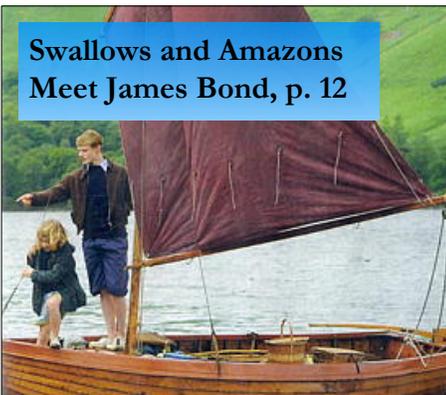




# Signals from TARSUS & North Pole News

February 2017

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



### A View from the Helm

By Robin Marshall  
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I hope you all had a Happy Christmas and very Best Wishes for 2017. I hope the New Year will be good for everyone.

It seems the years pass so quickly and a new year is upon us before we know it. Have you had snow where you live? No igloos I expect or mumps, an ailment that long since disappeared thank goodness. *Winter Holiday* was one of my favorites, though the appearance of Dick and Dot was not at first greeted with pleasure, on my first chapter or two. By the end of course they fitted into the story very well indeed. I wonder if others felt that too.

Most of us older Tars do not welcome snow and ice as we used too, that's why I live in Florida. But the younger TARS still must find it thrilling. As a child living in England I know I did, as did my children, more so as it was

something of a rare event.

It is a year since Simon Horn became our editor. He has done a grand job, and we have had lots of excellent articles and stories thanks to all of you.

Most Tarsus members have renewed already though some are lagging. I apologize for the incorrect link in the renewal form. Just to make sure you have the correct one it is: [www.arthur-ransome.org.uk/TARS\\_Subscription\\_Renewals.html](http://www.arthur-ransome.org.uk/TARS_Subscription_Renewals.html) It is an easy way to renew and you do get the current exchange rate plus a portion for the charges Paypal make. Be sure to have your member number ready and make sure you pay the overseas rate.

In the last Signals details of the 2017 Amazon publication appeared. If you would like this interesting publication, it will cost you at least \$25 which you send to me, and I will send the order to the UK to be forwarded to Alan Hakim. Make sure a check is made out to The Arthur Ransome Society and not Amazon Publications as I cannot cash it nor can Alan.

I am not sure if many members use Facebook but TARS now have a presence there: The Arthur Ransome Society (TARS) Facebook Group plus our own Swallows and Amazons in North America, and another plain Arthur Ransome Group. It is a good way to keep up to date on things. As we are separated by many miles it is also a good way to discuss our favorite books and post pictures. I would recommend taking a look.

Have a fun winter if you can. Please note my new home telephone number: 941-726-1974, and feel free to call if you have any queries.

Robin.



### Greetings from the North

By Ian Sacré, TARS Canada Coordinator  
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Greetings Canadian TARS Members!

Another year has slipped by silently, so very quickly, and once again I find myself writing the winter newsletter.

I am observing these days that as one ages time does seem to pass faster as each year leaves us and disappears into the past. I wondered why this is? I

decided to see what I could find out and found an interesting possible explanation in *Scientific American* magazine:

"Our brain encodes new experiences, but not familiar ones, into memory, and our retrospective judgement of time is based on how many new memories we create over a certain period. In other words, the more new memories we build on say a weekend holiday, the longer the trip will seem in hindsight.

"From childhood to early adulthood, we have many fresh experiences and learn countless new skills. As adults, though, our lives become more routine, and we experience fewer unfa-

miliar moments. As a result, our early years tend to be relatively over represented in our autobiographical memory and, on reflection seem to have lasted longer”

The article argues that we can therefore slow time down by keeping our brains active and continually learning new skills and exploring new places.

Well, I suppose it is worth a try!

Membership renewals for 2017 have been coming in nice and early, and to date I have heard from about two-thirds of the Canadian membership.

This information has been forwarded to Ted Evans, our TARS Treasurer.

For those who have yet to get around to it I would gently remind you that memberships renewals are due by the 1st. January 2017. Please let me know soon what your intentions are regarding your renewal.

Many of you will have read Erskine Childers’ *Riddle of the Sands*, which people will remember is a sort of sailing spy story set in the German Frisian Islands well prior to the First World War. The book was first published in 1903. I recently came across a copy of the film version made in the 1960's by the J. Arthur Rank Studios. The picture featured some lovely old gaff rigged cutter scenes in which the craft were being sailed by the protagonists. I found it most enjoyable to watch and



to be reminded of a gentler, slower, well-mannered time when modern ‘high fives’, self flattery and promotion were considered to be in very poor taste.

There have recently been some written pieces about the making of the new version of the Swallows and Amazons motion picture. Some people seem to like it and others not so much. I have not seen it myself as yet but was interested in some of the technical problems encountered during the making of the picture. It seems none of the children used in the new film were sailors. But having found young actors that were suitable for the parts, they were taught to sail using Royal Yachting Association (RYA) accredited sailing clubs around Britain and then in boats in the Lake District. But the boats they were

taught to sail in were much lighter and more responsive than the clinker-built boats used in the picture, so some relearning had to take place.

Finding suitable, clinker-built boats was another difficulty. In the end Nick Barton, the producer, used boats built for the Royal Navy Sailing Association in the 1940s, 50s and 60s which were in those years taken on board Royal Naval warships to teach young naval sailors how to sail. The boats had to be re-rigged to reflect the period specifications.

Shooting locations were a problem as well. During the summer, Lake Windermere was found to be much too busy, with many modern vessels with hullabaloo in command dashing all about the lake, so Coniston Water and Derwentwater were substituted instead.

One final piece of trivia. The precursor of what was to become the modern form standard life jacket we know today was originally designed in 1854 by a Captain Ward, a Royal National Lifeboat inspector, who created a cork vest.

Wishing everyone fair winds and calm seas in the New Year.

Sincerely,

Ian Sacre

TARS Canada Coordinator

## 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](mailto:sjhorn@gmail.com)

Welcome to the first issue of *Signals from TARSUS/ North Pole News* for 2017.

We have several longer articles this time, with locales ranging from Alaska, to Pacific beaches, to the Lake District, to a surprisingly snowy southern Ontario.

Catherine Madsen, though not a TARS member, has provided a fascinating story of her discovery of Arthur Ransome as a girl in Alaska, in “Swallows and Amazons in the Far North”.

Ian Sacré’s “The Bucket List Sand Yacht Saga” shows that water is not necessary for sailing, as long as you have enough sand!

“When Swallows and Amazons meets James Bond” is reprinted, with thanks, from the members' magazine of the Royal Yachting Association. It tells how the producer of the recent Swallows and Amazons film had to decide on the best way to cast the movie: find child sailors who could act, or child actors who could sail.

In “Ransome's Winter”, Peter Calamai, a resident of south-western Ontario's snow belt, draws parallels between Stratford’s snowy winters, Ransome's experiences in Russia, and

the realistic depictions of cold, snow and ice in *Winter Holiday*.

My “Confessions of an Armchair Sailor” punctures any illusions that any of you may have had about my own sailing experience.

Finally, Pieces of Eight introduces us to Moomintrolls, thanks to former editor Elizabeth Jolley, and Petr Krist gives us another of his excellent maps, this one from *Peter Duck*.

When I took on the editorship, I was assured that the membership would come through in the end, and that I would receive enough material to fill up the newsletter—but it might show up at the last minute. So far that has been true. As a result, in the course of producing each issue there has been a moment of panic (or two) when it looked like the next issue was going to be very short or contain a bunch of empty pages.

To celebrate Canada's 150th anniversary, Parks Canada is offering both Canadians and visitors a free 2017 Discovery Pass, which provides access to all Parks Canada locations. You can find out more and order your pass on the [Parks Canada website](http://Parks Canada website): [www.pc.gc.ca/eng/voyage-travel/admission.aspx](http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/voyage-travel/admission.aspx)

So, if you have anything you would like to publish in the next issue, start working on it **now**. Don't put it off. Or, if you would rather not write something yourself, send along suggestions. All are welcome.

Lastly, many thanks to Ian Sacré, whose many contributions have been invaluable.

Look for next issue in May or June!

The "Sail-by" at the 2016 Wooden Boat Festival in Port Townsend, Washington. How many rigs can you spot? Thanks to Molly McGinnis for the photograph.



## Dipping our Hands — Personal relationships with the books

### Confessions of an Armchair Sailor

By Simon Horn

I was about nine when I first read *Swallows and Amazons*. I was in England staying with my grandparents in the summer of 1959, and when visiting an Aunt and Uncle discovered the 12 stories in a closed bookcase in my Uncle's study. They were clearly precious, and I still don't remember if he let me read his copy of S&A, or if I had to wait until I got back to Cambridge to buy my own copy from Heffers Bookshop in Trinity Street. Whatever the case, I do know that for the next three years, every birthday and Christmas, and every time I managed to save up my pocket money, a new Ransome was added to my bookshelf.

For me, like many others, a great appeal of Ransome was his ability to show children, like me, doing real things like camping, sailing, lighting fires and so on, and, moreover, showing exactly how to do them. My family were not outdoorsy types, alas, so I didn't get many opportunities to

light campfires in the woods, but I knew absolutely that you did not do it by starting with balls of crumpled newspapers!

We lived in a big city and, although it was located on a great river, for me at least boating opportunities of any sort were few and far between. But I knew how to sail! I mean, I was convinced that I did. Ransome's narratives were so clear. Surely all I had to do was get in a sailing boat and then everything that I had learned from *Swallows and Amazons*, or *Swallowdale*, or even *Peter Duck* would naturally guide my hand.

Luckily my Uncle was a sailor, and I spent three summers in England when aged 9, 10 and 11. And a few times he took me and my cousins asailing on the Waveney River near Lowestoft, where they lived. Uncle had two dinghies, first a Firefly and later an Enterprise. There I was, waiting amidsthips for the signal, "Ready,



Enterprise class dinghies.

about", shifting to the other side and then pulling in the jib sheet. I was sailing. I doubt if I was much good — no experience and no chance of getting much more — but I knew what was happening, I knew what I was supposed to do, and I did it.

That was all a long time ago, and my total sailing experiences can probably be counted on one hand. Still, the most recent occasion was an afternoon sail a few years ago in a hand-built replica of Joshua Slocum's *Spray* off the northern tip of Cape Breton Island. Hauling up the mainsail with the others, once again I felt that I knew what was going on and could appreciate it.

The magic of Ransome's books still holds, and the benefits of self-reliance, cooperation and mutual aid that Ransome's characters display were important lessons for me, sailing or not.

Thank you, Arthur Ransome.



The Waveney River near Somerleyton.

(Pictures from Wikimedia Commons)

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

### Swallows and Amazons in the Far North

By Catherine Madsen

When my family arrived in Fairbanks, Alaska in the fall of 1962, we moved into a vast apartment complex called Fairview Manor. “Fairview” was a real estate developer’s modest assessment of a miracle: a wall of sheer white mountains across the southern horizon, the heights of the Alaska range. In the winter the sun rose on the left, moved westward across the mountaintops, and set again on the right a few hours later.

We had come from Detroit, which was then at full industrial blast; we were used to air that was grey in the daytime and a surreal greyish-pink at night. In Alaska the air was so clear that you could see the sharp ridges of the mountains almost a hundred miles away.

But apart from that extraordinary view — and the long nights, and the intense cold of the subarctic latitude — we more or less lived city life. I

went to school, went to the movies with a school friend most Saturday afternoons. When it was forty below and too cold to play outside, I explored the apartment complex’s basement labyrinth of heating pipes and storage lockers.

The next summer everything changed. We moved up into the hills north of town, to a little cabin settlement called Dogpatch. It did have dogs — huskies — a brown-and-white one called Pooh about six months old, and two ginger-and-white littermates about three months old called Puk and Kia, who chased each other at high speed and played tug-of-war with the caribou bones that littered their yard. Pooh moved in with us for the summer, and got along companionably with our small six-year-old mutt. Once a bear came by while the dogs were sleeping and put its nose to the kitchen window; they never stirred.

Thanks to Catherine Madsen of the Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, Mass. for this fascinating picture of a Ransome childhood in Alaska, and thanks to Winnifred Wilson, TARS librarian, for making the connection.

The cabins in Dogpatch were separated by aspen and birch woods, and connected by trail and a simple dirt road. We were renting Celia’s cabin. Celia was Celia Hunter, who with her friend and fellow bush pilot Ginny Wood, and Ginny’s husband Morton (known as Woody), had built most of Dogpatch and all of Camp Denali, a remote wilderness resort where they spent their summers hosting and guiding tourists. Celia’s cabin was a marvel of efficient storage and sturdy aesthetic grace. I slept on a shelf in an alcove off the main room. From the south windows — unless it was cloudy or raining — we could see the



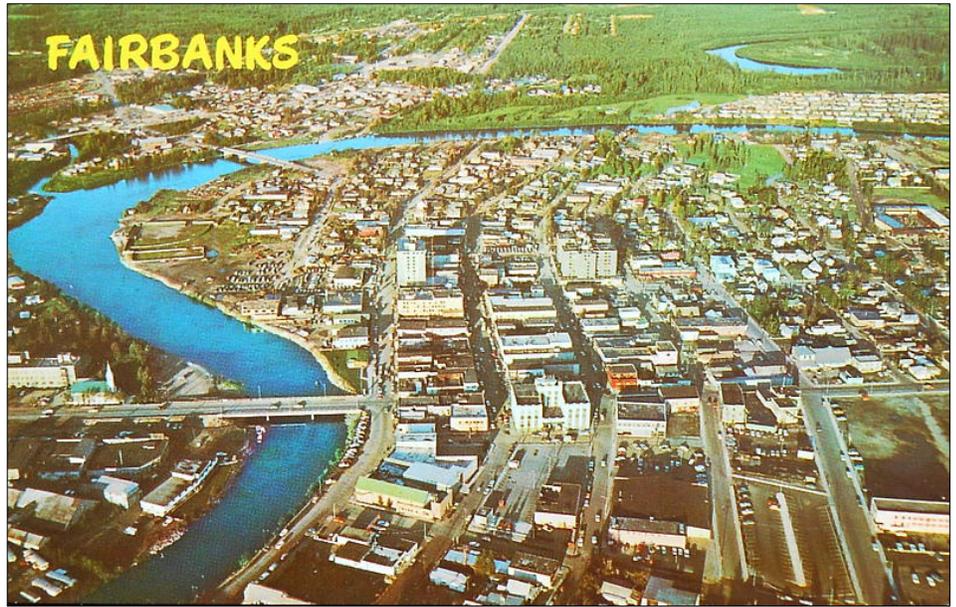
Part of the Alaska Range

mountains at any hour of the day or night.

Most of the other residents of Dogpatch were scientists at the University of Alaska: a botanist and an ornithologist who later wrote definitive books on their subjects, and a zoologist specializing in bears. The zoologist and his wife were raising three sons: Doug was nine, Jeff was seven, and Steve was five. I had just turned eleven.

The boys knew how to do things: they were building a treehouse, they made bows and arrows and wooden swords, they had a workbench covered with balsa chips. I was used to Detroit, where your family bought you things: the latest Disney hand puppet, a Barbie doll, a rock collection that somebody else had collected. To make things from scratch was exhilarating. I had never had boys as friends before, and that was exhilarating too; they had so much energy. The three of them slept in a large room that had just been built. The walls didn't come up to the ceiling yet and were unfinished on the hallway side, so you could climb up the exposed laths — we weren't supposed to — and drop over the top of the wall onto one of the mattresses. Near the house was a stand of birches permanently bowed by an ice storm; you could climb out onto the net of their thin trunks and bounce on them. We weren't supposed to do that either.

In the midst of all these adventures the boys kept talking about a book called *Swallows and Amazons*. The title puzzled me: Swallows were birds, Amazons were some women in Greek myth, and what did they have to do with each other? I was about to find out. The boys had three or four of



Fairbanks, Alaska in the 1960s.

the books, and they lent them to me one by one. (The rest I tracked down a few years later.) Here were children who did things on a grand scale. They sailed boats, climbed mountains, rescued a cragfast sheep; they cooked, and sometimes even caught, their own meals. They took risks and succeeded, got into difficulties and out again through their own wits and competence. They understood the beauty of where they were; I especially loved *Swallowdale*, with the secret valley and the trout tarn and the view from the top of Kanchenjunga.

I liked *Winter Holiday* too, because we had a lot of winter. We had certain advantages over the Swallows and Amazons and D's: we had Eskimo classmates, we heard sled dogs howling at night in the hills, a lot of people went to work on skis. The Swallows and Amazons and D's had to imagine these things; for us they were real and present.

At the end of the summer my family moved down the hill to Ballaine Lake,

half a mile from the university and roughly a mile from Dogpatch. Compared to Coniston Water, the lake was nothing much — you could take a canoe on it, but it was too small for sailing — but it reflected the sky, it was good skating for about half the year, and it had an island, or perhaps a peninsula (you couldn't take a boat through at the reedy end). That was all our imaginations needed. We started to plan.

So often in the Swallows and Amazons books there is a sense of urgency — a race against time because the school holidays are so short, or because there are adventures to have on land before Swallow is repaired, or because the Great Aunt must be outwitted, or because Nancy's mumps will soon be cured and everyone will have to go back to school. Alaskans have a sense of urgency about summer. Even with the endless lingering daylight the time is brief and intense; when the stars come back in August, fall and winter are coming. The first snow falls

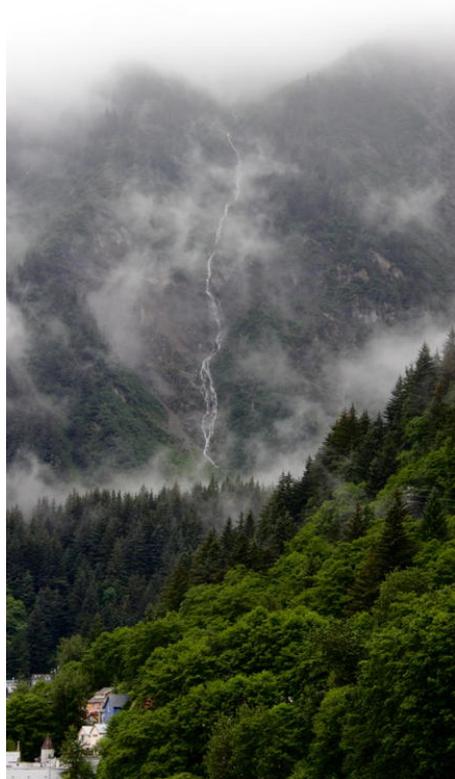
in late September or early October. Winter weather has its own exhilaration, especially if you ski or run dogs or love the night sky, but you have to take the cold seriously. We knew that our time was summer, and that it was short.

We didn't have a boat, but we had a flag: I made one for the boys and one for myself, with a golden tree and a silver star on a blue ground. (I was reading Tolkien too, and the tree was meant for a mallorn, but it also signified birches and aspens with their pale trunks and gold autumn leaves.) We made lists of supplies and tasks to accomplish. I learned to draw maps and tie knots. I was prepared to combine the intrepid spirit of Nancy with the domestic virtues of Susan, if only it meant we could camp at the lake next summer. The boys and I didn't go to the same school and didn't ride the same bus, so we saw each other less than we would have liked, but we wrote letters and made occasional visits. Meanwhile we developed our mythology — compounded of Tolkien and King Arthur and Robin Hood, but in the idiom of Arthur Ransome. Doug was Captain, I was Mate, Jeff was Able-Seaman and Steve was Ship's Boy. Because Dogpatch was hidden in the woods it was Lórien, and because the little group of houses near the lake seemed comparatively civilized and courtly it was Camelot; but our war-cry was 'Camelot and Lórien for ever!'

We didn't know much about it then, but in the northern and western coastal villages of Alaska there were children our age learning to hunt and fish and make things in earnest, and to navigate the tundra and the sea. The

old ways still survived then, as to a lesser extent they still do: survival skills that taught men to steer a kayak out a narrow lead in the ice to hunt seals at their breathing holes, and equipped women to make thread out of sinew and watertight clothing from a seal's gut. Hunters could read the weather for miles out to sea by the reflections of water and ice on cloud. Like Jacky in *The Picts and the Martyrs*, who teaches Dick and Dorothea to tickle trout, these were people who got their living from the land and knew it deeply.

But for us it wasn't like that, it wasn't even like it was for the Swallows. Parents have their own mysterious reasoning processes, and it's true that there are no bears in the Lake District, but we couldn't understand why we should be denied what the Swallows



Alaska, in the mountains.

had, the chance to be on our own and to test ourselves. We could only conclude that the boys' parents were pretty sure we were duffers. In spite of much pleading and agitating there was only one night of camping the next summer, and that was in their yard; at the beginning of the third summer their parents decided the boys ran too wild when I was there and we were forbidden to see each other for a time. (Of course I managed one day to get to their house anyway, evading detection; Nancy's example served me well.) At the end of that summer my family moved back to Detroit, to the endless city streets and the acrid air.

Once the boys grew a little older, they won out. I wasn't there to see it, but Doug wrote me when he was about seventeen that he and his brothers had built a sod hall and a couple of huts in a nearby field; Jeff as a young man built and lived in a yurt behind their cabin. They all became artists: Jeff along with their mother took up pottery, Doug painted (and illustrated his letters with beautiful ink drawings), Steve learned to carve wood and stone and old ivory and ice. Doug died at 41, but Jeff now lives in the coastal town of Homer in a compound of quirky and beautiful buildings he built himself, and Steve has won international fame for his ice sculptures.

The boys' mother still lives in the cabin in Dogpatch; at the age of ninety she still works in her pottery studio. I visited her a few months ago — Steve was there too, working on one of her outbuildings — for long conversations and good meals. She told me that even now, when she drives by Ballaine Lake, she sometimes says, "Camelot and Lórien for ever!"

## The Professor's Laboratory — Ideas and instructions for Ransome-inspired activities

### The Bucket List Sand Yacht Saga

By Ian Sacré

I have subscribed to the National Geographic Society journal for more years than I care to remember. In the 1967 November issue of the publication there appeared a piece entitled “Dry-Land Fleet Sails the Sahara”. The account describes the story of an expedition led by retired French army General de Brigade Jean du Boucher (then a colonel) in which he and 22 men and one lady — coming from France, Great Britain, the United States, Denmark, the Netherlands and the then West Germany — decide to embark on a rather outlandish endeavour: to sail sand yachts or perhaps more correctly land yachts from Bechar on the Morocco-Algeria border, southwest to Nouakchott on the coast of Mauritania, some 1,700 miles (2,740 kilometres) away. Most of the

route was in the desert. Only Jean du Boucher knew anything about the Sahara Desert, for he had spent 14 years in that inhospitable place as a soldier and had grown to love it. The expedition started with twelve sand yachts: six French-designed and built B.B's, three French-built Arguins and three British-built yachts.

The group was supported by six Land Rover vehicles, whose job was to carrying spare crew and supplies since each ‘craft’ was crewed by only the pilot. The team finished the expedition in 30 days but five or six of the yachts ‘foundered’ en-route with wheel bearing failure or broken frames due to the rough terrain. The expedition started out as a race but ended up almost as a voyage of survival.

This exciting account stayed vividly in my mind all through the intervening years since I first read it back in 1967. I often mused that a scaled-down version of the expedition was just the sort of thing the Swallow and Amazon crews would relish, just like Dick's sailing sledge in *Winter Holiday* fol-



Land yacht design from 1640.

lowed the real life example of Nansen's crossing of the Greenland icecap early in the 1900s. I also knew that it was perfectly possible to buy one of the ready-made, commercially built sand yachts now sold in several parts of the world, but where's the fun in that? I wanted to design and build my own!

The world speed record for a wind-powered land yacht is currently 126.1 mph (202.9 kms. per hour) established by Britain's Richard Jenkins in the very high-tech designed Greenbird in 2009, but neither my ancient body nor my bank account would allow me to do more than dream the impossible dream of attaining such a speed. If I could just design and build something that even moved it would be a satisfying accomplishment. Also, to save costs I wanted to utilize various bits and pieces I happened to have



Mark I - The Chariot

lying around. And so eighteen months ago I launched the project. For I had decided that I simply had to get some stuff off my bucket list!

I established four main criteria for the project.

1. Cost had to be minimal.
2. The contraption had to be easily taken to pieces for transport on top of my car or the 'Beast'.
3. It needed to utilize one of several existing sails I had on hand.
4. Stability had to be such that it would not capsize easily, since my old bones would not stand up to a body-breaking smash up!

My preliminary research revealed that I was not alone. It seemed there were a dozen routes I could follow and numerous theories that each designer, either home-builder or commercial, swore by. I discovered there were several different land yacht classes and dozens of clubs all enjoying sand yachting. Most of their craft were now made by professional manufacturers, though there were still many amateur designers and builders. Undeterred I decided on a simple horizontal isosceles triangle framework with a wheel at each corner. The single front wheel would be used to steer the thing using a long, cunningly designed and built tiller, and for a sail and mast I would use old sailboard gear. What could be simpler than that?

Little did I know.

Land yachts and sailing boats have many things in common but, in both cases, perhaps the most important issue for efficient performance and handling is the relationship between the physical positions of the centre of effort of the sail and the centre of lateral resistance of the craft.

Without going into a lot of detail, for



Mark 2 enroute to beach for trials

the craft to work efficiently the two centres need to be in roughly vertical line, one over the other. If they are not, then the craft will only work efficiently right down wind and nothing will let them tack to windward.

After several days work, I had worked out details and built what became known as Mark 1 or the Chariot. It was brightly painted red and black and all I needed for trials was a large, hard, level open space, and wind. My total expenses for construction had come to roughly \$150. The problem was, where to trial the machine? Anywhere close at hand (Metro Vancouver) was pretty much out of the question.

Spanish Banks, the beach directly to the west of Vancouver was a possibility but enquiries revealed that vehicular traffic is forbidden. However, I had plans for going to SW Washington State in any case and heard that there were three beaches there which permitted wind-powered wheeled craft. So with the Mark 1 prototype securely lashed down on the top of my car, off we went.

This expedition was also to be a camping trip so on arrival we first established our camp at a nearby site and then took off to the beach to assemble Mark 1. Regrettably there was little wind that day, just enough to move Mark 1 at a very slow, sedate pace down wind. But when the time came to round up and tack to wind-

ward the Chariot simply refused to move! By now the wind had almost died and it did not look like it was going to freshen any time soon. So the decision was taken to pack up for the day and have tea!

The morning came and with it a little more wind, so off we went for more trials. The down wind run again went well, but the Chariot still refused to tack up wind. It was then I remembered those two centres, on the Chariot they were laterally miles apart and nothing was going to make Mark 1 tack to windward as she was presently configured! Quite apart from the fact the whole thing also weighed too much. I kicked myself for being such

a forgetful fool and decided we were wasting our time with Mark 1 and that it was time to start thinking about Mark 2.

As soon as I got home I started work on revised drawings. With modifications the isosceles triangle concept was a keeper, but the wheels needed to be larger. The steering gear also needed modifications and the whole thing needed to be lighter. More importantly I had to devise a method to move the mast forward or aft to compensate for the weight variation of different pilots and the ground loadings on the rear axle wheels and the front steering wheel. If I could move the mast forward or aft, I would be easily able to adjust the relationship of those two important centres. Square aluminium tubing was chosen for the framing due to its light weight and the forward corner of the triangle was redesigned so that the square tube supporting the

front wheel steering assembly could be moved in or out to lengthen or shorten the longitudinal wheel base. The mast step was also arranged so that it too could be moved forward or aft. Larger wheels were procured and a new seating arrangement was devised. Two months later Mark 2 was ready for trials!

No messing about this time, we drove directly to Ocean City State Park in Washington and found a campsite within spitting distance of the beach. We assembled Mark 2 right at our campsite and walked her down the access roadway to the beach. After stepping



The "Beast": useful if you have to transport a sand yacht!

the mast and bending on the sail she was ready! Loading my test pilot on board, I gave her a little push and off she took with me running behind! After running a couple of hundred yards chasing Chariot 2 and totally out of breath I yelled, "Round up and start tacking!" and round she came flying to windward! Mark 2 was a success!

The wind was fitful later in the day but not before we had en-

joyed several of what seemed to us high speed runs up and down the beach. The wind lasted for the rest of that day and the next, and the only sound to be heard was the high speed thrum of the tires on the hard sand and the rattle of sheet blocks as we went about. Bliss!

I am not sure how long the wheel bearings will last in such wet, abrasive environmental conditions, but that is the least of my worries. With the next expedition already in mind I have redesigned the mast and have a larger sail on order which should arrive any day now. The new sail will have reef points so that different wind strengths can be dealt with more easily. I can't wait to get going again. My plan is to drive the 'Beast' with the disassembled Chariot 2 on the roof rack down to the Alvord Desert in SE Oregon for some serious sand sailing and exploring. The Alvord is a dry sand lake bed some twelve miles long but located in a fairly remote area at an altitude of roughly 5,000 feet so it is definitely a summer adventure. That bucket list of mine just isn't getting any shorter! I think the Swallows and Amazons would approve.



Mark 2 under way with the larger sail

## Captain Flint's Trunk — News from around the world

# When Swallows and Amazons meets James Bond

**Norfolk sailing enthusiast and film producer Nick Barton has produced a modern version of the Arthur Ransome classic. He talks to the RYA about some of the challenges of making the film - plus, how you can have your own Ransome adventure!**



Early in the production process behind the latest adaptation of Arthur Ransome's classic novel *Swallows and Amazons*, the team faced a major dilemma casting the actors who would play the children. They had to be skilled dinghy sailors who looked at home in a boat, but also had to be credible actors.

At first, sailing-mad producer Nick Barton (*Calendar Girls* and *Kinky Boots*) looked for children who could sail, in the hope of finding some who could also perform in front of the camera. When this failed, his production company, Harbour Pictures, chose young actors and taught them to sail using RYA-accredited sailing schools.

'We auditioned hundreds of children. None of them were real sailors before,' says Barton, 'so we took the children we felt would be best on film and gave them sailing lessons in various clubs and then in boats in the Lake District. They loved it and they were really, really good - great actually.'

During filming, however, the actors had to sail much heavier wooden boats than the sailing school trainers.



**Above:** Producer Nick Barton is a keen sailor. **Top:** A scene from *Swallows and Amazons*

Instead of having a jib and mainsail, they had one big lugsail. 'But they adapted well to it.'

Filming a story in 2015 that's set in the 1920s had its own challenges over health and safety. To safeguard the cast, life jackets and safety divers were on hand during all waterborne filming, and sailing doubles were also recruited to handle the boats if weather conditions became difficult, and in recognition that Coniston Water is 200 feet deep.

However, in most of the scenes, the sailing is done by the 'real' children, Barton says proudly. In fact, the two that do most of the on-screen sailing - Nancy, played by Seren Hawkes, and John, played by Dane Hughes - became very good and he is hopeful that they will carry on sailing.

Alongside the difficulties of recruiting competent dinghy sailors, Barton had the problem of finding suitable period

“ When I bought my boat in 1992, I thought “OK, I have got to make the film now - it's my chance” ”



Photography: ©Studio Canal/BBC Films

craft. 'A boat builder in Cumberland told me about a class of boats called RNSAs (Royal Navy Sailing Association), dinghies that were built in the 1940s, '50s and '60s to take on warships and teach young naval sailors to sail.' It took Barton four years to find the boats, which then had to be re-rigged to reflect period specifications.

Locations, too, were a challenge. Windermere, an inspiration for the main location in the books, was too busy during summer for shooting to be suitable. So Coniston Water and Derwentwater were substituted.

Barton is in many ways the ideal person to take Ransome's iconic children's book and adapt it for the modern cinema. For one thing, he's a serious sailor, living full-time in Norfolk thanks to his love of a John Leather-designed Norfolk Oyster, which he sails at Blakeney Harbour out of Morston. Barton first saw a version of this large day-sailing boat, which he describes as 'a bit like a bigger version of *Swallow* or *Amazon*, at a boat show in 1991 and was sailing his own custom-built craft by the next year. 'It completely changed my life,' he says.

Having sailed 'a little' with his journalist father when he was a child living first in Cape Town and then Eastbourne, Barton now sails every weekend in the season and during family holidays. His four grandchildren enjoy sailing as well, as do his daughter and son-in-law, and boat ownership is something the generations have in common. He credits the boat also with kick-starting his desire to create an updated *Swallows and Amazons* film, 'When I bought my boat in 1992, I thought "OK, I have got to make the film now – it's my chance".'

¶ It took Barton four years to find the boats, which then had to be re-rigged to reflect period specifications ¶



**Swallows and Amazon tells the story of two families staying in the Lake District**

That's because Barton is also a huge fan of the book's author Arthur Ransome. His affection for Ransome's work began, as it has for so many children, back when Barton was 12 and, he remembers, 'The books made a huge impression on me. I think it was the freedom that the children had to determine their own adventures and their own life on the Lakes. At that time I was not a sailor, but I was drawn to the idea of children being able to have an adventure without parents.'

It took Barton until 2007 to tackle the project in earnest, and to begin a two-year negotiation for the rights to the book with the Arthur Ransome Literary Estate. 'While I wanted [the film] to be faithful to the spirit of the book, nowadays you've got to compete with the bigger animated and family films that children have got used to – like *Harry Potter*. You have to add another dimension to it.'

Barton, together with screen writer Andrea Gibb and director Philippa Lowthorpe, wanted to create a film that was adapted for a modern audience, but also true to the source material. It couldn't simply be an update of the 1974 film, which was released at a time, he says, 'when you could make a simpler kind of film'.

What has been added is a spy story, modelled closely on events in Ransome's own life. While engaged as a journalist for the *Manchester Guardian* in Russia in 1917, Ransome became friendly with Lenin and Trotsky and was even



suspected by the Bolsheviks of being a British spy. In fact, in the late 1920s it emerged that he was a spy for MI6 so, says Barton, 'You could hardly invent what was already there.'

The new film includes a finale involving an attempted kidnap by Russian spies, intervention from the courageous *Swallow* and *Amazon* crews, and an exciting seaplane landing, which adds a touch of modern, James Bond-style action to the book's original plot line.

The result of this recreation and obvious affection for the classic source material is, Barton hopes, a film that will resonate with Ransome enthusiasts and newcomers alike – of all ages. Importantly, and providing a counterpoint to today's technology-obsessed world, it echoes the book's central message that children can create and revel in their own worlds and adventures, exercising their own imagination and independence. It's a siren call that has inspired sailors and adventurers like Ellen MacArthur and Richard Branson, so who knows who else will now be fired up to set out on their own voyages of discovery?

*Swallows and Amazons* is in cinemas from 19 August 2016.

*Swallows and Amazons* was produced in conjunction with BBC Films, BFI, Studio Canal, Harway Films, Screen Yorkshire, Electric Shadow Company, and Maiden Investments



Please note that this is the second version of the February 2017 issue of *Signals from TARSUS/North Pole News*. The Royal Yachting Association has requested that we reproduce their article exactly as it appeared in their magazine. Please do not distribute any copies of the first version of the February newsletter. —Ed.

## Dipping our Hands — Personal relationships with the books

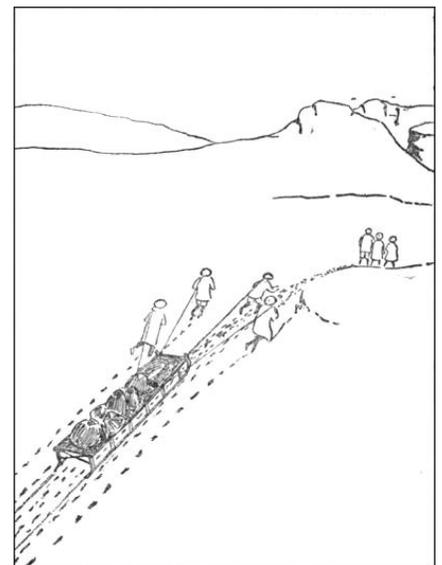
### Ransome's Winter

By Peter Calamai

I can claim some experience with the depths of winter, with ice stretching to the horizon and snowdrifts that swallow legs. For 35 years I lived in Ottawa, which justly claims to be the world's coldest capital city in the winter months (although Mongolia's Ulan Bator has lower temperatures averaged over the entire year). I have made numerous trips north of the Arctic Circle, two on the icebreaker CCGS Amundsen and even — for a week — at a research station just north of 80 degrees.

Then, in August 2016, I moved to Stratford, a city of 32,000 that lies two hours west of Toronto. More to the point, Stratford lies directly in the path of "lake effect" snow storms, so called because winds moving south over Lake Huron pick up moisture from open water which is

then precipitated in intense snow squalls that can cause police to close even the provincial highways to vehicles. Over the past three decades Stratford has averaged 96 inches of snow a year, much of that dumped in squalls.



Dog team in High Greenland.

Against this background I re-read the snowstorm portions of *Winter Holiday*, particularly Dick and Dorothea's perilous trek by sledge and on foot to the North Pole. What kind of winter storm did they experience? Captain Flint says: "This is a blizzard, or something very like one." But neither Flint nor any of the other adults (Eskimos) had much experience with severe winters in the Lake District. Indeed Flint had hurried home when he read about the lake freezing over because he didn't want to miss such a rare event.

A blizzard is defined by the Meteorological Service of Canada as "a severe weather condition characterized by reduced visibility from falling and/or blowing snow and strong winds that may be accompanied by low temperatures." A snow squall is described as "a moderate to heavy snow flurry, which is driven by strong, gusty winds. Visibility during snow squalls is usually poor."

Although the official definition doesn't address duration, a snow squall



The Igloo in snow.

customarily lasts less than an hour and often only 10 to 20 minutes. A blizzard can be much longer. I think the Ds were caught in a blizzard, since it lasted all afternoon, while the Polar Relief Expedition and other would-be rescuers came through the blizzard's aftermath, with maybe some snow squalls.

The Ds first travelled across the frozen lake on a small sledge with a square sail. Dick estimated the wind might have been blowing 30 miles per hour, so that would have been their maximum speed. That speed can easily be reached by the modern-day version of their 1930s sail sledge, a snowmobile. Fighting through a snowstorm on a snowmobile produces some of the same results — snow coats a rider's goggles as it did Dick's glasses, exposed skin turns blue as did Dick's gloveless hand, the driven snow lodges in every fold of your parka (or sheepskin coat in the Ds case.) Above all, a traveller is enveloped in a world of sterile white where the ice below blends seamlessly into the sky.

I think Ransome realistically evoked a severe winter storm for his young readers, many of whom in England would never have experienced anything of the sort. Other touches also ring true to anyone familiar with a wintery clime: snow forming "breastplates" on the front of jackets and sweaters, the lake ice swept so clear by the wind that it seemed "a thousand men with brooms had been at work," a small whirlwind of snow dancing round the floor if a door is opened even momentarily.

Possibly Ransome drew on his time in Russia for the ice and snow portions of *Winter Holiday*. Whatever the inspi-



"The houseboat's frozen in."

ration, to this resident in a cold climate the descriptions read true.

And speaking of Russia, when I was accredited as a Canadian foreign correspondent to the Soviet Union I acquired a very handsome black hat which I was assured was made of rabbit fur, just like those fashioned by the adventurers in *Winter Holiday*. I began to doubt that provenance when dogs back home barked at it. A furrier informed me it was cat, not rabbit. But with the ear flaps down it was quite cosy. I could comfortably have worn it through a blizzard to the North Pole.

### Noticed on eBay

If anyone with more available cash than I have is looking for signed copies of Ransome's books, copies of *Peter Duck* and *Pigeon Post* are currently listed on [eBay.co.uk](http://eBay.co.uk), each starting at £150 plus shipping, etc. Search for "Rare signed book" + the title.

—Ed.



## Pieces of Eight — The Junior Pages



### Crab Island Quiz

By Petr Krist

What do the 7 numbers represent?



1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_

Hint: There is a map in Peter Duck.

Answers:

1. Bill's Landing
2. Mount Gipber
3. Duckhaven
4. The new trail
5. Black Jake's trail
6. Black Jake's diggings
7. Here PD found the stuff

Hint 2: Try a mirror!

## Imaginary Worlds and Tove Jansson's Moomin Stories

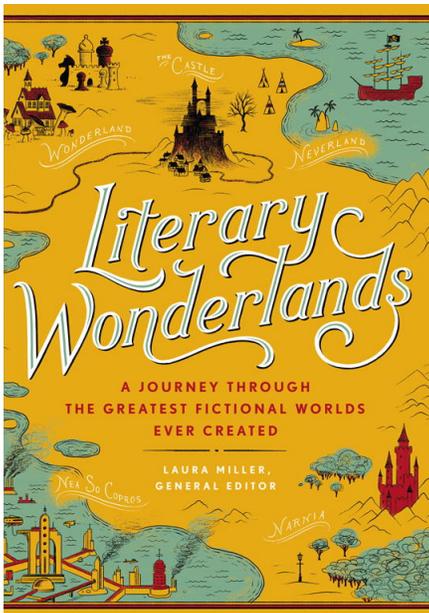
By Elizabeth Jolley

My mother recently received a wonderful hardcover book as a gift, the sort with a lovely cover that makes you drool over the presumed delights inside. *Literary Wonderlands, A Journey Through the Greatest Fictional Worlds Ever Created*, is a title that reminded me of a unit my mother taught in her 4th

grade classes many years ago, "Imaginary World", in which her students created a project using writing, literary inspiration, mapping, artistry and their imaginations to make their own imaginary worlds! They got to decide how big their worlds would be, what the topography was like, who lived

there, and how they lived their lives. Would there be bartering? Money to exchange? What type of work would the people need to do in order to live their lives?

Arthur Ransome is one of a number of authors who created imaginary worlds. Ransome's was firmly based



in his own experiences as a child, but he made The Lake and The Island his own, and created what he needed to keep the stories going. The Swallows must make a packing list, remember everything on it (matches, anyone?), show Mother that they are capable of sailing properly, borrow pots and pans that must be returned in reasonable condition, cook over a fire, boil drinking water, set up tents, navigate on water & on the surrounding lands... and that is just in the beginning of the first story! Ransome added some friendly farms for access to milk & eggs, boatbuilders to assist with holes in the hull, a doctor for the mumps, policeman, taxi driver, etc. Most of the local folk that support the Swallows and the Amazons were

based on the real people who lived in farms around the Lakes District years ago. However, the Lookout Tree, the Igloo, Swallowdale valley and many other bits & pieces came from his imagination, shared with us through his writing.

Another favorite author of mine and of my family for years, is Tove Jansson, a Finnish writer. She penned the wonderful imaginary world of the Moomins, a family of small creatures that remind me of a sort of hippopotamus/pig-type animal. There are quite a few books telling tales of the various adventures Moomintroll and his family & friends find themselves undergoing. Start with the first book, *Finn Family Moomintroll*, for a delightful description of the Moomin family and the round house they inhabit. They live in northern lands, near the sea, so in some of the stories you will find boats and boathouses. There is some magic of sorts, so that some characters may never be seen, only heard or felt. Jansson's sense of quirky humor shows through in the odd characters she has created, and also in the dialogue, which often leaves me chuckling! In *Moominsummer Madness*, which we were lucky enough to have seen made into a short film, the first few chapters are named, About a Bark Boat and a Volcano, About Diving for Breakfast, and About Learning to Live in a Haunted House. When I tell

you that during a fair part of the story, the Moomin family are living in an old theatre that is floating around in a flood, you can imagine what a funny adventure it is!

I hope you get a chance to look through the "Imaginary Worlds" book, with many listings, including *Gulliver's Travels*, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, *The Little Prince*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *A Wizard of Earthsea*, *The Princess Bride*, *The Sandman*, the *Harry Potter* series, *The Hunger Games* series, and many more imaginary worlds (but not Ransome's). And for some fun reading, check out any of the Moomin books by Tove Jansson! If you find one you really like, write about it for another issue!



Characters from Finn Family Moomintroll.

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