

Jewel of the Anacostia

Kingman Island, Once a Dumping Ground, Becomes an Education Center

Is it possible to take a big pile of mud in the middle of a river and turn it into a lively education center where kids can hike, do science experiments, watch wildlife and learn about helping the environment?

Kingman Island, in the Anacostia River near RFK Stadium, is becoming just such a place.

Kingman and its smaller sidekick, Heritage, are man-made islands. They were created in 1916 from sediment dredged up from the river bottom.

Since then, groups have sought to develop Kingman. Some wanted it to become a runway for small airplanes; one group wanted to build an amusement park.

Still others were waiting for another idea that would serve a large number of people.

Clearing Out a Lot of Junk

But first, the islands needed to be cleaned up. For years they were dumping grounds for all kinds of trash. Old bricks, pipes, bottles and paper littered the ground. Bushes and vines were so overgrown that it was hard to walk around.



PHOTOS BY ANN CAMERON SIEGAL FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Team-building: Katie Nuwayser, right, leads kids across a muddy patch of “volcanic lava” on Kingman Island. Behind her, from right, are Nailah Penic, Kortney Jackson, Kiara Jackson and Zack Nuwayser.



BY LARIS KARKLIS — THE WASHINGTON POST

Sizing Up the Islands

Kingman Island is 45 acres. Heritage Island is five acres.

How big is an acre? To give you an idea, a football field, minus the two end zones, is a little more than one acre.

For the cleanup, paths were created and tons of trash removed. A bridge was built connecting the islands to the shore. Future plans include building an environmental education center as well as docks for canoes and kayaks.

Recently, a nonprofit group called Living Classrooms of the National Capital Region teamed with Discovery Creek Children’s Museum to design hands-on activities in geology, ecology, wilderness survival, orienteering and wildlife studies.

Putting Kingman to the Test

This summer, students in fourth through eighth grades tested some of the activities planned for Kingman Island.

The kids worked on team-building skills such as figuring out how to get across a pretend bed of volcanic lava (actually a large muddy area) with just a handful of cardboard squares for stepping stones. They learned to read charts and use a compass to find their way, and then made maps of their course. And they discovered that animal footprints show up very clearly in mud.

In another exercise, the kids built doll-size boats using aluminum foil, two small sticks and a straw. Then they had a contest to see whose boat could hold the most pebbles and still float. (The winning number: 16.)



While on a hike on Kingman Island, kids find animal prints in the mud.

The students also created a trash timeline, using a string marked for time periods ranging from six weeks to 1,000 years. They matched various types of trash — including newspapers, styrofoam, soda-can rings and bottles — with how long each needs to decompose.

The fun activities forced the kids to use problem-solving strategies while thinking about their part in preserving the environment.

‘Learning by Doing’

Kingman Island is not open to the public yet, but families and school and youth groups can sign up for the educational programs.

The motto of Living Classrooms is “learning by doing.” One of the group’s goals is to teach children that “you can make a difference.”

A lot of people are working together to make a difference on Kingman Island.

— Ann Cameron Siegal



Nailah, Kortney and Kayla watch a passing Metro train from the bridge between Kingman and Heritage islands. The islands were created in the Anacostia River nearly 100 years ago.

There will be an island cleanup on Thursday, Nov. 15, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Some District students will be helping; others are welcome to join in. To sign up for this or other group programs, contact Living Classrooms at 202-488-0627.

