



## SIGNALS FROM T·A·R·S·U·S

December 2006

# MY FIRST KAYAK YEAR

By Rob Marshall  
West Florida

Having lived on the west coast of Florida for the best part of twenty years, and with a amazing view from my front room window over the Manatee Estuary, I decided it was time to get on the water once again.

So what to do to accomplish this?

I should, I suppose, have gone for a sailboat, but this meant getting a trailer, and I really wanted to be able to transport my boat on my car top.

Having seen some programs on TV involving kayaks, I thought this was something I could do.

So I booked a trip with one of the local outfitters.

This was to be on a local river to a Florida style restaurant, taking round trip about four hours. I inquired if this would be o.k. for a beginner, and was told “no problem.” As it turned out, I was the only one to have never been in a kayak before.

At first it seemed quite easy, but as the rest of the party started to disappear up the river, I became concerned, and started to speed up, only to find I had problems keeping a straight course, and ended up in the reeds several times.

Fortunately one of the guides, seeing my predicament, came back to help. She then proceeded to coach me in the right manner to paddle.

I did make it to the restaurant and on the way back found it easier. It was however a very long four hours. But though I was very tired, and the next day had the odd ache here and there, I was hooked.

So the search began for a suitable boat. I read that the best thing for a beginner was to try as many as you could. This I did going to several free demo days. I finally came to a decision—tempted by an offer on demo boats and the fact that the particular boats were manufactured in the



*First time in a kayak*

UK by P&H—I purchased their 16 ft Orca ocean model in roto-moulded polythene.

So after a brief trial run, I was ready for my first adventure. There is a county park near us that has an interesting launching place. It has a small low dock perfect for getting into and out of a canoe or kayak, unless you get it wrong in which case you can, depending on the tide, capsize into about a foot or more of water. (I have seen it happen, but kayaks can be tippy so it pays to do it right). Fortunately I got it right, and paddled off.

After leaving the dock I paddled through a narrow canal overhung with trees, then into a small lake, whilst looking for a small opening into a narrower canal lined with overhanging mangroves forming a tunnel.

Paddling this can be quite difficult as fallen trees and branches have to be navigated around and under, meaning one has to lie almost flat to get through—all the while being careful not to get one’s paddle hooked on a wayward branch. This I did a couple of times almost capsizing as I tried to paddle against a branch instead of the water.

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Signals brings neighbors together:

## 'WAKING' UP TO A NEW FRIENDSHIP

By Debra Alderman  
Mercer Island, WA

TARS has a way of bringing old sailors and AR lovers out of hiding and connecting people in amazing ways.

For our family, it has brought us some wonderful new friendships—most recently with a 'retired pirate' living about 2 miles from us across the "East Channel" between Mercer Island, where we live, and Bellevue, where Ted Schuchat makes his home on the shore of beautiful Lake Washington.

Ted saw an article I'd written in Signals last year and phoned me. From this beginning we've been thrilled to have developed a friendship with a remarkable and fun neighbor! Ted has been over to our house dinner a few times and we were honored that he attended our son Akiva's bar mitzvah this summer!

Last spring Ted graciously invited us come over to his house and rig up and sail his little boat *Wake*, which had sat unused for a few seasons and was feeling a bit lonely.

I thought I'd share some of these photos of our first day over at Ted's house last spring when we got *Wake* ready



*Cap'n Ted, Ableseamen Akiva and Moti, and a friendly native pitched in to get Wake "woken up" for a season of sailing on Lake Washington.*

for the summer season. We sailed her quite a number of times during our beautiful Seattle summer and fall and 13 year old Akiva (in the floppy hat in the pictures) has enjoyed becoming a very proficient sailor with this little boat.



*Moving Wake around to get her ready for her first sail of the season.*

# HOW TO MAKE A DELICIOUS HOT POT

By Elizabeth Jolley  
Portland, OR

*“Oh, thank you, Peggy. What is it? Hot-pot? It smells very good. You’re not taking it out on the tarn...?”*

*“On the tarn?” said Susan.*

*“I was thinking of another hot-pot,” said Mrs. Blackett. “It was once upon a time when I was young, and the lake was frozen all over....and a whole lot of us spent the day on the ice. A big hot-pot and a basket of other things were sent down to us from the house, and brought out to where there was figure skating going on in the middle of the lake. And the hot-pot was put down on the ice while the basket was being unpacked to get at the plates and knives and forks. And we all came skating along, very, very hungry, and found no hot-pot. Just a little cloud of steam drifting away, a pleasant smell, and a neat, round hole in the ice through which the hot-pot had that moment gone to the bottom of the lake.”*

*“What did you do?” asked Roger.*

*“Went without,” said Mrs. Blackett.*

*“What else could we do?”*

~WH

Mrs. Blackett may have gone without, but you can try some tonight! Traditional Lancashire Hot Pot is made with sliced potatoes layered over meat, carrots & onions (remember Susan prodding to make sure the potatoes were done?) In a farmhouse, the cook would have layered everything in a baking dish, added a bit of water to keep it all moist, and baked it in a slow oven for 6 hours or so. In the Igloo, with only a fire to cook over, Susan & Peggy probably adapted the recipe like this:

## Adventurers Wanted!

Have any adventures to share with our readers?

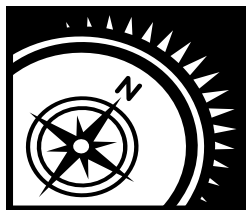
New insights into the AR books? Recommendations of great travel, reading and other adventures for us armchair travelers?

Photos, projects and other ideas are also most welcome!

Please send them to *Signals from TARSUS* editor, Debra Alderman.

dalderman@antiochsea.edu

**Deadline for the Spring 2007 issue: March 15th!**



## Hot Pot (AKA “Igloo Dinner”)

### Ingredients:

- 1 tin pemmican or bully beef \*  
cut into small pieces
- 3 potatoes, peeled & sliced in rounds
- 3 large carrots, peeled & chopped
- 1 large onion, peeled & chopped
- Water

### Instructions:

- Layer meat & vegetables in the pot.
- Add water to 1 1/2” deep.
- Layer potatoes over the top.
- Set over medium heat (to the side of the fire) & cook with a lid on until potatoes are soft; at least an hour.
- Sprinkle lightly with black pepper.
- Serve hot, preferably in a snowy place!

\*I had a hard time finding the right meat; tinned corned beef is mushy in water. Instead I used dried beef—firmer & salty; comes in thin slices, tastes better!

# FRESHENING UP YOUR LINENS WITH *SWALLOWS & AMAZONS*!



## LINEN SPRAY & LINEN POWDER

Our fresh and delicately fragrant linen spray and linen dusting powder are the perfect companion between you and your sheets. Mist our spray or wave a dusting of powder across your linens for total bedtime bliss.

Photo from House Collection 2006 brochure

Kate Crosby, frequent contributor to *Signals from TARSUS*, sent in this photo from a brochure she received for household items like aromatic candles, bath ‘fizzies’ and luxury laundry liquid. Kate writes that spotting a paperback copy of *Swallows and Amazons* in this photo featuring linen spray and powder “gave me a jolt!”

The question is—what exactly were the photo designers implying in this shot? Could they be saying that rooms that are typically filled with old books might need a little “freshening up?” Or are they saying that shpritzing your sheets with this stinky stuff will help you recapture the fantasies of your youth? That’s a question that will keep us busy pondering during the dark winter months when most of us will be spending a lot of time with our favorite old volumes stacked up by the bed. Thanks Kate!

To order, visit House Collection: [www.houseinc.com](http://www.houseinc.com)

# THE PLETTENBERG BAY SALVAGE AND SMELTING COMPANY

By Jim Wessel Walker

In the middle of the last century, before I went away to university, I spent each Christmas holiday for a number of years with friends at Plettenberg Bay on the Indian Ocean coast of South Africa. It was summertime in the southern hemisphere, so the holidays were long and the weather perfect. There were four of us, Dennis, Morris, David, and me, as well as some parents as kind and understanding as Mrs. Walker, the mother of the Swallows. They called us the kids. We called them the goats.

We lived in a white-washed cottage that clung to the side of a steep hill overlooking a lagoon on the right, a broad white beach with fishing boats on the left, and a rocky peninsula in the middle on which stood the Beacon Island Hotel. In those days the hotel was one storey high with broad verandahs and a green corrugated iron roof. Our cottage was named Upandown. A steep flight of steps led from the rocky, dusty, dead-end road to the first floor, just one room deep by three or four rooms wide. The steps continued up the outside of the house to the second floor with a large bedroom, a generous verandah, and a kitchen. The privy was a further climb up the hill.

There was no electricity at Upandown. I had the job of filling the lanterns each day with kerosene, which we called paraffin. I don't remember how Aunty Pat prepared meals for us, but suspect that Primus stoves were important. There may have been a wood-burning oven. One year Uncle Clack put in a paraffin-burning refrigerator. I still can not understand how burning paraffin could make something cold. Anyway, as far as I know, the fridge never worked. I have no memory whatsoever of bathing, but I do recall a shiny copper water heater that we fed with sticks.

From Upandown a rocky path led straight down the hill to the beach. We could see the cottage clearly from the beach and from the Beacon Island Rocks. The goats could signal mealtimes by hanging a beach towel out the verandah window.

When the waves were up we surfed. At first we lay on wooden boards about a foot wide and three or four feet long, but before long we learned to catch breaking waves without a board, swimming hard until the moment came to hunch the shoulders, pull in the head, and hold the body straight. We never saw anyone standing up on a big board. That sort of surfing had not yet arrived.

When the water was calm we turned to snorkeling off the Beacon Island Rocks. The underwater goggles we wore at first were too leaky to be useful, but before long we found facemasks that worked well. We tried to spear fish with a trident on the end of a bamboo pole, but the fish were much too fast for us. But there were spear guns at the Plettenberg Bay General Dealer, which also sold groceries, clothes, fishing tackle, paraffin, and petrol. These guns were powered by heavy rubber bands that could catapult a barbed steel spear, maybe a foot-and-a-half long, out to a distance underwater of six to eight feet. A light retrieval line connected the spear to the gun. With these guns we could bring home enough fish for supper nearly every day.

The gear cost money, but the sea provided. For decades anglers had been casting their lines off the Beacon Island Rocks and had been losing tackle when hooks, sinkers, or spinners got stuck underwater, caught in the rocks or snared in tangles of fishing line lost by previous anglers. When we arrived with our face masks, flippers, and snorkels, we found an underwater treasure trove. So we founded the Plettenberg Bay Salvage and Smelting Company. (Remember the Death and Glories.)

We gave up fish hunting for tackle hunting. Aunty Janet made us cloth pockets to hang from our swim belts. We would dive down to the rocks, cut free the tackle, and load lead sinkers and white metal spinners into these until we could barely float. Onshore we would empty our pockets and warm up in the sun for a while before going back in for another load, stopping only when we had as much as we could carry back up the hill to Upandown.

After supper we would retire to our downstairs lair, melt the old, dull sinkers or spinners in a discarded saucepan over a Primus stove, skim off the scum, and cast shiny new sinkers and spinners in molds that we had found at the store. Because anglers kept losing their tackle there was a ready market for our products.

I can now see that it was probably not a good idea for four young boys to spend their evenings crouched over a pot of molten lead, but there is no indication that any of us suffered lasting impairment. Probably our holidays were too short for that, or we spent too much time out of doors enjoying fresh air and sunshine. At the time it

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# FIRST KAYAK YEAR

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The current was against me but was not strong, and not a hindrance.

Finally after many twists and turns I passed under a bridge and just ahead to my right was a small opening into Terra Cie bay. Ahead was a small Island with another bigger one in the distance.

I decided, however, to follow the shoreline and soon found myself in a secluded bay. High on a tree I saw an osprey that had just caught a fish. It was holding it in its talons and tearing at it with its beak. On another tree was a group of Cormorants with their wings spread to dry.

Paddling on I saw a flash of blue as a kingfisher streaked along close to surface of the water. I hoped it would stop and perch on a branch so that I could get a clearer look, but it was gone. The water was very clear and I could see shoals of fish swimming around. With a kayak the paddler is very close to the water so it was almost as if I was with them.

I stopped paddling and just drifted with the current observing all around me, enjoying the silence broken from time to time by birds calling and the splash as mullet jumped out and back into the water. I paddled on finding more bays and exploring passages among the mangroves.

Finally it was time to turn back. I looked for the area that I thought I had come from. Then Panic! I couldn't see the entrance.

I knew then that I should have taken a compass bearing as John would have done. It should have been in line with the small island, but all I could see was an unbroken line of thick mangroves and a tiny bay. This had to be where it is, I thought. But no, I did not see it. I paddled up and down again, deciding to examine the small bay again. This time I noticed a small opening in the mangroves, I followed it through and once inside it opened out into the canal, a perfect hidden harbor.

I have done this trip many times since and the park service has made it easier to navigate by cutting back the fallen trees. I have had manatees pass right under me and surface close by, dolphins many times blowing a few feet away, and ospreys always hovering overhead.

On one occasion in a different location I spotted a Great

Northern (known in North America the 'Common Loon', which had no doubt come down to Florida to enjoy the sun and warmth. Dick would have been in his element~

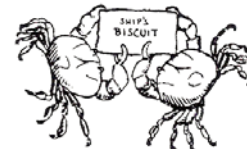
Another time a group of us went to an inland lake and paddled with the alligators. In a scene reminiscent of the old movies on Africa they would plunge from the bank as we paddled by. Then they would watch us—just two eyes showing above the water. One even swam under my boat hitting the hull with his tail.

One more joy was my 13 year old grandson saying he would like to try kayaking. So after taking him to a demo day he ended up with one too.

He is mad about fishing, and got me into fishing again. We have had many kayak fishing adventures since. But I will save them for another time.

*Rob Marshall's full resume is found on page 7*

## Peter Duck in Paradise



### Consider a TARSUS event in Florida!

This would be for a Winter Holiday with a difference, a chance to get away from colder climates, and enjoy some sun.

My idea would be to have a TARSUS event based on Peter Duck. We have palm trees, desert islands, crabs, crystal clear water. And should be able to throw in some treasure, I would look into using the Galatea as Wildcat (see my bio on opposite page for website).

At least for part of it and find a suitable island to camp on. This would be in '07/'08 fall, winter, or early spring. If you are interested or have ideas, contact me at: [rob4you@netzero.net](mailto:rob4you@netzero.net) Depending on the response I will work on more detailed plans.

~Rob Marshall.

# GETTING TO KNOW ROB MARSHALL

## Member Resume: Robin (Rob) Marshall of Bradenton W. Florida

No doubt electric lights have taken the place of paraffin lanterns.

I am a returning past member from 97/98.

I was born in London England, though spent most my life from the age of 4 on the South Coast around the Brighton/Worthing area.

In 1977 I moved to the US together with my wife and two children. We lived for a few years in Northern Virginia then to my present home in Bradenton Florida, just south of Tampa.

My Brother introduced me to the Ransome books when I was about 10. From then on I was an avid fan, together with a school friend who was as keen as I was. We explored the harbors and coast of the area trying to relive the books.

Our adventures sometimes caused consternation amongst the natives of some villages we visited as we tried walking down the middle of the streets as true explorers do. Fortunately the traffic was a good deal less than today's.

As I went into my teens *Swallows and Amazons* seemed less appealing as my mind was set on other things. This led to pretty much forgetting them until in 1997. On a visit to England I visited the Windermere Museum and I rediscovered the joy of reading the books again.

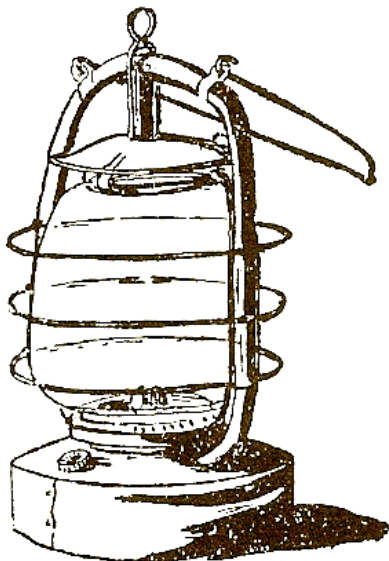
From the period when I was living in Virginia until three years ago, I had been involved amateur motor sports. But a bad accident on track, fortunately with no injury to me, helped me realize it was time to give that up.

I then obtained more of the AR books and began reading Tarboard which made me become a true aficionado once again.

Currently I am involved with a project restoring a 57 ketch the *Galatea* which is a replica of Joshua Slocum's *Spray*. This is to be used in a project called Aquarian Quest to educate children on the joy of sailing and the coastal environment. For more information, visit the website:

<http://www.aquarianquest.org/about.html>

I am also a member of The Traditional Small Craft Association and the Florida Gulf Coast Maritime Museum <http://www.tsca.net/FGCTSCA/> with whom I plan to



## Plettenberg Bay Adventures

(Continued from page 5)

seemed natural. Morris and David lived on the Big Ben Gold Mine in a country then called Rhodesia. I had spent part of my childhood with Dennis on the Master Cecil Mine also in Rhodesia. (Did Captain Flint or Squashy Hat ever visit Rhodesia?) So resource extraction and smelting came naturally to us and to the goats.

It is almost forty years since I last visited Plettenberg Bay, but I see on the web that it has changed completely. There are golf courses there now, and the Beacon Island Hotel is no longer unobtrusive and charming.

*Jim Wessel Walker, a retired Professor of Environmental Studies, is the father of Ten-Gong Contributing Editor, Mary Wessel Walker. He sails the Wildcat on lakes great and small in and around Michigan.*

# SAVE OUR SHIP!

## Northwest Seaport's Efforts to Preserve and Restore the Historic Tall Ship *Wawona*

By Debra Alderman  
Mercer Island, WA

Volunteers with the Seattle-based organization "Northwest Seaport" have been working tirelessly to save the historic schooner *Wawona* for decades but the future is looking grim for the wooden vessel that has been moored at the south end of Seattle's Lake Union. I remember the monthly shanty-singing gatherings that used to be held on *Wawona's* deck in the early '80s and sadly, it now it seems that the City of Seattle is ready to "leave her, Johnny leave her."

According to the Northwest Seaport's website, *Wawona* was launched at the yard of Hans Ditlev Bendixsen at Fairhaven, California, in 1897. The ship was one of the largest three-masted sailing schooners built in North America. "Today she is one of two survivors of the once immense commercial sailing fleet in the Pacific Northwest." The site states:

The *Wawona* was built in 1897 as a 166' bald-headed, gaff-rigged schooner to serve in the coast-wise lumber trade. In 1914, she began her 29 season career as a codfishing vessel. During WWII, she served the war effort as a military barge carrying lumber to the Boeing Aircraft Plant for airplane materials. After her retirement in 1947, she was considered for several ventures but became a heritage ship in 1964. During the past 42 years, the *Wawona* has hosted thousands of visitors and school children conveying the rich history of the Northwest and the tradition of the maritime trades.

The *Wawona* became a National Historic Site in 1970, the first ship in the nation to be listed on the National Register. Unfortunately the *Wawona* has fallen into terrible disrepair. The organization's web site states that "there is still a desperate need for additional funding in the race to save her from dry rot."

According to a *Seattle Times* article dated June 16, 2006, "The *Wawona* is in such bad shape that its three 110-foot masts were taken down in January, for fear they'd fall, and now are floating in the water next to the schooner. One can literally poke a finger into some of the boat's rotten boards, and some are plain missing."



*Wawona in her heyday sailing up and down the Pacific coast of the U.S. (Image courtesy of Northwest Seaport: <http://www.nwseaport.org/wawona.html>)*

Fundraising efforts over the years have fallen short of the estimated \$15 million dollars it would take to restore *Wawona* and make her a floating museum. According to the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, The C.A. Thayer, *Wawona's* sister ship and the only other remaining wooden sailing schooner on the West Coast, moored in San Francisco, is undergoing full restoration with significant federal government funding.

If dryrot wasn't enough for the poor old ship, on top of that, she was evicted from her moorage by her impatient landlord, the city of Seattle in early summer 2006. NW Seaport was given an ultimatum to move the ship by Sept. 30 or risk having her demolished. Multi gazillionaire Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen and the city are developing the entire south lake union area. The area where the *Wawona* has been moored is being turned into a park. It seems the city authorities believe that *Wawona* is not only unaesthetic tenant but she's also an unsafe neighbor.

But the city looked like it could be a compassionate landlord, too. Apparently the city council earmarked \$400,000 in the budget to help NW Seaport move the *Wawona* to drydock facilities in order to fulfill its own eviction notice. This would at least temporarily save *Wawona* from the proverbial wrecking ball and buy her a bit more time. A *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* article from

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# CITIZEN ACTIVISTS TO THE RESCUE!

(Cont. from Page 8)

Sept. 28, 2006 mentions that Seattle's Museum of History and Industry (MOHAI) plans to move to the former Naval Reserve Armory next door to *Wawona's* former moorage and the new city park and has committed to helping preserve and educate the public about Seattle's maritime heritage. According to the article, "the *Wawona*, badly in need of expensive repairs, has been proposed for future on-land display at the new MOHAI."

"On-land display" is the euphemism that museum and city staffers are using to describe what will happen when the *Wawona* is basically demolished, leaving only a bit of her on land to represent the beautiful ship she once was.

Apparently *Wawona* lovers had been confident that the \$400,000 earmarked in the city budget for removal of the ship to a drydock facility meant that it had another lease on life and would remain in one piece for the time being.

The drama began to get very intense in mid-November (2006) when local bloggers revealed to the public that the line item in the city's budget stated that "the Parks Department 'may' use [the funding] for cutting the ship up for display, essentially allowing Parks to potentially use public money to destroy a city landmark and one of the few ships on the National Register of Historic Places." <http://mhnblog.blogspot.com/2006/11/hearing-today-on-wawona-budget-proviso.html>

A letter and email writing campaign was hastily organized and a number of supporters turned out for the city council's budget hearings in November to voice their support for keeping the *Wawona* whole and the council agreed to protect the ship from demolition, for now.

According to Joe Follansbee, whose blog has been chronicling the saga of *Wawona's* trials and tribulations (see link, above), the city council "has approved budget language that prevents the Parks Department from using a \$400,000 allocation to dismantle or demolish the vessel. Instead, the money is to be used for preservation, restoration, or relocation of the city landmark." Not only that, but Follansbee reports that both the Seattle City Council and the King County Council are likely to each contribute significant funds toward a Maritime Heritage Initiative. So... a fairtale ending just in time for the holiday...but stay tuned for future installments of the continuing drama of the tall ship *Wawona!*

**FYI: Follansbee, project manager with the Maritime Heritage Network, has written a book about *Wawona's* history: <http://www.wawonabook.com/>**



*The Wawona has fallen into a sad state of disrepair and efforts to raise enough money to really restore her to her former glory have failed.*

## South Lake Union Showcases Maritime Heritage of the Pacific NW

An opportunity to view, tour and even sail or motor on fabulous historic boats and ships is right in the heart of Seattle on our urban Lake Union. For more information on the groups dedicated to restoring and maintaining these wonderful vessels or to learn how you can sail some of them, visit the web links below:

### Maritime Heritage Network

<http://www.maritimeheritage.net/>

### Center for Wooden Boats

(boat building classes and rentals of traditional wooden rowing and sailing dinghies)

<http://www.cwb.org/>

### Northwest Schooner Society

(historic schooner *Zodiac*)

<http://www.nwschooner.org/>

### The Virginia V Foundation

(historic steam ship *Virginia V*)

<http://www.virginiav.org/>

### Sound Experience

(historic schooner *Adventuress*)

<http://www.soundexp.org/>

### Northwest Seaport

(in addition to *Wawona*, the group owns the historic wooden tug *Arthur Foss*, 1906 lightship *Swiftsure* and other vessels.)

<http://www.nwseaport.org/>

# MISDIRECTION IN GREAT NORTHERN?

By Tom Napier

A unique feature of *Great Northern?* is its preface. To save readers scurrying off to look it up, let me quote it in full:

"Every effort has been made (short of falsifying the course of events) to prevent the inquisitive reader from learning the exact place where the *Sea Bear* was scrubbed and the Ship's Naturalist made his discovery. Persons who pester the author for more information (whether or not they enclose stamped envelopes with their letters) will not be answered. Further, should anyone with particular knowledge of the Hebrides identify the loch where the Divers are nesting and be the means of disturbing them, they will make enemies of John, Susan, Titty, Roger, Nancy, Peggy, Dorothea and Dick, as well as of the author, who will in that case be sorry he has written this account of what happened."

Here Ransome has cleverly combined two aims, one practical and one literary. Stating that he won't respond would have greatly reduced the number of letters from ornithologists wanting to know whether his story of nesting Great Northern is based on fact. At the same time he increased the verisimilitude of the story. The events in the book did happen and Ransome's relating them could have real consequences.

Taken literally, his plea simply doesn't add up. By the time he was writing (1947) either the nest would have been long abandoned or a permanent colony of divers would have been established. In neither case would an incursion by small numbers of enthusiasts be particularly harmful.

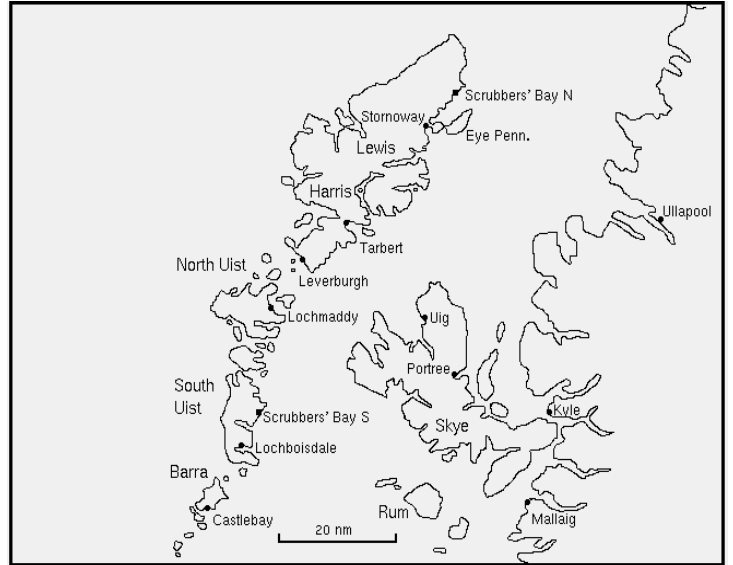
In his preface, Ransome refers to the protagonists as if they were still children. By 1947 they would have been in their late twenties and, having fought in the war, would have had deeper matters on their minds than the well-being of rare birds. He must be sticking to his original formula, writing as if he were reporting contemporaneous events. Such a preface would make perfect sense in a book written shortly after the events it describes when readers really could find the original nest and disturb the birds. Published a dozen years later its ostensible purpose is moot.

## The Writer's Options

Ransome implies that the hints in the book will not lead one to the true location. That said, he has three choices.

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*Could Scrubbers' Bay be on South Uist, 80 miles nearer Mallaig?*

He can use an invented locale, as he did in *ML*. He can borrow elements from several different sites, as he does in the Lakeland stories. Or, as in the stories set in the Norfolk Broads, he can use real places.

Provided plot exigencies permit, using a real and familiar location as one's backdrop saves a lot of work. Maintaining consistency is a good deal easier if one has maps, reference books and photographs available rather than one's own sketchy outline of an imagined area. The maps that appear in Ransome's books must have guided the author as much as the reader.

When basing a story on a cruise in the Hebrides it makes sense to make it match the real Scotland in outline if not in detail. Having warned us that things really happened elsewhere, Ransome was at liberty to use a real location as an apparent background as this would lead inquisitive readers nowhere. That said, nothing stopped him from using another real location as scenery for his story.

Suppose we take Ransome at his word. His descriptions point to the wrong location but someone familiar with the area could identify the correct loch. I shall presume that this will no longer arouse the enmity of the children who have all, with their maker, passed on to that great novel in the sky.

## Beginner's Entrance

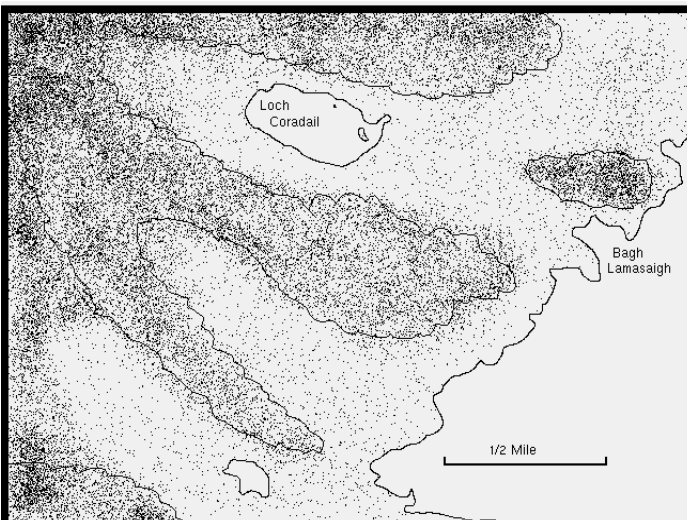
I did things backwards. In 1998 I toured the Outer Hebrides with my brother. I then read *Great Northern?* for the first time in some 45 years and speculated about where it was set. By 2002 I had formed the conclusion, on logisti-

## Great Northern (Continued from page 10)

cal and geographical grounds, that "Scrubbers' Bay" must be on the island of South Uist. The port featured in *Great Northern?* was, after all, the first and last port of call in a cruise around the Hebrides that had started from Mallaig. It made sense for it to be Lochboisdale, the closest Hebridean port to Mallaig that has a suitable stretch of coast north of it.

I did not then have Internet access (and still don't at home). Thus I only found out in 2003 that the conventional wisdom supposes that the port in the book is Stornoway, the Hebridean capital. I grant that the sailing directions to Scrubbers' Bay, the locations of lighthouses and of the cape that "looked almost like an island" match quite well. I might have noticed this myself except I'd ruled out Stornoway as being too far north to be the start of the Sea Bear's return trip. Since the outward trip mentions a stop at Portree (on Skye) I'd supposed that the tour of the islands had been made in a counter-clockwise direction. Stornoway would be the first port of call, not the last unless the Sea Bear retraced her steps. Tarbert, also mentioned as having been visited, would have been an intermediate stop on the way south. (Tarbert is a Norse word meaning "portage." The many Tarberts in northwest Scotland lie on isthmuses that boats were once dragged across.)

I'd also assumed that the route from the port to Scrubbers' Bay followed the coast. The route from Stornoway to the conventional Scrubbers' Bay candidate, Port Bun a' Ghlinne, rounds the Eye Peninsula (An Rhuba in Gaelic)



Could this bay in South Uist be the setting for "Great Northern?"

before covering some five miles of open sea. It would take longer to sail than the two hours Ransome suggests.

### A Hawk's Eye View

Port Bun a' Ghlinne, if rotated 90 degrees, more or less matches Mac's chart even to the road and the buildings. I could easily have visited it when I was in Stornoway, hence my annoyance at the order in which events fell out. Ransome may have been there.

On the other hand, its hinterland bears no resemblance to the Hawk's Eye view shown in the book. Lewis, the northern part of the main Hebridean island, is largely flat and boggy. It is occupied by farmers and sheep-herders, not deer-hunters. Harris, the island's more mountainous part, has no scenery resembling Ransome's views. For that you must look to the island of South Uist. The valleys that run west into the hills of South Uist resemble Ransome's Hawk's Eye view far more than any other part of the Hebrides. From south to north, his two valleys separated by a ridge could be Gleann Sheileasdail and Gleann Coradail. Only the former contains a loch but if one goes one valley further north one finds a half-mile long loch, Loch Coradail, that even has a suitable island in it.

Rocky bays abound and some occur in pairs. Scrubbers' Bay South could be Bàgh Lamasaign which is just below Loch Coradail. It has a hill and cliff to its north just as in Mac's chart but the ridge between this bay and Port a' Mhadiadh to its south is higher and broader than is shown in "Peggy at the crosstrees." Both bays are rocky, the near-by sandy Bàgh Usinis would have been more practical for beaching a boat.

The area abounds in "Pict-houses" and shepherds' huts but not Gael villages, the east coast of South Uist is virtually inaccessible except by sea. The loch and bays are a stiff five-mile hike from the nearest road. If Ransome borrowed them, he would presumably have taken the details from a map, as I did, rather than from first-hand experience. Perhaps some amateur pilot could provide us with a photographic Hawk's Eye view.

It was the prospect of exploring such inaccessible Hebridean byways by boat that reactivated my long dormant interest in sailing; I'm now reacquiring the necessary skills. Meanwhile I continue to ponder Ransome's intentions. I won't stake my reputation on Lochboisdale but to those who identify Ransome's port with Stornoway, maybe that's what he wanted you to think. After all, *Great Northern?* is full of decoys and red herrings.

## TIDBITS FROM TARSUS

### Signals needs you!

Thanks to the many new and veteran Signals contributors for submitting their creative, thought-provoking and entertaining articles for this issue of *Signals from TARSUS*.

**Spring issue deadline: March 15, 2006**

Contact me for submission format and length guidelines.

Thanks! Debra Alderman, *Signals* editor:  
dalderman@antiochsea.edu

### Welcome new members!

The following folks have joined TARSUS since the Fall 06 issue:

Christopher Locke, Adult, NY

Robin A. Marshall, Adult, FL

(Rejoin - was member 10 years ago)

Jane, Mark, & Elizabeth Miller, Family, CA

Kathryn Schuetze, Adult, NM

Janet Snow, Junior, NC

Kathryn Jane VanArendonk, Student, OH

### TARSUS contact information

Dave Thewlis is the TARS U.S. coordinator.

Please note his new address:

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McKinleyville, CA 95519-8028

[dave@arthur-ransome.org](mailto:dave@arthur-ransome.org)

707-840-9391 (work phone, messages)

415-946-3454 (fax)

### Resumes of fellow TARSUS members:

Dave says he can supply a complete new resume file to any TARSUS member who requests, but will have to charge about \$3.50 for it in printing and mailing costs. If newish members would like to share their "resume" or short biography, with all the current members, they can also submit it to Debra for publication in SFT.

### Fun With Semaphore—figure out the message below!



SIGNALS FROM T\*A\*R\*S\*U\*S

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## Amazon

### Publication 2007

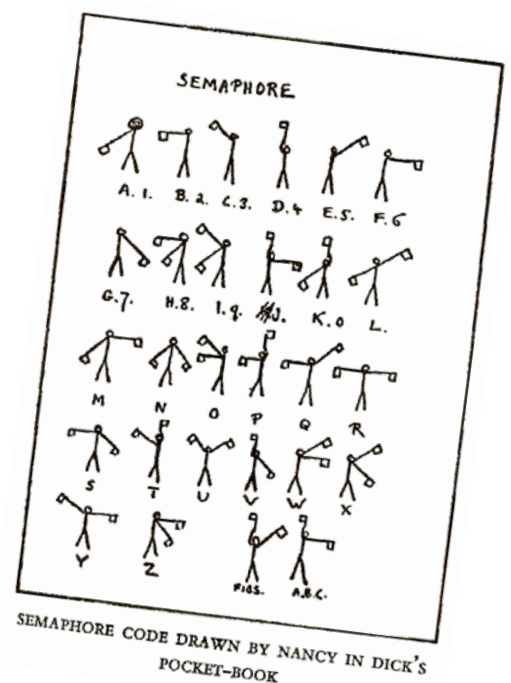
More than 20 years before Hugh Brogan and Christina Hardymont's seminal works, Hugh Shelley wrote the first serious appraisal of the work of Arthur Ransome and the appeal of the *Swallows and Amazons* books. In eleven short chapters such as 'The Holidays', 'Characters and Character', 'Forerunners, Fairy tales and Fantasy', 'Children and Adults' and 'Children and the Writer', Shelley became the first to analyze their amazing success, and the only commentator to interview Ransome himself and to benefit from his input.

The inclusion of Ransome's comments in his diary when he corrected the proofs, and the annotations in his personal copy will make the Amazon edition of Hugh Shelley's little-known monograph, first published by The Bodley Head in 1960, rather special.

*Arthur Ransome* by Hugh Shelley (96 pp, hardback) will be published (with the permission of the Random Century Group) for subscribers, at a suggested contribution of \$26 for overseas airmail, and will appear to coincide with the TARS AGM in May 2007.

To purchase this publication, send your check for \$26 made out to "TARS" to Dave Thewlis, the TARS U.S. Coordinator, and indicating on the memo line that it is for the 2007 Amazon Publication.

This price includes postage. Mail your check to Dave Thewlis (see address in column, left).



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