



SIGNALS FROM T•A•R•S•U•S

April 2002

Spring Salutations!

Let me start by offering our apologies once again for the delayed mailing of the last *Signals from TARSUS*, and the lack of *Despatches* accompanying it. As you will see from the accompanying mailing, the *Despatches* parcel finally did arrive – in mid-April! So we have sent them along with the proper accompanying publications for this mailing, *Signals* and (for Family and Junior members) *The Outlaw*.

Membership Renewal for 2002

In the February newsletter I warned TARS who had not yet renewed that they would not receive the April mailing if they failed to renew. As things were fairly messed up with the April mailing, we've decided to extend grace for one more mailing, so those who haven't renewed will still get the April mailing. But if you don't renew quickly, that'll be the last you'll hear from TARS!

Welcome

Welcome to Susan Davis and Hope Jensen.

Résumés

No new résumés this time. If you have not sent a Résumé please consider doing so. They make wonderful reading and tell us a lot about how our fellow U.S. TARS have found Ransome (and TARS).

Reprinting Articles from Overseas Newsletters

Currently the overseas newsletters do not appear in *Signals* except as excerpts on an occasional basis;

thus their contents are often not shared with the rest of TARS. Partly as a result of this, we (the overseas coordinators and newsletter editors) are going to occasionally publish articles or excerpts from other newsletters when something looks to be of interest to our constituencies. This means that I will occasionally be reprinting articles or excerpts from *Furthest South* (Australia), *News from Houseboat Bay* (New Zealand), *North Pole News* (Canada), and *TARS Japan News* (Japan).

It also means that if you have an article printed in *Signals from TARSUS* it may be excerpted or reprinted in its entirety in one or more of the other newsletters. If you submit an article and do not wish it to be reproduced in other publications, please be sure to tell me so when you submit the article.

Alas! No Lake Altoona Event in 2002

Jim Satterfield has informed me that he will be unable to have the Lake Altoona, Georgia TARSUS weekend this year. He does hope that this is a temporary interruption and that he will be able to have one next year, in 2003.

The Article File

My predecessors as Coordinator, Ellen Tillinghast and Betty Jo Baerg, started keeping a file of magazine articles, etc. related to AR. These articles are occasionally sent in by TARSUS members; we announce them in the newsletter and make copies available to TARSUS members for the cost of postage and copying. We've never printed a complete list of the articles on file, so here it is. If you are interested in copies of any of them, please let me know.

RANSOME-RELATED ARTICLES

A Cruise on the Norfolk Broads
<1996; source unknown
A Day on the Broads
Cruising World, August 1986
A Japanese Beach Cruiser
<1996; source unknown
Arthur Ransome on Fishing
Reviews
AR's Gift To Me – A Trout
Cumberland News, October 1997
Bareboating on the Broads
Sailing, February 1997
Building a Second *Swallow*
Stuart Wier, source unknown
Cruising As A Way of Life
Small Boat Journal, August 1989
Enemy on our trail, me hearties
Weekend Telegraph, July 1996
Exploring the English Broads
Cruising World, January 1981
In Filthy Pursuit of Power on the Lakes
Cumbria, November 1994
How the Heather Looks
(excerpt, meeting Ransome, Lake District)
Joan Bodger, 1959
In Search of Swallows and Amazons
Review, Cumbria August 1996
King's Ransome (about *Peter Duck*)
Yachting Monthly, March 1999
Listing of Braille and Audio Books by/about AR
Library of Congress, September 1994
Mavis (Titty) Altounyan articles
Obits, 1998
Michele Landsberg's Guide to Children's Books
excerpt on Ransome
Piccolos and Ransomania
<1996; source unknown
Piccup Pram
Messing about in Boats
Poached Trout
The Guardian, October 1972

Queen of Windermere
(Lake Steamboats) <1996
Ransome's Lost Cruise
Racundra's Third Cruise review
Yachting Monthly, March 2002
Robert MacNeil's New Adventures
Globe, October 1995
Sailing the *Amazon*
Cumbria, September 1993
Signaling from Mars
Reviews
Swallows and Amazons Forever!
In Britain, August 1991
Swallows and Amazons Forever!
The Parents' Review
Swallows and Bolsheviks
The Times, December 1994
Where Fact and Fiction Meet
Cumbria, September 1995
The Wrath of Uncle Arthur
~1998; source unknown

A Word About Nancy Blackett

This article comes to us from Adam Quinan, a Canadian TARS.

Recently the Nancy Blackett Trust discovered that *Nancy Blackett*, Arthur Ransome's best little ship and original of the *Goblin*, was in need of some expensive repairs. Actually as the owner of a fibreglass sailing boat my observation is that wooden boats like Nancy are ALWAYS in need of expensive repairs!

There are three problems. They had to remove Nancy's engine, which is not the one Ransome used but a much newer one. Underneath the engine they found that the engine bearers or supports were in very poor shape and are having to be replaced.

Then they found some other problems, boat owners know that you should never start on repairs because every time you do, more and more problems are uncovered.

There are eight cracked ribs, up from the original discovery of three, these are pieces of wood like your own ribs which run up from the keel to the deck. They make and hold the hull stiff. Anyone who has ever cracked a rib knows how painful this can be, so imagine poor Nancy's distress, far worse than mumps! The ribs had been repaired before but the repairs are now failing and the Trust wants to make a more permanent repair. This involves removing the cracked section and replacing it with good wood.

However, this wood must be scarphed (or scarfed) into place which is not wrapping it in a woollen comforter but shaping the joins so that they bond with the original in such a way that the rib retains its strength. Well, while they were down there and had free access, they took a look and removed a keel bolt. These are long bolts used to keep Nancy's keel attached to the hull. Guess what, they found that all nine of these needed replacing too!

Peter Willis Chairman of the Nancy Blackett Trust says that these extra unbudgeted repairs will cost about £3,000 extra. The keel bolts alone cost £100 each and there are nine of them.

So could you please consider helping preserve Nancy Blackett so that TARS can continue to sail her? By joining the Nancy Blackett Trust, you can put your name down for sailing or sleeping aboard when you visit the UK. I did this in 1999 and it remains one of my enduring memories, both sailing down the river and sleeping in the bunk that Roger used. If you want to join the NBT, Peter Willis can be contacted at info@nancyblackett.org or Peter Willis, Sylvan Cottage, White House Walk, Farnham, Surrey GU9 9AN, UK.

Adam Quinan

You can learn more about The Nancy Blackett Trust by visiting their website, www.nancyblackett.org. U.S. TARS who wish to join the Nancy Blackett Trust, or donate to Nancy, can send their dollars directly to me and they will be transferred to the U.K. through our standard accounting arrangement with TARS. – Dave Thewlis, Ed.



PILGRIMAGE TO 'RANSOME COUNTRY' AN ADVENTURE EQUAL TO HIS BOOKS

The following article by TARSUS Janet O'Neill first appeared in the November 6, 1994 Redding (California) Record Searchlight, and is reprinted with their permission.

The gift of a book to a little girl opened doors to the imagination, inspired a Britain adventure and sparked friendships across the globe.

It was nearly a year ago, in the chaos of Christmas, that relatives had descended on my parents once again and littered their living-room carpet with heaps of torn-open boxes and crumpled holiday paper. In a dramatic gesture, Uncle David stuck his hand into one of the piles and fished out a pale yellow paperback that had been unwrapped, then tossed aside.

He peered out from under his cap of shaggy white hair, fixed serious blue eyes on the 9-year-old child in the room, and said, "Molly, this book changed my life."

Until then, we'd never even heard of *Swallows and Amazons* or Arthur Ransome. Nor could we see the extraordinary journey that had, at that moment, begun.

Swallows and Amazons, first published in England in 1930, introduces the Walker children and their sailboat *Swallow*, and the two Amazons, Nancy and Peggy Blackett. Ransome ultimately wrote a dozen books in the series, culminating in *Great Northern?* in 1947.

"What's wonderful about these books is that the children are very resourceful," Uncle David said, explaining that unlike many modern stories, the children act on the environment instead of the other way around. They sail, they hike, they camp.

They figure things out. Aided and abetted by a trusting mother, they're allowed to savor childhood and discovery, and travel as far as their imaginations will allow.

Uncle David's favorite child-character, appearing first in *Winter Holiday*, was Dick, a bespectacled, studious young inventor and amateur astronomer who had a sister named Dorothea. In his mind's eye, my uncle can still see the town library of his childhood and the desk from which a librarian directed him to Ransome's works.

Uncle David grew up to be an astronomer and marry a woman named Dorothea.

A new year

By the end of January, Molly had read *Swallows* and passed it on to her father. One evening we were invited to a slide show on Beatrix Potter's Lake District. But as we took in the glorious views of lakes, fells, downs and becks, our thoughts strayed to Ransome, the inspiration he felt on Coniston Water and how he wove those places into his stories. And we did the unthinkable. We began to plot a Ransome pilgrimage.

Swallows and Amazons had so awakened in us a sense of adventure that we began to see possibility in a journey that beforehand would have seemed impossible.

Possible is far from easy. Money was indeed an object. As we scoured our penny-pinchers' guides to England we spied a listing for a youth hostel in Coniston called Holly How. Now the farm where the children stayed in the Ransome books was called Holly Howe, so I wrote the hostel's warden in search of a family room and a connection. In March, Sandra Kruger wrote back to say she knew of no link except the similarity of names, and that the Arthur Ransome Society headquartered at the Museum of Lakeland Life and Industry in nearby Kendal could surely help with further inquiries.

We booked a family room for August and fired off a letter to Kendal.

The Society

At the end of April, on TARS (what the Arthur Ransome Society calls itself) stationery, came a letter from David Carter, Honorary Vice President.

"I am glad to hear that a gift to your daughter has sparked an interest in Ransome's work in you all," he wrote. "Someone once said they weren't so much children's books as books for adults which happened to be about children."

My husband wouldn't argue, because by now he was in a race with Molly to finish each volume we could get our hands on. We'd managed to locate a few more, but were unable to locate the entire set this side of the Atlantic.

Carter directed us to books about Ransome and identified points of interest in "Ransome country," and allowed that perhaps we could meet with a society member once we got to England.

We also chatted by letter with a woman who ran a bed and breakfast in Coniston. She told us her children read Ransome in school, and that she could put us in touch with his nephew after our arrival.

Across the sea

After arriving in London in late July, we tracked down the rest of the "Swallows" series in Charing Cross Road to complete our collection. Then we headed to the lakes, exploring southern England and Wales along the way.

"Do you know Arthur Ransome's books?" we asked our farmhouse host in Snowdonia National Park.

He laughed. "Of course," he said. "That's what got me into the yachting business before I moved up here to Wales."

In the Lake District, our narrow, Spartan room at Holly How Hostel overlooked a vast lawn that sloped downhill. Our second-story window framed the huge monkey-puzzle tree presiding over the grounds.

When our turn came to use the pay phone downstairs, we called David Carter. He asked that we ring him back an hour later, and when we did, he invited us to a TARS gathering two nights later at the Red Lion pub at Lowick Bridge, one of Ransome's favorite haunts nearby. Carter rattled off the names of members and officers who would be there, including "Dick Kelsall. Dick of the books." Afterward I turned to my husband. "Guess who'll be there? Dick. DICK! THE Dick!"

The Red Lion

At the Red Lion, Kelsall, Carter and their wives shared our table. We learned that when Dick was a child, his family and the Ransomes were Lake District neighbors. Ransome and Colonel Kelsall were fishing companions, and young Dick and brother Desmond were consulted on the stories and characters as Ransome wrote his books. They were also treated to Ransome's animated storytelling. Dick Kelsall remained a close Ransome friend until the author died in 1967.

When we told the group at the pub about our planned climb the next day, Kelsall's wife, Irene, warned us to keep our provisions away from the sheep.

"They're very cheeky," she said.

In addition to the convivial TARS members at the Red Lion that evening was the visiting Japanese contingent, many of whom were staying at Bank Ground Farm - the Holly Howe of the books - at the northeast end of Coniston Water. They adore Ransome, and sported blue-and-white club sweatshirts.

Kanchenjunga

The following morning, the weather cleared for the first time in a week. We skipped our traditional English breakfast for once and fortified ourselves instead with homemade ginger biscuits we'd bought at the bake sale at the village church.

The ascent up Coniston Old Man required an early start. The children made the same journey in *Swallowdale*, on Aug. 11, 1931, only they called the mountain Kanchenjunga. After a trek that took us past Church Beck waterfalls, old copper mines, Levers Water and the Pudding Stone, we reached the windswept summit at 2,631 feet.

A lone shepherd clambered after his errant flock, which seemed most interested in our lunch.

"They're very cheeky," he said.



There we saw the plaque, a tapering 32-inch slate slab put into place at the end of May to commemorate the climbing of Kanchenjunga 63 years earlier. "And to celebrate the life and work of Arthur Ransome whose books have given pleasure to people throughout the world, whose ideas have influenced their lives," the inscription reads.

An incredible awe silenced us as we stood there, on top of the world, Coniston Water at our feet, the Isle of Man in the distance. We'd come so far yet we felt at home.

Home again

We managed to leave the Lake District without paying our respects to Wordsworth or Beatrix Potter (save for a soggy trek to Hawkshead), but did travel across Coniston Water by motor launch to John Ruskin's home at Brantwood. One day back at the village, Molly and I visited Ruskin's grave in Coniston's churchyard. An elderly woman from the Ruskin Society was placing flowers there, which she does each week. She wanted to talk about Ruskin. I confessed it was Ransome who'd brought us to Coniston.

"Oh," she said quietly.

After leaving Coniston, we stopped in Rusland to visit Ransome's grave. A carefully folded paper crane lay at the bottom of the headstone. The Japanese had paid their respects, too.

Only days after our return to California, the letters from England resumed. David Carter sent greetings and books - "rewarding Molly for being so patient while the grownups nattered the evening away" at the Red Lion.

We also heard from TARSUS, the U.S. branch of TARS, and learned that membership on this side of the pond is more than 50, made up of sailors, librarians, students, university professors and computer consultants living as near as Eureka and Oakland and as far away as Florida and Vermont.



Our most recent dispatch from the U.K. arrived just last week, advising that the Ransome plaque had been removed to the safety of Holly Howe.

The journey continues as we read and reread the books, and as we meet and keep in touch with those people "of a like mind," as Carter once described it.

But perhaps Brigit Sanders, who also plays a role in the Ransome legend, put it most eloquently in a recent TARS publication: "... One thing I have realized in the last year is that TARS have now become a Community ... In a world where Communities seem only to disintegrate, for us to have created one, however small, is something to celebrate."



Feature Column: Ransome Readers Recommend

As Mary's not available (see below) and I've no time this time, we haven't any reviews for this column. Needless to say, I encourage the Readership to write a short review of a book you think young TARS readers would enjoy and send it to us!



NOT From our 10-Gong Contributing Editor Mary Wessel Walker:

We don't have a column from Mary this time. For a while after *Despatches* failed to arrive, TARS contemplated mailing *Signals* and *The Outlaw* directly from the U.K.; had we done that there would not have been an accompanying *Signals from TARSUS*. Consequently I told Mary Walker not to worry about an April article – and when we decided to do *SfT* after all, there was no time for her to submit her copy – especially as she is traveling visiting prospective universities. Hopefully Mary will return in August.



A Final Word from the Editor

I hope to include the map of where TARS members are in the United States with the next *Signals from TARSUS*, along with the yearly membership list. Again I'd like to thank everyone who sent in articles and columns in response to my pleading in November. But guess what? I'm out of material again.... and ready for more contributions. And while we're at it, how about somebody getting together a TARSUS event, since the Georgia event won't be happening?

Dave Thewlis, TARS U.S. Coordinator
P.O. Box 670
Trinidad, CA 95570-0670
E-mail: <dthewlis@arthur-ransome.org>

707-488-9978 (work, messages)
707-488-2049 (home)
707-488-2618 (fax)

