



## SIGNALS FROM T•A•R•S•U•S

*December 2002*

### **Autumn Greetings!**

This is the Autumn, 2002 issue of *Signals from TARSUS*, and accompanies *Mixed Moss* and *Outlaw* (for Junior and Family members). The first order of business is apologies once again for the delays in mailing the August publications. One of the two boxes of publications from the U.K. arrived in the U.S.; the other, containing *Signals*, never showed up at all. We finally had to get *Signals* printed locally to get the mailing out. The U.K. is taking steps to make sure that this doesn't happen again.

### **Welcome**

Welcome to Charlotte, Elizabeth and Emily Crowe; Aeloa Delaney; Robbin Gargiulo; Gordon Higbee; Jonathan Labaree; Molly M. McGinnis; Michael McGrath; and Osamu Sugimoto,

### **Résumés**

No new résumés this time. If you have not sent a Résumé please consider doing so. They make wonderful reading and tell us a lot about how our fellow U.S. TARS have found Ransome (and TARS).

### **Dollar to Pounds Sterling Exchange Rate**

As presaged in the August *Signals from TARSUS*, the dollar to pounds sterling exchange rate has gone up as of 1 October 2002. Our new exchange rate is £1.00 = \$1.65. (Those of you who have been members for some time will recall that this is the exchange rate we had a few years ago.) Please note that this exchange rate is in effect for all TARS-related transactions conducted through the TARSUS Coordinator (membership, purchases, etc.)

### **Renewals of Membership**

And speaking of Membership Renewals, it is once again That Time. 2003 Renewals are due as of 1 January 2003, and I encourage you to send in your renewal immediately, before you lose track of the renewal form, this newsletter, your checkbook ... A personalized renewal form accompanies this mailing ONLY if you need to renew; please return it and your membership fee to the TARSUS Coordinator (Dave Thewlis; address at end).

### **2003 AGM and Literary Weekend**

The 2003 TARS Annual General Meeting will be over Spring Bank Holiday weekend (our Memorial Day weekend), 23-26 May, in Shotley, East Anglia, hosted by the East Anglian Region, convenient for Pin Mill, Alma Cottage and Secret Water (see next page for more details). The 2004 AGM will be run by the Scottish Region, probably in Edinburgh, on the same last weekend in May.

The next Literary Weekend will be held at the University of Greenwich, London (the *Cutty Sark* site) on 5-7 September, 2003.

## More about the 2003 AGM:

Meals and indoor meetings are planned to be at the Royal Hospital School at Shotley with sailing on a local reservoir. Meals will be on a cafeteria basis from Friday evening to Monday lunch; the expected cost for meals is about £50 (\$82.50). Unfortunately the School cannot provide accommodation as pupils will still be in residence; the AGM Committee will be providing information on local B&Bs for the assistance of TARS attending the weekend. In addition, Camping and Caravan (trailer) facilities with toilets and showers will be available on site, for about £20 (\$33) per pitch for the weekend.

*Nancy Blackett, Peter Duck and Lottie Blossom* (now *Ragged Robin*) are expected to be present, and it is hoped that Cochy can be reunited with NB. Unfortunately the tides will be wrong for a crossing of the Wade, and there will be extensive bird nesting on the island, so a visit may not be possible even by boat. Visits to AR-related sites are under negotiation and there will be spaces in the programs for free time for members' own activities.

## Ransome-Related Article File

Another article, courtesy of Captain Ike Stephenson:  
Pub Crawling Under Sail: Sailing, March 2002  
Sailing a gaff rig on the Norfolk Broads (but no direct Ransome references)

Copies are available to TARSUS members for the cost of postage and copying.

## Amazon Publications

The 2002 publication from Amazon is Arthur Ransome's *Bohemia in London* and has recently arrived to its subscribers. This is a beautiful new edition of Ransome's "first real book" with the original 1097 illustrations by Fred Taylor and a preface by Paul Crisp. The TARS Stall has some copies available if you were not a subscriber for the 2002 publication.

The 2003 Amazon Publication will be *Jib-booms and Bobstays: a Companion to the Swallows and Amazon Books of Arthur Ransome*; a note from Roger Wardale says "The Amazon team ... are hard at work scouring the twelve books for obscure, archaic and technical words and phrases to be included ... We hope to be able to provide plenty of illustrations to explain, for example, just what a bobstay really is!"

The TARSUS subscription for the 2003 Amazon Publication will be \$30, which includes air post from the U.K. Send your check for \$30 to the TARSUS Coordinator at the address below; make it out to "TARS" and indicate on the memo field that it is for the 2003 Amazon Publication.

The current and previous Amazon Publications are available from the TARS Society Stall (except for the ones which have sold out); more information can be found in TARS publications or on the TARS Stall web page at

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



*TARS crewmember #1025, Chris Cory, wrote the following for a book that his undergraduate class at Yale University is compiling for its 40th reunion this spring. We reprint it with his permission. The instructions were to write about "\_\_\_\_\_ and me," filling in the blank with anything important to him.*

**Arthur Ransome and Me**, by Christopher T. Cory

Her name is "Captain Nancy," she's a pirate, and thanks to her I married my wife.

Captain Nancy is a venturesome character, see, in the Swallows and Amazons series of children's books written in England during the 1920's and '30's. They and their author, Arthur Ransome, have become a minor amusement and a reinforcement for my hobby of sailing. They also mean I have good material for my future as a grandparent-who-reads-aloud.

The connection began when my son David, then in college, visited his Anglophile grandparents and stumbled on a book in the series, Peter Duck. Though much too "old" for it, being well brought up, he was open to classic children's literature. Besides, he and his sister, Caroline, had come to love sailing as their parents and both sets of grandparents had before them, and the book had the author's deft line drawings of a schooner. David read it, loved it, and soon learned about the David R. Godine reprints of the Swallows and Amazons books in nice paperback editions. He promptly gave me Peter Duck to read aloud to my stepson, Bob. It was a great success.

I distinctly recall finding the detail that confirmed I was in the hands of someone who knew not only his story telling but his nautical and natural facts. It was a brief description of the way differing refractions appear to bend a straight object like a fishing line that is half in and half out of clear water. Before long, I found Captain Nancy.

The books are about children whose parents trust them to go off sailing and camping by themselves and about the way their imaginations endow their activities with the whiff of adventure. In the first, Swallows and Amazons, children camp on an island in the English lake country, calling themselves the Swallows, after their boat, the "Swallow," and styling themselves explorers. (Their parents and other adults are "natives.") Soon they encounter another small sailboat, the "Amazon," with two girls who fly the skull and crossbones. The older one, whose imagination fuels many subsequent adventures, is the captain. Her sister explains why she is called Nancy: "Her name is Ruth, but Uncle Jim said that Amazons were ruthless, and as our ship is the 'Amazon' and we are Amazon pirates from the Amazon River, we had to change her name." Of course.

It was good to find a strong female character and children who love sailing. It was pleasant to find adventures that did not require violence or military equipment. It was nostalgic to find a sunny world where children could be safe by themselves in the out of doors. I promptly bought and read Robert all the other Ransome books I could find. And I started to learn about their author, who clearly was a thinking man's Victor Appleton. Appleton was the pseudonymous author of the Tom Swift books I grew up on, which I later learned were cranked out, along with the Nancy Drew mysteries and the Hardy Boys adventures, by a production line of hacks in a big house in Montclair, N.J.

I soon realized that if you ask almost any English person of a certain age about Swallows and Amazons, they'll light up with astonishment that an American knows one of their childhood delights. One of them piloted me to what now is a growing Ransome trove that includes books about the real life models for the children and the settings of his stories, a biography, and his own winning autobiography.

It turns out he was a true man of letters. He grew up summering in the Lake District, never finished college, and was a would-be writer in London until he fled a bad marriage to become a sophisticated war correspondent during the Russian revolution and marry Trotsky's secretary. In his 40's he found the rigors of foreign reporting more than his health could take. Eventually he moved to the lakes, where in 1920 he published the first Swallows and Amazons book and gradually became lionized. Once I had learned all that, for me only one thing was missing -- his first successful book, Racundra's First Cruise.

I knew he had written it to celebrate the construction and first sail of "Racundra," a 28-foot yawl he had built in Riga, Latvia, where he lived for three years after leaving Russia. It was out of print, and I had never asked rare book dealers to search for it.

Which brings us to a day sail ten years ago.

By then I had a stubby 22-foot sailboat with a cabin. Divorced, I was introduced by mutual friends to the editor of the weekly newspaper in East Hampton, Long Island, Helen Rattray, whose husband had died several years before and who had taken over the paper. She had my admiration for its good writing and tough journalism. The friends encouraged me to ask her to go sailing. I did; she accepted; we were becalmed. In the ensuing conversation, I waxed enthusiastic about Ransome and confided my quest for Racundra's First Cruise.

Quietly, she said, "I think I have that."

The conversation had been terrific up to that point. This, however, was kismet.

A few days later, she brought me the book. It was captivating. The first sentence is: "Houses are but badly built boats so firmly aground that you cannot think of moving them." We went sailing again. Before long she encouraged me to get a slightly larger boat (a Pearson 32) and offered to go halves on it. We named it "Racundra," got married, and have lived, though Ransome never uses the phrase, happily ever after.

My two grandchildren and her two are not quite old enough for Swallows and Amazons, but meanwhile The Arthur Ransome Society, saltily acronymed TARS, supports the publishing of Ransome's many other works, including quite a bit he wrote about sailing. (The society is one of those slightly quaint British enthusiasms like the Baker Street Irregulars, and can be found through The Arthur Ransome Site at <http://www.arthur-ransome.org/ar/>. I'm a member, carrying a wallet card proclaiming itself the "ship's papers" for "Crew Member No 1025.")

The most recent Ransome book is Racundra's Third Cruise\*. Here's a passage from it: "The mist curled up from the surface of the water and rolled northwards in the way we wanted to go, but at first there was scarcely wind to keep the mainsheet taught and the boom out. We moved at the pace of a barge drawn by a very sleepy horse, and, smoking the first pipe of the day, leaning over the mizzen boom and watching the steaming marshland on either side of us I felt the perfect bargee and enjoyed myself. This was not like those other moments sailing 'Racundra' by night with sleeping crew over a wide sea, with fifty miles before us on a single tack, but something quite different, quiet, intimate, and delightful in its different way."

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\*TARS: I ordered it on the Web through Amazon UK. -- CTC



## Feature Column: Ransome Readers Recommend

This column presents short reviews of books which Ransome readers want to recommend to others, especially Juniors, and we hope that both Juniors and others will offer reviews of books which they think will appeal to Ransome readers.

*The Cruise of the Blue Dolphin:  
A Family's Adventure at Sea* by Nina Chandler Murray

Reviewed by Pam Marshall

I accidentally came across this book when I typed Swallows and Amazons into the search box of the Common Reader web site. They billed it as a real-life Swallows and Amazons adventure, and indeed it is.

In 1933, the author's father, who had lost his job and who had fallen, but not too far, on hard times, decided to take his family on one last family adventure. The author, then thirteen, plus three of her four brothers and sisters, her mother, father, and grandmother set off on a chartered schooner for a year's sailing trip. They started from Gloucester, Massachusetts, sailed down the Atlantic coast, through the Panama Canal to the Galapagos Islands, and back again.

It was a year at sea with adventures enough for a lifetime – deserted islands, eccentric characters, pirates, buried treasure, and giant turtles. The children were already experienced sailors when they started out, but by the time they came back the girls were considered by one friend to be the most competitive sailors in Nantucket.

They did schoolwork with their Pa, had navigation lessons from the Captain, and got practical experience in every aspect of sailing. The focus of the book, though, is not on the sailing, but on their adventures, some amusing and some frightening.

A book, then, to be enjoyed by all AR fans from high school age on up.

*The Cruise of the Blue Dolphin* was published in November, 2002 by The Lyons Press



## From TARS Canada

As I mentioned in an earlier *Signals from TARSUS*, the Canadian newsletter, *North Pole News*, will occasionally republish something from *SfT* they believe will be of interest to Canadian TARS, and vice versa. *NPN* has been running a series of quizzes from the Ransome books. Here is the first quiz.

### SWALLOWS AND AMAZONS

#### **ONE POINT**

- 1.1 What was the name of the "powerful native" at the farm where the Swallows stayed?
- 1.2 What had the Swallows forgotten when they first set out for the island?
- 1.3 Who went with John when he first took *Swallow* to the secret harbour?
- 1.4 What name did the Swallows have for corned beef?
- 1.5 What did Mother say the Swallows would get if they didn't eat plenty of lettuce and peas?
- 1.6 What name did the Swallows have for ginger beer?
- 1.7 What did Titty call the toffee Mrs Dixon made for them?
- 1.8 What did Roger find in the grass when the Amazons attacked Wild Cat Island?
- 1.9 What did *Amazon* have that allowed her to sail closer to the wind than *Swallow*?
- 1.10 Why didn't it matter that Roger couldn't reach the upper candle lantern on the leading lights?
- 1.11 Who had a birthday party on Wild Cat Island?
- 1.12 What did Titty find to eat in *Amazon* after she had captured the boat?
- 1.13 What were the octopuses in Octopus Lagoon?
- 1.14 What did the Amazons use as a white flag to surrender?
- 1.15 What was the name of the policeman who came to Wild Cat Island?
- 1.16 What did Captain Flint have in his hands to fight with at the battle of Houseboat Bay?

#### **TWO POINTS**

- 2.1 What did the Swallows call the promontory where they signed the ship's papers?
- 2.2 What book did Titty want to take to the island, but left behind because it was big and heavy?
- 2.3 What song did the Swallows sing when they first set out for the island?
- 2.4 Which Swallows went for milk the first morning on the island?
- 2.5 What did the Swallows realise they had left behind, and went back to Holly Howe to collect on the second day?
- 2.6 What did John bring back in a small tobacco tin from Dixon's farm on the second morning?
- 2.7 What were Captain Flint's names in real life?

- 2.8 What birds did the Swallows see on the way to the charcoal burners' camp, that Roger called parrots?
- 2.9 Why did the Billies keep a snake with them in their wigwam?
- 2.10 What did John do to settle himself down after having been called a liar by Captain Flint?
- 2.11 What bird did Titty watch when she was alone on Wild Cat Island?
- 2.12 How did the robbers who broke into Captain Flint's houseboat get to the lake?
- 2.13 What do the Swallows call the constellation the Great Bear?
- 2.14 When they were sailing at night, what first alerted John to the fact that they were near land?
- 2.15 Why did the Amazons know so well the policeman who came to Wild Cat Island?
- 2.16 What wouldn't Susan let Captain Flint eat after the battle?

### **THREE POINTS**

- 3.1 What famous ship was Roger imitating at the beginning of the story?
- 3.2 What breakfast cereal did the Swallows have on the island?
- 3.3 What word did the female native use to mean "good night and sleep well".
- 3.4 What did mother leave in John's tent on her visit to the island the first evening?
- 3.5 When the Swallows and the Amazons concluded their treaty of offence and defence, what was the latitude and longitude given in the treaty?
- 3.6 How many mugs did the Swallows bring to the island?
- 3.7 What was the first thing done to mark where the Swallows reached the path to the charcoal burners' camp, and who did it?
- 3.8 What did Mother cook when she visited Titty when the others were away at war?
- 3.9 What was the message the Amazons left in their boathouse?
- 3.10 On the morning after the war, what did Roger want to put on his pemmican?
- 3.11 When Captain Flint was trying to tidy his burgled cabin, what was the parrot doing?
- 3.12 What country's flag was Captain Flint flying from his houseboat during the battle?
- 3.13 What bones did Titty and Roger find when they were looking for Captain Flint's treasure?
- 3.14 What did Captain Flint write on the wooden fish he put on Cormorant Island where his box had been?
- 3.15 After the storm on the last night, what did Mother bring from Holly Howe?
- 3.16 What was the last song the Swallows sang as they sailed into Holly Howe Bay for the last time?

Answers in the next *Signals from TARSUS*, along with the second quiz. Good luck!

From our 10-Gong Contributing Editor Mary Wessel Walker:

### The Third Somewhat-Annual Midwestern TARS Gathering

Once again, the TARS gathering in the Midwest was small, but fun and successful. We had seven TARS: the four Wessel Walkers, along with Kaitlin McCarthy and her mom, Gaye MacGregor and their German exchange student, Nela. We gathered at Gun Lake in western Michigan for a happy day of sailing and picnicking.

Gun Lake is a fairly large lake, with lots of different peninsulas and bays and even a few islands to explore. Most of the lake is surrounded by private property, but there is a large piece that is in a state park, which includes picnic tables and a swimming beach. (It also has camping facilities, but we didn't take advantage of those because it wasn't very far from home.)



The *Wild Cat* under sail

When the two parties met up at Gun Lake, we realized that we wouldn't be able to fit all seven of us into the *Wild Cat*, so Donna, Gaye, and Nela decided to scout out the landscape and establish a land base with a soft landing beach and shady picnic tables. Meanwhile, Jim, Margaret, Kaitlin and I launched the *Wild Cat* and sailed her over to the place the land party had discovered. Then we traded crews and took short sails all over the lake for the rest of the day. Some people would go out in the boat for half an hour or so, while the rest ate some picnic lunch, chatted and read our books. The boat crews explored the

various bays and inlets up and down the lake. The wind was brisk and the weather was occasionally a little threatening, but it was a great day for sailing. Gaye taught us a few new tricks to improve our sailing, and Nela took the tiller for the first time ever!

In the afternoon, the land base was being crewed by Kaitlin, Margaret, and I, so we decided to go swimming at the swimming beach while the others were off in the *Wild Cat*. We had a lot of fun having informal races and playing games. Then, while Margaret was off getting something, Kaitlin and I noticed that the *Wild Cat* was coming into sight. We decided that it would be fun to signal to them, and we both agreed that Margaret's red and white towel would be the best for the purpose. So, we carried it out into the middle of the swimming area and waved it, alternating the red side and the white side in a somewhat Morse-code-like fashion. I promise we didn't get it so very wet... ;-). The crew of the *Wild Cat* waved back, and some little kids swimming nearby were overheard to ask, "What are those big kids doing?!".



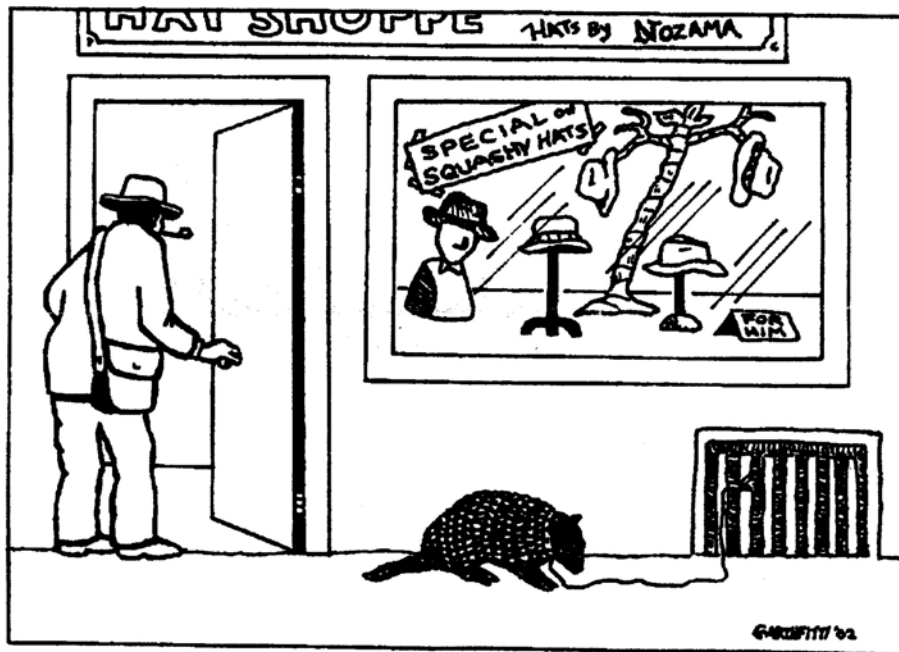
The crew: Nele, Gay, Kaitlin, Mary, Jim, Donna and Margaret

All in all, it was a delightful day, and all plan to participate in some similar event next summer. If you think you might be interested in joining us, contact Jim Wessel Walker at [jcgw@umich.edu](mailto:jcgw@umich.edu).

*About the author: Mary Wessel Walker is a student at Bryn Mawr College, which is just outside Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She is studying the ever-popular freshman major, undecided. And yes, Bryn Mawr is still an all women's college.*

Also from TARSCanada

The latest *North Pole News* has this delightful cartoon from TARS Canada member Garth Hutton:



## TIMOTHY GOES SHOPPING

### A Final Word from the Editor

Have a wonderful rest of the year, and start thinking about TARSUS events for 2003. And please send articles for the next *Signals from TARSUS*, due out in February or March.

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