



## SIGNALS FROM T•A•R•S•U•S

May 2003

### Spring Salutations

This is the Spring 2003 issue of *Signals from TARSUS*, and accompanies *Mixed Moss* and *The Outlaw*. I was wrong about the new publication schedule in the last newsletter. The 2003 plan is for *MM* and *Outlaw* in May and November, *Signals* in February and August, and *Ship's Log* in August. However there is some belief that *Signals* cannot be reduced to twice a year without becoming too untimely, so that may change again next year.

In this issue, in addition to the usual notices, pleadings and so forth, we have a short article by Tom Napier about an inconsistency in *Great Northern?*, a review of *The Unlikely Voyage of Jack de Crow* by Pam Marshall, a new distribution map of TARSUS in the United States and of course Mary Walker's regular column, this time reflecting on the meaning of "home." There is also another installment of the S&A quizzes from TARS Canada. Speaking of the S&A quizzes, I'd appreciate feedback from TARSUS members as to whether you enjoy them and want them to continue, or would rather we ran something else (always presuming of course that we get material to run...)

So, On With The Show and enjoy everything in the mailing.

—Dave Thewlis, Editor

### Welcome

Welcome to new members James, Sarah, Elizabeth & Hope Buchanan (WA); Hans & Louise Franke (CA); Eleanora Hubbell (ME); William, Natasha, Julia & Clara McCoy-Beery (CA); John Nichols (TX); Alexander Setzko (MA); Sandra Grabosky (WA); Emily Taylor (NY). And welcome back to Edward, Karen, Matsy & Liddy Stinson.

### Résumés

Thanks to Jerry Crouch for sending in his Résumé, which you will find included with this mailing. As always, if you haven't sent one please do so; it is always fascinating to learn about fellow Ransome enthusiasts.

### Call for Articles for *The Outlaw*

Recently, I received a note from Charlotte Ryton, editor of *The Outlaw*, looking for contributions from TARSUS Juniors. Charlotte wanted to be clear that articles don't have to specifically be on Ransome or Ransome places, but perhaps inspired by Ransome's stories and topics.

"There will be an article on archaeology I hope, so any kids who have been involved in digs? Also family history: "That was father," said Nancy on Kanchenjunga. Ancient ways of life - charcoal burners - American Indian? Signs of past history - High Street in Lakes is a Roman road, evidence of Picts in Scotland, etc. Could U.S. Juniors bring in projects/discoveries about pre-Columbian America? How about Vikings, who (possibly) sailed from

Cumbria to U.S.? It would be good to get some overseas material coming in. And other articles and stories off topic since there will always be some variety. Kids do not like to be too single minded.”

### 2003 Literary Weekend

The 2003 Literary Weekend will be held on 5-7 September at the Royal Naval Academy, Greenwich. The planning information and booking information may be accessed directly from the Arthur Ransome website at: <http://www.arthur-ransome.org/ar/litweekendinfo.html>.

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

Last issue Ted Alexander, who runs the TARS Stall, gave us some upcoming information about a new edition of *Racundra's First Cruise, Roger*, a biography of Roger Altounyan by Rodney Dingle, and a new edition of *Old Peter's Russian Tales*. The first two are now available from the TARS Stall; *Old Peter* should be available later in the summer. You can find information about the TARS Stall in *Mixed Moss*, or go to the Stall web page on the Arthur Ransome website:

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

Susie Altounyan

Susie Villard, née Altounyan, died on 8 February 2003. Susie was the last survivor of the Altounyan children – the real-life “Susan” from the S&A tales.

The AR voice tapes (now also available on CD) can be borrowed by TARS Library subscribers and they are a very popular item! The idea is that this is a more controlled way of allowing TARS to enjoy these items without contravening copyright laws too blatantly – they are officially loaned and borrowed for “research” purposes. (This principle was agreed by the Trustees after taking advice on copyright issues).

I think there was also a mention recently on Tarboard about setting up an audio/video library. Again, this is something which the TARS Library is already doing. Several items are available already and these will be added to in future years.

To borrow the tapes members need to become Library subscribers. There are Library subscribers in Canada, the U.S., Japan, and Australia. The voice tapes (or CDs) can be mailed (they have already crossed the Atlantic and been returned.)

In regard to the recent BBC film on the making of the 1974 S&A film, I am contacting the producer of the film to see if TARS can officially obtain a copy for use with in the Society. I shall unashamedly use the overseas membership as a potential lever. The BBC are however, renowned for their stickiness over copyright and charging the earth for film material. I shall keep everybody informed of progress.

*The Audio Tapes/CDs to which Margaret refers are recordings of Ransome reading some of his Rod & Line articles for the BBC, plus two Russian tales, “The Stolen Turnips” and “The Soldier and Death.” I recently borrowed them and was delighted; I'd originally heard one or two of the fishing recordings at a TARS AGM years ago.*

*You can find more information about the TARS Library in the back of “Mixed Moss.” I heartily recommend it to all TARSUS members. –Ed.*

### Audio Tapes (Margaret Ratcliffe)

## **Captain Flint drops a clanger**, by Tom Napier

When I came to reread Ransome's books as an adult I did so over a period of some six months. This led to my noticing inconsistencies which Ransome himself must have missed. Of these the most puzzling is a remark which Captain Flint makes in *Great Northern? The Sea Bear* has just anchored in a cove off the east coast of what is apparently the island of South Uist. (The sailing directions and topography fit; the port with a mailboat to the mainland matches Lochboisdale. Of course, this may just be Ransome disguising the site of the Great Northerns' nest!)

John has just lowered the kedge anchor to Captain Flint in a rowing boat when this exchange takes place, Captain Flint speaking first:

"Now, pay out rope and give a shout when you're nearing the end. It's made fast isn't it?"

"Just going to be," said John.

"Wouldn't help us much to lose the lot," said Captain Flint. "I did that once, so I know."

Now, the previous summer John had lost Jim Brading's anchor and chain for just that reason. The Swallows had consequently made an involuntary and hazardous voyage to Holland, a story which Captain Flint must have heard in great detail, if only at second hand. John, to his credit, resists the temptation to make an appropriately cutting retort. Here, Captain Flint is either being very forgetful or uncharacteristically tactless. Neither seems quite plausible. Far more likely the incident in *We Didn't Mean To Go To Sea* had slipped Ransome's mind when he wrote *Great Northern?* Some ten years later. To quote a tag from Horace that Roger, at least, would have known well, "Quandoque bonus dormitat Homer," conveniently, if loosely, translated as, "Even the good Homer sometimes nods."



## **Feature Column: Ransome Readers Recommend**

*The Unlikely Voyage of Jack de Crow:*

*A Mirror Odyssey from North Wales to the Black Sea* by A. J. Mackinnon

Reviewed by Pam Marshall

The moment I saw the picture on the cover of this book I knew that a Mirror Dinghy was the boat I had always wanted. And having realized this, how could I resist the book.

Sandy Mackinnon is an Australian who had been teaching English and drama at a public school in North Wales for six years. When he decided to quit his job, rather than just leave, he thought it would be more dramatic to sail away. He borrowed a dinghy from the school (Jack de Crow - named after his pet jackdaw) and planned to spend a couple of weeks sailing down the Severn River, enjoying the scenery and stopping at riverside pubs. Nine months and three thousand miles later he sailed into the Black Sea. He was shipwrecked, almost drowned, attacked by a bull, captured by pirates, and almost run-down by a tanker. And those were only a few of his adventures. Luckily for him he knew his Arthur Ransome well and was saved more than once by thinking about what the Swallows and Amazons would have done.

This is a trip that is delightful to read about, but that you wouldn't actually have wanted to be on. More often than not he was cold, wet, exhausted, and hungry. He must be a charming fellow, though, as it is amazing how often complete strangers offered him food, hot showers, and a bed for the night, to say nothing of repairs for his boat, which it usually needed.

To add to the delight of the book, he has illustrated it himself with charming drawings and maps. I believe Mr. Mackinnon is now back in Australia teaching, but I look forward to his next adventure.



## From TARS Canada

Here are the answers for the quiz on *Swallowdale* from our last issue, along with the third quiz, on *Peter Duck*. Three cheers for TARS Canada for allowing us to crib off their newsletter!

### SWALLOWDALE - Answers to the Questions

#### **ONE POINT**

1.1 No-one; 1.2 Smoke; 1.3 Native Post; 1.4 Maria Turner; 1.5 They went under the bridge; 1.6 Pike Rock; 1.7 Ben Gunn's; 1.8 He fell on it and carried it ashore; 1.9 Hid in Peter Duck's cave; 1.10 Candle grease; 1.11 A crossbow; 1.12 Pine cones; 1.13 Wild goats; 1.14 The Isle of Man; 1.15 Young Billy; 1.16 A duck egg.

#### **TWO POINTS**

2.1 The arrow pinning it had some of his feathers on it; 2.2 His watch and the barometer [one point each]; 2.3 The kettle; 2.4 Mixed Moss; 2.5 Churning for butter; 2.6 Making patchwork quilts; 2.7 Fried it; 2.8 Built a fireplace; 2.9 Titty and Roger; 2.10 French verbs; 2.11 A hound trail came through the valley; 2.12 Three; 2.13 To loosen the guy ropes; 2.14 Jacky; 2.15 They disturbed a grouse; 2.16 Strawberry ices.

#### **THREE POINTS**

3.1 Black tarpaulin sheets; 3.2 Horses; 3.3 There was a bar there, brought down by the stream; 3.4 Aztecs; 3.5 Because Bridget was in the boat; 3.6 He said it would take about as long as to eat a doughnut slowly; 3.7 A rice pudding; 3.8 Jack; 3.9 "Show the parrot his feathers"; 3.10 An oak; 3.11 Casabianca; 3.12 First cataract; 3.13 Titty; 3.14 Susan; 3.15 Molly Turner, J Turner, Bob Blackett; 3.16 He had lost the second hand off his watch.

### PETER DUCK

#### **ONE POINT**

- 1 What did the parrot say, when the Swallows arrived at the dock, to make Black Jake angry?
- 2 What did the *Wild Cat* use for ballast?
- 3 How did John first grab hold of Bill after Black Jake had pushed him into the harbour?
- 4 What happened to the dinghy Black Jake used to get to the *Wild Cat* to eavesdrop in harbour?
- 5 Who was the first of the crew to give in to sea-sickness?
- 6 What did they have to eat when Captain Flint and the crew went ashore at Cowes?
- 7 What did Captain Flint want to buy in Cowes?
- 8 What did Captain Flint regret about not stopping in Funchal?
- 9 What was to be the reward for the first one to sight Crab Island?
- 10 Who was the first to spot Crab Island?
- 11 What did Captain Flint have Peter Duck do before deciding where to anchor at Crab Island?
- 12 Why didn't Captain Flint stay in swimming for long the first morning at Crab Island?
- 13 What did they call the main peak on Crab Island?
- 14 Who found the spring of water at Duckhaven?

- 15 What did they have for breakfast at Duckhaven the morning after the storm?
- 16 Who took *Swallow* into Duckhaven after the arrival of the pirates to wait for Captain Flint?

**TWO POINTS**

- 1 What port did the *Wild Cat* sail from?
- 2 There were four cabins down below in the *Wild Cat*: one for John and Roger; one for Susan and Titty; one for Nancy and Peggy. What was the fourth cabin to be used for?
- 3 The coat of arms on Peter Duck's kitbag had a Norfolk wherry in one quarter, three flying fish in another and three dolphins in the fourth. What was in the first quarter?
- 4 How many masts did the *Wild Cat* have?
- 5 When they were sailing down Channel, how did Peter Duck show that it was definitely Black Jake following the *Wild Cat*?
- 6 Why was Captain Flint streaming the log when the *Wild Cat* was in fog?
- 7 What did Peggy bring from the galley for Bill after he had been picked up in the fog?
- 8 When the *Wild Cat* was hove to in the Bay of Biscay, what happened to Captain Flint that made him confident that the treasure expedition would be successful?
- 9 What did Bill do his first morning aboard to make Nancy and Titty sick and John queasy?
- 10 On the last night before they reached Crab Island, where did Captain Flint find Bill?
- 11 What did Susan serve, once the land party had reached Duckhaven and the signal bonfire was burning?
- 12 What did they see out at sea that signified the coming of very strange weather conditions to Crab Island?
- 13 What did Roger find to bring into the wreck at Duckhaven after their tent had blown away?
- 14 Why wouldn't the engine start when they were leaving Crab Island?
- 15 Who was injured, and how, when the pirates fired at the *Wild Cat*?
- 16 There were four leather bags in the box they found on Crab Island. What were the labels on the bags?

**THREE POINTS**

- 1 What were the little cranes used to lift *Swallow* onto and off the *Wild Cat* called?
- 2 What ship did Peter Duck say that he had sailed in that made such a big impression on Captain Flint?
- 3 What was the name of Peter Duck's wherry?
- 4 What did the two men who buried the box under Peter Duck's tree use to dig with?
- 5 What happened to the ship that rescued Peter Duck from his island?
- 6 Where did Peter Duck's three daughters live? [one point each]
- 7 How did Captain Flint know that Roger had been to look at the *Wild Cat*'s engine soon after his arrival on board?
- 8 What two kinds of biscuits were on display in the galley?

- 9 When the *Wild Cat* hit fog, she was in hearing range of the Wolf Rock. What was its fog signal?
- 10 Name three of Black Jake's crew, after the defection of Bill. [one point each]
- 11 When and why did Peter Duck say that he felt "like a man making the Finnish coast without a chart"?
- 12 What was the first indication that something strange was happening to the weather on Crab Island?
- 13 What did John call out to the others when he came out of the wreck the morning after the storm?
- 14 What two things, according to Bill, would you never have if you wear a tooth that has been properly knocked out?
- 15 Apart from the fallen trees and the aftermath of the earthquake, what had slowed Captain Flint down in his crossing of the island to Duckhaven?
- 16 Where did Bill go to live at the end of the voyage?



**From our 10-Gong Contributing Editor Mary Wessel Walker:**

### **In Which I Go Home**

I find that when life gets stressful one of the best things to do is to turn to a comfort book. No matter how much work I have, if I take the time to read a familiar favourite book, I find it helps me to de-stress. This is a really good method. Even if you only have time for a chapter or a few pages each day, you really should try it. It's something like visiting an old friend, or slipping into another world for a little while, a world where there are no surprises (and no papers or exams). So it was that recently I picked up *Swallows and Amazons* and discovered this passage right at the beginning, which Ransome wrote to explain how he had come to write the book. He is writing about his family holidays on Coniston Water and he says,

We adored the place. Coming to it, we used to run down to the lake, dip our hands in and wish, as if we had just seen the new moon. Going away from it, we were half drowned in tears. While away from it, as children and as grown-ups, we dreamt about it. No matter where I was, wandering about the world, I used at night to look for the North Star and, in my mind's eye, could see the beloved skyline of the great hills beneath it.

This passage struck me because it describes a certain sense of home. I am coming to the end of my first year at college, a ten-hour drive away from the place I grew up. And as I begin to think about packing up and going home, I am forced to come to the conclusion that I have more than one home, really. It's hard to define exactly what being at home means. For me, I think it's just something I discover about a place when I think about it. Ann Arbor - home - is home, of course. I imagine for most people the place they grew up will always be home to them in some sense. My friend Sarah grew up in Overbrook, a Philadelphia suburb not far from where we go to school. Sarah lived in Overbrook until she was 11, when her family moved to Arizona. This past weekend she took me and another friend to show us around where she used to live, and it is clear that she still considers that place home on some level. Here at Bryn Mawr - school - I have also found myself a home. I have learned a lot, grown a lot, and made many very dear friends here. So this is also home.

My family's vacation home, which we call the Little House, is also certainly home for me, in an entirely different way. I have spent many very happy times there, relaxing, working in the garden, swimming, and

sailing. Somewhat like Ransome, I have a picture of the skyline at the Little House hanging on my wall here at school. And Gordonwood, the summer camp I have gone to for basically my whole life, and where I hope to work this summer, is also home. I am completely comfortable when I go there. I also have many friends there. And there's the campsite on Government Island in Les Cheneaux where my family has camped three summers now. As we sail there from the dock in Cedarville, our boat laden with tents and camping supplies, the point where our campsite is comes into sight long before we actually get there (particularly when we have to tack!), but as soon as we can see "Peggy's Point" we all get a sense of coming home, like when Susan says at the end of *Swallowdale* "Isn't it a blessing to get home?"

I suppose I am blessed to have so many places I consider home. There is just one drawback, and that is, having more than one home means that you are never all the way there. I guess I'm always going to be looking for some place that blends all of these places into one. Perhaps the old saying is true: "Home is where my books are."

*About the Author: Mary Wessel Walker goes to Bryn Mawr College, in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. She is about to take her exams and write her final papers and go home (wherever that may be).*



## NEW RESUME

Wm. Jerome (Jerry) Crouch, (January 2003)

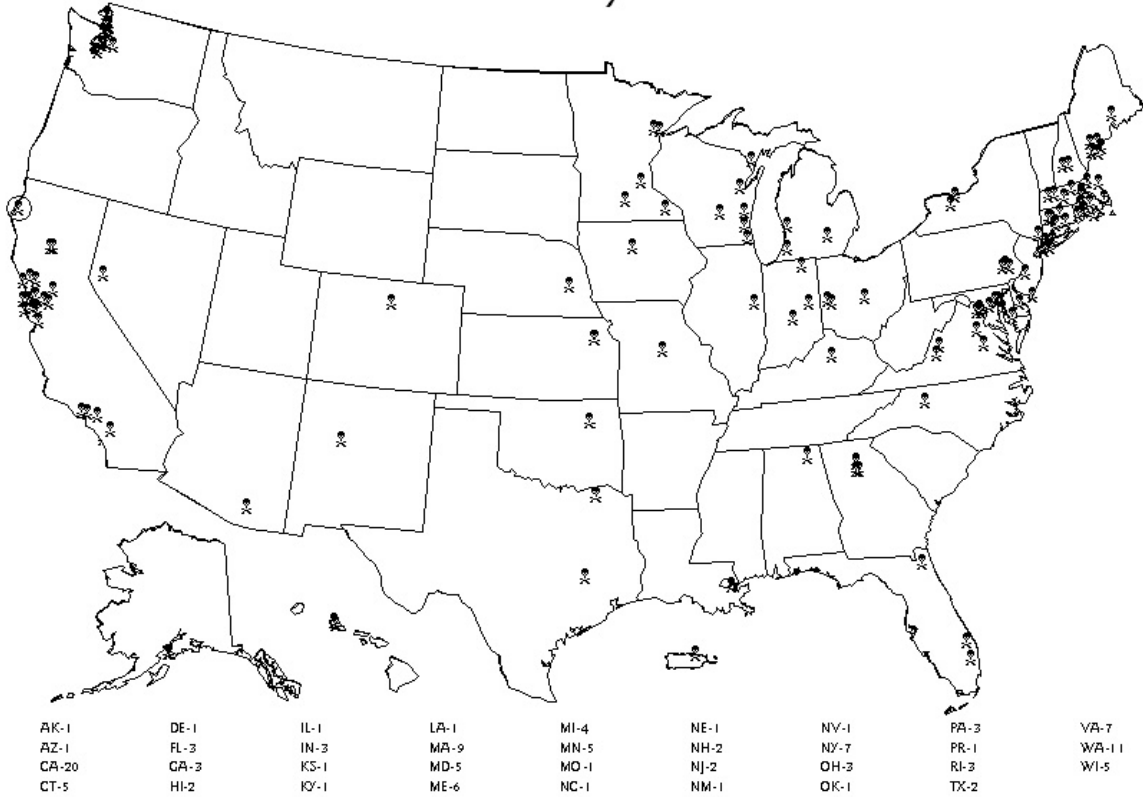
Unlike most of the other crew members, I came upon Arthur Ransome and the Swallows and Amazons late in life and from a decidedly unnautical background. I have always enjoyed certain kinds of books for children and grew up on *The Wind in the Willows* and thought, with the *Water Rat*, that there was nothing so good as "messaging about in boats," even though I never really had a boat to mess about in. In the course of my work I have been a regular reader of such journals as the *Times Literary Supplement* and the *New York Times Book Review*. I remember reading, several years ago, an article on children's books in some such journal that mentioned the Swallows and Amazons stories. I was interested, partly, I think, because it was a series and not just a single book and because the stories dealt with the out of doors. But it was not until some time later that I actually got a copy of *Swallows and Amazons* from the library and read it. Even then it was, again, some time before I decided to look for the others. I think that my interest was really aroused by seeing them all listed in the catalogs from "A Common Reader" that I get regularly. I made up a list of the books and did find a copy of *Swallowdale* in our library but had to get copies of all the rest through interlibrary loans since neither our public nor our university library had any of them. I have also gone on to read, also on interlibrary loan, Hugh Brogan's *Life*, Christina Hardyment's *Captain Flint's Trunk*, Roger Wardale's *Nancy Blackett*, and Peter Hunt's introductory study. I have found it fascinating to read about the parallels between the books and the places and people that Ransome knew. Recently my wife presented me with the entire series published by David Godine, and I had already bought of copy of *Coots in the North*. So I now have pretty much the corpus ready at hand.

I think that what appeals to me about the books is the innate decency evinced by the characters (with the exception of a few villains, of course), which to me is refreshing in a world that seems increasingly indecent. I enjoy the great sense of the open air that Ransome creates so well and also the sense of doing things, of common activities that he conveys so tellingly. Readers of the books cannot but help being caught up in them, being as it were an unseen character in the stories, sharing with the other characters their activities, feelings, and experiences. And, finally, there is the locale of the stories (I'll pass over the two exotics here) the Lake country and the Broads that in Ransome's hands becomes, for me at least, a defining element of the books: though I have never seen either of the places, I feel as though I know them.

As for my personal life, I have spent the better part of it in the book business first as a college teacher of English composition, a book traveller, and finally editor for the University Press of Kentucky, from which I retired ten years ago after thirty-one years. Rather than sailing, I fear that I give my time to cycling, which I have been doing now for twenty-five years or so. It seems a more natural thing to do here in central Kentucky where we have a lovely countryside of horse farms and rolling hills traversed by many small roads and lanes but, alas, not many waterways and those with more than their share of Hullabalooos. But in Ransome's books I can feel the wind against my cheek, hear the water chuckle under the stem, and look for the small white sail down the lake.

Jerry Crouch

# TARS U.S. as of May 2003



TARSUS has 124 households distributed approximately as shown including Alaska, Hawaii and Puerto Rico.  
 (Locations of Alaska, Hawaii and Puerto Rico have been changed to fit them onto the map.)

## A Final Word from the Editor

I've been editing Signals from TARSUS since mid-1996, so I think it's about time to find a new editor. If you are interested please drop me a note or give me a call and I'll be happy to tell you more about what the job entails. It's a lot of fun, except maybe for whining for new material to publish! I do plan to continue as TARS Coordinator, so the only workload you will inherit is preparing the newsletter four times a year.

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