

# World Enough & Time

***The Severn River above Annapolis has a destination for every boater and, for those lucky enough to live nearby, time enough to do it.***

**S**cene One: The sky is pale blue above a lazy cone of early morning cumulus, and I am in the galley carefully crushing saltines, which perversely explode into the air creating a fine fallout of crumbs that settle into the cracks and crevices of the stove and onto the cabin sole. It's a Saturday in mid July, and I'm mixing up crabcakes to be cooked on the stern-mounted grill at anchor this evening somewhere on the Severn River. ¶ Scene Two: Fall is on its way, and I am stepping onto the boat with a Trader Joe's bag containing the day's menu for a meal to be consumed on the Severn River: small tubs of hummus, pitted kalamata olives, sheep's milk feta and stuffed grape leaves. A *ficelle* of French bread sticks out of the bag. A ripe cantaloupe comes on board with me too. Unknown to me just then, it will spend the day quietly rolling up and down the galley floor as my daughter Kris and I cruise up the Severn to her favorite

***Jody Argo Schroath*** ■ ***photographs by John Bildahl***







**ABOVE:** Families enjoying a Memorial Day day at one of the Severn's many community beaches (left), on the water (right) and on beach and water simultaneously at First Island (below).

**PRECEDING PAGES:** A sailboat about to head under the bridges and to the upper Severn; and one of hundreds of idyllic waterfront properties on the Severn, this one on Chase Creek.

anchorage at the top of Hopkins Creek. Happily, we'll find its pungent sweet flavor undiminished by its peregrinations.

Scene Three: This time it's a weekday morning in late May, and the cockpit of the boat is still heavy with dew as I stand in the galley, orchestrating the construction of sandwiches—caraway-seeded rye bread, thinly sliced rare roast beef, finely cut onion and horseradish—for lunch with good friends on the hook somewhere on the Severn River.

Three scenes and three separate destinations, all on the same short river. I could easily have thought of more, one for each time I've taken a boat up beyond the bridges. And I'm a relative newcomer to this area. What about the others, the ones lucky enough to spend their lives along the river itself? And what about those others, perhaps a little less lucky by some measures, who spend their lives below



the bridges, but within easy reach? How many scenes and how many destinations could they compose? The Severn is that kind of river. Not that it gets much respect on the Bay in general. It's always all about Annapolis. But if the Severn gets overshadowed by the star power of its principal port, so much the better for the rest of us. We know beyond a shadow of a

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doubt that the Severn above the bridges, with its high wooded bluffs, deep creeks, pocket beaches, party sandbars, drowned islands and jaw-dropping homes, is one of the most beautiful, accessible and boater-friendly places on the Bay, east or west,

north or south. It's Ozzie and Harriet, the 1 percent, Robin Hood, arms dealers, Capuchin monks and a Paris cafe all rolled into one. And all you have to do to find it is slip beyond the two bridges. I do it all the time.



**T**ake Scene One, for example. My husband Rick and I have invited a few friends to come out for a late-day cruise on this hot summer Saturday. We could join the throng of boats in the Bay, sailing out and then sailing in, but instead we decide to travel up the Severn and search out a cool place to anchor before returning in the early evening. We set off at about 4, but the wind is fitful and the sail is painfully slow and hot. Eventually, we surrender to the ease of motoring, but stay out of the creeks, which are usual destination but now are likely to be

breathless and buggy. Instead, after we reach Round Bay, we head west, letting go the anchor along the north shore of Little Round Bay near Long Point, hoping to catch any soft evening southerly that may find its way in off the Bay. We get more than we bargained for. A passing squall briefly whips up the bay before passing rainless into the east. We put the crabcakes on the grill just as the sun begins its long summer exit and are through with dinner and bustling back home before the stars have time to take the stage.

The structure of the Severn River is straight forward, running northwest from its mouth for about 10 miles in a fairly straight line. The channel too is straight forward, running nearly shore to shore from its mouth to Indian Landing, always accepting the usual shoal areas around points. Where there are exceptions, as in a particularly large shoal off Brewer Point, the way is well marked. Along the river's brief course, a remarkable dozen or so navigable creeks shoot off to left and right of the main stem. The river's mouth is formed on the north by Greenbury Point, with its famous old radio towers and infamous long shoal—marked by flashing red “4”—and on the south by Tolly Point, with its equally infamous shoal—marked by flashing green “1AH”. This lower section of the river needs no introduction, as Annapolis Roads leads into Annapolis harbor, with Back and Spa creeks below the bridges offering shelter to hundreds of recreational vessels, both resident and transient, and Weems Creek between the bridges offering shelter to a good many more. You can follow the river past Annapolis along the Naval Academy bulkhead, then under the two fixed bridges—the Naval Academy and the U.S. 50/301 bridge—before it widens into Round Bay and Little Round Bay about six and a half miles upriver. Then the river narrows once again and makes a slight jog to the west at The Narrows. Here one finally loses sight of the bridges. Two miles later, the navigable river comes to an end, just beyond Indian Landing. It's a lovely run. The river and its creeks are bounded everywhere by high wooded bluffs. They are also highly developed with homes of every size and description, though many share their steep slopes with mature red oaks and towering tulip poplars.

Take Hopkins Creek, for example, our destination in Scene Two and Kris's favorite anchorage. It's late September, and the sun's bite is finally beginning to fade. Our Middle Eastern smorgasbord is stowed in the refrigerator, and our dogs are strapped into their life preservers. Kris and I head out of Port Annapolis into Back Creek and then make a beeline across the harbor to head upriver. We have only a few hours before we need to be back for dinner with friends. We won't have time to visit any of our other favorite spots, but that won't prevent us from thinking about them as we pass them by. I throttle back the sailing cat's twin 29s, and Kris raises the jib to catch the smart southeast breeze that soon begins to nudge us gently upriver. Perfect. Shortly after clearing the second bridge, we pass the first of the Severn's upriver tributaries, Cool Spring Cove. This small jewel on the starboard shore is guarded inside by a long rock jetty that juts from a spit of land on the starboard shore. A small white cottage, only a few feet from the water, nestles into a protecting canopy of trees that have clearly kept it safe over the years from storms galloping up the river. The depth going into the cove reads between 13 and 15 feet and about 9 feet going around and behind

BELOW: *The docks at Smiths Marina off Little Round Bay; and summer fun off the back of a Sea Ray.*



the jetty, with the deepest water to be found to the port of the 6-knot speed marker. Inside are a few homes, mostly hidden in the trees, and a few boats, including a battered old lifeboat. It is small. A boat could anchor here in a pinch, but not, perhaps, a very big boat. I had passed the cove many times over the years without going in because the entrance looked daunting and the dimensions cramped. Finally, on a chill fall morning while Rick and I were making a trip upriver in a center-console, with the mist still lying over the warm water, we decided to look in. We

were enchanted by the little cottage and the old lifeboat, and we found the entrance much easier than it looked on the chart.

Passing the cove now with Kris, I point to the imposing residence that looks down over cove's entrance and out the river from a steep bluff. That house was built in the 1920s by an arms dealer, I say, and then became a monastery for Capuchin monks. They left in the 1970s, and the house sat empty for 30 years, looking grim and haunting the dreams of fanciful young boaters who passed beneath its shadow. About 10 years

### Cruiser's Digest: Severn River

All Severn Rivers, including the Severns in Maryland and Virginia, were named for the River Severn in Great Britain, which rises in Wales and flows into the Celtic Sea at Bristol after a run of about 225 miles. The name Severn is believed to be of Welsh origin, but of a meaning lost to the ages. Like the British themselves, the name got around, though everyone else reverses the order, calling it the Severn River. In addition to America's pair, there are two in Australia, two in Canada and one in New Zealand.

The Severn in our story began its modern life as Ann Arundell River. Before that, it was undoubtedly called by a number of other names during its 10,000 years of

habitation. The names of the Severn's creeks were not standardized until the

beginning of this century, when the Severn River Association and several other groups sat down to the task. The Severn River Association, by the way, is the nation's oldest organization dedicated to the preservation of a river. It celebrated its hundredth anniversary last year. You can find out more about it at [www.severnriver.org](http://www.severnriver.org).

The Severn River below the bridges is chock-a-block with marinas of nearly every size and facility. But above the two bridges, there are only two public marinas: **Smiths Marina** (410-923-3444; [www.smithsmarina.com](http://www.smithsmarina.com)) in Browns Cove off Little Round Bay and **Severna Park Yacht Basin** (410-647-4450; [www.absolute-marineservices.com](http://www.absolute-marineservices.com)) on Forked Creek, above Round Bay. Both offer repair facilities, while Smiths Marina also has fuel, transient slips and a boat ramp.

The same things goes for restaurants—dining above the bridges is pretty much limited to cold drinks and ice cream bars at Smiths Marina and, of course, what you pack for yourself. As a compromise, the excellent **Severn Inn** (410-349-4000; [www.severinn.com](http://www.severinn.com)) is located just

before the bridges and does have some limited and definitely exposed docking. So if you go by boat, pick a nice quiet day with limited boat traffic, or drop the anchor and dinghy in.



ago, it was bought by the owner of Phillips Seafood, who reduced its 20-some monk-sized bedrooms to a more comfortable seven, with eight bathrooms, 11 fireplaces and a nine-car garage. It is now it's up for sale for \$32 million.

A few minutes later, we reach Round Bay. Since we're are heading for Hopkins Creek, which will put us in the lee of the land and therefore out of the wind, we drop the jib and motor west into Little Round Bay and south of St. Helena Island—possibly home to a speakeasy during Prohibition, and just as possibly not. Hopkins is a splendid little creek with a long sandbar closing off all but a small entrance channel. The deep water passes nerve-wrackingly close to the sand spit and then curves around behind it before continuing along generally in the center. The area behind the spit makes a fine anchorage—protected, but still open enough to catch a little breeze on a hot night. Kris and I,

however, proceed to the end, passing down the hallway of tall trees and cliffs to the little marsh at the end, no more than half a mile in all. It should

be late enough in the year to anchor here with impunity: not too hot and not too buggy. If it had been either one of those, we likely would have decided to anchor in Hopkins' sister creek instead. Maynadier (pronounced –deer at the end) and Hopkins share an entrance off the south shore of Little Round Bay, with Maynadier splitting off to starboard behind Mathiers Point.

*You can go up the same river, but have a different experience every time.*



The creeks curls around another point then opens into a perfect little bay, with depths of 8 to 10 feet and enough room for a small flotilla to swing at anchor and still not crowd the homes that populate the section of shore that is not marsh. Yes, here too there is marsh, so you can have your summer breeze and wildlife watching too. There is even a small slalom course set up

for waterskiing.

This early fall day, Kris and I have the head of Hopkins Creek to ourselves. With the anchor down, Skipper stands at the bow, whipping his head from side to side, as he watches a pair of blue herons chase each other over the top of the marsh grass and finally argue their way out

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*ABOVE: A Brewer Creek view of Sherwood Forest's characteristic dark-hued homes on the hillside. Below: youngsters battling it out in the shallows while the adults read and nap nearby; and a family kayak expedition getting under way.*



the creek altogether. Kris and I watch the birds as we sit at the table in the cockpit, making short work of the hummus and feta before settling down to our dented cantaloupe. We while away a few more minutes over our ice teas before pulling up anchor and motoring back down river. We arrive home in plenty of time for dinner.

That's the charm of the Severn. It doesn't take a lot of time to have fun. You can go up the same river, but have a different experience every time, depending on the time of year, day of the week, and choice of creek. What could be more modern? Or economical in these days of high fuel prices? Even landlubbers love a cruise up the Severn. They find it unthreatening and beautiful. Best of all, perhaps, they are not obliged to sleep on the boat! That's a very appealing scenario for the boat-owner in some cases, as well.

This brings us to Scene Three. The refrigerator is well stocked with roast beef and horseradish sandwiches when my guests arrive. They are dear friends from Ohio. They both grew up, went to school together, married and raised their children in the same small town, about 50 miles inland from Lake Erie. It's a gently rolling land of hay stacks, apples, strawberries, silver-queen corn and big-boy tomatoes. It has no boats. "We're game for anything," they tell me on arriving. But I know better—or at least I'm pretty sure I do. I've already decided that we'll go up the Severn and have a picnic. But first I feel obliged to give them a quick run up Spa Creek as far as the bridge so they can see Annapolis from the water—a thing everyone on earth should do at least once, I figure. We exit the slip with reasonable grace and head out Back Creek and into Annapolis harbor to avoid the Horn Point shoal. Immediately, a trawler the size of small iceberg jostles past us, anxious to be on its way. We roll over the wake it has left carelessly behind. Caught off guard, my friends are sud-

denly nervous and grasp the cockpit combing tight. I say something inane but, I hope, reassuring, and we settle down again. It's a busy day out here, but not terribly busy, because it's still early in the season. We pick our way through a flock of small sailboats and roll over more wakes before we turn to follow the Academy bulkhead toward City Dock. Fifteen minutes later, our tour complete, we are all measurably relieved as I turn left out of Spa Creek to follow the river up and under the bridges. Not that there isn't wake here as well, but it is more predictable, with boats either going up or coming down the river rather than going every which way. We have the sails up now too, which steadies the motion considerably. I can feel the tension easing with every minute. We have a beautiful sail!

### *Homes cling to the high bluffs that line the shore, nearly lost in the trees.*

Passing by, we look up Chase Creek, which is just beyond Cool Springs Cove. My husband Rick, who is not with us on this trip, loves Chase's split personality, I tell them. The creek's right branch curls around a small shoal and then squeezes through a narrow passage to open into a lovely small cove with a depth of about 7 feet. Homes cling to the high bluffs that line the shore, nearly lost in the trees. There's just room enough for a boat to swing at anchor, completely protected from whatever might be happening outside. The left branch, by contrast, is full of moored boats as well as Pines on the Severn's community beach and slips. One day, I explain, Rick and I watched a well-found sloop ghost up to the dock under sail, drop its main and come to a dead stop head to wind, perfectly positioned. Wow, Rick had whispered. Someday.

Passing Chase Creek, my friends and I run under the wind as far as the top of Round Bay—far enough for their first outing, I think—then turn into the wind and drop the sails. A long beat down-river doesn't seem like a good idea. I have them on my side now, and I don't want to lose them. Besides, it's already time for lunch. So I make a short detour to show them Little Round Bay and St. Helena before turning back. Along the leeward shore, where the deep water curves in toward shore at the former entrance to Brewer Pond, we pass a nice old Pearson with the anchor down, its occupant stretched out in the cockpit, deep in a book. They are definitely on my side now. This is nice. We round Brewer Point, staying well off to avoid the shoal and keeping flashing green "5" on our right, before turning into the entrance to Brewer Creek.

As we drift inside, I point to the right, where the dark brown homes of Sherwood Forest rise three deep in some places up the steep and deeply wooded hillside. This land was developed in the 1920s as summer cottages, I tell them, and was named after the Sherwood Forest of Robin Hood, as you might have guessed. They're certainly not summer cottages anymore, my friends reply, clearly impressed. We soon reach the end of the creek, so I turn the boat around and we head back out, turning right and then right again into the creek immediately below it—Clements. I continue my description: A second parcel of land was developed at the same time and located next door, I say, but this one was named Epping Forest, which is located near the original Sherwood Forest, so the Robin Hood thing works here too. But each is very much its own community, I continue, with governing organizations, and in Epping Forest's case, its own summer camp. Looking up, we can see narrow ribbons of road descending steeply from the homes along the top to the water below.

This is where we're going to stop for lunch, I tell them, pointing to one of the Naval Academy mooring balls in a small cove off the creek's southern shore.

I slip the engines into neutral and go forward to snag a mooring. The Naval Academy keeps these mooring balls on some of the creeks as hurricane holes for their boats, I explain. When they are not using them, they are available for anyone to use. Now, I say, if you'll open up the cockpit table, we'll have lunch. And we do. A light breeze blows up the creek from the river, and we pass a happy hour eating sandwiches and polishing off glasses of cold lemonade. It's mid-afternoon when we retrieve our line from the mooring ball and then motor back into the river. Reaching Annapolis harbor once again, we pick our way back across the busy stretch of water to flashing red "2E" and flashing green "1E", which mark the entrance to Back Creek, and home. We are all satisfied with the day's adventure, and the Severn River and two brand-new fans.

The Severn River's biggest fans are quite naturally the people who live there. Take a ride upriver any day of the week during the summer and you'll see them. Search the community beaches and you'll find them sitting in slingback chairs along the shore, watching their children splash and play in the water. Scan the hundreds of private docks and piers, and you'll find children and dogs playing and people fishing, sunning or reading. Watching three laughing little girls jumping off the swim platform of a docked boat on Chase Creek, one day, I thought it would almost be worth growing up again as long as I could do it on the Severn River.

There is an old cliché that if you sit long enough in a sidewalk café in Paris, everyone you know will eventually walk past. On the Severn, that Paris café is the fuel dock at Smith's Marina in Browns Cove off Little Round Bay. Hang around long enough and everyone on the river will eventually come by. On a summer day, the parade of boats coming into Smith's fuel dock seems unending. Earlier this year, Rick and I stopped at Smith's for only a few minutes, but it was long enough to meet four separate boats captained

and crewed by women who were out for an afternoon spin on the river, as much at home in their boats as their backyards—no doubt because they were one and the same. Smith's Marina has been in the same place in the same family since it was established in 1936 as a boat rental and bait business. This summer they are opening a grand new building for the ship's store, office and restrooms.

Epilogue: It's Memorial Day weekend, and I'm running late for a trip up the Severn. I'm so late, I don't even have time to do anything about lunch. But I don't really care. I'm going to make the trip with a colleague in his little 1960 runabout, which is painted bright orange and blue and has fins. The engine is not quite as old, a 75-hp Evinrude, but it's decked out in black and white racing checks. We are going to look pretty cool going up the river! He and I meet at Lake Ogleton, where we launch the boat, then head out across Annapolis harbor. We bounce and bobble across the wakes of a hundred boats. Everybody must be out on the water today, I think. Finally, we clear the bridges and the water smooths considerably. We begin to duck into one creek after another on our way upriver—Cool Springs Cove, Chase, Saltworks, Clements, Brewer. Every creek, every beach, every piece of the river is full of people and boats of every age and description. On Chase Creek, a family from Leesburg, Va., on a trailer cruiser is enjoying their own quiet swimming hole. On Clements Creek, *Caper*, *Winona*, *Ugly Duckling* and *Sunrise* ride on moorings. On Luce Creek, *Twill* and *Miss Trish Won* lie at Navy moorings while raft-ups are forming up nearby. Beyond Round Bay, we look up Valentine and Plum creeks then Forked Creek, home to the Severn's only eastern shore marina, Severna Park Yacht Basin. Forked Creek is also home to some very big houses. Out of Forked Creek, we turn north again and slow down to pass through The Narrows. Here the river feels like a set from

a 1950s live-action sitcom—Ozzie and Harriet with boats. Look, I say, there's Ozzie watching David and Ricky building an Optimist pram in the backyard. Harriet's probably down at Smith's filling up the family Chris-Craft.

Another mile upriver and we reach the islands. On First Island, a small platoon of runabouts is pulled up along the sand. This is a favorite rendezvous because the island is surrounded by deep water nearly to its sandy shore. Second Island, just off Indian Landing, is empty save for an old deserted cottage that is slowly toppling into the water. The remnants of Third Island can be seen beyond Indian Landing. Beyond Third Island the river shallows quickly, making a final turn before ending in the freshwater Severn Run. We circle First Island and head back downriver. It's time for lunch. We follow the parade into Smith's Marina. We walk into the marina store, and pick out two ice cream bars and a couple of bottles of water. It's a far cry from fresh grilled crabcakes and roast beef sandwiches, but it couldn't have tasted better. We climb into the boat and head back onto the river. The sun is hot now, but the wind we create as we speed downriver makes it tolerable. Reaching the harbor, we turn off to take a turn up Ego Alley, then pick our way through the anarchy of holiday boat traffic to Lake Ogleton.

As I sit at the ramp, waiting for my colleague to return with the boat trailer, I get to thinking about Captain John Smith. No doubt he was a great man and a prodigious explorer, but the Severn River is where he went wrong. Smith seems to have explored nearly every nook and cranny on the Bay, but he never went up the Severn. His mistake, I think to myself. If he had, he'd have picked out a homestead and settled down to live happily ever after. And right now, his great-great-great-great-grandson would be walking over to Ozzie and Harriet's house up at The Narrows to see if he could borrow an outboard for the old family shallop. ♪