted with approval the work on the Island done by wait listers attending orientation of a recent Sunday. The ferry railings will be replaced. They will be supported by six metal stanchions constructed by Stan’s brother and finished with bolt holes by member John Stepko. Joe will install them. Stan also said he is looking into ways to further raise the tow line in high water and elevate the racks and roof of the canoe shed.

Gerry Barton recommended to the Captain that a high-water plan be developed that specify actions to be taken as the River rises to levels threatening the Island ferry and related equipment. (He noted that the ferry had been secured for high water with the front end of the pontoons facing downriver rather than upriver.) Cecily Abram asked if there were water quality reports for

the water by the Island. Stan noted that there are many water-related readings taken at the dam, but the readings do not tell us whether the water quality is safe for swimming.

**Action Items:** Richard will:

- 1) Write a letter of appreciation to the National Park Service thanking the staff for the prompt construction of a detour around the condemned trolley bridge. This path reopened safe access to the tow path and Island from the Sycamore Store parking lot on MacArthur Blvd.
- 2) Direct preparation of the high-water plan.

**Financial Secretary's Report:** Sherry Fizdale distributed the income collected report for the period January 1 to May 31, 2018. Total is \$112,900.79. The four largest revenue sources are:

Dues.....	\$94,923.23
Guest Card Fees.....	8,200.00
Application Fees.....	4,620.00
Initiation Fees.....	3,000.00

**Membership Secretary's Report:** (Included in its entirety in this Islander, highlights follow) Anne Waidmann reported that waitlisters at the Island for Orientation also dumped water from swamped and land-locked canoes and restored our picnic tables to their original pre-flood locations. Following the two recent Orientations, only six families have not attended the orientation for waitlisters. She also mentioned that the question was raised as to whether the criteria for Senior Membership (20 years) should be modified if a study finds that the growth of senior membership (which increases over all membership) results in overuse of the Island. Stan recommended we call Senior members "seasoned" and then asked who is using the Island. David Winer said that a study about 18 years ago showed less Island activity than expected. Membership numbers by category are: Regular 160, Senior 78, Wait List 60, Inactive 21, Honorary 13.

**Swim Supervisor Report:** Larry Hileman said the last Islander water safety letter was good and that a water safety alert should be in every newsletter. Stan thought a rowboat would be useful as part of our water safety equipment.

**Proposed By-Law Change to Monthly Meeting Day/Time:** Richard led a discussion of the request to change the meeting date and time, from Wednesday to Sunday, which was put forward with the hoped for benefit of including more members at the meetings, and making it easier to get to and from the Island for meetings, since the trail is tough going in the dark. This was a By-laws proposed change initiated at the May meeting. After discussion, a straw poll was taken at the meeting, and it indicated a majority of those present favored retaining the present meeting date and time (second Wednesday of each month). He will write a report for the July Islander on this subject and it will be voted on in July.

Respectfully submitted,

John Noble  
Vice President and temporary minutes taker

## Sycamore Island Membership Secretary's Report, June 13, 2018

Submitted by Anne Waidmann

On Sunday we our second very successful Orientation with 14 families in attendance to learn all about how the Sycamore Island Club operates, and to go over clubhouse, swimming and canoeing rules and learn how to operate the ferry and how to sign up for relief caretaking duties. Many thanks to Joe Hage, Richard Bertaut and Larry Heilman for helping out with this one! (Waiting list members are required to attend an official orientation in order to use their waiting list passes and to volunteer as relief caretakers, and before becoming eligible for Regular Membership.) There are only 6 families remaining on the waiting list that have not attended an Orientation. We're working with these members, and hope everyone will have an orientation date in our database by the time of our next meeting.

Last month, we discussed several ideas for making our lottery and waiting list procedures work better, and decided to establish a subcommittee to look into this. We plan to begin that process in the fall.

A question has arisen about the awarding of Senior Membership, which is available (at the option of the Member) after 20 years of Regular Membership. Because we may be anticipating a fair amount of growth in the numbers eligible for senior membership in coming years, it has been suggested that we consider phasing in an age requirement in addition to the membership requirement in order to keep our total membership relatively constant.

As of today, we will have the following numbers in all categories of membership:  
Regular 160, Waiting List 60, Senior 78, Inactive 21, Honorary 13

Proposed By-laws Change regarding Sycamore Island Monthly Meeting Date and Time:

In the May meeting, Ms. Dunham proposed that the By-laws be changed to provide that the monthly meeting be held at a more convenient day and time, to encourage more attendance and to avoid the hazards of the path to and from the Island in the dark.

This proposal was discussed in both the May and June meetings. A straw poll at the June meeting indicated the proposal would not pass. Thus, it was recommended that a poll of the membership be conducted on-line, using the app SurveyMonkey, and the results reported on at the August meeting. In the meantime, out of respect to the discussion to date, the following By-laws change is offered for vote at the July meeting:

Proposed that the By-laws provide that the Sycamore Island monthly meetings on the Island will be the second Sunday of the month at 4 pm.



Islander Editor: Mark Friedrichs; suggestions or contributions of content or photos welcome to [mark.d.friedrichs@gmail.com](mailto:mark.d.friedrichs@gmail.com)