



Signals from TARSUS

JANUARY 2010

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Ship's Papers--Important Information for the crew

A View From the Helm,

By Robin Marshall, TARSUS Coordinator

The last week some parts of the country and in fact parts of the world been closer to the North Pole in terms of the weather, than usual. Even here in Florida we have had the longest spell of what some might call cool weather, but to us cold, that I have known since living here; we are not used to having to clean a frosty windshield.

The UK has had exceptionally cold weather and looking at the Lake cam (www.lakelandcam.co.uk) it certainly looked like Winter Holiday, even parts of the lakes freezing for a while.

When I was a boy living in the south of England snow was a relatively rare occurrence much to my dismay at the time. During the few winters that I remember when we did have snow it was usually gone within a few hours. I had to wait until I was 15 and came to the US on a visit to my sister in Buffalo, NY to see a real winter and see people driving cars on freezing Lake Erie with little huts and people fishing through holes drilled in the ice. I had a real winter holiday that year and learnt to skate.

At Christmas I treated myself to a handheld GPS with the idea of being able to take my grandchildren Geocaching. For those of you not familiar with this, it is hunting for treasure (caches) with the aid of a GPS. I recommend you read the article in SFT June 2008 by Ike Stephenson for more details. So far we have had great fun, and the GPS comes in useful for my boating activities and can be used for hiking, driving, etc.

I am delighted to welcome the following new members:

Joining me in Florida	Chip Hines	Satellite Beach, FL
Elsewhere in the US	The Nelson/ Bucholz Family	Lakeville, MN
	Isaac Lewis	Goldendale, WA
	Deidre Iams- McGuire	Grass Valley, CA
	Craig Kenneck	Concrete, WA
	David Forman	Port Orchard, WA
	Andy Fisher	Evanston, IL and
	James Peterson, our new member in Mililani, Hawaii!	

We welcome you all aboard TARSUS!

Deidre Iams-McGuire, a junior member, has set up some polls with an Arthur Ransome theme on the official AR website: <http://arthur-ransome.org/forum/polls> Be sure to check this out and vote. Whilst there look at the other forums and contribute your opinions. These forums are for you the members, and your ideas and opinions can make a difference. Juniors have their own section and it is a way to get to know other juniors around the world; it is a safe and monitored, please use it.

Another junior member, David Forman, tells me that he has several friends who he is interesting in Arthur Ransome adventures; this is the way to spread the word.

Andy Fisher, who has had many sailing adventures, has contacted his fellow members in Illinois with a hope of some interaction with them. It is a good way to get to know fellow members and enjoy their experiences and thoughts on all Ransome things.

Finally thanks to all those who have sent in their renewals and a reminder to those who have not got round to it yet; we don't want to send out any Black Spots!

TARSUS & TARS Board Information

TARSUS--The Arthur Ransome Society in the United States:

TARSUS Coordinator: Robin Marshall robin@arthur-ransome.org
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US Members, please contact Robin Marshall with your questions, concerns or ideas--he will forward your e-mail or letter to the appropriate board member.

Signals from TARSUS editor: Elizabeth Jolley
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Please send your articles & ideas for articles for Signals from TARSUS to Elizabeth any time--she will publish articles when there is space.

TARS--The Arthur Ransome Society--Board:

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Australia: David Bamford
New Zealand: Dr. Peter Summers
Canada: Harry Miller
Japan: Tamami Nakayama

Friendly Natives—Short bios of members

Louis A. Springsteen, Westwood, NJ, sends this letter:

Dear Ms. Jolley:

I just received the latest edition of "Signals from Tarsus" and felt compelled to write to you. I was first exposed to the Arthur Ransome series when I was in grammar school, about 70+ years ago. After reading "Swallows and Amazons" I eagerly looked forward to reading more. Over the years I have purchased all of the books in the series and have been able to introduce them to my granddaughter, Mikaela Springsteen, who is one of your "Pieces of Eight" editors.

After she and her Dad read "Winter Holiday" together, they decided to construct a sledge, like the one that was mentioned in the story. (I bought that book for the price of \$2 back in 1934.) They adapted a sled, built a sail, and as the enclosed picture indicates, took off on a cold blustery day in ice-covered Peck Lake, in the New York State Adirondacks. What fun they had! Maybe you can include this picture in a future edition of your magazine.

We are grateful for all your efforts in keeping the Arthur Ransome name alive and encouraging the reading of his books to the generations to come.

And here's the photo!



Kanchenjunga's Cairn—Places we've been and things we've done

I Did Mean to Go to Sea, Chapter 4

By Pete O'Neill

After taking on six gallons of water we continued our search for westerlies to ride home on. The flukey easterlies soon dropped away altogether, so the skipper made the decision to use most of the remaining diesel and motor eastward toward San Francisco. We would save enough to run the engine to charge batteries for the radio and running lights.

By the next afternoon, our nemesis, the easterlies, returned and quickly built to 18 - 20 knots. As the wind started gusting to 25 knots, the seas steepened and started throwing our damaged boat around viciously.

At that point we decided we would tack our way toward San Francisco, carrying the starboard for 24 hours before coming about and carrying the port tack for 24 hours. In this way we hoped to get to the other side of the giant wind machine, or one of them. The problem was that even though we could make 100+ miles on each tack, we were only making 30 miles toward our destination per tack.

At the end of our second southbound beat, we heard over the radio of a boat at 42 degrees north reporting light westerlies, so we carried the next starboard tack northward. Unfortunately, as we nosed north of 40 degrees, we encountered fog and quite cold conditions, more than my light sweater and windbreaker, which the skipper had advised would be all I would need, could handle.

The westerlies never materialized, and the boat that had reported them said they had fallen away after about eight hours to be replaced with more easterly winds. On the positive side, we no longer had 25-knot gusts; it was pretty steady 18 - 20, but the fog was really becoming a problem.

We would sail in and out of banks with about 200 yards visibility, and took to sleeping with our life vests in case we were run down by a ship. We were so far north, we were off the coast of Oregon, but 1,500 miles out. Even though it was cold, I wondered if it didn't make more sense to carry on to the Straits of San Juan. In fact we heard that one boat bound for the west coast had given up and sailed on to Juneau, Alaska.

Then on the following morning, a ship appeared out of a fog bank near by. There was no danger of collision, and the skipper got on the radio to make contact. The radioman, with a Scandinavian accent, said, "Just a moment; let me wake the captain."

Within two minutes the captain, with a British accent, asked, "How can we help?" Our skipper explained that we were nearly out of drinking water and diesel. The captain told us that he could help us with both, especially the diesel as his Chevron Oil tanker had over a million gallons of it, and that he was bound from San Francisco to Taiwan. He also told us that he had heard about us from Coast Guard Juneau, and that he had kind of been on the lookout for us, which sent chills up and down my spine when I thought of the skipper's reluctance and my insistence on calling the Coast Guard.

The captain told us to hold our course, and he would make a big circle around us, and that, "it would take about five miles to bring this thing to a stop." That being accomplished, we motored up under the lee of his stern.

A sandbag with a messenger line attached to it came flying off the stern of the tanker,

but it fell in the water a little short of us, so we motored in a little closer, and the next time it landed squarely on the deck. We pulled down a larger line and tied it to a bow cleat, while the skipper stayed in the cockpit with the motor idling in reverse, ready to gun it if our puny wooden boat got too close to the mammoth steel ship.

Suddenly, the messenger line came back down, and the crew held up the end of a hose and shouted, "Water!" We pulled the hose over and filled our tanks and water jugs. What a relief. The crew of the tanker told us to hang on to the end of the line, and to loop the heavier rope through the handles of our six-gallon fuel jugs so they could pull them up and fill them.

While the other two crew members were busy dragging the heavy diesel-filled jerry jugs across the surface of the water and lifting them aboard, another messenger line was thrown to me with an old duffle bag secured to the end of a heavier line. They told me to keep the line taut so the duffle on its way down wouldn't get wet. In it I found a case of Coca Cola.

"Thanks!" I shouted.

"There's more!" they replied.

The next trip down revealed a case of beer, and they still weren't finished. Three more trips by that old duffle brought us some fresh fruit and veggies, a head of lettuce and a couple of tomatoes, boxed milk and juice, a frozen chicken, frozen hamburger and steaks, and some bread and hamburger buns.

I thought to myself, God bless you Captain Gulliford. And as I looked up I realized that most of the ship's crew was now gathered around the stern. I also noticed an oriental-looking man dressed in chef's clothing. He wiped his hands on his apron as other crew members were using their cameras and video cameras to record what for them was a most interesting diversion from their normal daily routine. I saw the chef waving, so I waved and yelled thank you as loud as I could.

We untied, motored away, and the ship's humongous prop began to turn. Before we even knew it they were on their way. Over the radio we got details about who to write to with letter of thanks. I could hardly believe what had just happened. We had water -- water, fuel, and fresh food for me to cook. We still had a long way to go, but everything seemed much more hopeful.

To be continued....

Participating in TARS events in the UK

By Don Rice

My son, Aaron, and his family live in the U.K. and provide me with an excuse to travel there twice a year. I usually time my visits to coincide with something else, such as the TARS biannual Literary Weekend, which was held at King's College in Cambridge this past September 11 – 13.

Brits like to complain about their deteriorating public transportation. Hah! Let them come here and try to get around without a car. Aaron lives in the tiny village of Lyminge, Kent, in the southeast corner of England. A bus passes by every hour or so, and I easily managed to get to Folkestone in time to catch the 10:01 train to London. My single consolidated ticket and printed itinerary took me to Charing Cross station, where I proceeded by the Underground to King's Cross. From there it was a straight shot to Cambridge. Nothing could have been easier.

Staying at King's College was a special treat, particularly so since it gave me the

privilege of walking in and out of the porter's lodge gate as if I belonged there, while dozens of other tourists from around the world could only stare enviously as the robed doorkeepers nodded and smiled at me while refusing them entrance.



The Porter's Lodge entrance to Kings College

I had originally booked a room in Bodley Hall, an older dormitory overlooking the River Cam, so I could experience a bit of Cambridge student life as I'd seen and read about it in books and movies. Because of a drainage problem we would-be Bodleyites were transferred to the (John Maynard) Keynes building – not as picturesque, but nicer and more convenient. The rooms were, as they say in the U.K., en suite, meaning having their own baths. It was like staying in a very clean, if plainly furnished, motel.

The Chatwynd Room on the ground floor, in which we registered, chatted with one another, and examined displays of books and other material by, about, or somehow related to Arthur Ransome, opened into the Keynes Theatre. It was here that we were regaled with lectures and reports from Friday evening through Sunday noon. I can only marvel that the conference committee continues to find entertaining speakers with something pertinent to say about Ransome and the Amazons and Swallows. I guess that demonstrates what interesting topics they are. A sample of lectures at this conference: "Mr. Ransome on Mr. Stevenson," "Arthur Ransome and His Imitators," "In the Wake of Evgenia and Arthur," and "Children's Literature in WWII."



A coffee, tea, and biscuit break in the courtyard between lectures

Our meals, starting with Friday's dinner, were included in the overall price, and I've never had better food at a conference anywhere. I saved only one of the menus – Saturday's lunch – but this will give you some idea of the quality of the entrees: a choice of grilled tuna nicoise with balsamic quail eggs, lemon and garlic backed poussin with coriander, stir fried satay marinated beef with capsicums, and stuffed Italian red peppers with vegetable rice pilaf and portobello mushrooms. There were many equally elegant "accompaniments." I have to believe this is not normal student fare, but a menu negotiated by the conference committee. The meals were served by a professional Italian staff in the Great Hall, a 3,000-square-foot, high-ceilinged, wood-paneled room lined with oil portraits.



The Great Hall prepared for dinner

After dinner we convened in the Keynes Theatre for a welcome from TARS president Gabriel Woolf, a short lecture, and a few other matters of business. At 9:45 those of us who cared to met in the college bar. The next morning, after a sumptuous breakfast buffet, we reassembled in the theatre for more discussion followed by the lunch I described above. Saturday afternoon was free, and I'd earlier signed up for a tour of the university library, one of many events being held that week in recognition of Cambridge's 800th anniversary. That evening there was a formal dinner preceded by a reception on the Back Lawn, an ancient and carefully tended broad swath of green that extends 100 yards to the river. We stood in the thin light making clever remarks while sipping from flutes of white and rosé wine served by the uniformed wait staff.

The best part of the entire conference, at least for me, was meeting the hundred-plus TARS members who'd assembled there. Everyone was pleasant and welcoming. I certainly never felt out of place. And it was fun renewing acquaintanceships from previous events -- the 2005 Literary Conference in Norwich and the 2007 International Annual General Meeting (IAGM) in Southampton, where I actually got to go aboard the *Nancy Blackett*.



Punting on the River Cam

The only catch, of course, is the expense. Flying to the U.K. and then traveling to event sites is not cheap. The cost of a conference sounds reasonable when priced in pounds, but tends towards outrageous if you're paying \$1.80 USD per pound. If I weren't traveling there to see my son and his family, I'm not sure I ever would have attended any events.

However -- if you can somehow find the time and cash to do so, I would strongly urge you to make the trip of a lifetime to the 2010 IAGM in Oban, Argyll, Scotland, that will culminate in a four-day visit to the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides – *Great Northern?* country.

The major difference between IAGMs and Literary Conferences is the presence of young people – it's always fun seeing girls in their red knitted Amazon caps -- and being able to leave your jackets and ties at home. These are occasions for adventure, not formal dinners. Some of the many planned activities include a full day excursion to Iona, dinghy sailing for juniors, and a cruise on Loch Etive, plus talks by four Ransome experts. Reread the details on pages 2 and 3 in the September – December *Signals* and give it some serious thought.

Cheers.

Scout Camp & AR

By Ike Stephenson

When I first got to camp I picked up a copy of the Boy Scout Handbook. My scouting background was minimal and long ago so I figured some catch up reading was in order.

Among the information about merit badges, the scout law, the scout oath, first aid instructions and gear lists was a quote from Robert Baden Powell, Scouting's founder. When asked about the Scout motto, 'be prepared', he gave an interesting answer:

"Be prepared for what," Baden Powell was asked.

"Why any old thing" he answered.

That sense of preparation and the anticipation of many opportunities struck me as quite an AR-ish answer as if one is prepared for any old thing then will not be a drowned duffer!

AR's characters sail quite a bit and so do scouts. Northwoods Scout Reservation is situated around Arrowhead Lake on the eastern part of Michigan's mitten above the thumb. Sunfish, which have a rig very similar to what Swallow and Amazon had, are used to teach the Small Boat Sailing merit badge.

Also at issue were medications. Many campers and staff would be minors taking medications of prescriptions basis. Handling these fell onto me. Did rambunctious Roger ships boy suffer from ADD? How about Titty and her always cooking imagination-perhaps she needed some anti anxiety assistance? What would Peggy have taken for fear of thunder? Would city kids Dick or Dorothea have had asthma issues that required them to put inhalers in their rucksacks?

I came to make cracks that we should put something along the lines of Ritalin/adderall in the water, load the dining hall ventilation system with albuterol. Since so many scouts took these meds life would be easier for me if we mass administered.

While the scouts would camp in tents I lived comfortably and privately. Amongst the amenities were flush toilet, private shower and air conditioning, as well as a stove on which to heat water for morning coffee and occasionally oatmeal.

Right next door was the dining hall and kitchen. It quickly became clear that nobody was about to go hungry. Several friendly cooks with facilities Susan would die for produced 3 squares a day. Foods ranged from eggs to pancakes to taco salad to polish sausage to goulash. A few scout troops cooked out but most made it to the dining hall for their calories.

Each day I tried to get out and circulate in the camp. In "Scoutcraft" basic skills like

using a knife, rope work, first aid and wilderness survival were taught. The scout handbook is fond of pocket knives saying they are about the best thing you can have. Scouts take knives seriously with concepts like a safety circle. You must master knife safety prior to qualifying for a "Totin' Chip" which allows purchase of a knife at the camp store. Others took fishing or mammal study at nature. "Handcraft" taught wood carving and pottery. On the waterfront canoeing, kayaking and lifesaving were learned.

Over the 5 weeks we had a pretty safe season. A separated shoulder and broken ankle were the most serious injuries.

A few scouts seemed not to realize that the Scouts' Law states "a scout is clean", and would forgo changing socks and foot care to get blisters.

It was an enjoyable interlude as we prepared to move from our long time Michigan home to North Carolina. Summer camp is as close to AR as many kids will get. I celebrated my 38th birthday while working at camp...a nice flashback all in all.

Sea Bear's Galley—Puddings, Biscuits & more

Two Mates in One Galley—How did Susan and Peggy Do It?

By Debra Alderman
Mercer Island, WA

How did Susan and Peggy manage to share the task of keeping their combined crew provisioned and fed? Two mates are usually one too many for the typical galley and figuring out how to sometimes lead and sometimes follow is a tricky task.

On our big summer cruise this year aboard L'Chaim two families who co-own the boat were on board. Each family had a mom, a dad, and a son. I've changed the names to protect the identities of everyone. My family, let's call us the Smiths, like things simple. We had to integrate, cooperate, and live in very close quarters with our good friends, whom we'll call the Browns. The Browns are fairly typical folks, but their mate, my good friend "Patty," seems to feel that a vacation just isn't as enjoyable without some serious cooking. She wanted to try new recipes requiring stocking the galley with quite a number of ingredients that I am sure we'll never need for anything else.

She also experienced a craving for freshly baked cookies as only she can make them (the ones in the many fabulous bakeries along our route were just not up to snuff, evidently). Each time we'd enter a grocery store when we'd be in port, I'd catch her trying to sneak flour and packets of baking powder into the shopping cart! I tried to explain to her that our minuscule propane oven had deteriorated to the point that it barely got up to 275 degrees (F) and then would often shut off after a while on its own. I tried to explain to her that we just didn't have the equipment in the galley for cookies, and then I'd feel like a jerk for being the gatekeeper of my friend's urge to bake!

On board I'm the kind of mate who knows that her crew values simple, filling meals which can be prepared in less than an hour. Patty, in contrast, apparently really enjoys cooking elaborate meals when she's on vacation. On our cruise, the gang was extremely patient on the nights when Patty was preparing dinner. She'd slave away for two hours, making a huge mess, only to produce a dab of rice and a dab of tofu and veggie stir fry per crew member. At 9 p.m. They'd politely eat their supper and then move on to bowls of cereal to try to assuage the gnawing hunger that remained unsatisfied.



Mate ‘Patty’ preparing a complex meal that will be underappreciated by the crew and will result in many dishes and crockery that will need to be washed up

On my nights I’d rely on tried-and-true crowd pleasers that I am able to whip up quickly and that don’t require lots of ingredients. But, alas, some of the canned soups contained MSG, the rice that cooks up quickly is white, and the veggies were not always organic. Patty has higher standards and our family lower, obviously. But short of making two totally separate meals for each separate family, how could we work this out?

The mates each felt a responsibility to make sure the crew members she was related to were taken care of. And yet neither of us wanted the cruise (to some of the most beautiful areas of Canada’s coastline) to ruin a long-standing friendship. Not to mention the fact that the two skippers on this trip, Mr. Smith and Mr. Brown are business partners. Somehow we had to parley on this and find some pax! But I just could not manage to have a heart to heart talk with Patty about all of this. I’m sure that would have helped. Instead, I took responsibility for working on my own control-freak issues.

I finally decided that I would stop trying to limit Patty’s drive to try recipes in the cookbooks she brought along. On nights when she felt like cooking, I stayed clear out of the way and simply offered to clean up afterwards. Some nights Patty and her hubby were off taking showers at the marina at the dinner hour and I would sneak into the galley and whip up a quick supper of pasta, mac n cheese, vegetarian burritos, etc. I would be putting the main dish, some steamed veggies, salad and baked potatoes on the table in the salon right as they’d be returning to the boat. What could they do but sit down and relax and enjoy the plain but filling meal?

There were a few nights that Patty suggested we all go out for dinner and I realized that the two boys, theirs is age 12 and ours age 16, would not appreciate the expensive restaurant food or the delay in being fed. I would quickly zip around the galley and make supper for the boys. Then we grown ups would leave them to go off by dinghy in search of yummy Mexican food and refreshing margaritas in Nanaimo Harbour or beer-battered halibut

pieces and Yam fries at the pub in the tiny Sunshine Coast port of Egmont. We got to enjoy a pleasant quay-side meal without our able seamen (the ones with the bottomless pits for stomachs), and the kids had a relaxing time hanging out back at the boat.



Mate Debra finishes cleaning up the galley after one of Mate Patty's cooking sprees

Even though Peggy and Susan seemed to cooperate and work together seamlessly, I can tell you that two mates sharing a kitchen and provisioning a crew is one of the more challenging aspects of sailing with an extended group. But I'm happy to say that by the end of the trip, both Patty and I had learned to compromise and appreciate the other's strengths as a mate. I admit that Patty came up with a couple of yummy ideas that I'll use again, and Patty found out that leaving her 12 year old home with a responsible teenager really enhances a shore-side evening out. Who knows—Patty may even have relaxed her standards a bit and I suspect she may be trying out some of my quick and easy meals she experienced on board during our cruise.

Postscript: after the big summer cruise we were all aware that the oven had been disappointingly underperforming for quite some time. We had an opportunity to buy a beautiful brand-new floor model stove/oven for half price at a marine store that was moving to a new location and trying to get rid of its stock. Mind you, anything that goes in a boat is going to be exponentially more expensive than things that don't go on boats. So the stove was still really expensive, but we decided it was worth it. After the guys installed it, Mr. Smith emailed the rest of us that it was ready to be used. I emailed back that Patty should be the first one to run down to the boat and inaugurate the new oven by baking cookies!

Two recipes from Summer 09 Cruise in the Canadian Gulf Islands and Princess Louisa Inlet:

Platter o' Leftovers

Inevitably there comes a time in a mate's life when she's told to put out some potluck appetizers for visitors or just the regular crew, or even some sort of dockside event. Members of our yacht club are rather competitive when it comes to putting out yummy stuff for the appetizer buffets on cruises. My challenge is that my tiny sailboat galley is a lot more limited than their spacious power boat galleys. So while a little planning is essential, the ability to be creative with leftovers and long-shelf-life stores is also very important. This past summer I discovered that a big pile of refried beans right out of a can can be a focal point for a platter of yummy nibbles. Here's how I do it:

Put a large blob of canned vegetarian refried beans (cold is fine) in the middle of a dinner plate or a slightly larger platter. Surround this blob with any or all of the following, or whatever leftovers you've got:

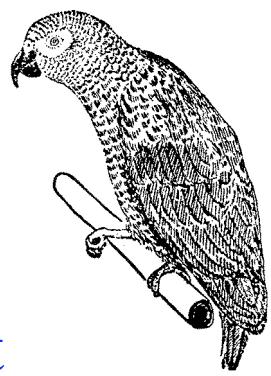
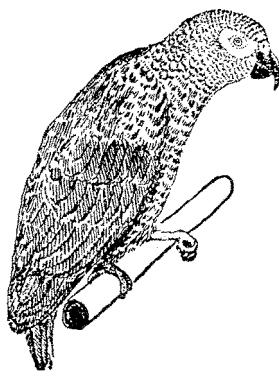
- Sliced hard boiled eggs
- Sliced tomatoes
- Sliced leftover baked potatoes
- Blob of guacamole
- Slices of cheese
- Bits of raw veggies or leftover cold steamed veggies

Serve with a bowl of salsa on the side and a basket of good chips. Put out little plates and forks and napkins to keep boat clean and discourage double-dipping.

Another idea I came up with to use leftovers and make yummy appetizers is to buy the chips that they are selling now that look like little cups. They can be filled with, for instance, leftover rice, topped with grated cheese, and baked or broiled on a cookie sheet for a few minutes to melt the cheese and warm up the filling a bit. Yummy little bite-sized goodies!

Breakfast

"Patty" found an idea for an easy cold breakfast that she and I thought a rather tasty and nutritious porridge alternative. You need to cook up some short-grain brown rice ahead of time (or use up leftover unseasoned rice). Rice stores well in a zip-lock bag, which is convenient for a tiny boat fridge or ice chest. In the morning when you're ready for breakfast, put a serving of about a cup of rice in a bowl and add a tablespoon or two of sweetened condensed milk and some raisins. Stir well. Could be warmed up, but it's fine cold. Quite filling and tasty.



Pieces of Eight

The Junior Pages

Edited by Jessika Hodgson, Mackenzie Reid, and Mikaela Springsteen

Winter Holiday Word Scrambles

Unscramble the words below:

1. OLIGO_____
2. ARMF_____
3. ECI ACHTY_____
4. IKTGNAS_____
5. THORN LOPE_____
6. UPMSM_____
7. INSLAG_____
8. REIWNT_____
9. MRSA_____
10. MTSORNOAY_____

Dot's Journal: **Ice and Simplicity**

By Jessika Hodgson

Cold. Really cold. My fingers are numb and my usually active mouth is practically frozen shut in the wind. Kurump, kuthump. Ouch. I struggle back up, rubbing my rump. Stopping a minute once I am on my feet, I scan the landscape around me. The sky is darkening with reinforcements of snow clouds. The foothills go from glistening to glowering. I set my jaw in determination and stiffly push myself forward once more.

I'm not in Narnia, the world under the enchantment of the White Witch. I'm not in Jack London's Alaska, fifty below, struggling to build a fire. I'm not even Captain Nancy, recently recovered from the mumps, struggling through the blizzard to save the D's. Although I am skating, skating in my hometown, on my hometown's namesake, Palmer Lake, in the Colorado state. Clunk, clunk, glide, clunk, clunk, glide. A simple pattern of movements with a simple result. A simple adventure.

I think it was, maybe, two, three years ago that my dad discovered the freezing of the lake. I couldn't skate back then. A couple of years later, I'm pirouetting and power skating... Well, okay, not really, but I can skate pretty well now, with a lot of practice and impatience (I'm the Nancy type, remember?). I still can't stop properly, but that's beside the point. What really matters is that from skating, I get a sense of perfect fulfillment, much more than when I finish and turn in a troublesome school assignment. Skating is simple, satisfying, and splendid!

I'm not a Ransome expert. I find enjoyment in reading some of the books analyzing his works, and biographies and such, but when all's said and done I would much rather read his own *Swallows and Amazons* series. But I think I have something here. Arthur Ransome, intentionally or perhaps subconsciously because it was engrained in his soul, wove an underlying theme in every one of his books: It's the simple things in life that matter most. Sailing in tiny boats and making friends with crazy pirates, skating across a lake and making friends with daydreaming scientists and authors, rescuing a bird by risking your own freedom and making friends with a funny old lady who feeds her pug chocolate, and always, always with good food and songs to follow. Simplicity is key. So leave your cell phones and laptops and thing-a-majiggies, and pull on your skates.



From the Beckfoot Kitchen: Peppermint Bark

I love Peppermint Bark. It's really good, really easy to make, and a great winter holiday substitute for the usual ration of chocolate.

Holiday Peppermint Bark

Ingredients

- 1 (12 ounce) package white chocolate chips
- 24 hard peppermint candies

Directions

1. LINE baking sheet with waxed paper.
2. MICROWAVE morsels in medium, microwave-safe bowl on MEDIUM-HIGH (70 percent) power for 1 minute; stir. Microwave at additional 10- to 20-second intervals, stirring until smooth.
3. PLACE peppermint candies in heavy-duty plastic bag. Crush candies using rolling pin or other heavy object. While holding strainer over melted morsels, pour crushed candy into strainer. Shake to release all small candy pieces; reserve larger candy pieces. Stir morsel-peppermint mixture.
4. SPREAD mixture to desired thickness on prepared baking sheet. Sprinkle with reserved candy pieces; press in lightly. Let stand for about 1 hour or until firm. Break into pieces. Store in airtight container at room temperature.
5. Make sure you ask an adult to help you melt the chocolate and pour it onto the baking sheet. Always be careful when cooking, to make sure you have fun!

Signals from Mars

This one Arthur Ransome talked about many times in his books, not surprisingly, since they are all about sailing. Pictures are from www.anbg.gov.au/flags/signal-meaning.html (which also tells what the flags additionally mean).

Maritime Signal Flags

(Ed. note: the Signal Flag alphabet has changed over time; this may not be what was used at the time of the S&A series)

Dipping Our Hands--personal relationships with the books

Book Insert--Just What is all This "Ransome" Stuff?

By Ed Kiser

"...a printable LETTER that I printed off and stuck inside the covers of "Swallows and Amazons" in each of the sets of books I now own, hoping that somehow, whoever winds up inheriting these, can come to know the value I placed on them..."

The set of books, which were all written by ARTHUR RANSOME, all have a special significance to me. I know that just because they were "special" to me, that this does not necessarily mean that they will be special to you, but perhaps I can tell you just how special they were to me, and thus, they can be meaningful to you and to your children as well.

When one is growing up, and becoming involved in the fine pastime of READING, certain books become the highlights of one's reading experiences. Some of you may remember somewhat fondly the series of books about the character, "Nancy Drew". Some may remember the series of books about "Winnie the Pooh", or the "Dr. Seuss" series. I recall enjoying several books of the "Dr. Dolittle" series, where the good Dr. Dolittle managed to learn to talk to the animals, and understand what they were saying back to him. Hollywood even made a movie about "Dr. Dolittle".

But when it comes to a very favorite set or series of stories, I feel I must put the set written by ARTHUR RANSOME at the top of my list. One day, I hope that some grandchild of mine will have both the opportunity and the motivation to settle down in a good chair with one of these stories and let himself get lost into the imaginary play-world of these adventurous English children, and thus get to share in their adventures even as I so avidly did in my youth. I know in this modern age of television, that it is not all that easy to get a young person to actually sit in a chair with a book, regardless of the book. When I was young, there was no TV to distract me, so perhaps it was a bit easier to turn to a good book for an adventure of the mind. But if only the youngster can get a start, perhaps by a parent reading the first chapter to him to get him started, that just maybe he too will want to go on with the story in the book, and turn off that TV, at least for a little while anyway.

It all started with the first book of the series, "Swallows and Amazons", which is the one a newcomer to Arthur Ransome really should begin with, because it is there one is first introduced to the characters that play such important roles in many of the books to follow. I do not know what prompted Mom to select that particular book from the library and bring it home to me, but I am forever grateful to her for doing so. I was quite taken by the story, and was quite delighted one day to find that Mom had found another book of the series in the library, and I was able to continue my friendship with those English children and share in their adventures. I think the feature that immediately attracted my attention to the book was the presence in the very front of the book of a MAP, which illustrated the various places where the characters went to have the various events of the story. As the story progressed, it was so nice to be able to flip back to the front of the book and look up on the map just where they were. It really helped to understand what was going on because I could see WHERE it was all happening. That map in the front of every Ransome book made it very special, and gave me a love of maps that has stood me in good stead ever since. I enjoy maps. I enjoy the National Geographic Magazine because they put out a lovely detailed MAP in just about

every other issue. This interest in maps went beyond the Ransome stories. When going on a trip with the family, I was the one that wanted to hold the road map on my lap, and follow along the line where we were, to be able to announce the next town that we were coming to before we got there, and to be so proud to see the sign at the entrance to that town that announced that I was right in my prediction.

It was in the Ransome maps that I was first introduced to the concept of the "points of the compass". At least, the four basic directions of North, South, East and West. I soon discovered that somewhere on the map was this fancy looking arrow with the four directions identified, and that this object was common on almost every map I ever saw. A map just was not a map unless there was somewhere an Arrow indicating which way was NORTH. This feature was very important in the reading of any map.

The Ransome children characters had their adventures in essentially two parts of England: the Lake District to the North, and the tidal marshlands called "the Broads" to the northeast of London bordering on the North Sea. These adventures quite unobtrusively led me into a feeling about the nature of the land they were in. There was quite a difference in the two areas, each with its own very characteristic features. I felt that I had become quite aware of these two areas as if I had actually been there.

It has always been a secret yearning in my life that maybe, one day, I would actually get to go and see the Lake District, and the Broads, but I greatly fear that such will never happen. The one time I got to go to England was in 1983, but I was there on company (IBM) business, with hardly any time off for my own exploring, so regrettably, I had to come back home, having been so close, yet still so far from these two areas of fascination. How I would have loved so dearly to have been able to go on a small boat and sail the length of a Lake of the Lake District, or perhaps rent a small motorboat and travel a bit on the waterways of the Broads, being aware of the tides and the flows of the waters according to the tidal influence. Maybe one day, one of my grandchildren will have this opportunity and will take this trip for me.

Reading these stories let me feel I was a part of those adventures. Those English children became my personal childhood playmates, my personal friends. I knew them. I knew how they would react. I knew their individual differences, their personalities, their strengths and weaknesses. I was close to them, all by reading these stories. Although at the time, I did not realize it, reading these stories was really quite educational. If I had known that before time, perhaps I would have avoided it on general principles, but as it was, the learning came easily and automatically. Not only was I to become acquainted with the geography and topography of those two areas of England, but there was much about boats and sailing that I quite accidentally learned as well.

One time, when I first started working for IBM, I bought a four-meter catamaran, a sailboat with a twin hull, and a twin rudder system, one rudder swinging at the rear of each hull. I knew how to sail that boat from experience, and that experience was that I had sailed with those Ransome children, and knew what to do, because they had done it, and had their actions described so well that I learned, and remembered, so when the day came I was on my own boat, I knew what to do. I understood what it meant to "step the mast", to ship the rudders by being sure the gudgeons were properly set into their corresponding pintles, to understand how to sail close-hauled in a direction that was almost into the wind itself, to tack back and forth to generate an overall course that was into the wind, what it meant to luff the sail (spill the wind) and to come about with a jibe with a following wind. I knew how to reef the sail by rolling the sail about the boom like a window shade, because I was "with"

John when he reefed his ship, once on the Swallow when sailing at night, and again on the Goblin in the North Sea with high winds. I knew to watch the pennant at the masthead to be sure that it was on the same side of the boat as the sail, as otherwise it might mean an unexpected jibe and a crack on the head being the surprising result from a blow from the boom. I did not read a book on sailing, on small boat handling, I read Arthur Ransome. There is where I learned it. That is all I needed. There was much of interest to be learned from these stories. They were interested in "signaling", that is, communicating from one distant point to another by visible signs like waving of flags, or flashing of lights. Some detail was spent on describing how to signal with the two-handed semaphore, with a table of the various signs so you could see what flag position meant what letter of the alphabet. They used Morse Code to communicate with flashing lights at night, so of course, that code had to be learned as well. We learned together about how to make charcoal, by first visiting with the charcoal burners, to see how they performed their craft, then by making our own charcoal (see Pigeon Post).

This skill also was closely related into how to make a campfire last all night so it could be restarted first thing in the morning from the glowing embers preserved from the evening before. The directions of the compass took on much more than just the North, East, South, and West, but also it became meaningful to refer to directions as North Northeast, or North by East, and really understand just what that meant. (Reference Compass points, in "We Didn't Mean to Go to Sea".) They used the compass in surveying and in making a map of the areas they surveyed. It gave practical meaning to the proper measurements of line lengths and angles, with applied Geometry and Trigonometry being used to produce the proper accuracy of their maps. When these topics were encountered in school, it made me feel quite comfortable to know that "I had already done that stuff", because I had been "with" the surveyors in "Secret Water", mapping out the islands of their immediate area.

There were only a few Ransome books in our local library there in Laurinburg, NC. I asked Mom to look for more, and she was watchful for others, even got the library to make a special order for a few more through an inter-library loan program. There were still others out there somewhere that I wanted to read, but could not get through the library system. I was about twelve when for Christmas, my Grandpa Bedell gave me my first Ransome book, my own, my very own, one I could keep. It was the "Picts and Martyrs", and as luck would have it, it was one of those I had not yet "met". I was so delighted. Apparently Mom and told her Dad of my interest in the Ransome stories, so he found this one, and it really hit the spot. I actually had one; I wanted more - I wanted them ALL! I was in college and there in Chapel Hill, NC, I came across a bookstore that specialized in SECOND HAND books, books that were out of print, but back on the market from estate sales or general clearing out of attics, garages, etc. So I went to them with a list of the Ransome books and begged them to put out "feelers" to other associated old bookstores to see if any of these were available. This project lasted during the several years I was in Chapel Hill, but they managed to find these books.

Not sure where they came from, but they all had had previous owners. Some had been tossed from some public library and thus became available in the old bookstore, some had been owned by private individuals. I finally completed my set, and in the process, came across several new ones that I had not yet encountered, and was thus able to enjoy new adventures with my old childhood chums.

As I write this (1997), I realize that these books, which are grouped together on my personal shelves, have been reread many times, as I continue to relive my adventures with those English children, even though I am 62 years old this year. The books are a bit worse for wear, with some pages becoming almost loose, and bindings breaking open in places. I try to handle these treasures with care, but Time has a way of extracting its toll.

About a year ago, I was "channel surfing" and happened to flip onto the Disney Channel. I watched a short bit, and suddenly it got my attention. It was in the middle of a movie that was essentially the story of "Swallows and Amazons". I did not even know that any of those books had ever been made into a movie, but here one was. It was in the middle, so no point in thrashing about finding a blank tape to record it. A short time later, I again just happened to find myself in the middle of another Ransome story, the "Coot Club", but again, was too late to start the recording. I diligently watched the schedule from then on to see if any more airings of anything from Ransome was coming about, so I could be ready to record that movie, but had no luck in it at all. I was so disappointed that I had not known about those broadcasts in time. Some months later, we were looking for nothing in particular in a new big book store recently opened up, and I saw they had a video area, so I went to them and asked them to look up any stories of Arthur Ransome. I rattled off a series of titles for them, and sure enough, they said they found in their catalogues two films that had been made from two of his books. I asked them to order them for me, which they did. It took several months before they called to say my tapes were in, so with much delight I picked up my new purchase. They were the "Coot Club" and "The Big Six". Several months after that, they called again to say that they had found another film from my list of titles, and so I was able finally to add "Swallows and Amazons" to my tape collection. I don't think any of the others ever made it to movie status, but I am delighted to see these three. At least I get to SEE the land in which their adventures took place, and not just have to picture it in my mind's eye from his verbal descriptions. It really made the places so much more real.

These books were written in the 1930-45 period, and published during that time, and some have since gone out of print. So it was with quite a surprise that included in two of the videos of the Ransome movies I found an advertisement flyer that was offering for sale the books themselves. These were in paper back, not hard back, but at least, the Ransome books were now finally back in print, ready for some new generation to come to know and enjoy these delightful characters and share in their adventures. I immediately ordered the complete set, or at least, as much of the set as they had in print. So I have now started a new collection of NEW books of the Ransome series. You might wonder why I have started this second set, as I have a complete set already. But you see, that was MY set, and is somewhat worn, requiring careful handling which is not exactly a child's strong point. I wanted a set that was NEW, that could be enjoyed for its first time by some admiring grandchild, who hopefully would come to know and love those stories as much as I had so many years before.

Eventually of course, I know that MY original set will also become available when I have no longer any earthly use for them, and hope that they will be kept together, as a COMPLETE SET, to be passed on to some grandchild that will love and respect them for what they meant to Grandpa. As each new generation comes along, there is another eager mind, ready to be taught as I was taught, ready to share the adventure of my childhood playmates, the Swallows, the Amazons, the D's, the Coots, The Death and Glories, the Eels, and their associated contacts, and can come to love and respect the value of each and every one of these most precious books. They were my dearest and most precious friends. Treat them as such. Let them become dear friends of yours as well, as their warmth is timeless.

Accept these books from me, with all my love,

Edwin M. Kiser

PS. Thanks, Arthur - it has been a pleasure to share your lifetime adventures that you made so real to so many...

A Letter to Arthur Ransome--from a young reader

Dear Arthur Ransome,

I like your books a lot. I think that "sail is the thing," and I like to explore our woods. When I think of flags I think of pennant-shaped ones, and I find great beauty in wooden boats.

At the beginning of last summer we went camping in our woods. It was only us three children, and we made our own breakfast and even made a fire on the beach. If we had not read your books we would have called our parents Mom and Dad, but because of your books we often called our parents natives. There was a savage (Dad) who helped us pitch camp, and we traveled by the native paths. I had a want for using tins for containers, but we never actually achieved that.

We own a sailboat, and I am a very enthusiastic sailor. I have a want for ship-shapeness that I might have not been so eager for had I not read about the tidy *Swallow*. When I row, "no splashes" would probably never have been a goal except when I splashed my sisters, but it is a good option, though I favor more power than the tiny bit that is necessary for "no splashes." I feel that our sailboat should have a pennant, whereas it would not be important if I hadn't read your books.

Thank you for writing such books. I owe something to them and to you.

Sincerely,
David

David is a 10-year-old AR enthusiast--his father shared this letter with TARS & TARSUS.

A Final Note from your editor:

I welcome all submissions--the next issue will roll out sometime in May 2010, so think of spring & summer in Ransome-land! I'd especially like some ideas for crafts or how-to's, and if anyone wants to try to set up a summer campout or adventure, be sure to list it here.

Also, if you enjoyed reading about Don Rice's trip to England for a Literary Weekend, consider writing up an article about a trip YOU have taken to any of the spots in the AR books. Include photos, please--those of us who can't travel to see the "real" places love to hear about them & see them right here in our own newsletter!

Stay warm :-)

Elizabeth