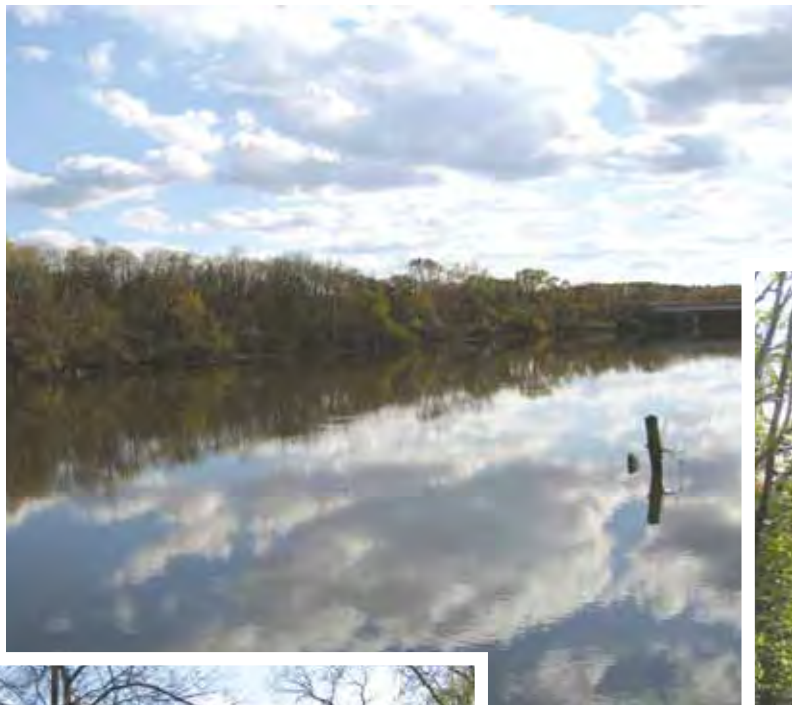


NEW
YOU!



The Anacostia River is a natural beauty.
RIGHT SMALL: The wooded trails of Kingman Island.
LEFT SMALL: The bridge to Kingman Island.

A New Nature-Filled Backyard for the Hill

Stretch Your Legs on Kingman Island

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY MAGGIE HALL

It's chilly, but the sun is out. You're desperate to get into the countryside on this Alpine-like crisp day, kick a few leaves, get a decent walk in, but time is not on your side. You can spare a couple of hours, but that's it.

Capitol Hill residents now have a quick escape that will transport them into a magic winter wonderland without the hassle of bucking the traffic or taking the best part of the day to get there and back. Kingman Island is now ready – and waiting – for visitors. Within minutes of leaving home, you can be getting that swift outdoor injection that so many of us require this time of the year.

A place where vistas of wide skies and tree-lined horizons combined with a wide, lazy river beckons. Such a spot conjures up images of places faraway. But nearby Kingman Island fills the need. Friends I showed photographs I took on a recent sunny Sunday thought I'd been in the Shenandoah. Only the occasional rumble of traffic over the East

Capitol and Anacostia bridges, the low rattle of the Blue Line Metro making its way to and from Addison Road Station, and the now and then sight of RFK Stadium and the skyscraper chimneys of the Benning Power Station, brought me back to where I really was.

Trails have been carved out of thick, creeping, crawling undergrowth, punctuated with wooded groves. All manner of vegetation and flowering shrubs abound. Honeysuckle in a sunny, sheltered spot is showing remarkable signs of beginning to bloom, and winter berries of many hues and types weigh branches down. A massive observation deck with benches is a wonderful spot to linger. Don't forget the binoculars – this is a bird-spotters delight.

The 45-acre island and its smaller 5-acre sister Heritage are manmade. The Army Corps of Engineers built them in 1916 with reclaimed sediment dredged from the river. The idea was to create a rec-

reational area for DC residents. It never happened. And while the dredging established a fulsome tidal marsh and wetlands, subsequent neglect over the years allowed nothing more than dull mudflats to take over. The island, which was connected to the mainland by a rickety bridge, turned into a megadump – favored by dubious contractors and uncaring householders. The migratory birds stopped coming, and the island with the grand name, became an abused blot on a none-too-pretty landscape, despite its governorship by the National Park Service.

In 1996 management was transferred to the DC Government, which drew up grandiose plans for a child-oriented theme park. Happily, Disney-on-the-Anacostia died a seemingly death. But it still took ages for the Anacostia tide to finally turn for Kingman. Eventually the Army Corps of Engineers moved in again and started clearing the island of its rubble and junk and restoring that area of the clogged river into a pleasing-to-the-eye, freshwater

tidal "lake," which in turn lured back the long-lost wildlife habitats. And now at long last, along with them the visitors.

Grand plans to turn the Kingman refuge into an attraction are on the city's drawing board. The starting point is a futuristic visitors' center, or to give it its proper name, an "environmental education center." A construction made largely of glass, which would stick out into the river, is envisioned. Meanwhile, Kingman Island is wonderful as it is, all wild and woody, with twisty paths leading to splendid, open views of the serene river, which is so peaceful to gaze on as you try not to wonder how contaminated it still is. And it seems there's no danger of the center intruding into this urban calm anytime soon. Design plans are still waiting approval. In the meantime, a brochure providing basic information and a map detailing the trails is available from a box as you approach the bridge.

If you go on the weekend, I can almost guarantee you'll hear the "shriek." At first you think you're hearing the primeval squalling of some rare wild creature that's found an oasis in the rushes of this inner-city wilderness. What's puzzling though is the sudden change in tone – from deep-throated warbling to in-pain clatter. The din became a real question that was not answered until getting back to the parking lot. The noise had nothing to do with nature – just a group of guys having small-time NASCR fun, with remote-controlled, very noisy, model racing cars!

Shortly they might have to find somewhere else to indulge their screeching, 70 mile-per-hour hobby. It's only because public access to Kingman Island is still in its infancy that there was room in the parking lot for them to race around!

To get there: take Benning Road NE, turn right onto Oklahoma Avenue NE, for the parking lot entrance. For information, call 202-557-1925. ★

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Dr. Sheila Samaddar is a local Hill resident and has been practicing dentistry for 9 years.



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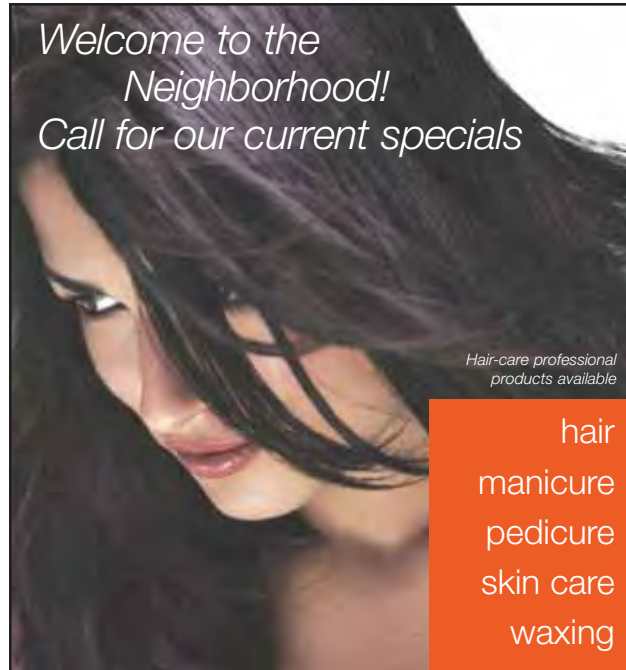
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