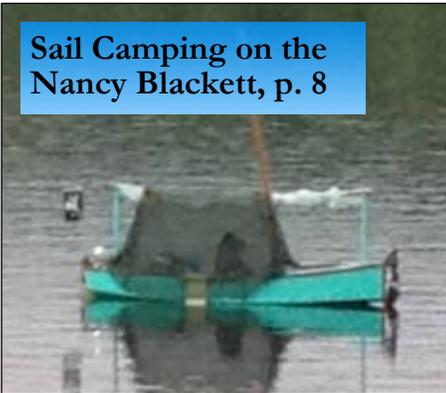




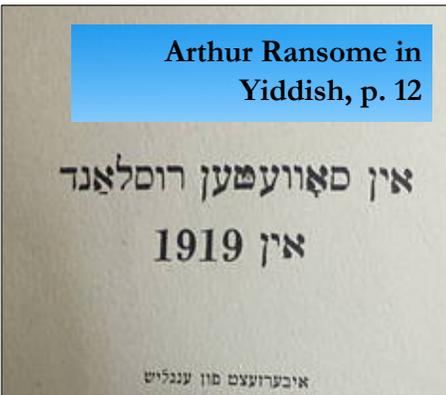
# Signals from TARSUS & North Pole News

June 2016

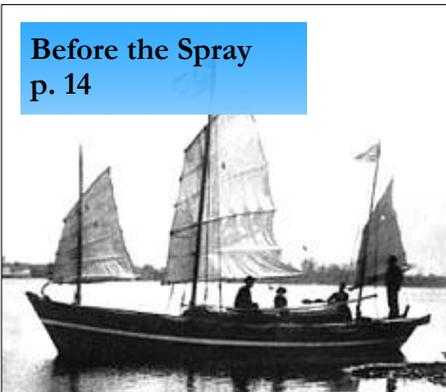
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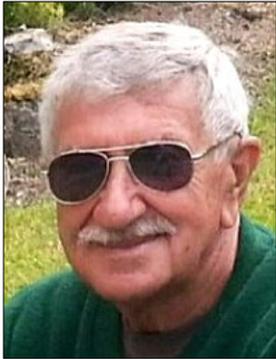
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**Support the Nancy Blckett Trust 20th Anniversary Appeal.  
Find out more on page 16.**

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



### A View from the Helm

By Robin Marshall, TARSUS Coordinator  
210 18th Street NW Bradenton, FL 34205  
robin@arthur-ransome.org

Once again, we are on the verge of summer, which gives us all a chance to get out and explore outdoor pursuits.

This summer looks set to be an opportunity for my own adventure. In May I will set off with my wife, and Oscar our dog, for eight weeks in the south of Spain. Later my son and grandson will join us and hopefully my daughter and grandchildren as well.

We really will be amongst the natives, since we have rented a house in a small village up in the mountains of Las Alpujarras. Over the winter we have been trying to learn some Spanish. This has been somewhat harder than we thought — maybe learning in one's 70s is not so easy.

Very impressed with the new newsletter. I hope you let Simon

know what you think and send him many articles. He needs some for the younger TARS as well.

Fortunately most 2016 subscriptions have now been paid, and I would like to thank all those who made an extra donation to TARS and in particular to TARSUS.

I have listed to the right those who so far have forgotten to send in their subscriptions in. As I mentioned last year: if you are not on the list, then you are paid up to date. However, if your name is listed and you believe you have paid, please contact me asap.

Have a great and enjoyable summer.  
Robin

### Jib Booms and Bobstays! You are standing into danger!

The TARS Membership Database is purged of non-renewals at the end of May. The following members have not yet renewed:

P J Bauer 1411  
W Eggena 5035  
D Hill 358  
D Iams Mcguire 4626  
F L Johnson 800

Please send your renewal check quickly or your membership is likely to go to Davey Jones!

Your membership type and renewal amount:

Junior: \$17.50 – Adult: \$52.50  
Student: \$35.00 – Family: \$67.25  
Senior/Pensioner: \$44.00  
Corporate: \$105.00

To pay, or if you have already paid, contact me by email at [usa@arthur-ransome.org](mailto:usa@arthur-ransome.org), phone at 941-726-1974 or mail at:

Robin Marshall  
210 N 18th St W.  
Bradenton FL 34205



Unidentified topsail schooner off Kingston, Ontario (photographed by your editor in June 2007).



## Greetings from the North

By Ian Sacré, TARS Canada Coordinator  
750 Donegal Place, North Vancouver, BC V7N 2X5  
gallivanterthree@telus.net

April 28th 2016

Greetings, fellow Canadian TARRY members! Simon recently sent out his reminder that input is required for the Spring edition of Signals from TARSUS/North

Pole News, so to avoid being keel-hauled or having my timbers shivered or, even worse, being Black Spotted, I thought I should at least have another go at contributing something (you can read my book reviews further on). First some administrative details. Our Canadian TARS membership subscribers now stand at 26, while the total actual membership consists of 40 warm bodies!

Regrettably, two members decided to resign from TARS, but all remaining Canadian subscriptions were fully paid up by the end of February. Ted Evans advised me that Headquarters is envious of the prompt Canadian membership renewal action. Apparently some of the home country members have to be 'bugged' well into June or beyond. Well done and thank you everyone! All we need to do now is

recruit some more willing hands to help swell our ranks a little. Perhaps we need to consider resorting to old press gang tactics to fill out our Watch Bills and Muster List?

Spring really does seem to have arrived in most parts of the country though I was dismayed to learn that parts of our land recently had fresh snow in mid April!

Not good.

I hope everyone makes bold plans for the summer, and that we will have the pleasure of hearing about some of your adventures in the autumn.

Wishing every one fair winds and calm seas,

Ian Sacré  
TARS Canada Co-ordinator

## Ship's Library — Books we've read and want to share (part 1)

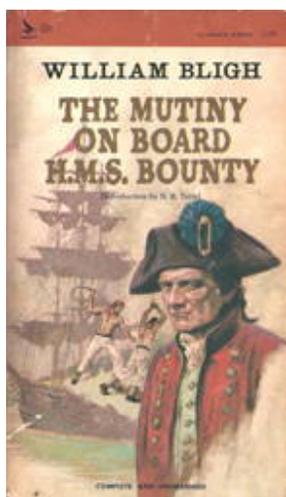
### Nautical Reading

Reviewed by Ian Sacré

This winter I had the opportunity to read a number of good books that other TARS members might well enjoy.

The first was *The Mutiny on Board HMS Bounty*, which is an account written by Captain William Bligh himself, shortly after he returned to England and was exonerated by the Naval Court Marshal for losing his ship.

As nearly everyone knows, after the mutiny of April 29, 1789, William Bligh was cast adrift in the *Bounty's* launch accompanied by 19 of his crew. The launch was 23 feet in length, of carvel construction. The narrative is drawn from his journal and ship's log, which his clerk man-

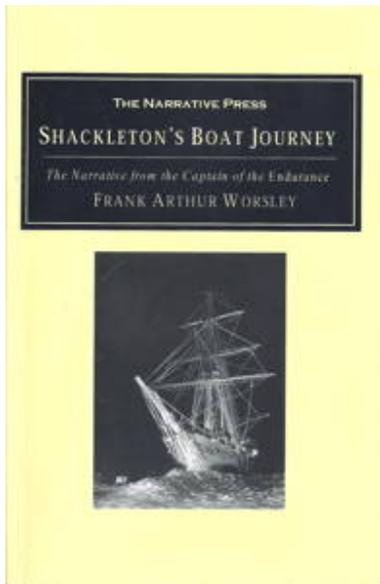


aged to take with him into the boat. I had always thought that the incredible 3,600 miles Bligh sailed was non stop. In fact he stopped several times during his small boat voyage, first in the islands between Tofua and Australia, then on the North East coast of Australia, before finally making fever-ridden Timor.

Bligh's only instruments were a quadrant — an early form of the modern

sextant — and a compass. Despite all the trials, tribulations and suffering they all endured, he was ever the navigator and took the time to record numerous hydrographic, geographic and navigational observations during the voyage. I found it a most interesting read.

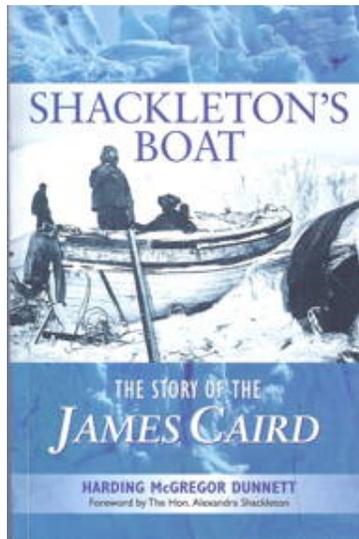
The next book I thoroughly enjoyed was *Shackleton's Boat Journey, The Narrative from the Captain of Shackleton's Ship, the Endurance*, written by Frank Arthur Worsley. Frank Worsley was the navigator of the launch during the 800-mile passage that carried six of them from Elephant Island to South Georgia Island. Their boat was called the *James Caird* and was also 23 feet long and carvel planked. Written in a typical mariner's plain-speaking style, the book is well worth reading.



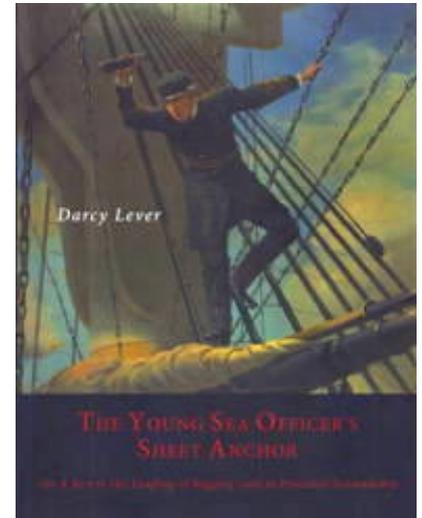
This book led me on to read *Shackleton's Boat, The Story of the James Caird*, written by Harding McGregor Dunnett. A most interesting book, well illustrated with many photographs. Frank Worsley oversaw the building of the *James Caird*, which was so named after one of Shackleton's main financial contributors to the ill-fated Antarctic Expedition. Though built in 1913-1914, the boat still exists and has been preserved.

In 2013 the *James Caird* became part of the Shackleton Exhibition on display at Dulwich College, Shackleton's old school. (The book's author also went to Dulwich.) The original rescue of the boat from its landing place on the island was the result of efforts by Norwegian whalers, based at that time on the north coast of South Georgia Is-

land. They were so impressed with the incredible small boat voyage in winter by Shackleton and his crew that they brought the boat back to their base and physically carried it up from the dock to a place of safety. Later they arranged for the boats' transport back to England!



Finally I read *The Young Sea Officer's Sheet Anchor, or A Key to the Leading of Rigging and to Practical Seamanship*, by Darcey Lever. Originally written in about 1811, the copy I found was a modern reprint of the original, beautifully illustrated text. All the drawings and plates are the original black and white engravings. So if you want to know how to manually step a mast in a three masted man-of-war or load water casks into a ship's boat on an open beach this is just the book for you.



The author's foreword is delightful. In one paragraph he says: "A mere verbal explanation often perplexes the mind, for no one but a seaman can clearly comprehend it; and he is not the object for whom such aid is intended."

He says in a later paragraph: "Young Officers sometimes feel a diffidence in soliciting information; either from a fear of exposing their ignorance, or from the idea that such a request may be treated with ridicule. A reference, like a work of this nature, which can be consulted in privacy will obviate the difficulty. It was not a secondary consideration in the prosecution of it. The Author has done his best." How very true even in this day and age.

For those that may be interested I found all the above books on [abebooks.com](http://abebooks.com), a site I use quite frequently.

## 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)



## A Note from the Editor

By Simon Horn, sjhorn@gmail.com

I recently had the chance to spend two weeks in Bermuda doing research for a book (although that's another story\*). It wasn't a very nautical visit, since I spent much of my time in archives and museum quarters examining old photographs, but Bermuda is a small, isolated island group in the middle of the At-

lantic, so you are never far from the sea, and boats. Big boats, little boats, cruise ships, dinghies, sail boats, motor boats, tug boats, ferry boats... the list could go on all day. There was even a Canadian frigate in harbour while I was there.

As far as I know, there is not the slightest evidence that Arthur Ransome, in his Captain Flint days, ever visited Bermuda, but I think he might have liked it. A British colony since 1612, Bermuda was described to me the year before my first visit in 1995 as "England with palm trees". A bit of an over-simplification, perhaps, especially since American influence has grown greatly since World War II, but in the first half of the 20th century the place would have been very English.

While Ransome probably didn't visit Bermuda, he did write introductions to seven volumes in the Mariner's Library, published by Rupert Hart-Davis in the 1950s. The Mariner's Library reprinted classic accounts of sailing voyages, often single-handed, beginning with the granddaddy of them all, Joshua Slocum's *Sailing Alone Around the World*. R. D. Graham's *Rough Passage* (Mariner's Library #9) describes his single-handed 1934 voyage from England to Newfoundland, followed by a harrowing return via Bermuda. Alain Gerbault's *In Quest of*

*the Sun* (Mariner's Library #30) presents the four and a half-year voyage of his cutter *Firequest* from New York through the Panama Canal to the South Pacific and back to France via the Cape of Good Hope, including an early stop off in Bermuda for repairs. (No doubt other books in the 38-volume series mention Bermuda as well, but my collection unfortunately remains incomplete.)

Bermuda has a long history of boat-building and sailing, one that is being carried on by the Bermuda Sloop Foundation's sailing training vessel, the *Spirit of Bermuda*. Alas, wooden sailing vessels are no longer built in Bermuda, so the 112-foot, three-

masted schooner was built in Rockport, Maine, to the pattern of a Bermuda-built, Royal Navy sloop of war from 1831. The ship was launched in 2006. When not voyaging with a crew of Bermuda youth, the *Spirit of Bermuda* can be seen moored at Dockyard, at the western end of the island, which is where my picture (below) was taken.

\* \* \*

I hope you like this edition of the newsletter. Thanks to everyone who sent in material or suggestions. For a while there I was afraid that the issue would be very thin, but people came through, as Elizabeth Jolley told me they would. Please send me your impressions, your criticisms, and your suggestions for future issues. While you are out enjoying the summer with your families, take a picture for the newsletter; I'm sure you can find an Arthur Ransome connection!

Simon

\* For anyone interested, try [this website](#) for a clue.



The *Spirit of Bermuda*, under power, leaving its berth at Bermuda's Dockyard.



as possible had the twelve novels on my bookshelf. These were read and reread several times over the following years, yellow and dishevelled as they became (as to be expected for 45-year-old paperbacks).

In 2012 I went on a group hiking trip in England to Coniston Water and the Cotswold Hills. Time had weakened my connection to the legacy of Arthur Ransome and the Lake District and thus, regretfully, I missed the opportunity to hike Kanchenjunga (The Old Man of Coniston) and possibly check out other Ransome highlights in the area of the Lakes. However, the arranged bus trip from Coniston to Bourton-on-the-Water in the Cotswolds included a stop at Little Moreton Hall in Cheshire, the Tudor architectural masterpiece. In the bookstore there I found and purchased Roger Wardale's book *Arthur Ransome, Master Storyteller*. This of

course rekindled a dormant interest in the great man and his children's novels, and I read the stories again once I returned home.

Then calamity struck! In March 2013 a broken water main filled my basement with water that, while clean, destroyed many books, including my Puffin editions of the Swallows and Amazons, as well as many irreplaceable items such as my vinyl record collection and photographs. Once more I was without the Arthur Ransome's stories.

Following the loss of the paperbacks and my reawakened interest in the stories, I set about finding replacements. Initially I found only the paperback editions published by Red Fox. Then, wonder of wonders! I discovered that Jonathan Cape, with hardly a break in 80 years or so, was still publishing the hard cover editions, resplendent with

those glorious dust jackets that I knew and had loved. As fast as disposable income became available I bought all twelve volumes, shortly followed by the purchase of the Kindle editions to make sure I could dip into the stories anywhere and at any time I chose.

In one of the Red Fox volumes I had found a reference to "The Arthur Ransome Society". I soon made my interest known to the society and became a member. Since the purchase of the Wardale book, my interest in the person of Arthur Ransome and his writings has expanded immensely. Thanks to Cape and the TARS Stall my library has grown, and now takes up a complete shelf on my Ikea "Billy" bookcase. I expect my collection of books and e-books will continue to grow in the future but at a whole lot slower rate. In the meantime I have much pleasurable reading in store for a long time.

## Shades of Misse Lee?



TARS member Robert Dilley sent in two pictures taken on a recent visit to China.

Here are a couple of pictures I took on a recent visit to China. One shows an elegant lady (descendant of Misse Lee?) in a sampan; the other a line of fishing cormorants. Both on the Dragon River, a tributary of the Yangtze in the Three Gorges area.  
– Robert Dilley



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

### Sail Camping on the Nancy Blackett

By Diane Tucker, Farmington, Connecticut

My family are Swallows and Amazons addicts. We lived and breathed Arthur Ransome, reading every one of the twelve books. It took nearly a year and we were all a little depressed when we closed the cover on the last one. My daughter wanted to be Nancy Blackett, the sassy, irrepressible heroine of the series. If I am being totally honest, so did I.

It isn't surprising to learn that the character of Nancy Blackett has been the inspiration of generations of British women, much like Nancy Drew here in the U.S. She is a true feminist. In fact, she is more like a post-feminist as she (as well as her other female cohorts in the S&A books) shows no recognition whatever of gender stereotypes. She simply does whatever is required with bravery and panache.

Having read a few depressing pieces lately in periodicals like this one, about the decline of boating, the lack of interest that kids today have for outdoor pursuits and sailing in specific, I was thrilled that my daughter

adored it. At twelve, she has already owned three sailboats, an Optimist, a Sunfish and a Cape Dory 10. At camp, she sails a Pico. My Julia wants to build a boat someday, and I bet she will!

Despite sailing on her own, Julia recently informed me she wants us to go camp sailing! If you have a kid that wants to play pirate with you, I advise you to jump on it. We quickly made a list of desirable features for our pirate ship. Knowing in my heart my swash-buckling days were apt to be short, I wanted to be sure the boat would suit me long after I hung up my peg leg and sword. Storage was important. Comfortable thwarts for this pirate was key. I'm not a young terror of the seas any more and I don't want to sit in the bilge. Most of all, the boat needed to accommodate a twelve-year-old girl and her mom for the occasional over night.

I poured over designs and kept coming back to the Jim Michalak Lady Bug. Boy, was she cute. I love a gaff rig, and I read where Chuck Leinweber said it might make a decent camp sailor! Did I not remember seeing a picture of his Lady Bug in the Texas 200? So I ordered the plans and started in to find a boat builder. I know I should have gone in for building it myself, but I wanted it for my daughter, not my grandchildren!

Reprinted with grateful thanks to the author and to both *Messing About in Boats* magazine ([www.messingaboutinboats.com](http://www.messingaboutinboats.com)) and *Duckworks Magazine* ([duckworksmagazine.com](http://duckworksmagazine.com)).

I poured over boating periodicals, scrolled through websites and waded through boat building advertising. I happened across a website in my target geographical location by a builder in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. I liked how he described the boats he made. The photos of the boats were just beautiful, the boats built with obvious care. The descriptions of them were simple, but lyrical. I was pretty sure I found The One. His name was Greg Hopkins, of Next Wave Boat Shop. I e-mailed. He e-mailed. I sent plans. We talked on the phone. Without further ado, I sent a deposit!



I didn't worry about a contract or references or anything. Like the old days in a sense, we did it on a handshake. It was a "telephonic handshake", but still.

So began my almost nightly correspondence with Greg Hopkins. As my husband snored next to me, Greg and I typed back and forth, discussing types of wood, fold-out seats for a camping platform and other minutia. Greg documented the build with lots of photos. If a night or two went by when we didn't write, the day seemed out of kilter.

We struggled over the issue of a sleeping platform, until Greg solved it in one stroke by suggesting a hammock slung between the thwarts. With no centerboard case in the way, the hammock could be supported by slipping a piece of wood through pockets in either side of the hammock. The wood pieces would fit snugly in a space at the edge of the thwart. Simple and perfect solution! I never would have thought of it. This kind of thing made working and becoming friends with Greg such a pleasure.

The only time he questioned my

thoughts was as we picked colors. I wanted Interlux Seafoam Green on the sides, and the leeboard to be painted the color of Hollandaise sauce. Being a New Hampshire man, that seemed kind of sissified to him. I couldn't blame him, but this was to be a "girl boat". Greg painted the boat the way we wanted, even mixing the Hollandaise sauce leeboard paint himself.

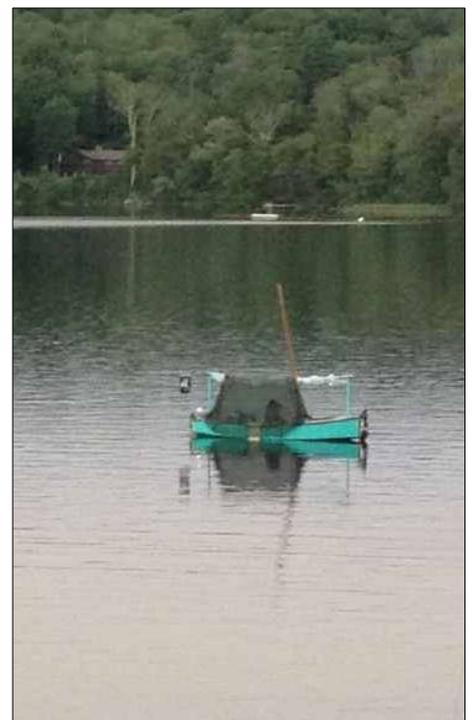
The day I picked up the boat was so much fun! As I had, Greg had shared the story of our Lady Bug build with his friends. So, pickup was like a party where I got to meet all his buddies. What a great group of guys! We got on as though we had known each other forever. Then Ann Hopkins, Greg's wife turned up. She wanted to see who was e-mailing her husband in the small hours! We hit it off the same way Greg and I did, and went off to buy pizza and beer together as lunch for the gang.

After a few hours spent rigging the Lady Bug, re-rigging and yes, rigging again, we finally sorted the sail rig out. Lest anyone get worried, the Lady Bug rig is as easy as pie. It was all our fault.

Could we have been joking around too much? I couldn't possibly comment. The fellows found that my little homemade Harbor Freight trailer needed some serious adjustment to properly carry the precious 'Bug. They went way above and beyond, essentially rebuilding it. I pretty much had a new trailer! I couldn't be more grateful, and I think of those nice men every time I look at it. That's quite a lot since the boat has spent a wonderful summer being sailed almost daily, and the trailer is in my driveway waiting for the sad "boats out" time later this fall.

What did we name our Lady Bug? Why, "Nancy Blackett", of course. The perfect name for a pirate ship built for two aspiring Swallows and Amazons out for some adventures in their sea foam green girl boat.

The big day for camp cruising finally arrived. While my daughter spent a month at sleep-away camp, I repurposed a mosquito netting tent I





bought off an army-surplus website into a snug, bug-free boat tent. I tested our sleeping arrangements, including a hammock I had made. This was to hang between the bench seating in an arrangement ingeniously contrived by Greg. The idea is to sew pockets on either side of the hammock, through which large dowels which usually make up the front edge of the bench are inserted. The dowels are then replaced where they usually sit with the fabric stretching over the cockpit. The system works like a charm and is a very good way to solve the sleeping dilemma on a dinghy. However, I could not figure a way for me to get the hammock perfectly taut between the two benches. When two of us are to sleep aboard, gravity being what it is, whoever sleeps on a bench is very apt to roll into the hammock alongside her shipmate at some point in the night. With time drawing short, I took a few naps on the benches and decided they would do for the time being without the hammock. Certainly we would get away with it for one night.

During my nap-time experiments, I also learned that sleeping on the sole was very satisfactory provided a nice mop-up was done with a sponge prior to sleep. As a solo camp cruiser, Ladybug is a good choice, whether you sleep on the sole, or in a nifty hammock. For the time being, I folded the hammock away for another cruise and started thinking about the rest of our equipment.

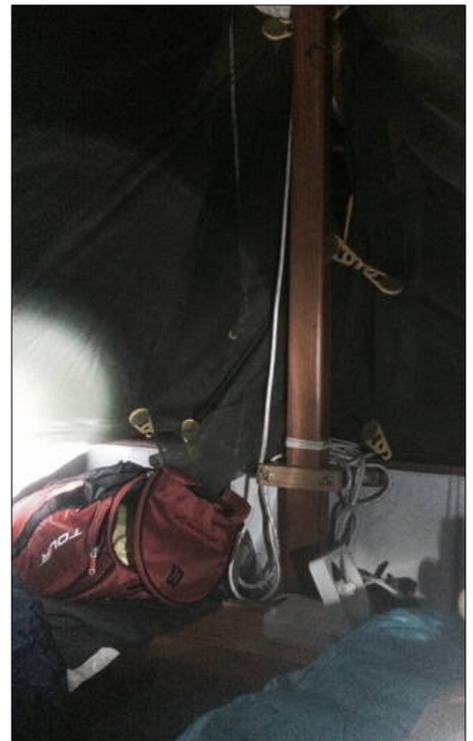
The tent was easy to set up. I inserted a few hooks under Nancy Blackett's gunnels. Bungee cord went around the cockpit and behind the hooks. Using Byers Tarp Tie-Downs I hooked the mosquito netting under the bungee cording.

Provisioning was vital. We would spend the late afternoon and night aboard, with breakfast first thing the following morning. A reasonable, healthful and comforting dinner would be needed, plus snacks and breakfast. In consultation with my First Mate, we decided upon canned tomato soup with toast. We would carry milk for making the soup as well as for tea and for my daughter to have a good glass before bed. Dessert being the most important factor I made sure to have, as the Swallows and Amazons crew did, plenty of chocolate. Breakfast in the morning would be oatmeal with dried cranberries put in, along with mandarin oranges (no scurvy in this woman's navy) and good, hot tea with milk.

I have a wonderful "stores box" I got from John Owens at JO Woodworks down in Texas, another great guy I have had the luck and pleasure to run across since I got the boating bug. I put our Trangia alcohol stove, sporks, mugs, canned goods, baggy with pre-

made toast, chocolate bars, a box of Cheezits, tea bags, a baggy of sugar and a thermos of milk in there. Fire blanket and fire extinguisher were in a dry bag, to be placed near at hand while cooking. Another dry bag contained the lantern to be hung from the boom inside the tent for pre-bed reading. Sleeping bags were set, and I had made a nice set of comfy pillows last winter during a blizzard out of Sunbrella fabric that matched the color of the boat. A couple of warm sweat-shirts, our pj's and we were ready for adventure.

I worried a bit when considering what might happen in the event of a midnight call of nature. The Ladybug is a small, open boat. We had a bucket aboard, but on a boat that size a bucket of "effluvia", would be at risk of seriously fouling the cockpit and its inhabitants should something (someone?) "kick the bucket". Another romp through the Army supply catalogue turned up an item called a Wag



Bag. Eureka! The Wag Bag goes in the bucket, you go in the Wag Bag. Fancy chemicals in the Bag turn whatever you put in there into a gel-like, frozen state. You wrap the bag and its now inert contents into the ziplock provided with each Wag Bag and dispose of it all in the first trash bin you see on shore. No fuss, no mess, no smell. These things even come with TP and hand sanitizer. A lady mariner's sensibilities, as well as most gentleman mariners', are safe with a few of these things aboard. You could probably even use the "head" such as it would be during daylight hours provided no one was nearby. At night, no worries at all! Talk about well-provisioned!! Better to have and not need, than need and not have.

My daughter and I took a lovely late-afternoon cruise before anchoring off shore. Our little Eastport Pram bobbed next to our mooring. We use the pram as a tender to get to Nancy Blackett and for rowing for exercise. We kept well away from the mooring, not wanting the two boats to bump one another and keep us awake. Plus, we wanted to lie at anchor, not at the end of a mooring tether which would be sort of like camping out in one's backyard.

Over the summer, the Nancy Blackett attracted quite a bit of attention. Every sail (which was close to every day) people hailed us with compliments. They loved the color, they loved the sail, but generally they just loved the boat, asking, "What kind IS it?" I had lots of chances to toot the Michalak horn and tell his story. My favorite compliment was "You and your boat give our lake CLASS!" While anchoring that night, we made sure to give

everyone on the lake a chance to see us and watch while we put up our tent. We thought it might be the first time such a thing had been seen there and were proud to add still more cachet to the Nancy Blackett's reputation.

The tent went up easily, and my daughter pronounced it "cool". Soon we were ready for supper. The hot soup went down a treat, and the toast was a comforting addition, just like home. The capacious Michalak bulkheads had swallowed so much gear we couldn't believe it. Though it was hard for us not to overpack, the Ladybug was more than a match for us.

As night fell, we settled in on our benches. They really weren't too bad for sleeping, maybe a tad narrow, but really not bad. We had Thermarest sleeping pads, and I've certainly slept in less comfortable quarters. The lamp dangled from the boom. We read our books. It was peaceful and wonderful! And then the fishermen arrived.

Suddenly the water around us was illuminated like a surgical suite. There were boats both port and starboard containing Serious Fishermen. One guy stayed all night. With my head below the level of the gunnel, I didn't notice it much. Julia was more both-

ered than I, but I think that goes with being nearly thirteen. One is nearly always a bit bothered at her time of life. Even with the fishing lights, I could still see the stars clearly, and far better than home in suburbia.

I slept until eight. By that time, according to my child, a fleet of kayaks, a man in a shell and a whole new cohort of fisherman had already passed my sleeping figure. We made our breakfast, which tasted fabulous, as outdoor breakfasts always do. It was time for a swim, and we wriggled into bathing suits below gunnel level lest the fishermen see us. Before we dove over Nancy Blackett's side, Julia grinned at me and said, "We HAVE to do this again".



## Captain Flint's Trunk — News from abroad

### Arthur Ransome in Yiddish

By Avi Lank

Between the end of World War I and the publication of *Swallows & Amazons*, Arthur Ransome had an unlikely set of readers: Yiddish-speaking European immigrants to the United States, many of whom were concentrated on the Lower East Side of New York City. These were people hungry for news of the small Jewish communities they had left in the old Russian

Empire, and Ransome's reporting for British newspapers during the Russian Civil War provided them with a window on conditions in the Motherland.

There is scholarly dispute as to exactly what Ransome was up to when he was in Russia at the time. No matter the ultimate answer to those questions,

however, his dispatches from the period painted a vivid picture of what life was like in Moscow and what was then called Petrograd, now known as St. Petersburg.

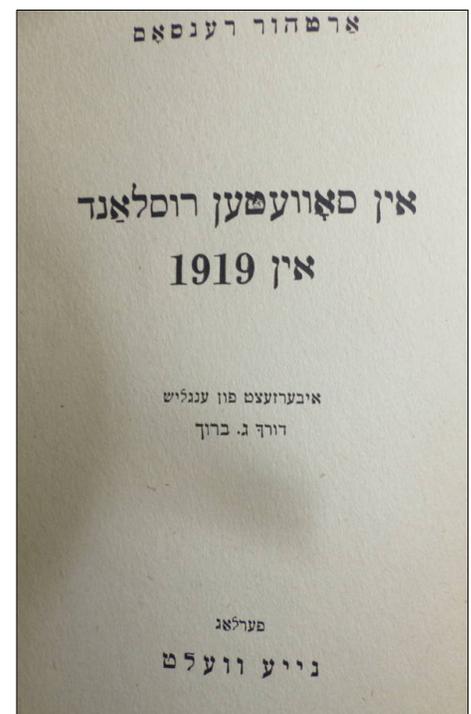
Here is an excerpt from an online posting of his book *Russia in 1919*, describing his experiences at a "better" hotel in Moscow at the time:

On paying for my room at the beginning of the week I was given a card with the days of the week printed along its edge. This card gave me the right to buy one dinner daily, and when I bought it that day of the week was snipped off the card so that I could not buy another. The meal consisted of a plate of very good soup, together with a second course of a scrap of meat or fish. The price of the meal varied between five and seven roubles.

One could obtain this meal any time between two and seven. Living hungrily through the morning, at two o'clock I used to experience definite relief in the knowledge that now at any moment I could have my meal. Feeling in this way less hungry, I used then to postpone it hour by hour, and actually dined about five or six o'clock. Thinking that I might indeed have been specially favoured I made investigations, and found that the dinners supplied at the public feeding houses (the equivalent of our national kitchens) were of precisely the same size and character, any difference between the meals depending not on the food but on the cook.

A kind of rough and ready co-operative system also obtained. One day there was a notice on the stairs that those who wanted could get one pot of jam apiece by applying to the provisioning committee of the hotel. I got a pot of jam in this way, and on a later occasion a small quantity of Ukrainian sausage.

Besides the food obtainable on cards it was possible to buy, at ruinous prices, food from speculators, and an idea of the difference in the prices may be obtained from the following examples: Bread is one rouble 20 kopecks per pound by card and 15 to 20 roubles per pound from the speculators. Sugar is 12 roubles per pound by card, and never less than 50 roubles per pound in the open market. It is obvious that abolition of the card system would mean that the rich would have enough and the poor nothing. Various methods have been tried in the effort to get rid of speculators whose high profits naturally decrease the willingness of the villages to sell bread at less abnormal rates. But as a Communist said to me, "There is only one way to get rid of speculation, and that is to supply enough on the



The title page of the Yiddish translation of Ransome's *Russia in 1919*. Ransom's name appears in the Hebrew alphabet used in Yiddish at the top of the page.

card system. When People can buy all they want at 1 rouble 20 they are not going to pay an extra 14 roubles for the encouragement of speculators." "And when will you be able to do that?" I asked. "As soon as the war ends, and we can use our transport for peaceful purposes." There can be no question about the starvation of

Avi Lank is a member of TARSUS. He is a retired journalist living in Milwaukee, Wi., and co-author of *The Man Who Painted the Universe* (Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2015) which is about a hand-built rotating globe planetarium in northern Wisconsin and contains a reference to Dick's stargazing in *Winter Holiday*.

Moscow. On the third day after my arrival in Moscow I saw a man driving a sledge laden with, I think, horseflesh, mostly bones, probably dead sledge horses. As he drove a black crowd of crows followed the sledge and perched on it, tearing greedily at the meat. He beat at them continually with his whip, but they were so famished that they took no notice what-

ever. The starving crows used even to force their way through the small ventilators of the windows in my hotel to pick up any scraps they could find inside. The pigeons, which formerly crowded the streets, utterly undismayed by the traffic, confident in the security given by their supposed connection with religion, have completely disappeared.

Nor can there be any question about the cold. I resented my own sufferings less when I found that the State Departments were no better off than other folk. Even in the Kremlin I found the Keeper of the Archives sitting at work in an old sheepskin coat and felt boots, rising now and then to beat vitality into his freezing hands like a London cabman of old times.

The writing is vintage Ransome, using an economy of words, explaining without cant and leaving the reader richer and better informed. Such accounting was an invaluable resource for immigrants to the US who had left behind relatives in such places. In addition, Ransome's reporting on the Communists was at least even-handed, if not sympathetic. That caused an American organization called the Jewish Socialist Federation to take notice of his work. According to an email from Daniel Soyer, a professor of history Fordham University in New York City:

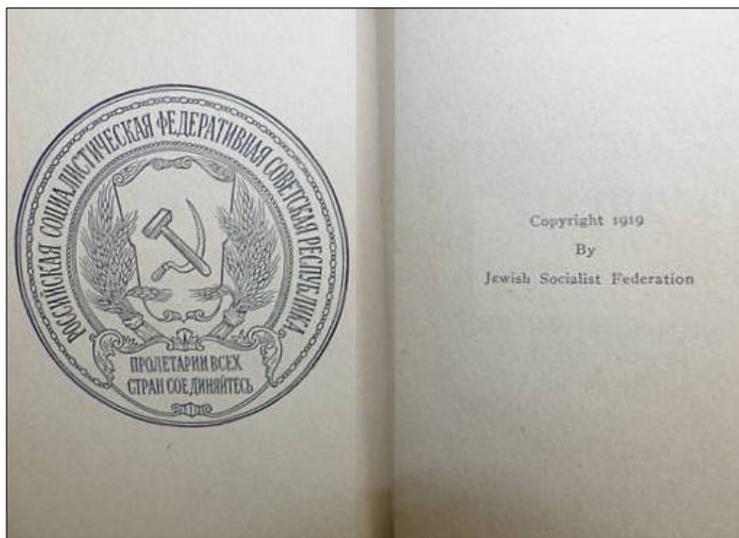
Founded in 1912, the Jewish Socialist Federation was one of a number of "language federations" affiliated with the Socialist Party, the language in this case be-

ing Yiddish. Although theoretically the federation was designed to conduct general Socialist agitation among Yiddish-speaking workers, in practice it had considerable autonomy ... Like all Socialists around the world, the JSF early on was fascinated by what was going on in Russia, all the more so because most members were actually from the Russian Empire. And it was pro-Soviet.

Ransome's work dovetailed nicely with the Federation's aims, and led it to publish a Yiddish translation of *Russia in 1919* for distribution in North America. I have been unable to find out how many copies were printed, but at a recent trip to the Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, Massachusetts, there were several on a shelf awaiting new owners. The Center is devoted to the collection, preservation and distribution of books printed in Yiddish. It collects them by any method possible, as described in *Outwitting History* (Algonquin Books, Chapel Hill, 2005), a delightful

memoir by the founder of the Center, Aaron Lansky. While many of its books come from private collections in the Northeastern U.S., in particular New York City, the Center does not keep careful records on where particular volumes came from. For that reason, Catherine Madsen, a bibliographer at the Center who showed me the Ransome volumes, was not able to provide provenance for any copy. Madsen, by the way, was familiar with Ransome's work, having read the S&A series while living in Alaska as a child. Yiddish, which was the common language of Jews in Eastern Europe, is written in the Hebrew alphabet, and Ransome's name appears in Hebrew characters at the top of the title page. That is followed by a copyright page, in English, naming the Jewish Socialist Federation as the copyright holder, and then a page with a seal containing the hammer and sickle emblem, apparently an imprimatur from the Soviet Union.

I purchased two copies, one for my own collection and one for the TARS library, which was sent over to Scotland in May. Winifred Wilson tells me that the Library's only other holding of *Russia in 1919* is a Lithuanian translation. As a journalist, AR had readers in many places, and many tongues.



Right, the copyright page of the book. Left, a seal of the Soviet Union.

## Before the Spray

By Maida Follini

The first person recorded to sail alone around the world was Joshua Slocum, born in 1844 on North Mountain in Nova Scotia, within sight of the Bay of Fundy — which has the highest tides in the world. His father John was a boot-maker, but Joshua at age 14 left the cobbler's shop for a more exciting life at sea. He sailed first as a cabin boy and cook on local fishing schooners, but at 16 he took a voyage as a seaman on a merchant vessel to Dublin, Ireland. From there he found berths as a seaman on British ships, sailing to China, the East Indies, and California. He studied for his officer's license and at 18 qualified as Second Mate, later achieving First Mate credentials. After a stint in the California fur trade, he officered merchant ships carrying freight between California, China, Japan and Australia.

In Australia he met his first wife, Virginia Walker. Virginia sailed away with Joshua, and the couple had seven children, born in foreign ports or at sea. By 1874, Slocum had acquired a vessel of his own, a ninety-ton schooner named *Pato* (Duck in Spanish). Continuing in the Pacific cargo trade, the Slocums moved on to larger



The Liberdade.

ships, including a clipper ship, *North-ern Light*, and the barque *Aquidneck*.

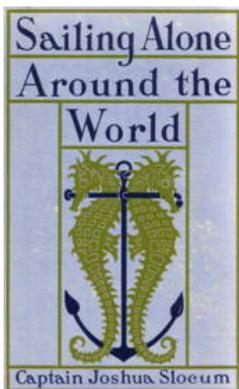
In 1884, on a voyage to Buenos Aires with the *Aquidneck*, Virginia Walker Slocum became ill and past away. Joshua Slocum sailed to Massachusetts, where he left his younger children with his sisters. His oldest son Victor, remained with his father as First Mate.

Two years later, Joshua remarried, this time to his 24-year-old cousin, Henrietta Elliott. The family, including all but the two youngest children, sailed away with their father. Poor Henrietta, on her first voyage, experienced a hurricane, an attack by pirates, an outbreak of smallpox among the crew, and finally in 1887 the wrecking to the *Aquidneck* off the the coast of Brazil.

Undeterred, Slocum and his sons built a 35-foot boat, the *Liberdade*, out of salvaged materials, and sailed her with the family 5510 miles back from Brazil, through the Caribbean to South Carolina. They reached Boston in 1889. Not surprisingly Henrietta Slocum stayed on land after that!

Joshua continued his adventurous life on the sea. In December 1893 he contracted to deliver from New Jersey to Brazil an unusual armoured steam war vessel supposedly able to fire a torpedo.

The ship began to leak at the beginning of the voyage, lost its rudder, and, either by a miracle or due to the persistence and improvising of Slocum and the crew, somehow managed to reach Brazil where, in January 1894, the ship was taken over by the Brazilian navy. It was an unlucky vessel, however, for



Slocum's *Sailing Alone Around the World* is available in many editions. Long out of copyright, the book can be downloaded in an ebook version at [Manybooks](#), [Project Gutenberg](#) and similar sources. — Ed.

after further mishaps, it holed itself on a rock and was abandoned.

Joshua was not the sailor to remain on land for long. A whaling captain in Fairhaven, Massachusetts, gave him an old sloop, named the *Spray*, which had been hauled out and propped up

in a field with a canvas covering. Slocum set himself to rebuild it, and on April 24, 1895, at the age of 51, he set sail from Boston, Massachusetts to sail around the world.

A little over 3 years later, on June 27, 1898, Slocum and the *Spray* cast an-

chor again at Fairhaven after a trip of over 46,000 miles.

The three years of this adventure were engagingly recounted in Joshua Slocum's famous work, *Sailing Alone Around the World*, one of the best sailing accounts ever written.

## Ship's Library — Books we've read and want to share (part 2)

### *Dancing on Ice, A Stirring Tale of Adventure, Risk and Reckless Folly*

Reviewed by Alistair Bryden

*Winter Holiday* has always been one of my favorite S&A books, if not the favorite. The story is familiar: frozen lakes, seals, igloos, Eskimos, dog sleds, polar exploration, High Greenland and the climactic rescue mission across the ice to the North Pole. But where did all this come from?

The conventional answer is well documented in various Ransome biographies. AR met and talked with Nansen when he was living in Riga in Latvia, and there are multiple references to Nansen in WH: Captain Flint's houseboat is renamed the Fram after Nansen's famous Arctic exploration vessel, and Nansen's books *Furthest North* and *The First Crossing of Greenland* are on Captain Flint's bookshelf (and almost certainly AR's bookshelf as well).

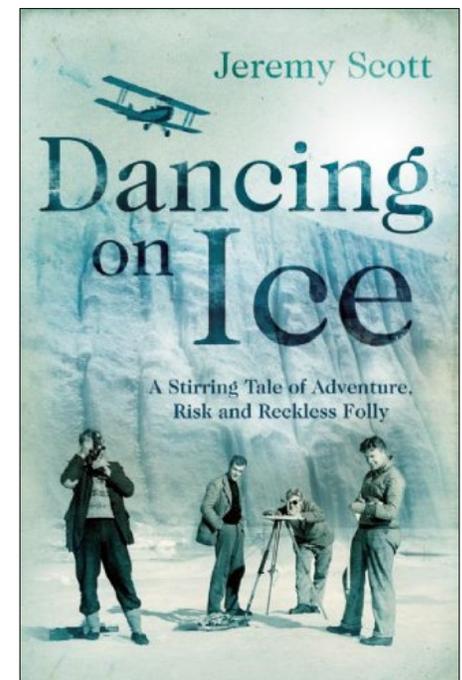
AR was later to describe Nansen as a "hero since my childhood". But was Nansen Ransome's only inspiration?

Today, Gino Watkins (1907-1932) is not a well-known name, but in the late 1920s and early 30s, during the depths of the Great Depression, he was a widely known, authentic British hero, in a time when there were few heroes. Watkins' exploits are the sub-

ject of Jeremy Scott's 2008 book, *Dancing on Ice*.

A golden-haired Cambridge student, Watkins organized and led expeditions to Svalbard, Labrador and Greenland, including wintering in Greenland. He was extraordinarily tough, with some very challenging and lengthy winter trips on his resume. He even had direct links to the glory days of the British polar expeditions as the ship he chartered for his greatest Greenland trip was the *Quest*, which was previously Shackleton's ship. Watkins died young, aged only 25, while paddling his kayak in a Greenland fjord, hunting for seal meat for his party.

On a personal note, I have always been aware of Gino Watkins. My father (born in 1915) had a biography of Watkins on his bookshelf, and I recently learned that the explorer lived on the same London street as my father during the late 1920s, so it is not impossible that they met or were connected. Dad would certainly have been an admirer. From another perspective, I have had a life long interest in kayaking, both river kayaking and sea kayaking. Watkins is a famous figure in kayaking history as he learned



the so-called Eskimo Roll from Greenland Inuit and brought this technique back to the UK, along with an example of a Greenland kayak and paddle and necessary equipment such as a sealed skirt.

If we look at the adventures of Watkins and his party, it is not hard to see many connections to *Winter Holiday*. Firstly of course there is the timing. When Ransome was writing WH (published in 1933), Nansen's adventures were over 30 years old, but

Watkins was very much in the news. His most famous trip to Greenland was over the winter of 1930/31. I haven't been able to find out whether AR was a member of the Royal Geographical Society (although I think it very likely) but it was the RGS that awarded Watkins their Founders medal in 1932. Watkins spent holidays in the Lake District, likely sailing and walking in the hills, so again it is not impossible that AR had met him or knew of him.

On the Greenland expedition, Watkins and his team used dog sleds, hunted seals, lived with Eskimos (as they were still known at the time) and took weather readings. One of their members, Augustine Courtauld, manned a weather observation sta-

tion for five months by himself in a tent on the Greenland ice cap! This in turn led to a dramatic rescue mission by Watkins, when they found Courtauld with his station completely buried, with only a stove pipe sticking above the snow, and out of food. Sounds familiar.

Of course other aspects of Watkins expedition are not reflected in WH, including a 600-mile sail in an open boat around the bottom of Greenland, flying two Gypsy Moth sea planes, learning to kayak from the local Inuit, and having very social relationships with them as well. One of the party, Spencer Chapman (who later wrote the famous jungle warfare book *The Jungle is Neutral*), fathered a child on one of the Inuit girls who

shared their very small cabin, although this was not public knowledge till much later.

I am confident that the publicity around Watkins' trips and adventures, stirred AR's old memories of Nansen and it seems likely, based on the evidence, that he reflected at least a part of Watkins' adventures in the climax to *Winter Holiday*.

All of these adventures and more are admirably described in Jeremy Scott's book. Well written, the book moves at a rapid pace, and I am sure that it deserves a honorable place in the Ship's Library. Incidentally, if any reader can point me to any other references to Watkins in the various Ransome biographies, I would be very interested.



## The Nancy Blackett Trust 20th Anniversary Appeal

*The Nancy Blackett Trust 20th Anniversary Appeal aims to raise £20,000 towards securing the future of Arthur Ransome's historic yacht Nancy Blackett, the original of the Goblin in "We Didn't Mean to Go to Sea". It was 20 years ago that Arthur Ransome fans worldwide showed phenomenal support by raising enough money to buy the Nancy Blackett and preserve her for future generations to appreciate, enjoy... and sail. Now we need to boost our finances to put her future on a firmer footing, so we're asking you to...*

***"Please help Nancy Blackett to last forever"***

Learn how you can help on the Nancy Blackett Trust website ([nancyblackett.org/appeal/](http://nancyblackett.org/appeal/)) — Ed.



## Pieces of Eight — The Junior Pages



### Bananas Everywhere!

By Molly McGinnis

Bananas appear in almost all the Swallows and Amazons books. Here are the examples we have found.

#### **Bananas in *Swallows and Amazons!***

*Then there was a really huge bunch of bananas which Mother tied in a tree as if it was growing there. "You can pick them just as you want them, she said."*

#### **Bananas in *Peter Duck***

*There was great delight when they came on a wild banana, with a heavy drooping cluster of ripe fruit. Bill, Titty, and Roger ate some as they walked along, and Captain Flint cut a big bunch and put it in his knapsack.*

#### **Bananas in *Pigeon Post***

*...they had finished up a cold rice pudding and a lot of bananas...*

#### **Bananas in *We Didn't Mean to Go to Sea***

*And aren't there a few bananas left in the bag in the starboard locker?*

#### **Bananas in *Secret Water* (11x)**

*At the bottom of the basket was another bit of paper with the message, "Fill up with bananas."*

Eleven times the Swallows and Amazons and Eels consider bananas or eat bananas! This is the most times of any book. Banana and Blackberry Mash features largely on the *Secret Water* menus.

#### **Bananas in *The Big Six***

*Always before, when they had had money to spend, there had been so little of it that they had spent an hour or so outside the window, calculating just how far it would go, and de-*

*clining to go without chocolate for the sake of getting bananas, or to do without bananas...*

#### **Bananas in *Missee Lee* (7x)**

*Gibber was eating some green bananas from the tree that Roger had found when they landed.*

#### **Bananas in *The Picts and the Martyrs* (2x)**

*Then she put down everything they had: the tinned foods, soups, steak and kidney pie, corned beef, stews, peaches and sardines, the fresh food, half a beef roll, one third of an apple pie, six bananas, twelve oranges, ten eggs, half a loaf of bread...*

#### **But NO bananas!**

In *Swallowdale*. How could the Natives have forgotten to send some!

No bananas in *Winter Holiday*, either, but that's understandable. They'd freeze in the shipping, wouldn't they, in those uninsulated days?

Bananas are missing from *Great Northern*, too. Perhaps Captain Flint understood that the relentless odor of bananas sharing space in a small cabin becomes quite sickening.

#### **But especially...**

#### **Bananas in *Coot Club***

*You wouldn't think a chap could get a stomachache for fourpence but he done it. He go and buy a bunch of dud bananas and eat the lot.*

And because of that stomachache, poor Robin, the Hullabaloo-watcher

at Acle bridge, lets the Margoletta and its Hullabaloo slip by him and sets off the chases and escapes and dramas that take up the whole rest of the book.

Mrs. Barrable supplied bananas for her crew: a dozen bananas of the smaller and more tasty kind... These would be the kind called Chinese Bananas in American supermarkets, I think, and they truly are tastier, much, than the standard mealy, bland Gros Michele types. If you shop in Asian markets you might find Turbana brand, firmer and tastier than Dole's version of Chinese Bananas.

#### **Are Bananas Chinese?**

All bananas, in fact, are almost Chinese — they are native to Southeast Asia (Cambodia, Thailand, Burma, Malaysia, and many more countries). The banana plant has been grown by humans since about 8000 BCE — 10,000 years or more. The tough aromatic leaves made roofs and fences, plates and cups, food wraps and writing paper. The "banana flower" — the big bud at the tip of the fruit bunch was (and still is) eaten. The fruit of a wild banana is mostly seeds and it took a few thousand years of selecting banana fruits for fewer smaller seeds and tasty pulp and a couple of lucky mutations and natural hybridizations before bananas, the fruit, became much of a food item.

## Beckfoot Kitchen

### Banana Blossom Salad

By Molly McGinnis

If you can find fresh banana blossoms, try a salad. Banana blossom salad is one of my favorites, and I like to think that Missee Lee might have served it to her captives. It's a cinch to make once the blossom is sliced and prepared.

Like many near-wild vegetables, the banana bud is bitter and puckery and has to be treated to get the puckery stuff out. Slice it as fine as you can, sprinkle with salt and let it macerate for 10 minutes or so. Wring out the shreds (I twist them in a linen dish-towel, but be aware that the juice may stain it) and drop them into a pot of simmering water and let simmer until they're tender. Drain into a colander, wring the shreds out again (bare hands work for me at this point), and let cool.

Meanwhile, heat a couple of tablespoons of oil (tasty unrefined peanut oil if you have it), throw in a few cloves of minced garlic to wilt and turn barely golden, and let this cool while you chop or smash in a mortar a handful of roasted peanuts.

Cut a tomato or two in half, squeeze the juice through a tea strainer over

the now-cooled garlic oil (or just live with the seeds), throw this mix over the banana blossom slivers and toss with a handful of the chopped or smashed roasted peanuts. A tablespoon or so of toasted sesame seed is a nice touch. Taste for salt and toss

some in if you think it needs it. Garnish with the juiced tomatoes cut into wedges and lime or lemon wedges for squeezing over the salad ad libitum (as Missee Lee would say). Elizabeth Jolley's banana-blackberry mash could also be added...



Banana tree showing the prominent blossoms.

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