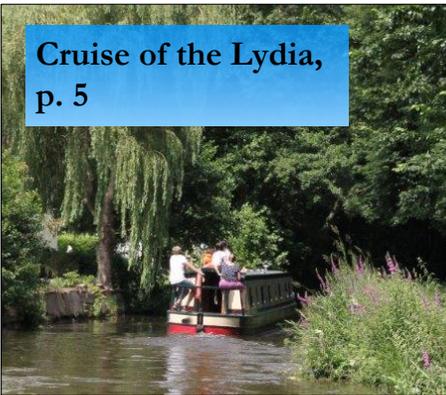




# Signals from TARSUS & North Pole News

October 2017

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## Ship's Papers — Important information for the Crew



### A View from the Helm

By Robin Marshall  
TARSUS Coordinator  
210 N 18th Street W Bradenton, FL 34205  
[robin@arthur-ransome.org](mailto:robin@arthur-ransome.org)

Here we are in October again. Summer is leaving with many memories both good and bad. I hope all members had some fun and maybe an adventure or two.

Down here in Florida our adventure was more of the unpleasant kind, since summer here is also hurricane season. So, with the usual dire warnings from the media, we found ourselves facing possible disaster from a hurricane called Irma.

We usually watch but don't worry. We tend to be warned warned well in ad-

vance, and often the storm veers off somewhere else. This time the closer it got, the more anxious we became. It really looked like our luck had run out, this and the horrifying pictures of the devastation on the Caribbean islands. Many years ago we had made storm shutters. Living in a flood zone close to the Manatee River, we knew we would be evacuated, and sure enough the mandatory evacuation notice was given. At times like that it is hard not to start running round in panic like a chicken with its head cut off. We managed to overcome that urge and were able to leave the house all buttoned up with its shutters and head off to our daughter, who lives on higher ground.

Fortunately by the time Irma got to us it had lost a lot of strength and the next day we were able to return home, pleased to find that at least our house was as good as when we left and it still had water and power.



Hurricane Irma over the Virgin Islands

There were many trees down, though, and even now the sides of the roads are still littered with piles of limbs as the local authorities struggle to clear them.

November is usually the end to the hurricane season so now we can rest easy again.

\*\*\*

I think several members have now seen the new *Swallows and Amazons* movie, with most not happy with its interpretation of the book. I have yet to hear if it produced a new wave of memberships in the UK; something tells me it did not.

\*\*\*

The next thing for TARSUS is member renewals. As the British pound has fallen since the referendum I have adjusted dues to a more realistic level, at the same time allowing for further fluctuation, I hope. If you pay me directly, the new rates are:

Junior \$16 – Student \$30  
Adult \$46 – Family \$53  
Senior \$38 – Corporate \$90

You still have the option to pay using Paypal at the Arthur Ransome site, where, depending on the daily exchange rate, it may cost a bit less or more: Be sure to have your member # and select the overseas category in the pull-down menu.

[http://www.arthur-ransome.org.uk/TARS\\_Subscription\\_Renewals.html](http://www.arthur-ransome.org.uk/TARS_Subscription_Renewals.html)

Smooth sailing and fair winds.

Robin



## Greetings from the North

By Ian Sacré, TARS Canada Coordinator  
 750 Donegal Place, North Vancouver, BC V7N 2X5  
[gallivanterthree@telus.net](mailto:gallivanterthree@telus.net)

While revelling in these last warm days of summer, before the wet and snowy days of autumn and winter come all too quickly upon us, I was quietly enjoying the day, happy with the thought that really there was nothing pressing for me to do.

Then out of the blue there arrived Simon's email. This brought to mind the game we used to play in gym class which was called 'Simon Says' Do this, or Simon says do that! But if we did what ever it was we were told to do and Simon had not said it, we were counted out! Well, not wishing to be counted out, Simon said it is time to prepare something for the North Pole News. So here are a few tit-bits that come to mind.

Once again, the headquarters reports from Ted Evens regrettably show that the TARS membership has continued to shrink. As of the end of August the paid membership is down to 818 made up of 1,115 warm bodies. It may be of interest to some of you to see how this breaks down by Region and/or Country (see the table).

A statistic which would be both revealing and interesting would be the age grouping of the TARS members. For instance, how many young members are there under say aged 16? How many between the years of 16 and 25 and so on.

Once in a rare while I come across an adult who has read at least some of the AR series. The other week, on a routine visit to my doctor, he asked by way of conversation what I had been up to lately. I mentioned that I just

returned from two weeks holiday on the Norfolk Broads. Where upon he asked if I had seen the Margoletta and any Hullabalooos? Quite surprised I said no, I'd not seen the Margoletta but I had seen lots of Hullabalooos, and added, so you have read Arthur Ransome's *Coot Club*? To which he replied that he had read and owned the whole series and had often gone sailing on the Broads with his father as a result. For a few unprofessional minutes we relived fond memories. I shall now have to work on him and see if I can recruit a new member!

While on the subject of memberships and our small numbers here in Canada, one of our handicaps it would seem is that we are so wide spread and

Region	Membership	Members
Australia	43	62
Canada	25	40
Czech	1	1
Eastern (UK)	105	135
France	7	9
Germany	1	1
Ireland	1	1
Italy	1	1
Japan	10	13
Malta	2	2
Midlands (UK)	133	200
New Zealand	19	23
Scotland (UK)	44	50
South Africa	1	1
South Western (UK)	78	112
Southern (UK)	154	209
Sweden	2	2
Switzerland	1	1
USA	49	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>818</b>	<b>1,115</b>

this does not lead to easy get togethers. If it would help to provide more interaction between members It would be possible to send out a list of TARS Canada members names, their email addresses, postal addresses and phone numbers to each of you. I would appreciate hearing from any Canadian members who would object to this so that I can remove their names from any such distribution list and thus protect their privacy.

## Membership Renewal for 2018

Of course, once again the time has come to send out a gentle reminder that our TARS subscriptions expire on the 31st. December 2017, just over two months from now. Where the year has gone since I found myself writing a similar reminder last year I simply do not know. Someone once said that as we get older time seems to fly by faster and in my case it certainly appears to be the case.

As most Canadian TARS members will have observed, our Canadian dollar has taken a recent small upswing against other currencies. I have therefore adjusted the Overseas Canadian dollar subscription rates for 2018 which you will see are marginally lower than last year. Because the exchange rate fluctuates minute by minute I have rounded each figure upward to the nearest dollar. This will allow a little slack just in the case our dollar goes down between now and year end.

As usually mentioned, for those Canadian TARS members wishing to pay their renewal subscriptions directly to the Arthur Ransome Society UK in funds drawn on a UK bank

please send your payment to:

Membership Secretary  
Mr. D.Y. Middleton  
9 Merrow Avenue, Poole  
BH12 1PY, UK

The renewal form will be found on the back of the address sheet that accompanied your copy of *Signals*. The overseas TARS membership rates when paid in British Pounds Sterling are as follows:

Junior: £10.00 Student: £20.00  
Senior: £25.00 Adult: £30.00  
Family: £35.00 Corporate: £60.00

Please let me know if you pay directly to the UK so that I can tick you off my list and advise Ted Evans so that he

can update the regional membership directory.

For those who wish to continue to renew their TARS Subscriptions by personal cheque drawn on a Canadian Bank and made payable to me, the rates in Canadian dollars are as follows:

Junior: \$17.00 Student: \$33.00  
Senior: \$41.00 Adult: \$49.00,  
Family: \$57.00 Corporate: \$97.00

Please make your cheques payable to me, Ian Sacré, and send them to:

750 Donegal Place  
North Vancouver  
British Columbia, V7N 2X5

\* \* \*

I do hope that some of you will continue to put on your creative thinking caps and send contributions to our Editor. Simon is always looking for material and perhaps there is a best-selling author lurking amongst you!

Enjoy these autumn days and I hope the coming winter is kind to everyone.

Keep an equal strain on all parts! (As was said in the heyday of the clipper ships.)

Warmest regards,  
Ian Sacré  
TARS Canada Co-ordinator



## A Note from the Editor

By Simon Horn, [sjhorn@gmail.com](mailto:sjhorn@gmail.com)

Welcome to *Signals from TARSUS/North Pole News* for September... oops, October 2017.

Autumn has been very late coming this year, so that will have to be my excuse for being a month late.

In this issue, **Ian Sacré** reports on a week-long trip by narrowboat Lydia on the Llangollen Canal on the En-

glish-Welsh border. With 10 family members of a variety of ages packed in to an eight-berth craft, organization by Ian's daughter Pam was key. Ian's gorgeous pictures of the Welsh borders make me wish I had been there.

Recently, I finally got to see the 2016 *Swallows and Amazons* movie. I provide my take on it, examining how it compares both to the book and to the 1962 BBC TV version as seen by Ransome in his diary (thanks to Margaret Ratchliffe's *The Twilight Years*).

**Donald Tunnicliff Rice** also gives his appreciation. He explains how for him the new movie didn't capture the

spirit of the book, while the touring musical version he saw several years ago — with adult actors, no less — did get it right.

**Elizabeth Jolley** brings us up to date on her daughter's "Tent for Two" expedition with "partner-in-climb" Mike. The intrepid explorers have been climbing mountains over the western United States and backpacking along the Pacific Crest Trail. Next stop: Ecuador and the Galapagos!

**Molly McGinnis** ensures that we won't go hungry as long as we can get hold of some pemmican, uhh, corned beef. She gives us two recipes for

"fried cannonballs": her own for corned beef and potato, and Susan's recipe from the stories. As she says, "Fried Cannonballs sound so tasty, the perfect entrée for eating round a campfire."

**Pieces of Eight** is short and sweet this time — no one sent me anything! — so at the last minute I rustled up a "Book Maze". Your contributions really are necessary!

The next issue should appear in January or February. The holiday season does tend to disrupt things, so I am setting a preliminary deadline for articles of December 1. That should allow me to get stuck into the issue before I go away for a week at the beginning of January, and finish it before the end of the month when I get back. You can probably already see the flaw in this plan: you, the readers, have to work on your contributions before you get swallowed up by your own holiday activities. We will see what happens. Start today!

## Kanchenjunga's Cairn — Places we've been and our adventures

### Cruise of the Lydia

By Ian Sacré

During the 2016 Christmas holidays I floated the idea to my two daughters that it might be fun for us all go on a narrow boat cruise on British Waterways. The 'all' being my daughters Jill and Pam, their husbands and a collective assortment of five grandchildren ranging in age from eleven to eighteen. We would thus make up a motley crew of ten. I had previously been on a narrow boat voyage which I had thoroughly enjoyed despite the fact, as I later found out, that the boat I hired had sunk two weeks previously to my hiring due to a leaking stern gland! And so it was after making a few suggestions as to what sort of cruise might work for us, I left the idea to ferment and hopefully mature in their fertile younger minds.

Two or three weeks later, Pam called me to say that she had talked the idea over with her sister Jill and they liked the proposal and asked what dates would work for me. I replied that any dates would be fine. Finally, with their very busy family lives, school, sports



and work commitments etc. it thus transpired that the second week in July was selected as being best for them.

Pam is a frustrated tour planner at heart despite having been a publisher's agent with a university honours degree in English Literature before having three children. She asked if she could do the homework and organize the narrow boat booking, etc? What an offer! It was gladly accepted by all of us! There followed numerous phone calls, consultations and debates.

Then one day an excited Pam called to say it was done! We were all booked for a week on a 70-foot narrow boat on the Llangollen Canal which meanders in and out of England and Wales! The only thing was,

because there were only eight proper berths in the boat her husband Desmond and I would have to sleep in the galley! Was that alright? She assured me that there were two very 'nice' settees in the galley area which would be just fine for Des and I! Of course I said yes but I must confess I wondered why, as the patriarch of the family, I was being assigned unceremoniously to what amounted to the forecastle or steerage! And besides, what had Desmond done to deserve this banishment? However, the plan called for us all to make our own way to England and then to rendezvous on the appointed day in Chirk, which was the home port of our trusty vessel.

Finally the big day arrived and my cousins in Shropshire kindly drove me to the boat yard. But my goodness, no one was there except the staff! Did I have the wrong date? No, the date was correct. Were there any messages? None that the manager was aware of. There was nothing for it but





thus be destined to live out of my pack for the whole week. Desmond on the starboard side was not so lucky because under his berth was housed the boat's fresh water pump! A noisy contraption to say the least, particularly when it was activated at 2.00 in the morning!

to go for coffee and return a bit later.

Two hours on we drove back to the yard and found it a hive of activity. Luggage for nine was piled high. Cardboard boxes filled with provisions, and five grandchildren all talking at once! When I saw the enormous stack of gear I could not help but comment that we needed a freighter not a narrow boat, to which my number one daughter Jill replied, don't worry we have a solution. When everyone has unpacked, all the empty suitcases etc. are going back into the cars!

I quietly made the observation that one of the essentials for getting along well in small spaces is for everyone to be neat and tidy and to make sure they keep their gear together and out of other people's way. But as the next seven days were to reveal, no one heard me as I frequently tripped over gear and bottled water left strewn about all over the place!

Miraculously, half an hour later the mountains of clothes were more or less stowed. My twenty inch wide 'nice' settee bench in the galley turned out to have a cavernous space under the thin cushion into which I could just squeeze my soft pack. I would

We were then given a half hour briefing by the staff and sent off on our voyage of discovery. We had a whole week to cruise ahead of us so we decided to sail eastwards for two and a half days and to see where we got to, then turn around and head westwards to the end of the canal at Llangollen where we would again turn



around and spend the night before wending our way back to Chirk, our home port. Locks, tunnels, aqueducts, lift bridges, pubs and the unknown awaited us.

The family immediately got into the swing of things as the landscape flew by at the dizzying speed of two and a half knots! Stone and brick bridges were fun as anxious mothers cried out

to their respective children to get their heads down, as we slipped under the ancient structures with only a foot and a half to spare. The bridge abutments were narrow too with only six inches of clearance on each side. But as the staff had said, "Your boat weighs 24 tons and don't worry if you knock something, it is built to take it!"

Frequently our crew members would disembark as we passed under a bridge to walk or run a while along the ever present tow path only to rejoin the vessel a mile or more along the way. A major concern were the families of baby ducklings that always seemed to be between our hull and a dock wall as we glided by. Screams of concern would go up from the forward crew as the ducklings scooted out of the way and the helmsman anx-

iously glanced over the side for mangled bodies. We saw none! Often, my other son in law Jason, an avid runner, would hop off and disappear for two hours as he ran ahead to 'check out' the tow path, though I think the pubs were his hidden agenda!

The tunnels were exciting as well. Unlit, and only wide enough for one vessel, the trick was to have our lookouts



keep watch for a craft about to enter the tunnel at the other end and to make sure the tunnel was clear before we committed ourselves. We then turned on all our cabin lights to illuminate the walls of the tunnel thus helping us to stay in the middle.

Another thrill was transiting the Pontcysyllite Aqueduct, a narrow iron trough on eighteen stone piers forming nineteen arches, designed and built by Thomas Telford between 1795 and 1805. The iron waterway crossed the River Dee more than 125 feet below us. Again, our essential lookouts were on their toes since the trough, over 1,000 feet long, was only wide enough for one craft! The views

were unmatched here as they were every day we cruised.

The ship's boy, Beckett, the youngest of our crew at eleven, became an expert lift bridge cranker. He and his father would jump off the boat as we slowed to let them off so they could run ahead to crank up the bridges so that we could take them on the fly and slowly pass through the abutments without stopping. Grinning from ear to ear, his face beet red with exertion, he was one happy lad as he clambered back on board at the stern!

Of great amusement to the crew was the night I fell out of my bunk! Well, twenty inches is not really very wide and I am six feet three! Fortunately the

drop was only twelve inches but it was a rude awakening. From then on I put extra cushions on the sole in case it happened again!

The final approaches to the town of Llangollen were interesting. For nearly a half mile the canal was only wide enough for one craft so the five grandchildren were sent running ahead and spaced out to signal an approaching vessel we were transiting the narrow section and to wait for us to exit. They were a super crew and as the days went by all learnt to steer our craft with it's large tiller!

After a night in Llangollen we reluctantly turned our bow for our home port. The secret stashes of candy and chocolate bars all eaten. The fridge almost empty and the provisions consumed. But our memories all filled to the brim with the experiences of opening lift bridges, cranking the sluice gates of the locks and leaning our weight on the beams of the lock gates to swing them wide open to let us pass and all the while soaking in the magnificent scenery. A glorious adventure shared by the whole family. Thank you *Lydia!*

North Vancouver, October 2017



## Ship's Library — Books (and movies) we've read and want to share

### The 2016 Swallows and Amazons Movie: A Lost Opportunity

By Simon Horn

“Who are these bad-tempered people?”

A comment about the movie on the *Arthur Ransome's Swallows and Amazons in North America* Facebook page.

I should start by explaining that I did not have very high hopes for the new *Swallows and Amazons* film. I suppose I was expecting the standard Hollywood treatment, and I am afraid that is what we got.

We all wanted it to be good, since I think we hoped it might lead to a new generation of young readers discovering Ransome's books. It wasn't good, and I don't know if there has been an increase in sales of the books since the movie appeared.

Perhaps some people who enjoyed the movie have gone on to pick up *Swallows and Amazons*, and I hope that it appeals to them. I fear, however, that some will be confused, disappointed or simply nonplussed, since the movie really is false advertising for the book.

The new film is not an adaptation of Ransome's classic, it is a bizarre mixture of S&A and spy thriller. It doesn't do a good job of either.

The assumption by the producers of the new film, as it was for the 1962 BBC television version, is that contemporary audiences would find Ransome's, quite frankly gentle, plot boring.

When I read the 12 books between the ages of 9 and 12, they were quite exciting enough, essentially because I

could believe they were real: that they could have happened to me! It was not for nothing that I, like countless others, sent Ransome the classic question: “Did the stories really happen?”

I received a classic Ransome answer on *Swallows and Amazons* notepaper, where he pointed out that “two of those books”, i.e., *Peter Duck* and *Missie Lee*, “are of a different kind of reality”. What was important was if they seemed real while I read them. Which is absolutely true of fiction generally.

Of course, sophisticated 12-year-old that I felt myself to be, I knew the S&As hadn't tackled Chinese pirates and Black Jake wasn't hanging about Lowestoft piers. What made the books seem real, though, was Ransome's attention to detail and the consistent characters of the children.

The other 10 stories, though... they might have been real! And I found them all exciting.

#### Swallows and Amazons or thriller?

In the 1960s the TV contract with the BBC said that any change in the story or characters had to be approved by Ransome.

Ransome objected to taking the episode of the thieves stealing Captain Flint's trunk and turning it into



the centre of the plot. In his diaries he said:

“Their story is a conventional ‘cops and robbers’ story, facetious and extremely silly.” (*Twilight Years*, p. 246)

Essentially, the BBC people maintained that Ransome's book was not sufficiently “dramatic”, and that therefore something had to be added to make the story work for the audience.

Eventually Ransome felt worn down by the whole controversy and remarked:

“They may be right and a decent film cannot be made of my book unless the book is altered wholesale to match the silly film.”

and

“I think the fundamental trouble may be in the impossible attempt to make out of my quiet story a string of independent ‘exciting’ events.” (*Twilight Years*, p. 252)

And, after it appeared:

“I loathe the T.V. mess they show as my story. It is not, nor are the characters even approximately like mine. I am sorry I ever agreed to let them do it.” (*Twilight Years*, p. 255)

I have not seen the 1960s production, and some people who have say it was not that bad, despite what the Ransomes thought.

I have seen the 2016 movie, though, and as Margaret Radcliffe says in the latest *Mixed Moss*, Ransome “would have loathed it”. The addition of the spy plot (like the thieves in the 1962 version), alters the story completely, permitting the filmmakers to add chase scenes and threats (and a seaplane, for heaven’s sake\*), supposedly in order to make it gripping enough for today’s audiences.

A *Daily Mail* published an article by Barbara Altounyan (Roger’s daughter) August 16, 2016, just before the movie’s release. A quote from the film’s writer, Andrea Gibb, gives the game away: “We’ve made Ransome’s real story our subplot... There’s the imaginative danger the kids are living in with the Swallows against the Amazons, and the real danger that exists around them.”

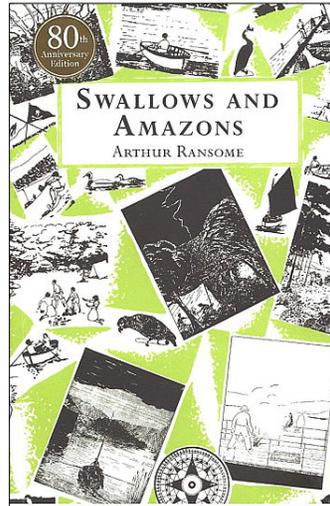
By making the spy story the primary plot, the film does not leave room for Ransome’s own story to be fully developed. Things have to be left out because the movie keeps jumping from one story to the other.

In the original, the purpose of the rob-

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\*This reminds me of the 2008 version of *The 39 Steps*, where the original final confrontation with the German spies was apparently not considered exciting enough, hence the arrival of a German submarine in a Scottish loch!

bery is to provide a mechanism for reconciliation between Captain Flint, his nieces and the Swallows, to have him realize that he has been unhelpful, unfriendly and quite unfair, especially to John. The idea is not to provide chase scenes and visual thrills.



It is quite thrilling enough for an eight-year-old girl to be alone in a boat, anchored in the middle of a lake in the dark, overhearing adults clearly up to no good.

#### **Who are these people? or, does conflict = nastiness?**

The next area where the new film falls down is in its characterizations. With the partial exception of the two youngest children, none of the characters are true to the book. This is a pity, since the children’s acting is pretty good, especially the two younger ones.

The change of characterization shows itself particularly in the way the film deals with conflict.

All right, “Screenplay 101” tells us that drama requires conflict. Fair enough. But why does the new movie seem to think conflict requires general unpleasantness and nastiness.

In the movie Roger loses his father’s knife, which has been given to John, while watching one of the spies rifling through Captain Flint’s rowing boat at Rio pier. When John finds out he is furious, which is fair enough. But he then browbeats Roger, calling him a duffer, possibly the worst insult he could have thought of, since everyone knows that father is counting on them not to be duffers. The sheer cruelty of it is typical of the film.

Everywhere the movie adds contrived conflict between characters, presumably because they are afraid we will go out to buy more popcorn if they don’t.

In the book the Swallows do not lose the food basket overboard because John jibes on the trip to the island. If they had lost the basket overboard, however, I somehow doubt that Ransome would have written John and Susan sniping at each other for the rest of the voyage.

In the movie, after John jibes and the basket is pushed overboard:

Susan: “Look what you made me do!

John: “It wasn’t my fault!”

In the book John does not jibe thanks to Susan’s warning:

Susan: “Look out what you’re doing, John!”

Captain John, with his mind on the houseboat, had not been thinking about his steering... The boom was just going to swing over when Susan called, but John, putting down the helm instantly, just saved a jibe. After that he looked at the houseboat only out of the corner of his eye. The wind was so light that a jibe would not have mattered much, except perhaps to bumped heads, but it

would hardly have done for the captain of the ship to have set an example of such bad steering to his crew.

What about the characterization of the Blackett girls? The movie tries to capture the relationship between the older Nancy and the younger Peggy, with Nancy telling her to shut up a lot. In the book Nancy's frustration at Peggy's chattering comes out often, but the film's Nancy is a lot angrier. In fact the whole parley on Wild Cat Island is a lot more tense and angry than it is in *Ransome*. This is set up by the Amazons' "No Trespassing, Danger of Death" sign and all the creepy skulls.

In the book the tone changes as soon as the children discover that Captain Flint is a common enemy, and in any case the Amazons really want to be friends. As Peggy says, "Let's be allies... Really we wanted to be allies as soon as we saw your smoke on the island yesterday. We are sick of natives." So they agree to "a treaty of offence and defence" in Titty's words. "Yes," said Nancy Blackett, "defence against our enemies and all sorts of desperate battles between ourselves whenever we want."

In the book they agree that the "war" will decide who gets to be commodore and whose ship will be flagship. In other words, it is clear that they intend to be friends in future. The basis of the alliance is their common opposition to Captain Flint. The parley ends with a meal together where they share their supplies, and then Nancy shows John how to get safely into the secret harbour.

In the new movie, however, the war will decide who "wins the island" and

who will get both boats; in other words, enemies forever. The different treatment of the war in turn changes the whole nature of the make-believe the children are involved in:

- in the book it is a game and they know it. This does not mean it is unimportant, but it does mean they can distinguish between make-believe and reality (for want of a less judgemental term);
- in the film the make-believe is more hostile and defensive. Clearly Nancy's anger seems to take precedence over any possible friendship.

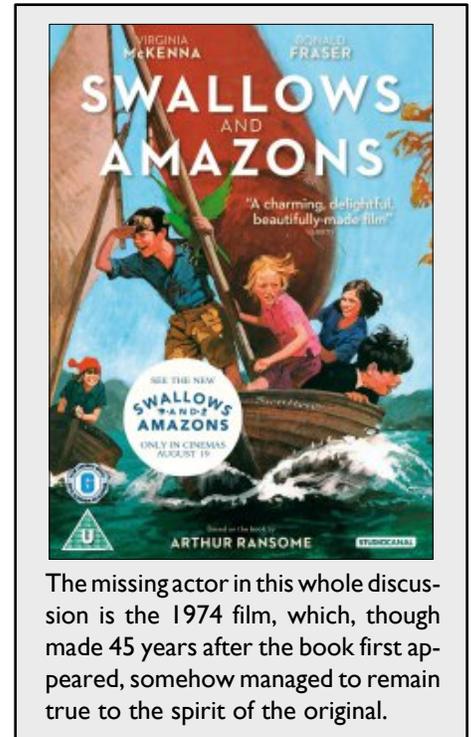
Now perhaps one could argue that the Walkers and even the Amazons are much nicer in the book than most children might be today, or even would have been then, but the point is, in the story the Walkers rely on each other and they know it. They do not spend their time arguing out of some emotional need to come out on top. Similarly, the Amazons are totally prepared to be friends once they discover their island has not been taken away.

Now, what about Captain Flint, even leaving aside the entire spy plot? He is simply another "bad-tempered" person, who apparently gets along with no one. This provides continuous excuses for more contrived "dramatic" conflict: with the Walkers, with the Blacketts, with his sister Molly, with the harbourmaster, even with the lady in the shop in Rio.

Captain Flint's bad-tempered nature even affects "the best of all natives", mother.

In the book, mother asks John if the Swallows have been meddling with Captain Flint's houseboat:

"No," said John, gloomily. "But



The missing actor in this whole discussion is the 1974 film, which, though made 45 years after the book first appeared, somehow managed to remain true to the spirit of the original.

he thinks we have."

"I know," said mother, "Mrs Dickson told me. I said I was sure you hadn't."

Mother knows her son, and believes him.

"He called me a liar."

"He wouldn't have called you that if he knew you," said mother. "It doesn't matter what people think or say if they don't know you. They may think anything."

In the new film, they simplify things by not having the Amazon's set off a firework on Captain Flint's houseboat roof. Instead, John accidentally breaks a window in the houseboat, thus giving everyone, including mother, a reason to suspect the Swallows of the theft at the end of the story. And the mother seems quite ready to believe it.

Even the secondary characters are bad tempered, with Mrs Jackson being negative about more or less everything, including the more laid back Mr

Jackson, in almost every scene in which she appears.

When the movie *Swallows* meet the charcoal burners, movie's general unpleasantness reappears. Although the men will turn out to be friendly, the first couple of minutes as John and Titty (sorry, Tatty) enter the camp are pretty fraught, with all the dead animals, and the sheep's skull, and the adder on Tatty's feet, followed by what seems to be a fairly hostile reception.

In the book, however, Roger is a bit frightened when Old Billy appears and he takes his sister's hand. But the charcoal burner's first words are reassuring:

“ ‘Hullo you!’ said the little old man. ‘come to have a look, have you. Glad to see you.’ ”...

“He seemed a very friendly sav-

age. Roger let go of Titty's hand.”

And the adder sleeps safely in a box under Young Billy's bed!

### Have times changed?

Time after time the movie takes an incident in the book and hypes it into something more scary or conflictual.

We are told that it is impossible to write stories or make movies that could have been made 30 or 50 or 70 years ago. Supposedly the world has changed, and it can no longer be done. Today's audience wants something more interesting. (You are free to ignore the success of the 1974 movie!)

I think in many ways it is that true that society has become less like the idealized version of fair play and comradeship that Ransome's books portray. Perhaps it is simply that those ideals seem naive and no longer attainable.

That does not mean we have to like it. And it does not mean that we have to encourage the meanness that today seems all too prevalent. If the The Arthur Ransome Society is going to mean anything, it should not be simply a means of encouraging the outdoor skills and activities that are being lost. Above all it should continue to encourage the values of self-reliance, comradeship, mutual aid and empathy that Ransome's work championed. The new movie, alas, does not do that; all too often it undercuts those values.

Several reviews have said things along the lines of, well, hopefully at least it will encourage children who have never heard of him to read Arthur Ransome. I hope so too, but I fear they may find it all a bit confusing. Perhaps not.

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## The New Movie

By Donald Tunnicliff Rice

It must have been twenty or so years ago that I discovered the 1974 *Swallows and Amazons* VHS\* in the Columbus, Ohio, public library. Some boy — and I'm sure it was a boy — had scrawled on the cover, “This is the most boring movie I have ever seen.” I was immediately reassured and knew that I was going to enjoy it, not because it was boring, but because it must not have been Disneyfied to appeal to an audience unfamiliar with the books. And I was right. Loved it.

Then — I guess it was five years ago — I happened to be in the vicinity of Canterbury, England, when the touring musical version of *Swallows and Amazons* was playing at the Marlowe Theatre. It was with some apprehension that I awaited its start. I admit it

took a few minutes to adapt my brain to the non-traditional casting (age, size, and ethnicity were out the window) and the clever, imaginative set with musicians and crew members as part of the show. Then I was totally entranced, even believing that two blue ribbons were a body of water. This show deserved every enthusiastic review it received.

This brings us up to this year and the 2016 *Swallows and Amazons* movie. Didn't like it. Not because it didn't stick to the original story, but because it was a stupid story. I wouldn't have liked this movie if I'd never read the book. When I saw the stage musical I absolutely believed in Roger even though the actor who played him was old enough to have a beard — and did

have a beard. The play was a fantasy, and Roger's characterization worked. However, I could not accept the advanced ages of the children in the movie. The older ones would have to be emotionally stunted and possibly dangerous to act so childishly. And I really, really missed Captain Flint. The only part of the movie I truly liked was seeing the names of acquaintances in the credits.

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\*For those of you who are too young to know, VHS stands for Video Home System in which tape cassettes about the size of a paperback were inserted into a tape player (and recorder) attached to your television. At the time it provided a welcome opportunity to see movies you might otherwise have missed.

## Kanchenjunga's Cairn — Places we've been and our adventures

### Tent for Two: A Year of Adventure

By Elizabeth Jolley

TARS family member Helen Jolley of Portland, Oregon, and her “partner-in-climb” Mike Dorfman of Boston, MA are taking the year off from work and normal daily life, a choice of which I am sure Ransome would have approved whole-heartedly!

Under the name “Tent for Two”, Helen and Mike have already climbed four snowcaps in the Cascade Mountain Range of Oregon and Washington. First they climbed our famous volcano, Mt. St. Helens (8366 feet/2550 meters), which Helen has designated as “her” mountain, 'cause clearly she's named after it! Next they moved upwards to Mt. Adams, (12,280 feet/3743 meters). Moving further north, Mt. Baker (10,781 feet/3286 meters) was third on their list. The crowning glory was Mt.

Rainier, a full 14,411 feet/4392 meters of elevation! They were both happy and a bit surprised that each climb went well, and they were not turned back because of weather, timing or dangerous conditions.

That was just the start of their year. After all four of those climbs, they headed to the Wind River Range in Wyoming. The high route across/through this range is pretty challenging: elevation stays mostly above 10,000 feet/3048 meters, and is often above 13,000 feet/3962 meters! Although they had planned an 8-10 day backpacking trip, they only stayed about 5 days, finding it was



Helen & Mike on top of Mt. Adams with Helen's tall brother, Will.

dangerous due to larger-than-usual amount of snow in the highest passes, as well as thunderstorms rolling in. But not to worry, they still have plenty of adventures left in their year!

As I type this, Helen and Mike are about a week away from completing a 500-mile/804-km+ backpacking trip on the highest portion of the Pacific Crest Trail, the Sierra Range in California. We recently enjoyed catching up with them for some R and R and lots of good cooked meals — the sort they can't manage on their lightweight one-burner stove — at Tuolumne Meadows, just east and uphill from Yosemite National Park.

When they finish the trail section, Mike and Helen are headed into San Francisco to clean up and feed up at

On Mt. Rainier, Helen offers Mike an Oreo to stave off being hungry.



an aunt's house, then to Massachusetts and New Hampshire for Mike's sister's wedding and his mom's birthday. I am sure his parents will be happy to find that he has survived all the adventures so far! Fair disclosure: Helen and Mike are carrying a device designed to keep all the various parents happy: InReach by Garmin. Using the website and a password, any of us can check on our determined adventurers to see where they are on a map, with pings sent via satellite every hour. Whew! Nice choice on their part :-)

After spending the remainder of October and all of November living at Helen's family home (because they have been living far away in Massachusetts and Maine for four years, and her family needs some Helen-time), the daring duo will fly away to Ecuador for some climbing and a Galapagos Islands visit. In January they will head to New Zealand, where Mike had a term abroad in college. He wants to share his memories with Helen, and she wants to check out the Lord of the Rings sites. No surprise that they want to do some climbing and/or backpacking there! After that? Plans are on hold until later, but may include much-deserved down time on a nice island somewhere quiet, time in India and Nepal, possibly a stop somewhere in eastern Europe, and definitely some western European

If you are interested in following along as they travel around the world, check out their blog here:

<https://tentfortwoblog.wordpress.com/>

and their Facebook page here:

[https://www.facebook.com/search/str/Tent+for+Two/keywords\\_top](https://www.facebook.com/search/str/Tent+for+Two/keywords_top)

visits. Helen, with a Master of Education in PE, wants to visit some of the famed northern European countries to learn more about their schools; maybe Denmark or Finland.

Finally, we have cooked up plans for parents to meet up with them in Eng-

land, and you can be sure that a visit to the Lakes District will happen! We have fond memories of our two family trips there in 2000 and 2004. Helen's eyes lit up as she exclaimed, "We can have Swallows & Amazons time together again!"



At Tuolumne Meadows with Helen's parents.

## Useful Links

**The Arthur Ransome Society (TARS) website:** <http://www.arthur-ransome.org.uk>

**All Things Ransome, a website devoted to keeping articles, artwork, and anything related to Ransome:** <http://www.allthingsransome.net>

**The Arthur Ransome Wiki, an encyclopedia on Ransome, his life and works:** [http://arthur-ransome.wikia.com/wiki/Arthur\\_Ransome\\_Wiki](http://arthur-ransome.wikia.com/wiki/Arthur_Ransome_Wiki)

## Ship's Library — Books we've read and want to share

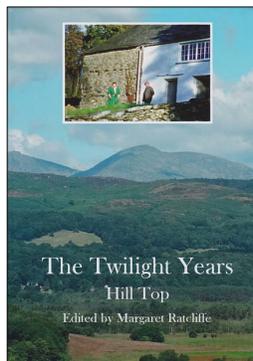
### *The Twilight Years - Hill Top*

By Simon Horn

*The Twilight Years* is a two-volume collection that will bring together Arthur Ransome's diaries for the last 10 years of the author's life. Volume 1, *Hill Top*, is the Amazon Publication for 2017. It presents Ransome's diaries of his life with Eugenia in the Lake District from 1956 through 1965. It also provides more extensive material about what editor Margaret Ratchliffe calls "The BBC Affair" in the latest *Mixed Moss*.

During this period the Ransomes divided their time between Hill Top and their London flat. The second volume will cover the London diary entries, and will be the Amazon Publications book for 2018. If you are interested, I suggest that you subscribe to the second volume, so that we can ensure its publication (watch for the subscription form with *Signals*).

That does raise the question, however: should you read Volume 1, if you can get it, and should you subscribe to Volume 2?



It strikes me that *The Twilight Years, Hill Top*, is a classic example of a book that appeals if you are already interested in Arthur Ransome. It is not a book that you should recommend to a friend whom you are trying to interest in our favourite author.

How can I put it? The diary entries are interestingly dull (dully interesting?). Ransome was not a diarist. The entries tell us what he was doing: if he went fishing and what fly he used, if Rattletrap was acting up, if his publishers were being unhelpful, if his health was causing particular problems. They do not generally tell us what he was thinking. I have a feeling that Ransome would be horrified if he knew his diaries were being reprinted. What for? Now, to be fair, I actually enjoyed

reading through the book, but I am an enthusiast (and a writer and editor, to boot), so I have an excuse. I am not certain that most members of the Society would be interested.

The book is divided into two parts, however. The second provides more extensive diary material about "the BBC affair". For me that was the most interesting part, because it shows why Arthur and Eugenia were so upset with the BBC's treatment of *Swallows and Amazons* for the 1962 TV series. They disagreed with the result, which, despite a contract that ostensibly gave Ransome the final say, turned his book into "a conventional 'cops and robbers' story, facetious and extremely silly".

So, if you want an insight into Ransome's final years, read *The Twilight Years*. It will give you an idea of what they were like. If you are like me, however, it will make you wish that Ransome had been a diarist, along with everything else he was.



Chilean training ship, the barquentine *Esmeralda*, anchored in Halifax harbour, for Canada Day, July 1, 2017.

This beautiful ship has a controversial past, since it was used as a prison ship by the Pinochet regime after the Chilean military coup that overthrew the democratically elected Allende government in 1973.



## Pieces of Eight — The Junior Pages



### A Book Maze

Each picture from one of Ransome's books links to a place in the maze where you must choose which way to go. Start at the top with *Swallows and Amazons*. To find your next choice look for *Swallowdale*. End at the middle with *Great Northern?* But watch out: two of the clues are wrong. Good luck!

The maze is a circular labyrinth with a central point. Red lines connect 12 picture clues to specific points within the maze. The clues are:

- Top: A boat with a large sail (from *Swallows and Amazons*).
- Top-right: A group of people around a conical tent (from *Swallowdale*).
- Right: A person in a canoe on a river (from *Swallowdale*).
- Far right: A sailboat on a lake (from *Swallowdale*).
- Bottom-right: A person on a boat (from *Swallowdale*).
- Bottom: A person on a boat (from *Swallowdale*).
- Bottom-left: A person on a boat (from *Swallowdale*).
- Left: A house with people on bicycles (from *Swallowdale*).
- Far left: A boat on a lake with a cliff in the background (from *Swallowdale*).
- Top-left: A person on a boat (from *Swallowdale*).
- Bottom-center: A person on a boat (from *Swallowdale*).
- Bottom-right: A person on a boat (from *Swallowdale*).

(Solution on page 19.)

## The Sea Bear's Galley — Eating with the Swallows and Amazons

### Fried Cannonballs

By Molly McGinnis

“Fried Cannonballs” sound so tasty, the perfect entrée for eating round a campfire. Many of us have dreamed of making them and some of us have tried making them. Ransome gives us the Swallows’ recipe:

First, John opens a tin of corned beef, and they take turns with the mincing machine. (With three hungry crews, eight people altogether, the Best of All Natives must have supplied a very large-sized tin!)

Mincing machines, or meat grinders in the USA, haven’t changed much over the years. Here’s the machine Susan blued an allowance on, or one much like it.



I found this one, made in England in the 1920’s, on the Web. It’s about identical to the meat grinder whose handle I manned at about Roger’s age, in Ohio in the 1940’s. I wonder what Susan fastened her mincing machine

The corned beef, a couple of onions and some stale bread saved by thrifty cooks were put through the machine, and then mixed together in a pudding bowl with a raw egg and the little that was left of the morning’s milk. The mixture was rolled into balls, by Titty and Dorothea, who happened to have the cleanest hands. Butter was melted in the frying pan, and then a skilful circular motion, close above the flames, gave the cannonballs a chance of being browned on all sides.

*Pigeon Post*

to... some have legs instead of a clamp, but the legs are meant to bolt onto a sturdy surface.

#### About ingredients

I couldn’t make Fried Cannonballs work with any kind of tinned (canned) corned beef, so I abandoned authenticity and made my Fried Cannonballs from corned brisket and round I cooked myself. American supermarkets sell this in plastic vacuum bags. An even better, British style, cut is called silverside, from more or less the same area of the cow as the round in an American cut. I’ve seen silverside in Canada and it’s sold online.

About butter: supermarket butter is loaded with whey and wash water (“overrun”) and not good to fry with and so is most of the exor-

bitantly priced “European Style” butter (plugra) I’ve tried. Amish butter is becoming very popular and it’s probably very close to the butter the Dixons made in the S&A books, with the whey paddled out and the same delicious taste. Look on the internet if you don’t see the two-pound paper-wrapped rolls in your local groceries. It keeps very well (that’s why we paddle the excess liquid out) in the refrigerator and forever in the freezer.

Potatoes and onions: Organic onions are usually dryer. Use yellow or white cooking onions, not the “sweet” kind. Red, russet, and “gold” potatoes will work but the “gold” kinds seem to hold things together better. Most kinds are tight-textured and probably much like the new or early potatoes the S&A’s would have had, which could well have had yellow flesh like the best modern potatoes.

#### Cooking the meat

It takes a few hours but only a few minutes of your time to cook corned



beef. I baked a brisket from the package directions once and I'll never boil corned beef again! If you do "boil" the meat, use the simmer burner after bringing it to a boil and hold the heat so low the broth barely "shimmers," with maybe an occasional bubble, so the meat won't go to strings before it's tender.

Fried Cannonballs are a second meal from the corned beef (two packages if there are many at table) and here's how it works.

First meal: corned beef, potatoes and cabbage cooked in the juice, or cole slaw.

Second meal: fried cannonballs made with leftover corned beef, potatoes, and raw onion.

### 1. Baking the meat:

Allow three to four hours for cooking (the package lies). I trim as much fat as I can from the meat because it's too delicious to resist; you may wish to skip trimming. Put the corned beef into an oven dish with lots of room for water with what's left of the fat on top. Cover the meat with water, dump the spice package plus a clove or two and some peppercorns over it, and cover it – fold foil over the dish to make a tight lid if necessary.

Stick a fork in the meat after a couple of hours – it probably won't be tender at all – turn it over and add more water if it's not to the top of the meat. If the meat tests tender a long time before dinner hold it at about 140°F (60°C) if your oven has a 'keep warm' cycle, or leave it in the turned-off oven and an hour before serving turn the oven to 250°F (120°C) to heat. This makes lovely firm corned beef which slices rather than breaking into strings.

### 2. The rest of the dinner:

You'll boil potatoes and cabbage in the broth. If you baked in a stove-top pan, put the meat on a plate with a little juice, cover and keep warm while you cook the vegetables in the baking pan. Or, pour off some broth into a saucepan and keep the meat warm in its baking dish. In either case bring the broth to a boil on top of the stove (taste for salt and add water if necessary) and cook peeled potatoes (lots of potatoes! You'll use some later) and when they're a little short of tender (I use an icpick to test) add skinny wedges of cabbage to cook lightly. Meanwhile, slice some of the meat rather thickly and add sliced and unsliced meat back to the pan before taking it all to the table. Hey! I paid a lot for my fancy pans and they always go to the table. Besides, isn't that what the S&As would do?

When dinner is over, fish out the meat and potatoes and put them in the refrigerator.

In a day or two you can use the pound or so of leftover meat and come cooked potatoes to make Fried Cannonballs.

At last! The Cannonballs.

#### Recipe One:

##### Cannonballs with Potatoes

It takes less time to make the cannonball mix than to read the directions!

You will need a big bowl with room to mix it all up in. Exact proportions are less important but the mix must hold together enough to shape into spheres. Characteristics of ingredients vary. Some potatoes are larger or more dry, some onions are smaller or juicier, and so on. (If you ate all the potatoes, peel a few more, slice thickly

and microwave them between two plates with a few drops of water while you prepare the meat and onion, allowing about one minute per potato.)

It's easier to roughly chop the cooked potatoes (they'll break up when you mix the cannonballs) than to try to get them through the grinder. For your first barrage of cannonballs, try about 2/3 as much potato as meat. You can adjust the proportions to taste; you may want more potato (or need more cannonballs). Put the chopped potatoes into a bowl big enough to mix everything up in.

Tip: fasten a gallon plastic bag to the outlet of the grinder with a strong rubber band and you won't have to grind in stages into a tiny bowl.



#### The Mix

1. If you use an egg, break it into your bowl and beat it with a fork to mix white and yolk.

Cut a small to medium cooking (preferably not "sweet") onion and the chilled corned beef into strips that will go through the grinder. Grind the meat, add to the bowl, and grind the onion (my mother always put onion through last, to clean the grinder). Dump the meat onto the potatoes, grind on some pepper, and mix lightly

If the mix seems sloppy, squeeze some juice from the onion before adding it. Mix and knead it all together with your hands.

Note: dehydrated onion would probably be great for cannonballs. Would the mix need to stand for a bit to absorb the onion?

2. Heat a frying pan. I use the ancestral 12-inch cast-iron pan and start it heating on a low fire as I begin to shape the cannonballs.

3. Shape the cannonballs and put them on a plate. A big serving spoon helps me keep the shape round (ish).

4. Add fat to the frying pan, about a quarter inch. I like a mixture of olive oil or other good-tasting vegetable oil and butter. The oil keeps the butter from scorching.

5. When there's a slight haze over the fat, carefully slip the cannonballs into it from a big spoon, one at a time. As one side browns, turn them with the help of the spoon to keep the shape. No shaking my heavy pan! And turning rather than flipping is safer in-

doors. Eventually, you'll have something like this. Definitely fried and definitely cannonballs, though I'm not too sure about their ballistic characteristics.

And if you can't get the mixture to hold its shape? Make Man Friday cakes as Mrs. Walker did.

"What if we were to make pemmican cakes?" Man Friday rummaged in the store box, and found some butter which was rather soft. She sniffed at it, and said it ought to be eaten, anyhow, and more would have to be got from Mrs. Dixon's to-morrow. She found some potatoes and also the salt.

Man Friday... peeled some potatoes, and set them to boil in a saucepan at the edge of the fire. She chopped up the pemmican into very little bits like mince. Then, when the potatoes were soft, she took them out of the water, and broke them up, and mixed them with the chopped meat and made half a dozen round flat cakes of pemmican and potato. Then she put some butter in the frying-pan and melted it, and then she fried the pemmican cakes till they sizzled and bubbled all over them.

*Swallows and Amazons*

## Recipe 2: Susan's Recipe

You will need:

- Three (at least) slices of dry bread
- A large frying pan
- A large (serving) spoon
- A big bowl for mixing
- About a pound of cooked, chilled corned beef, cut into grinder-size strips
- A small egg
- A small to medium onion, peeled and sliced
- Milk (a very small amount)
- Pepper, nutmeg, garlic: inauthentic but tasty additions
- Fat for cooking (historically butter. Add about 1/3 olive or other oil to keep from scorching)

I like to add few scrapings of nutmeg and a clove of garlic. Cook would have nutmegs, but I doubt if any pantry in the S&A's books would have allowed garlic within a mile!

1. If you don't have well-dried bread handy, break the slices into small pieces and put it to dry out in a barely warm oven (175 to 200°F/ 100°C) well ahead of time. Don't even think about trying to grind bread, but throwing it into a food processor to make little lumps out of big ones is helpful. (You could toast fresh bread, but the dryer it is the better.)

2. Break an egg into the mixing bowl and break it up with a fork. Grind the onion, mix with the egg, add the bread and toss. Add a good grinding of pepper and a bit of nutmeg if you wish.

3. Grind the meat, add, and squoosh everything together firmly.



4. Let the mix firm up while you find the oil and butter and heat the pan (don't add fat yet), and hope the mix will form into fairly solid balls. If it won't, add more bread, or some cracker crumbs. If the mix still won't make a ball that will hold its shape, make Man Friday cakes or fry it all as a giant hamburger patty and cut in wedges to serve.

The S&A's obviously had a steel, not cast iron, frying pan:

*...a slip, or twist of a weak wrist had been known to send all eight cannon balls together headlong into the fire.*

This method is not an option for a cast iron pan unless you're an Olympic-class weight lifter. I turn the cannonballs with a spoon, restoring them to a more or less spherical shape also. But first—

7. Finishing: shape the cannonballs. Smaller balls – between golf and tennis– are less likely to break apart. If you have bread or cracker crumbs you can (inauthentically) roll the balls in the crumbs. This helps them to keep their shape. Let your cannonballs rest while you add about 1/4" of fat to the pan and heat until there is a slight haze over the surface. Then carefully slide the cannonballs from the spoon to the pan.

Serve hot.

### The Rest of the Meal

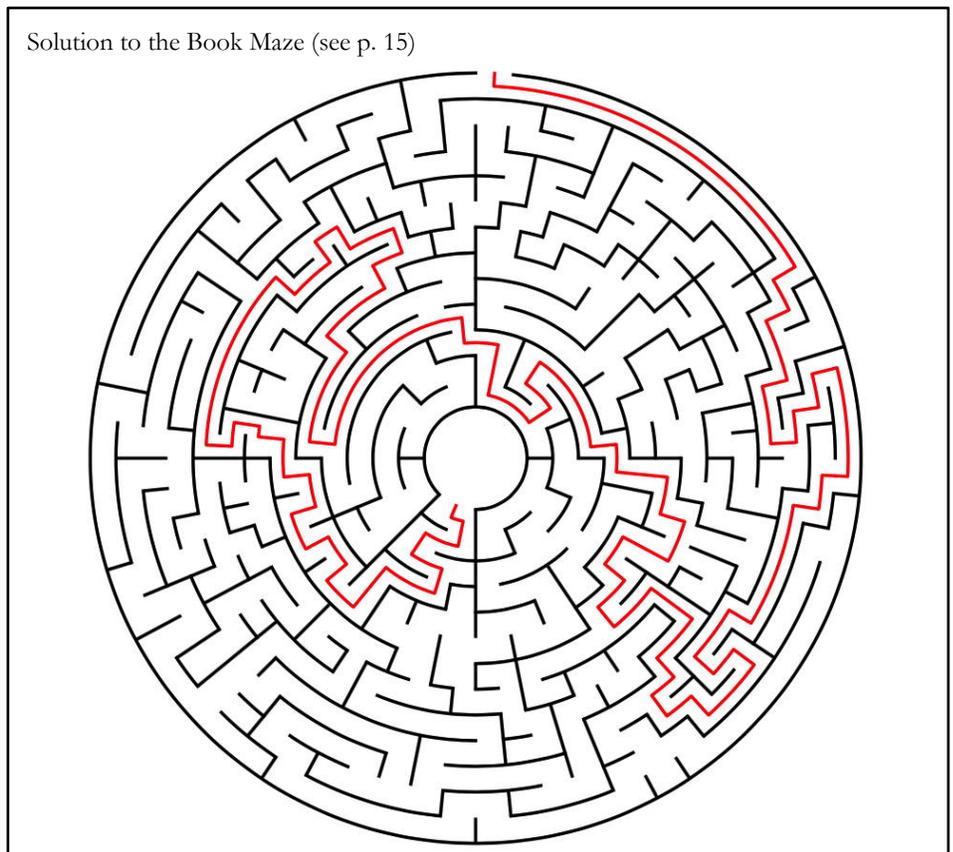
Authentic S&A's fresh "English" (shelled) peas are a rarity nowadays; use frozen if necessary. We like cole slaw better and it's very quick to make– shredded cabbage tossed with mayonnaise mixed with pickle juice and a bit of the ground onion. You can cut the mayonnaise with yoghurt or sour cream or use sour cream – sprinkle a bit of salt and a pinch of sugar over the cabbage. And you can buy slaw-ready ingredients of all kinds in

plastic bags now: cabbage, cabbage and carrot, broccoli slaw, kale slaw, brussels sprout slaw...

You don't necessarily need a starch because of the bread in the cannonballs. Potatoes go well with them but if you're going to boil potatoes why not make potato cannonballs...

And of course, blackberry and banana mash for dessert. If you don't remember the recipe, frozen blackberries work well and the rest is self-explanatory.

Solution to the Book Maze (see p. 15)



***Signals from TARSUS/North Pole News* is a joint publication of TARSUS (The Arthur Ransome Society USA) and TARS Canada.**

The TARSUS coordinator is Robin Marshall, [robin@arthur-ransome.org](mailto:robin@arthur-ransome.org)

The TARS Canada coordinator is Ian Sacré, [gallivanterthree@telus.net](mailto:gallivanterthree@telus.net)

The editor is Simon Horn, [sjhorn@gmail.com](mailto:sjhorn@gmail.com)

Please send contributions, questions and suggestions for the newsletter to the editor.