



SIGNALS FROM T•A•R•S•U•S

February 2003

Winter Greetings!

This is the Winter, 2003 issue of *Signals from TARSUS*, and accompanies *Signals*. You may remember from the last *Signals* that beginning with 2003, the February *Signals* will also contain the AGM planning information formerly in *Despatches*, which will no longer be a separate publication. *Signals* will now be published twice a year, in February and August. *Mixed Moss* will once more appear twice a year, in August and November.

Welcome

Welcome to new members Jerry Crouch and Terry Kirker.

Résumés

Thanks to Terry Kirker for sending in her Résumé, which you will find included with this mailing. 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).

Renewals of Membership

2003 Renewals were due as of 1 January 2003. About 2/3 of TARSUS members have renewed as of the beginning of February; of course, that means that 1/3 haven't done so yet!

*If you find a big black or red spot on this newsletter or on the address label on your packet, you have **not yet renewed**. Members who have not renewed by the end of March **will not receive** any further TARS mailings. So please renew now; don't risk losing your membership!*

If you are unsure of your membership category it shows on the mailing label. If you have send in your renewal and still got a sticker, please ignore it; your renewal and our process overlapped. Please contact me via e-mail, phone, fax or mail (contact information at the end of this newsletter) if you have any questions.

2003 AGM

The planning information for the 2003 AGM (23-26 May, in Shotley, East Anglia) is included in the *Signals* in this mailing. We included some advance information in the December 2002 *SfT*.

If you plan to attend, you can pay for your booking via the TARSUS Coordinator by sending me a copy of your completed booking form(s) plus a check for the required amount in U.S. Dollars. Please calculate the amount as £1.00 = \$1.65. See <http://www.arthur-ransome.org/ar/tarsus/bookinglimitedevents.html> for more information.

Upcoming Items from the TARS Stall

Ted Alexander, who runs the TARS Stall, has informed me that there are going to be some very interesting publications over the next few months.

A new edition of *Racundra's First Cruise* is being launched towards the end of March, and will be available through the TARS Stall. A book about Roger Altounyan is expected sometime in the spring, but we have no other details. And finally, a long-awaited new edition of *Old Peter's Russian Tales* will come out sometime in the summer. I'll put something in SfT as things are available, or you can watch the TARS Stall web page:

<http://www.arthur-ransome.org/ar/tarsstall.html>

Contact Information for New Members

We are no longer going to print the contact information for new TARSUS members in *Signals from TARSUS*. Each new member receives an up-to-date membership listing, and once a year (with the August mailing) all TARSUS members will still receive the TARSUS Membership Listing. If you need to reach a new member whose name you see in the "Welcome" section, please drop me a note or give me a call. *—Ed.*



The misadventures of a perpetual beginner, by Tom Napier

If I were to condense my status as a sailor into one word it would be "occasional." My interest in sailing was piqued by reading Ransome's books at an early age. I was given "The Picts and the Martyrs" as a Christmas present when I was eight or nine and felt an immediate affinity for Dick who shared my interests in astronomy, chemistry and electric bells.

I sympathized with Nancy and Peggy. The bane of my life was my father's aunt who lived with us as a combined poor relation and resident baby-sitter. I knew all about GA troubles, mine rarely left. I discovered the earlier Ransome books in the library and was introduced to the Swallows. They seemed like interlopers into the cosy relationship between the Amazons and the Ds. Somehow I never quite became attuned to them.

Although I grew up a quarter century later than Ransome's characters, and the Second World War lay between us, their world and mine were not so very different. I lived on the fringes of a small city and spent long family vacations in rural settings, lodging in Scottish farmhouses, camping by lochs and playing with the local children. Ransome's Lakeland environment and its natives were familiar to me even though I had never been there.

On vacation my father fished for salmon and my mother hiked. My sister and I had to find our adventures where we could. Alas, mine were mostly imaginary. I never had the opportunity to sail. Small rowing boats were workaday tools and sometimes available but in my youth 14-foot sailing dinghies were toys for the rich. We lived on a minister's stipend, our month-long vacations were only possible because my father exchanged pulpits with rural ministers. Still, I'd caught the sailing bug. Not only did sailing, with its vector sums, appeal to my young physicist's mind but I felt it was a skill, like riding a horse, that a well-rounded person should acquire.

Come the 1970s I was living near Geneva in Switzerland and working at CERN, the European particle accelerator laboratory. My lady friend and I joined the CERN yacht club and took our beginners' lessons on Lake Geneva after work. We soon learned the basics but rarely strayed far from shore. As the evening advanced the wind invariably dropped and it became a race to drift back to the dock before the light failed.

Our course was more thorough than the instructor had, perhaps, intended. One windy evening I found myself crewing a dinghy which was definitely about to turn over. With great presence of mind I grabbed one of the life-jackets lying around and concentrated on avoiding sails and rigging as the boat capsized. In April Lake Geneva is very cold. We'd had lessons in how to right a boat but I doubt if any of us had expected to put them into practice. We got the boat upright, got into it, bailed it out and, as we headed shivering to the shore, saw wind-blown life-jackets far in the distance, bowling end over end across the surface. Mine was the only survivor.

My friend and I often vacationed with Club Med and one year we visited a camp on the Moroccan coast. It offered sailing lessons so we signed on. There were three snags. Sailing took place in the open Atlantic. Before we could get anywhere we had to get our boat through the breakers. Lessons were given with six people in a dinghy designed to carry four. Our misfortune was to crew with a learner who weighed about as much as three normal people. Put him to windward and it didn't much matter where the rest of us sat. Even when level we had about three inches of freeboard. At least once I threw myself across the boat to balance it as the water surged to the gunwale. That year we gave up on sailing lessons and learned to ride horses.

A year or two later we vacationed at a privately owned camp on the Greek island of Zakynthos. It had a small dinghy which no one else seemed to want so my friend and I used it. It was a struggle to sail as it was determined to turn broad-side to the wind whenever it could, "lee helm" if I have my terminology correct. Going about meant forcing the bows into the wind then catching the sudden turn away from the wind on the other tack. Once we didn't make it all the way round. We'd already transferred our weight to the windward side when the boat flipped back onto its original tack.

Over we went but at least we knew what to do. Unfortunately, the boat had become completely inverted. The water was some ten feet deep and the top foot or two of the mast was deep in the sandy bottom. All we could do was to swim ashore and to wait for the boat to free itself. (No use waiting for the tide to float it off in the Mediterranean!) At least this time the water was warm.

A decade later I was living in Pennsylvania. I found a lake nearby where one could rent the type of dingy I was familiar with. One fall weekend I gave sailing another try. By this time I should have known better. Running before the wind was easy. Then I tried to tack back. That's when I discovered that the upper rudder gudgeon pin had worn almost to nothing. Make any serious movement of the rudder and off it came. Being a mile downwind in an unsteerable boat bears a distinct resemblance to being paddleless up the proverbial creek.

I put into shore, lowered sail and let my crew off to fetch help. As I made my way on foot through the shallows, towing the boat behind me, I kept thinking that at least Humphrey Bogart hadn't had to contend with the irate anglers whose lines I was crossing. I'd made about half the way back when the rescue boat arrived and I completed my return under ignominious tow. At least they gave me the rental money back.

Were you to ask me if I can sail I would probably say yes. Ask me, "Do you sail?" I'd have to answer "No." But, though my abiding passions lie elsewhere, I've never stopped trying. John might not understand but I think Nancy would.



Feature Column: Ransome Readers Recommend

This column presents short reviews of books which Ransome readers want to recommend to others, especially Juniors, and we hope that both Juniors and others will offer reviews of books which they think will appeal to Ransome readers. It has been such a short time (2 months) since the last Signals from TARSUS that I haven't received any reviews, however, so the column (cupboard)? is bare. To prevent a reoccurrence of this lamentable state, I entreat TARSUS to submit reviews for the column ...



From TARS Canada

In the December 2002 *Signals from TARSUS*, we published the first of the S&A quizzes from the Canadian newsletter, *North Pole News*. Here are the answers for the first quiz, on *Swallows and Amazons*, along with the second quiz, on *Swallowdale*. Three cheers for TARS Canada for allowing us to crib off their newsletter!

SWALLOWS AND AMAZONS - Answers to the Questions

ONE POINT

1.1 Jackson; 1.2 Matches; 1.3 Titty; 1.4 Pemmican; 1.5 Scurvy; 1.6 Grog; 1.7 Molasses; 1.8 Their clasp knife; 1.9 A centreboard; 1.10 He wasn't allowed to use matches; 1.11 Vicky (Bridget)'; 1.12 Chocolate; 1.13 Water lilies; 1.14 A blanket; 1.15 Sammy; 1.16 Cushions.

TWO POINTS

2.1 Darien; 2.2 A German Dictionary; 2.3 Spanish Ladies; 2.4 All of them; 2.5 Their fishing rods; 2.6 Worms; 2.7 James Turner; 2.8 Jays; 2.9 For luck; 2.10 Swam round the island; 2.11 A dipper; 2.12 By motorbike; 2.13 The Saucepan; 2.14 The sound of wind in trees; 2.15 His mother had been their mother's and their nurse; 2.16 Ice cream.

THREE POINTS

3.1 The Cutty Sark; 3.2 Force; 3.3 Drool; 3.4 A piece of paper with the message "If not duffers won't drown"; 3.5 Lat 7, Long 200; 3.6 Six; 3.7 Titty cut a blaze on the side of a hazel; 3.8 Pemmican cakes; 3.9 Ha! Ha!; 3.10 Marmalade; 3.11 Trying to bite the head off a little jade image of Buddha; 3.12 Siam; 3.13 Minnows; 3.14 "Honesty is the best policy"; 3.15 Hot cocoa; 3.16 "Leave her, Johnny, leave her".

SWALLOWDALE

ONE POINT

- 1 Who did the Swallows find waiting for them the first day on Wild Cat Island?
- 2 In the message they left on the woodpile on Wild Cat Island, what did the Amazons say they would be watching for?
- 3 What did Titty write in very small letters in the top left hand corner of the envelope of the letter she sent the first morning to Holly Howe?
- 4 What was the Great Aunt's name?
- 5 How did Titty and Roger cross the road above Horseshoe Cove without being seen?
- 6 What was the name of the rock that John ran *Swallow* onto?
- 7 Whose name was already carved in the rock of Peter Duck's cave?
- 8 How did Roger land the trout he caught in Trout Tarn?
- 9 What did the Swallows do when the Amazons attacked Swallowdale?
- 10 What did Titty use to make the image of the Great Aunt?
- 11 What did Nancy use to shoot the arrow with the message to Horseshoe Cove?
- 12 With what did Titty and Roger fill their knapsacks before the expedition to Kanchenjunga?
- 13 What did Roger see that caused him to fall off when climbing the crag on Kanchenjunga?
- 14 When they were all on top of Kanchenjunga, what was the "short dark line on the blue field of the sea" they could see forty miles away?
- 15 Which of the Billies did Titty find when she went for help after Roger had twisted his ankle?
- 16 What was Roger given for supper when he stayed in the charcoal burners' camp?

TWO POINTS

- 1 Why did the parrot scream at the message the Amazon's had left on the woodpile on Wild Cat Island?
- 2 What did John have hanging from hooks at the head of his tent?
- 3 What was the first thing John brought up from the wrecked *Swallow*?
- 4 What was the name of Captain Flint's book, published from the notes Titty had found the year before?
- 5 What was Mary Swainson doing when Titty and Roger first went with Peggy to get milk from at Swainson's farm?
- 6 What did old Mrs Swainson spend much of her time doing?

- 7 What did Roger and Peggy do to the seed cake soaked in the shipwreck to make it edible?
- 8 What was the first thing Susan did once the Swallows had decided to move to Swallowdale?
- 9 When they shifted camp to Swallowdale, who went under the bridge instead of across the road?
- 10 What holiday task was Titty studying on the Watch Tower Rock when Roger spotted the Amazons coming to attack.
- 11 What happened on the day the Amazons attacked Swallowdale to make them miss supper as well as tea?
- 12 How many times did Titty walk round the cave with the image of the Great Aunt?
- 13 Why did John go out into the rain at night in Swallowdale?
- 14 What was the name of the boy who brought milk to the Swallows while they were preparing to climb Kanchenjunga?
- 15 When the sailing party arrived in Swallowdale after the Kanchenjunga expedition, how did they know that no-one had been in the valley for some time?
- 16 What was it that Roger said "Anyone can eat ... any time.... They don't take up room like other sorts of food"?

THREE POINTS

- 1 What was covering the houseboat's cannon?
- 2 Mrs Walker's Australian nanny had a saying "Sleep like old trees and get up like young...." Young what?
- 3 Why did John tell Susan not to steer straight for the mouth of the stream in Horseshoe Cove?
- 4 Who did Titty imagine used the road between Horseshoe Cove and Swainson's farm?
- 5 How did Titty know, before Mother has arrived at Horseshoe Cove, that they were to be allowed to stay on that side of the lake?
- 6 When the Swallows stopped for breakfast on their first visit together to Swallowdale, how did Roger estimate the time remaining to reach the valley?
- 7 What did Mary Swainson bring up with the milk on her first visit to the camp in Swallowdale?
- 8 What was the first name of Mary Swainson's woodman boy friend?
- 9 What was the message on the outside of the arrow Nancy shot in Horseshoe Cove?
- 10 Under what kind of tree was the Amazon war canoe tied up?
- 11 What was the title of the poem that Captain Flint suggested for the Amazons to learn for the Great Aunt?
- 12 What did the Amazons call the point at which a low waterfall made the Amazon River unnavigable?
- 13 Who was the first to wake in the morning while they were camped half-way up Kanchenjunga?
- 14 Who was the last to wake in the morning while they were camped half-way up Kanchenjunga?
- 15 Whose names were on the piece of paper inside the metal box Roger found in the cairn on top of Kanchenjunga?
- 16 Why was John unable to time the start of the race between *Swallow* and *Amazon* precisely?



From our 10-Gong Contributing Editor Mary Wessel Walker:

In Which I meet another TARS

Once I read an article in Mixed Moss that speculated on what the point of having an Arthur Ransome Society is after all. I mean, what are we trying to do? There's only so much to be said about Ransome's life, only so much research that can be done on the Lake District, so why do we bother, year after year? The article responded to this question by saying that the point of this Society, of any society, is simply that we are building community in a world where community is more often broken apart. This idea struck me at the time (which was several years ago, so I cannot refer you to the specific article, reference the author, or quote the actual words) and has stuck with me ever since. In many ways it is very true. Here we are, part of a growing and diverse international community, linked only by the shared love of a series of children's books from the 1930s. But what we do is important because we have built a community, even while there seems to be less and less community in our world. And this is important. I have a story which, in my opinion, illustrates what TARS is all about.

Before I got to be such a busy person as I am now, I used to go frequently to read the postings on Centreboard, TARS' Junior posting board. I also often posted things myself. In February of 2000 I got an email from a girl named Carla who said she had read some of my postings and thought I sounded like an interesting person, and asked me if I wanted to be email pen pals with her. I said yes, because Carla seemed like a cool person too. She and I began to write frequent lengthy emails back and forth. Carla lives in Peterborough, England, and we



spent quite a lot of time trying to figure out one another's school systems. I remember her asking me whether American high schools are really like how they're portrayed in the movies! At first we also talked mostly about our favourite Arthur Ransome books and characters, but we began to discover other common interests. We both are huge fans of C. S. Lewis's Chronicles of Narnia, and we both discovered Harry Potter around the same time. At my encouragement, Carla read The Lord of the Rings, and became a fan long before the movies started coming out. We quickly became very close friends by way of these long emails speeding back and forth.

When my family began to plan for our trip to England in the summer of 2001, we made sure to include a visit to Carla and her family in Peterborough. We met them at the train station, and they took us to visit the famous Peterborough Cathedral. Afterwards, my parents and sister went on to visit some other friends in Leicester, while I stayed in Peterborough with Carla and her family for another day. That next day, Carla's dad took us to see Castle Rising, an ancient castle in the area, and then we went on to the seaside. It was a glorious day, and I treasure my memories from it. We built a sandcastle and wrote "Swallows and Amazons forever!" in the sand on the beach.



Since then we have kept in touch. Neither of us have much time for emailing these days, but we do see each other online and chat three or four times a week. I no longer consider Carla a pen pal: she's one of my closest friends! We tell each other all about what's going on in our lives, even though it's unlikely that I will ever meet the people Carla's talking about, and visa versa. We are making plans to see one another again this summer.

For me, this is what TARS is all about. People meet each other and form bonds, in some ways not unlike the bond between the Swallows and the Amazons, and this bond grows into a valued friendship. We need to keep TARS, and societies like TARS, alive and building these communities that are so rare and so valuable these days.

About the author: Mary Wessel Walker is keeping insanely busy at Bryn Mawr College, which is just outside Philadelphia. She doesn't know what she's going to major in yet, but it doesn't seem to involve getting much sleep.



A Final Word from the Editor

Start thinking about TARSUS events for 2003. And please send articles for the next *Signals from TARSUS*, due out in April. I would **particularly** like articles, book reviews, or whatever strikes your fancy from Juniors, and from TARS who haven't yet contributed to *Signals from TARSUS*. And maybe we'll all meet one day at a national TARSUS event – who knows?

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