



SIGNALS FROM T•A•R•S•U•S

February 2002

Winter Greetings from (Northern) California

This newsletter accompanies *Despatches*, which contains particulars about the upcoming 2002 AGM (Annual General Meeting) in Chew, Somerset. This year the AGM will once more be held on Spring Bank Holiday Weekend (our Memorial Day weekend) on 25-27 May, and I have at least one enquiry (from Pam Marshall) asking if any other TARSUS will be attending. I would like to thank Maureen Eichner, Pam Marshall, Janet O'Neill, and of course Mary Wessel Walker, who responded to my whining and pleading for articles; three appear in this newsletter and I've Janet's article to hold over for the next *Signals from TARSUS* in April.

Membership Renewal for 2002

TARS Membership Renewals for 2002 were due on 1 January 2002. The last mailing (in December) included membership renewal forms. As of this writing, a fair number of you have not yet renewed.

*If you find a Membership Renewal Sticker on your newsletter (which will have your name, membership type, and the cost for each membership type), and a **big black or red spot** on the outside of the envelope, **you have not yet renewed**. Members who have not renewed by the end of March **will not receive** any further mailings from TARS. So please renew now; don't risk missing the April mailing or losing your membership.*

If you have sent your renewal in and still got a sticker and spot, please ignore them and accept my apologies; your renewal and our process overlapped.



Welcome

Welcome to Lars Benson; Dan Burd, Emma Burd & Anne Reynolds; Margaret Eichner; John Gunter; and James & Christopher Petersen.

Résumés

Thanks to Elly Hendricks and Bob Herbert for sending in their Résumés, which you will find included with this *Signals from TARSUS*. 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).

Poached Trout

Occasionally a TARS will send me a copy of an article related to Arthur Ransome or the locations about which he wrote. I keep a file of these; announce them in *Signals from TARSUS*; and for

copying and postage will send a copy of the article to anyone who asks.

Dorothy Hill has forwarded to me an article called "Poached Trout" by Anthony Pearson published in *The Manchester Guardian* in 1972. This article is generally about fly fishing and poaching, and contains an absolutely wonderful beginning:

"You have the greatest of all advantages, the best any fisherman could hope for," Arthur Ransome told me shortly before his death.

"Deductive skill, enthusiasm, and youth?" I said.

"No," he said. "You are a born poacher."

Send me \$1.00 for copying and postage if you want to receive your own copy of the article.

A Minor Omission

For the last few years we have published each February a map of the United States showing the (approximate) location of TARSUS members with small skulls and crossbones, which seems quite appropriate. This year the map will be provided later in the year, after the membership purges mean I don't have to place as many little skull-and-crossbones on the map.

Shaking Hands In India

In TARSUS member Bob Herbert's Résumé, included with this newsletter, he mentions that he wrote to Arthur Ransome after the Second World War to tell Ransome that he had twice been a morale booster, once when Bob was very ill, and once again when Bob stumbled across *Swallowdale* in a bookstall in Poona, India in 1943. Bob's Résumé contains the story, but I thought even those who didn't receive or weren't reading the Résumés would be interested in Ransome's reply:

"January 1, 1948

Dear Mr. Herbert,

Thank you for a letter that any author might be pleased to receive.

I like people to like my books and best of all I like people to find that they have not grown too old to read them. That, almost, makes me feel not too old to go on writing them.

So, presuming on our chance meeting in the Indian Bookshop, I shake you warmly by the hand and am,

Yours sincerely,

Arthur Ransome."

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Feature Column: Ransome Readers Recommend

In November 2000, we started a column of short reviews of books which Ransome readers want to recommend to others, especially Juniors. Mary Wessel Walker, our 10-Gong Contributing Editor, initiated the column, writing : “Sometimes we stumble across books that, for one reason or another, remind us of Ransome. Maybe characters remind us of Ransome characters, or maybe they go sailing or camping. Sometimes a book reminds us of Ransome because it just FEELS right. In this column of *Signals from TARSUS* we invite all TARS, especially Juniors, to write short book recommendations for other Ransome lovers. Be sure to include a mention of the general age group and reading level you think the book is best suited for. Send your recommendations to Mary Wessel Walker at 3007 Geddes Ave., Ann Arbor, MI 48104 (jcgw@umich.edu) or to Dave Thewlis (dthewlis@arthur-ransome.org).”

The Gauntlet
Ronald Welch

Peter Staunton, wandering one afternoon near a ruined castle on the Welsh border, stumbles across a rusted metal gauntlet and slips it on. Falling asleep, he wakes up in the 14th Century, when his Norman ancestors hold the castle, and he is the son of Roger de Blois, the Lord of the Castle, and in the middle of the Welsh border wars. This book contains a tremendous amount of information about day-to-day castle living, tournaments, and history, presented in a very engaging style, as Peter tries to understand what has happened to him and comes to a realization that native wit, grace and character matter a lot more than anything he knows from his native time.

While this book doesn't have a lot to do with sailing, I guarantee it will fascinate youngsters interested in adventure and history, and particularly those interested in the middle ages. The author's depiction of castle life, and of the attitudes of the Normans and Welsh of the period, are both real and realistic. I have no idea if the book is readily available any more; I read it many years ago, and stumbled upon a copy in a bookstore years later. But it's worth the search!

Reviewed by Dave Thewlis



The Other Kind of Sailor - Maureen Eichner

For all you fortunate TARS members who live by the sea or own a sail boat, this may surprise you. There is another kind of sailor.

The kind I'm talking about is the kind that doesn't live near any kind of sailable waters, or maybe even doesn't own a sail boat. This is the kind of sailor whose library is full of nautical books, and who knows the pirate alphabet (Ar, ar, ar, ar...). Personally I hum sea shanties on the bus. A few years ago I tacked up and down a narrow strip of grass at recess.

The kind of sailor I'm talking about is the kind that asks their relatives to get them new S&A books at Christmas. After the unsuspecting relatives comply, they retire to their lairs and devour them. When they eventually emerge, they wander around the house singing "Yo ho ho and a bottle of rum" or "Spanish Ladies". If you are that kind of person, your relatives will probably believe that you are either mildly insane, or very excited. Don't worry. Probably somewhere along the line someone will think that you're crazy, so make the best of it.

Here are some ideas.

Have fun! Get out some tapes or CDs of sea shanties and learn some new ones.

(Me: "Away you Rio!
Sing fair you well my bonny young maids,
For we're bound for the Rio Grande.")

Teacher: "Miss Eichner, what are you humming?")

Once I mapped our yard. I learned several things about mapping. The most important one is not to try to map in winter. It is simply undoable, because you are freezing cold. It is extremely difficult to draw with cold hands. I know only too well.

I am the kind of person who likes to get into the spirit of things by reading a good book. That is why there are 11 nautical books on my bookshelf right now. There are more downstairs on my father's bookshelf. There may also be a few scattered around my room. I also like to hunt up nautical phrases. In a dictionary of obsolete terms I came across this one: 'calenture—a burning fever; a malady peculiar to sailors in which they imagine the sea to be green land, and will throw themselves into it if not restrained!' So if you ever hear of a girl who attempted to throw herself into the Scioto River in Columbus Ohio, that was probably me.

Don't worry, I've just caught calenture.

The extent of my nautical mania will soon become apparent. When I was in sixth grade we had to do a report for science/health class. We were supposed to pick someone who was either a famous scientist or who had an impact on health. I picked Nathaniel Bowditch, the great American navigator. At least I was sure that no one else would be doing him. Last year, in seventh grade we were supposed to do another report, this time on some kind of a frontier. So once again I chose to do my report on Nathaniel Bowditch and his "New American Practical Navigator".

You might be thinking that I don't know how to sail. After all, I live in Columbus, and if you look at a map, it's no where near Lake Erie. Wrong. The Scioto River is large enough to sail on. I learned to sail in a day camp hosted by the Columbus Parks and Recreation Dep. It was a lot of fun and once I taught two obnoxious boys 'Drunken Sailor'. Unfortunately, they were still obnoxious.

We own the *Swallows and Amazons* movie and have shown it to several friends and relatives. One of my friends will now come up to me and act out the following scene:

Susan: "Roger, eat your apple."

Roger: "Must I?"

Susan: "Yes. Mother says we're to eat plenty of green things, or we'll all get scurvy."

Roger: "What's scurvy?"

Titty: "Sailors die from it like flies"

Roger quickly bites into an apple.

Or, even worse, she'll come up to me and simply say, "Sailors die from it like flies." This can be rather disturbing until I realize what she's talking about!

So, as you can see, my nautical life is quite empty. As a matter of fact, I'm beginning to think of 10-gong pirates. I wonder if I can find an old Chinese costume somewhere...

About the Author: Maureen Eichner is 14 years old and explores new ways of being The Other Kind of Sailor in Columbus, Ohio.



A Trip to the Broads - Pam Marshall

In the summer of 2000 my then twenty-one-year-old son, Christopher, and I spent a week sailing on the Norfolk Broads. To say we were novice sailors is overstating the case. I had never been in a sailboat before and Christopher had had three sailing lessons during a visit to Fire Island when he was sixteen. My original idea had been to rent a motor cruiser. But the fear of being hullabalooos and the assurances from Blakes (the boat rental people) that after a couple of hours of instruction we'd be good to go overrode all common sense. We would sail!

We took the train from Norwich to Wroxham and then a taxi to Horning (no pony trap, alas). Horning did not disappoint us. A wonderful small sailing village, it seemed remarkably unchanged from AR's day. In homage to the Coot Club, we had dinner that night at the Swan. The next morning we went down to the Norfolk Broads Yachting Company to pickup our boat - 24 feet long, Bermuda-rigged, named the Westerly. After the advertised two hours of being literally shown the ropes, we were on our own.

Because we were there in early June, the Broads were relatively uncrowded - very few sail boats and not even that many cruisers. Even so, It quickly became apparent that the sailing was going to be a bit more difficult than we had anticipated. Luckily, we had a motor. Our solution was to sail on the broads and motor on the rivers.

A week was the perfect amount of time. We were able to see almost all of the Northern Broads. Because the Broads have changed so little, we always felt as if we were in the middle of an AR adventure (motor aside). We did have our disasters – getting stuck in the mud (we were finally able to push ourselves out with our punt pole) and getting caught in the weeds (I'm still not sure how we got out of that) – but on the whole the week went smoothly. One of the highlights of the trip was seeing all the birds. The Broads are a wildlife refuge and wildfowl abound. There were coots, endless varieties of ducks, geese, and swans, and all with babies. Everywhere you looked there were mama birds followed by their chicks. The Coot Club was clearly a success.

We were sorry when our week ended and would love to go back to see the Southern Broads. We would highly recommend this trip to any TARSUS members. For beginning sailors, though, we would probably suggest renting a motor cruiser (you can even get the kind with the traditional design) and towing a sailing dingy.

About the Author: Pam Marshall lives in Vermont and would like to hear from any TARSUS members planning to go to the AGM this summer, or who have ever rented a canal boat in England. Her e-mail address is pmarshall@tss-cpa.com



From our 10-Gong Contributing Editor Mary Wessel Walker:

Oops! Last time I wrote about my family climbing Kanchenjunga. Dr. Robert Dilley, a TARS member from Canada who grew up in the Lake District, pointed out several mistakes in my column. In my column I talked about how we climbed down by way of a picturesque tarn I called "Elterwater Tarn". Dr. Dilley points out that, though there is an Elter Water in the Lake District, it is no where near Kanchenjunga. From what he said, I realize that the tarn I meant was Levers Water. I have no idea where I got the name Elterwater from; my only excuse is that when I wrote that article it had been several months and I couldn't remember exactly the name of the tarn, but for some reason Elterwater came into my head. Sorry if I had anyone confused. The tarn I meant was Levers Water. Dr. Dilley also points out that saying Lake Windermere is a bit redundant, like saying Lake Michigan Lake, because "mere" means lake. Thank you so much to Dr. Dilley for helping out!

In Which We Sail On Coniston Water

Last June my family and I spent a week in Ransome country in the Lake District in England. We spent several days exploring Coniston Water from the water and trying to find Ransome-related sites. The first day we went to Coniston, there wasn't enough wind for sailing, so we rented a rowing boat instead.



Margaret (front) and Mary rowing on Coniston Water

The rowboat was a very sleek and lightweight, beautiful wooden boat, much like what the Beckfoot war canoe must have been like. Although rowing is never as good as sailing, this was not bad since the boat was designed to be rowed (unlike when we have to row our *Wildcat*). The boat had two pairs of oars, so my sister and I could both row at once.

Later that day we got to ride on the steamship *Gondola*. She was part of the inspiration for Captain Flint's houseboat. Steam is an amazingly quiet way to travel! Much quieter than any of the gas-powered motor boats you see these days - almost totally silent. The ride was so smooth that the purser could (and did) stand a 50p piece on its edge. (50p pieces are seven

sided). The day was beautiful and the wind was picking up some more. The cabins, or lounges, were very elegant.

When the cruise was over, the wind had really picked up, so we decided to go sailing. We had a lovely wind for tacking down the Lake towards Peel Island (Wild Cat Island). While on the water we saw a charming boat which looked just like the *Scarab*, except perhaps a little smaller. Then we saw that she was flying a TARS burgee, so we waved ours at her and Daddy called "TARS ahoy!"



Gondola on Coniston Water



Capt. James Walker at the helm

The gentleman who was sailing her was as delighted as we were to see a fellow TARS. I rigged the burgee on a shroud using my hair tie. As we were both tacking down the lake we had a good conversation. We learned that another similar boat, with a brown sail, which was sailing nearby, was called the *Peggy Blackett*. We did not make it to the Island before we ran out of time and had to turn back. The wind was dropping, so it seemed that we weren't moving, though we were actually moving quite quickly – running before the wind with no sense of motion. We did get back to the dock with plenty of time to spare. We caught our bus back to Bowness and home easily.

The next day we went back to Coniston for our official Ransome cruise. The guide was a real TARS and very knowledgeable. He pointed out to us potential models for

Holly Howe and Beckfoot, as well as scenes recognizable from Ransome's illustrations, the Amazon boathouse, the reeds where the Amazons lay hidden during the war in *Swallows and Amazons*, Houseboat Bay, and, of course, Wild Cat Island, complete with a secret harbor. It was so exciting to see all these sites we've read about for so long.



The *Scarab* lookalike (but probably NOT *Coch-y-bondhu*)

The guide also asked Ransome trivia questions. I'm afraid my family and I seemed to monopolize the answers, but we always tried to let other people have a chance first and answered only if no one else volunteered! The launch, which seemed very noisy and obnoxious compared with the *Gondola*, was called *Ransome*.

The sailors with the TARS burgees were out again, and the cruise guide said that they were such Ransome enthusiasts that they had replicas of the boats built for them!



Wild Cat (Peel) Island

About the author: Mary Wessel Walker, our 10-Gong Contributing Editor, is a 12-th grader and up to her ears in a production of "The Music Man" at her high school in Ann Arbor, Michigan.



