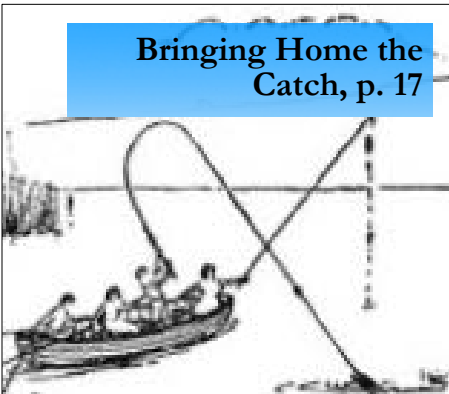
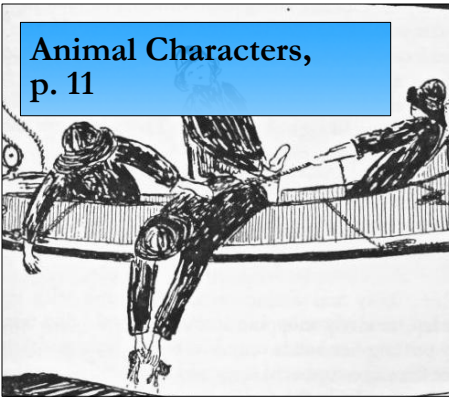
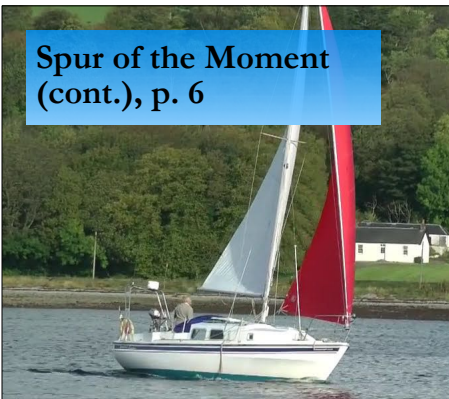




# Signals from TARSUS & North Pole News

May 2022

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



### A View from the US Helm

By Robin Marshall  
TARSUS Coordinator  
210 N 18th Street W Bradenton, FL 34205  
[45tarsus@gmail.com](mailto:45tarsus@gmail.com)

Once again we have to thank Simon Horn for his dedication in producing this fine newsletter.

A lot of work goes into this, and many thanks to all the contributors.

I also thank all of you who sent in your membership renewals, and I apologize to anyone who may have received a reminder but had already paid. Since the membership process changed, I have not been receiving monthly updates from the U.K. letting me know if any members have renewed online.

Which brings me to the question of my role as U.S. Coordinator. For some time I have been feeling that I cannot give my full attention to this, mainly as I am aging and also have to devote most of my time to my wife, who is wheelchair bound, and to the household chores, which all fall to me. Therefore I will be resigning at the end of the year.

If anyone would like to volunteer to take on the task of U.S. Coordinator, please let me know. Otherwise I imagine the UK could deal with the service, as most things can now be done directly.

Smooth sailing,  
Robin

\* \* \*

I mentioned in the last edition that one of our past members, Jane Duffy, has sent me a parcel of books which she felt members might like. Some of you have requested and received books. If you are interested I will send you one or more, I just ask that you cover the cost of shipping and packaging.

Here is the amended list:

### About Arthur Ransome

*In Search of Swallows and Amazons*

by Roger Wardale

*Arthur Ransome on Fishing*

by Jeremy Swift

*Arthur Ransome Under Sail*

by Roger Wardale

*Captain Flint's Trunk*

by Christina Hardymont

*The Last Englishman*

by Roland Chambers

### By Arthur Ransome

*Old Peters Russian Tales*

*Racundra's First Cruise*

*Racundra's Third Cruise*

### Children's stories in S&A vein by other authors

*The Salt Stained Book*

*A Ravelled Flag*

*Ghosting Home*

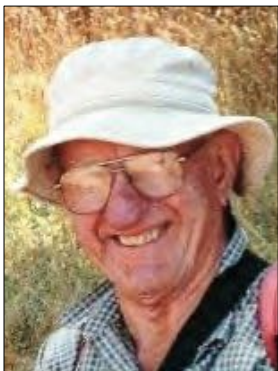
*The Lion of Sole Bay*

by Julia Jones

*Brambleholme Summer*

*Brambleholme Autumn*

by Duncan Hall



### Greetings from the North

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

Greetings Canadian TARS Members.

Well, Spring has finally arrived in most parts of Canada and with it an improvement in the Covid 19 pandemic, or plague as I prefer to call it.

However it still seems to lurk in pockets around here in British Columbia and elsewhere in the country and I often hear of acquaintances being smit-

ten despite having been double shot and boosted (sounds like a gunner's talk from a Patrick O'Brian novel!). The new TARS Membership on-line

subscription renewal system has now been in place since before Christmas. For many it seems to have worked flawlessly but for others, not so much. This has resulted in a few Canadian members leaving the Society. The main difficulty seems to have been for members who do not use PayPal but would prefer to use Visa or another credit cards to pay their subscriptions. Since many of our members have little interest in modern electronic media and communications systems, trying to figure out and utilize the new sys-

tem to pay has proved to be a burden. Organizations providing an online renewal web page all seem to use different methodologies. I can sympathize with those having difficulties.

I recently spent an hour trying to renew a magazine subscription as a birthday present for an old friend. Any modern ten year old would have done it in two minutes! But by the same token that same ten year old would probably not be able to tell you from memory where the Amazon River is located without looking it up

on the Internet, while most ‘ancient mariners’ like us could do so at that same age without blinking!

I have a young nephew who kindly sorts things out for me on this infernal machine from time to time. When I ask him in amazement how he did this or that. He smiles and says, “You know, Uncle Ian, I don’t really know how I did it, I just do it!” A black art to be sure.

I am currently in the throes of selling my present abode here in North Vancouver and moving over to Vancou-

ver Island. So I am living in a state of perpetual tidiness with the net result being I can’t find anything. Several boxes which have already been packed have already been opened several times as I search for some misplaced treasure. You have all been there I am sure. Hopefully things will be sorted out in the next few weeks. Wishing everyone fair winds and calm seas,

Sincerely,  
Ian Sacré  
TARS Canadian Coordinator



### A Note from the Editor

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

Welcome to *Signals from TARSUS/North Pole News* for May 2022.

Thanks as always to all the contributors.

I have included a guide to using the members’ area of the central TARS website. You may well have seen this in the latest issue of *Signals*, but the members’ area of

the website is well worth visiting, so I thought it was good to repeat it.

#### In this issue

In *Kanchenjunga’s Cairn*, **Ian Sacré** presents part 2 of “On The Spur of The Moment”. He has his yacht; now he will have to get it in full working order. It sounds like it may be a long process, but things are going well.

In “Voyaging on a Tall Ship”, **Jules Blue** describes what sounds like a fascinating presentation to the UK Midland Region by voyager Jenny Wedick about her South Pacific trip on the barque *The Lord Nelson*.

**Maida Barton Follini** opens *Dipping Our Hands* with “Animal Characters: Participants, Rescued and Rescuers”,

presenting the various animals that appear in Ransome’s books and the roles they play in the stories.

Next, in “Why *Peter Duck* and *Missee Lee* Are Not Just Fantasies”, **your editor** questions a common characterization of these stories, and explains why he thinks they are full-fledged members of the Ransome canon.

In *Dot’s Latest Story*, **Paul Nelson** asks “Snake vs Cat: Who Would Win?”.

Regular contributor **Molly McGinnis** again takes charge of *Beckfoot Kitchen* to show us how to cook fish in “Bringing Home the Catch”.

Then, in *Pieces of Eight* **McGinnis** talks about the role fishing plays in Ransome’s twelve.

\* \* \*

The next issue is due in September 2022. But only your contributions make it possible. As you plan and carry out summer activities, consider reporting on them for the rest of us.

I will send a first reminder at the beginning of August, but don't wait. Please start thinking about contributing right away.

I hope you all remain well,  
Simon

#### Guidelines for Submissions

**Preferred document formats:**  
Microsoft Word (docx), Apple Pages, RTF.

**Illustrations and photos:**  
You can indicate in your article where you would like your illustrations to appear, but please provide them separately in jpg or png formats, since they may be difficult to extract from text.

Images should be reasonably large: I can make a big photo smaller without losing quality, but I can’t make a small one big!

## How to Use the Members' Area of the TARS Website

(from *Signals*, May-August 2022)



### The Arthur Ransome Society Member Site



### Members' Area



Welcome to the TARS website! Have you discovered the Members' Area yet? Believe it or not, most TARS members still haven't. Which is a pity, because it's easy to enter and contains a mass of interesting stuff. If you haven't had a look yet, why not try now!

#### How to get into the Members' Area of the TARS Website:

**Before you start**, you'll need to acquire two things: a **Username** and a **Password**. Both can be obtained from Diana Wright - in fact you may have them already. Two years ago, when the website was launched, Diana emailed every then member with their individual Username and Password - if you can check your old emails you may find them.

If not, just **email Diana at [webmaster@arthur-ransome.org](mailto:webmaster@arthur-ransome.org)** and ask her to send them. Then...

1. Find the website: go to [www.arthur-ransome.org](http://www.arthur-ransome.org)
2. From the line of options in green type, go to the far right and click on **Members' Area**
3. This takes you to the **Log-in page**, which asks you to enter 'Username or email address': and 'Password'.
4. Tick the 'Remember me' if box you don't want to have to enter these details every time you visit, then...
5. Click on the green 'log in' button

**And you're in!** You'll find a list of options, all in green type:

**Home Publications and Events Society information Juniors Arthur Ransome My Account**

So now, go exploring - click on any of these (ignore 'My Account' for the time being) and see what you find! If you get stuck, bored or just want to move on to another section, just go back to the top (or scroll to the bottom of the one you're in and click 'back to top')

**Home** has a general welcome, and **Latest Updates**, with details of recent events (and a short-form calendar) and additions to the website, plus contact details for TARS officers and the link to our own facebook site, The Arthur Ransome Society (TARS) Facebook Group ( which is not the same as the non-TARS-run public site, 'The Arthur Ransome Group').

**Publications** not only has useful information about TARS publications, but also the actual publications themselves in low-res PDF versions for you to download and read (note, if you click on a download, nothing will appear to happen, but it will go to your Download box where you can retrieve it to read offline later). Suggestion to UK members: look at the overseas magazines!

**Events** In the Members Area you'll find full details of all UK regional and national events, including those which for safeguarding reasons are members-only. There's an interactive **calendar** with details of events.

**Society Information** contains the full catalogue of the **TARS Library**, the **TARS Stall stocklist**, details of the IAGM, Literary Weekend, Minutes of meetings and forms.

**Juniors** provides some additional material to the wonderfully comprehensive public site.

Click on **Arthur Ransome** to find loads of fascinating information about the man and his life.

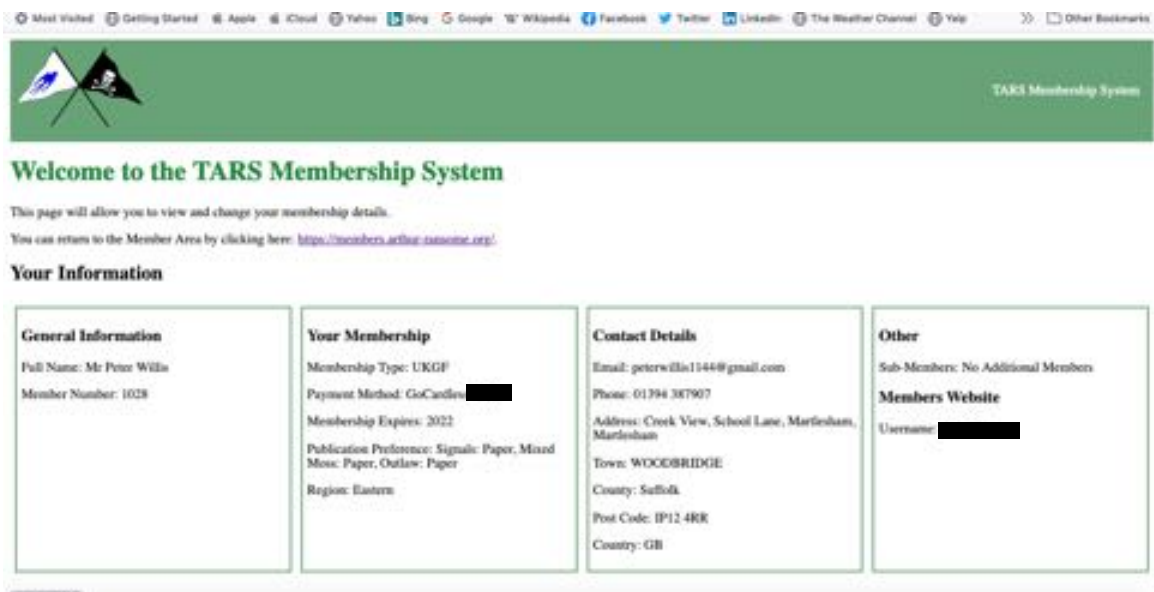
## Going interactive

**And now... find yourself!** Click on **My Account**, then on **My details** and you'll find the page shown below, titled **Welcome to the TARS Membership System**, and be invited to 'Load My Information', Click here, and you'll open up a four-box display ready-loaded with your name, your membership number, details of your membership – including how you prefer to receive your TARS publications, whether as paper copies or electronic downloads – and you can hit a little box marked 'Update info' if you want to change any of these details – your preferences, or your address if you move house. All of this is private to you - access is linked to your login details, your username and password.


If you go back to **My Account** and click on **Payment and Renewals** you'll find you can use the website as a convenient means of paying for such things as purchases from the TARS Stall, or books from Amazon Publications.

**Membership:** TARS has already started the process of switching to Direct Debit as our preferred method of subscription payments, and a number of members have already adopted it. It can be done via the website - and we'll publish more in the next *Signals*, in time for the 2023 renewals. Meanwhile, enjoy getting to know your website!

The TARS Website is managed by Diana Wright, email [webmaster@arthur-ransome.org](mailto:webmaster@arthur-ransome.org)



Most Visited Getting Started Apple iCloud Yahoo Bing Google Wikipedia Facebook Twitter LinkedIn The Weather Channel Yelp Other Bookmarks

 TARS Membership System

### Welcome to the TARS Membership System

This page will allow you to view and change your membership details.  
You can return to the Member Area by clicking here: <https://members.arthur-ransome.org/>

#### Your Information

<b>General Information</b> Full Name: Mr Peter Willis Member Number: 1028	<b>Your Membership</b> Membership Type: UKGF Payment Method: GoCardless Membership Expires: 2022 Publication Preference: Signals: Paper, Mixed Mess: Paper, Outlaw: Paper Region: Eastern	<b>Contact Details</b> Email: peterwillis1144@gmail.com Phone: 01394 387907 Address: Creek View, School Lane, Marlesham, Marlesham Town: WOODBRIDGE County: Suffolk Post Code: IP12 4RR Country: GB	<b>Other</b> Sub-Members: No Additional Members <b>Members Website</b> Username: [REDACTED]
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## Kanchenjunga's Cairn — Places we've been and our adventures

### On The Spur of The Moment... continued

By Ian Sacré (North Vancouver, B.C.)

A week after my Westerly Centaur was delivered to Hornby Island by my daughter Pam and her husband Desmond, I was able to travel over to the island, accompanied by my long-suffering friend Jill, to see what on earth I had bought in my advanced state of mental weakness. This malady, I am told, tends to afflict people, particularly men, with the onslaught of their second childhood!

There she was in all her glory, still lashed to her trailer and with her mast and rigging lying haphazardly along her deck and cabin top, draped all about in a most unseamanlike manner. My son-in-law Des, afraid that I might launch myself into space in my excitement to climb aboard, had taken the time to construct a beautiful and cunning staircase at the stern of the boat leading from the ground to the hatch over the lazarette.

Donning our coveralls, we clambered up the staircase, then stood on the

platform at the top to survey the shambles that lay before us. The cockpit was loaded to the gunwales with a tangled mass of boat equipment. Green slime covering ropes and tackles, filthy fenders and boxes, old tanks and five years of leaves covering the

teak duckboards over the sole of the cockpit and side benches. A once lovely, laminated ash and mahogany tiller green with algae, its butt end rotting and delaminating, showed shyly through the debris. The varnish had weathered off the mahogany companionway drop boards, which had



There is nothing, absolutely nothing, half so much worth doing as simply messing around in boats. (Kenneth Grahame, *Wind in the Willows*)

swollen and were jammed in their slides. As we stood viewing the disaster below us, my companion Jill looked at me and uttered the understatement of the day: "I think we may have a few things to do!" she said.

We decided to remove everything from the boat, starting by unloading the cockpit to clear our path to the companionway leading into the cabin. Metal and plastic tanks were handed down from the cockpit, and numerous fenders of various sizes and condition were tossed onto the grass below. The teak cockpit duckboards were lifted and passed down to be washed and scrubbed, then set aside to dry. Under the duck boards was a thick layer of rotting leaves covering the whole of the sole and plugging the cockpit drains. This mess was

Perhaps not quite this bad!



scooped up into buckets and dumped in the nearby woods to continue its composting. With the cockpit finally empty, we were able to give it a quick preliminary wash, clearing the drains to permit proper drainage once more.

We are very fortunate because attached to our little cottage is a small but dry storage shed with a good floor and shelves. We turned the structure into a bosun's stores. As material was cleaned and sorted, we placed the gear in the shed to dry and prevent further deterioration.

We then decided to tackle the mast and rigging. The mast had been lowered five years before, I suspect by using a tackle and A frame secured to the port and starboard chain plates. But the rigging bottle screws had not been disconnected from their strong points, and I noticed that two had bent slightly during the mast lowering process. We disconnected all the shroud and stay bottle screws and laid them and the halyards alongside and parallel to the mast, securing them all with lashings. The mast is 31 feet long. Rigging examination and repair was reserved for a later date.

At the end of that first day we were finally able to remove the swollen companionway drop boards and gain entry into the cabin. What a mess! We found four or five bags of sails. They felt quite damp but on removing the sails from their bags and spreading them out, we were delighted to see that there was no mildew on any of them. This was good news indeed. After the sails were aired and dried in the sun they were carefully folded and placed back in their bags and stowed in the shed. The interior of the boat

One day... before too long!

smelt musty but again there was no mildew, which was a relief. We found all the cushions rather dirty but still no mildew; a good scrubbing would soon put them to rights.

Having finally emptied the boat I was anxious to take a quick peak at the engine and see if it was seized. Access to the engine is gained by removing the companionway ladder down into the cabin. The engine is located under the bridge deck and partial engine access can also be had by removing a hatch in the cockpit sole.

We had discovered all the batteries had been stripped from the boat before I bought it and would thus need to be replaced, but in any case I had no intention of attempting to start the engine until the engine oil and all fuel and oil filters had been changed and the fuel tank emptied, cleaned and filled with fresh diesel fuel.

Jill found the engine emergency starting handle. I fitted it to the crank shaft and, raising the two decompression levers, took a deep breath and swung the handle. Low and behold the engine turned over by hand with ease. What a relief! Things were looking up!

We were also able to determine that the engine's water passages had been flushed through with anti-freeze. This was a very good discovery, since five years of sitting naked in the open during Calgary winters is a very, very daring thing to do! A cracked engine block was not something I really wanted to deal with.

As we poked around the boat's nether regions, we found the six sea cocks fitted to the craft. Two for the cockpit drains, two for the head, one for the galley and one for the engine cooling water intake. All of them seemed a little stiff but appeared to be functional.



When the weather warms up they will all need to be stripped down and examined, greased and reassembled.

Sadly, the vessel's electrical wiring was not a pretty sight! Cables seemed to be running in all directions: attached to LED lights, added on junction boxes, and connected to lockers which had once contained lead acid batteries of various sizes. Various instruments were mounted about the cabin. Heavy duty electrical cables ran forward from an empty battery compartment and were attached to the electrical controls of not one but two almost new Lofrans anchor capstans. Two capstans mounted on a 26-foot boat seemed a little overkill to me because when operated they consume a significant amount of battery power, all of which has to come initially from the engine's small alternator.

We were also surprised to find four large loudspeakers which had been mounted by cutting holes in the beautiful teak bulkhead, sticking the speaker housings into the holes and fastening them in place. The speakers were removed immediately! Big loudspeakers are built with colossal permanent magnets and when they are mounted on the other side of a bulkhead adjacent to a magnetic compass, the compass capitulates and gives up ever trying to point the way! Thirty or forty degrees of uncorrectable compass deviation would not be surprising.

Finally, by the end of the second day the vessel was completely de-stored and empty. The task of cleaning could begin. Into the cabin we marched with steaming buckets of hot water, which we had liberally laced with our favourite cleaning agent, Super Clean — a pleasant-smelling purple brew found in automotive parts stores — and got to work!

\*\*\*

## Glossary

**Lazarette** — The name of a locker (cupboard) or compartment used for the stowage of equipment, etc. found right at the stern of a vessel but below the deck level.

**Duckboards** — Derived from World War I wooden board plank gratings laid in the trenches to walk on to help keep the troops' feet dry because the trenches would often fill with water. In the case of a boat's cockpit they would serve the same purpose. Such boards might also be called the cockpit 'sole' or 'cockpit gratings'. (My father, a veteran of WW1 trench warfare used the term duckboards frequently to describe the boat's bottom boards when we sailed together.)

**Bottle screw** — A bottle screw is a type of turnbuckle used for tightening rigging shrouds and/or stays. It was so called because the mid-body barrel of the device is shaped like a bottle at both ends which protects the threaded top and bottom screw parts within the bottle rather than exposing the threads to the elements as is the case with a regular turnbuckle.

**Companionway drop boards** — The companionway is the opening into the cabin of a boat. Sometimes the entrance way is fitted with doors and other times slots are created in the port and starboard opening door frames and thick drop boards are made which, when placed horizontally in the slots will slide down to the sill of the opening thus closing the opening partially or completely depending how many boards are dropped in. In heavy weather if the drop boards are in place in the opening they will help to prevent water flooding into the cabin if the cockpit should be filled with seawater.

**Anchor capstan** — This is a vertical drum affair, made to revolve either manually or mechanically and a anchor rode (rope) is wrapped around the drum and the drum revolved to hoist up the anchor. Some anchor capstans also have a sort of sprocket affair (called a gypsy) into which an anchor chain can be fitted and used in the same manner as an anchor rope.





## Voyaging on a Tall Ship

By Jules Blue (Midland Region, UK)

In mid-January of this year, members of the UK Midland Region of TARS enjoyed an illustrated talk given by Jenny Wedick about her adventures on tall ships.

We had anticipated a short audio-visual summary of Jenny's 'I Grabbed a Chance' 62-day voyage in the South Pacific. What followed was so much more than this, and could have continued well into the evening!

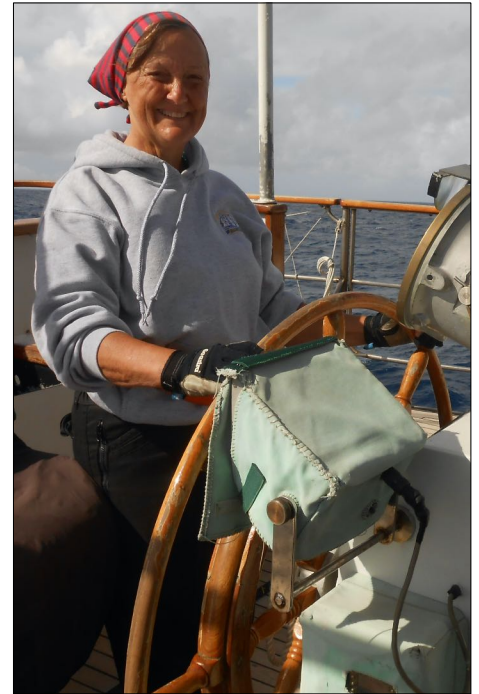
Jenny's opportunity for adventure and exploration came from the Jubilee Sailing Trust ([jst.org.uk](http://jst.org.uk)), a non-profit charity based in Southampton, England, and founded in 1978, that promises to 'change lives through ad-

venture and exploration on board a tall ship (currently *Tenacious*). Jenny took a chance to crew on a 55-metre, metal-hulled, sail training barque named *The Lord Nelson*, a three-masted tall ship launched in 1986 and decommissioned in 2019.

From the Chatham Islands off the eastern seaboard of New Zealand in the Pacific Ocean, the plan of the sea-fair voyage was to pass around the (in) famous headland of Cape Horn and across the strait of Magellan, brushing by Tierra del Fuego ('Land of Fire' in Spanish), the southernmost tip of the South American mainland (location of the albatross-shaped Cape Horn Monument, a commemoration to

lives lost in the attempt) for a distance of approximately 4,457 sea-miles (7,173 km) under as much sail as much as possible!

Duties on board for the mixed ability, amateur/professional crew ranged from filling out log books, taking measurements such as wave heights and fetch, sea temperature, windspeeds and wind direction, weather reporting to give an accurate picture for predicting weather patterns and to 'stay



Jenny Wedick

ahead of the (weight of the) wind and the weather' — by adjusting sails, footing the yards (climbing and pulling at gasket hitches), tying top-sails and reefs and Royals and top gallants (pronounced "t'garns'l)—deck-scrubbing with salt-water, to taking turns on watch and generally making sure that all the crew were well, that no taps were left dripping and that all was secure. Jenny undertook much of this and still made time to keep up a blog/journal for friends and family and posterity. (There may also have been some knitting of egg containers along the way, as eggs were stored all over the ship to avoid breakages!)

Albatrosses, their wings spanning three metres+, were spotted off the Chatham Islands hunting for jellyfish and balancing on the thermals, but really no other birds crossed their path, except for the odd petrel. When asked



*The Lord Nelson*

about the sound of the sea, without tides or coastal currents or breakers to hear, Jenny explained that the seas made a gentle lullaby, a ‘rhythmic pattern of swells, smooth peaks and troughs’ as the ship lifted on a wave or swell and soundlessly slid down to the next. When asked what it was like with the constant panoptic and empty horizons, Jenny reminisced about the permanent horizon line that betrayed nothing but the curvature of the Earth. (And when crossing the International Date Line, that imaginary fix between the North and South Poles, they even had a December 32nd!)

Interesting was Jenny’s description of reaching the oceanic pole of inaccessibility — Point Nemo, or Latin for ‘no one’ — which lies at 49.0273°S / 123.4345°W in the South Pacific

Ocean. This region is the area furthest from all and any points of land or coastline (and maybe even humanity except perhaps for astronauts in the International Space Station (ISS) passing briefly overhead). From this location the closest land to *The Lord Nelson* was Ducie Island (part of the Pitcairn Islands) to the north, Moto Nui (part of the Easter Island archipelago) to the northeast, or Maher Island (off the coast of Marie Byrd Land, Antarctica) to the south. At 1,680.7 miles (2,704.8 km) from the nearest landmass, talk about being in the middle of nowhere!

This region is also known as the ‘space clutter graveyard’, a dumping ground for decommissioned satellites, etc., where defunct space debris is sent to lessen the risk of hitting inhabited lo-

cations, and the planned destination, in 2031, for the current ISS.

What’s more, since the oceanic pole of inaccessibility lies within the South Pacific Gyre, that point in the Earth’s oceanic system of rotating currents bounded by the Equator to the north, Australia to the west, the Antarctic Circumpolar Current to the south, and South America to the east, this zone is largely abiotic — lifeless — because essential life-supporting nutrients cannot reach it. So here you are not only in the middle of nowhere but also as far from all known life as you can be on Earth!

Not even Peter Duck would have enjoyed such an extreme and exciting voyage on *Thermopylae*!



## Dipping our Hands — Personal relationships with the books

### Animal Characters: Participants, Rescued and Rescuers

By Maida Barton Follini (Halifax, Nova Scotia)

“Mix up some more milk,” said Titty.  
“Sinbad’s ready for another lot.”

“Sinbad?” said Roger, doubtfully...

“Shipwrecked sailor,” said Titty  
“Poor little Sinbad. Were you asleep on the chicken coop when it was washed overboard? Or did you find it just in time to save yourself from drowning?”

The Swallows had sailed through a storm, halfway across the North Sea, after the cutter they were on slipped its anchor and drifted out of the harbour at Harwich. Now the winds had died down, and John, Susan, Titty and Roger were out of danger, sailing with a light breeze towards Holland and

safety, when Roger spotted something on a floating chicken coop — a soaked kitten.

“It’s alive!” Roger shouted. “I saw its pink mouth.”

All four of them saw the kitten open that pink mouth, whispering a cry for help they could not hear.

“When there’s a man overboard, always jibe,” John repeated the rule to himself, as he brought the sloop around. It took careful maneuvering to bring the Goblin close enough to reach the chicken coop with the kitten clinging to it. John, half out of the boat, with his crew hanging on to him, grabbed the kitten and brought it aboard.

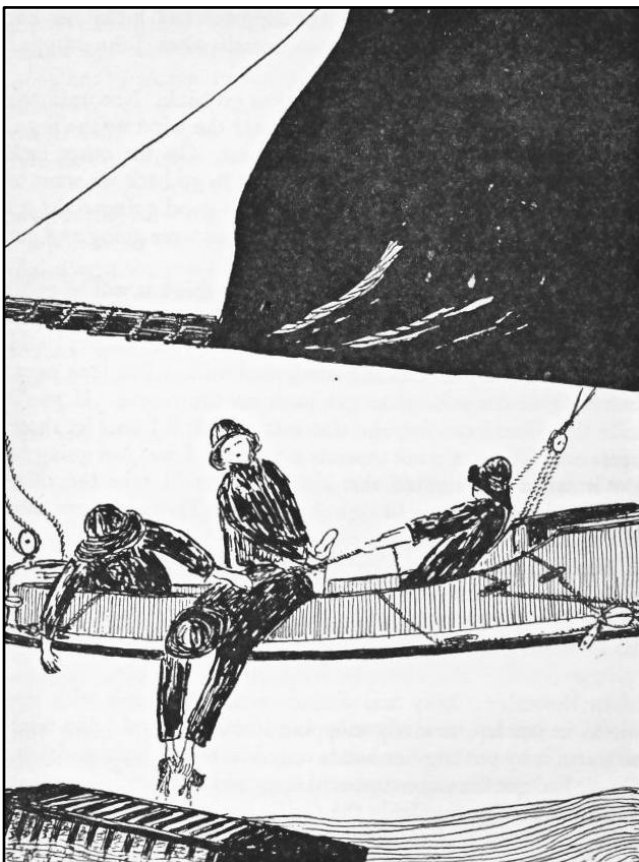
And now Titty and Roger were trying to dry it, warm it up and feed it with rum and milk. The kitten responded, and soon was purring in Titty’s lap. And Titty named him “Sinbad.”

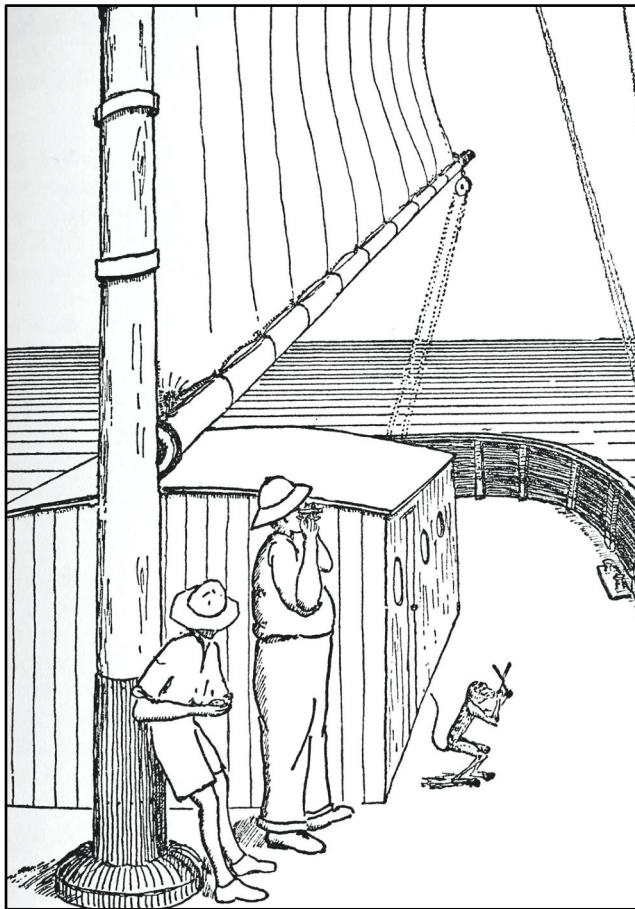
And, copying the Ransome books as much as I could, when my grandmother adopted a stray kitten, I named it “Sinbad” and took him boating with me in my grandfather’s rowboat, visiting small islands in the local millpond. Why Sinbad? I never knew the origin of the name — until now, 80 years



later, with Google I could find out.

The name (Wikipedia tells us) comes from a cycle of early middle-eastern folk tales set in the time of the Arab Abbasid Caliphate (796-1258 A.D.) featuring the hero, Sinbad the Sailor of Baghdad (in Iraq), who goes through a series of challenging adventures, surviving all to achieve fame and fortune. On his first voyage he goes ashore on an island that turns out to be a huge sleeping whale, and when the whale wakes up and dives, Sinbad is cast into the sea and is only saved by seizing on some floating wood, by which he reaches land. On his second voyage, he is stranded on an island inhabited by rocs (giant legendary birds) and riding on a roc he returns home with a sack of diamonds that make his fortune. Other adventures include being captured by man-eating savages;





captured and escaping from the Old Man of the Sea (Nereus - an ocean god); rescuing himself from a desolate coast by building a raft which carries him (serendipitously) to the city of the King of Serendip (Ceylon) and returning to Baghdad with riches.

Well, Sinbad the kitten was cast into the sea, like the legendary Sinbad, and rescued, not by rocs, but by Swallows! And he survived to have other adventures, taken with the Swallows to camp at “Secret Water” and meeting a Mastodon and the savages of the Eel Clan!

Other pets in the Ransome books are Polly the parrot and Gibber the monkey, given by Captain Flint to Titty and Roger, respectively, in return for finding his manuscript. Polly plays an

important part, both by contributing feathers for the Amazon’s arrows (in *S&A*) and for calling out in Peter Duck’s cave (in *Swallowdale*) to tease the Amazons, who were searching for the invisible Swallows. And Gibber played the key (but horrendous) part in *Peter Duck* by setting off the explosion which destroyed their ship, and caused them to be captured by pirates!

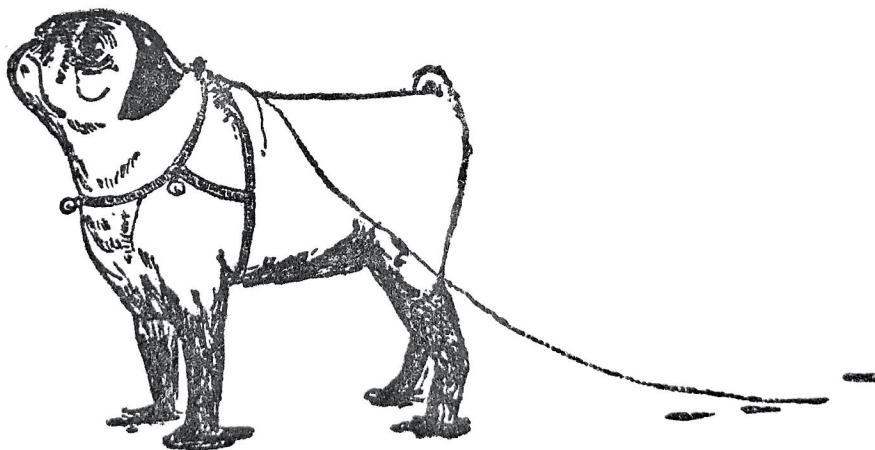
William, Mrs. Barrable’s pug dog, however, performed the typical dog task of rescuing the crew, when in *Coot Club* he reluctantly trudged across the low-tide mud

to carry a string which pulled a rope which eventually led to a cable-connection between the mud-grounded *Teasel* and the *Titmouse*— so that Tom could send food supplies over to the hungry *Teasel* crew!

Another hero was the pigeon, Sappho, in *Pigeon Post*, who flew through the smoke and the heat, straight to her loft at Beckfoot, with the message tied to her leg: “FIRE HELP QUICK”. The message that Dick, at Beckfoot, took off the rubber band on Sappho’s leg and handed to Captain Flint. The message that brought Colonel Jolys and his volunteer fire-fighters to High Topps to put out the wildfire and save homes and farms from destruction.

In Ransome’s books, the children are the main characters, but their companion animals often play a role in the plot, while retaining their natural behavior.

While animals, including birds, may not have as central a place in Ransome’s series as they might in books with animal heroes — such as *Beautiful Joe*, by Marshall Saunders, which features a dog, or *Black Beauty*, by Anne Sewall, about a horse — Ransome shows how naturally many pets (perhaps with the exception of Gibber the monkey, who had to “vacation” in a zoo!) can be part of a family’s life and included in its daily activities, especially those in the outdoors.



THE HERO

## Why *Peter Duck* and *Missee Lee* Are Not Just “Fantasies”

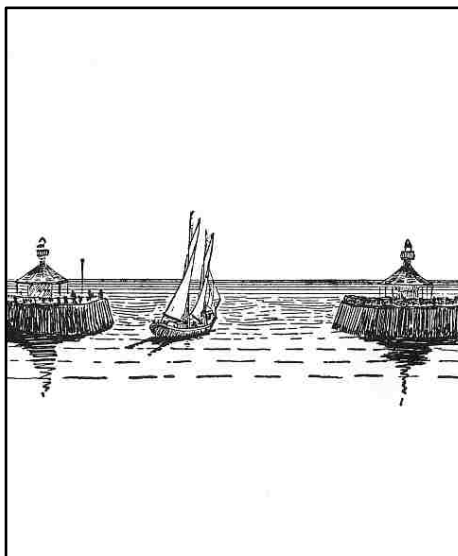
by Simon Horn (Montreal, Quebec)

In the January-April 2022 issue of *Signals*, Jon Tucker wrote an article entitled “The Realism of *Peter Duck*”, which he introduced by saying:

Many readers have disregarded *Peter Duck* as sheer fantasy, unworthy of linking with the ten credible adventures of the S&A series. However ever since my childhood I have been drawn by the sheer realism of much of this novel.

His argument appeals to me. I have often been annoyed by the apparently increasing tendency among some Ransome enthusiasts to characterize *Peter Duck* and *Missee Lee* as fundamentally different from the other 10 books (or, perhaps, the other nine, depending on one’s take on *Great Northern?*).

These two books are, supposedly, fantasies: unlike the others, they could not really have happened. Where the other books, especially the Lakes stories, involve their characters in adventures which might have happened to real children, no one can believe *Peter*



*Duck*’s story of Caribbean treasure and (Caribbean) pirates or *Missee Lee*’s tale of Chinese pirates.

The implication, generally implicit but sometimes explicit, is that these two books are lesser than the others, that they cannot live up to what makes the other books the classics that they are. They are somehow “unworthy”. to use Tucker’s term.

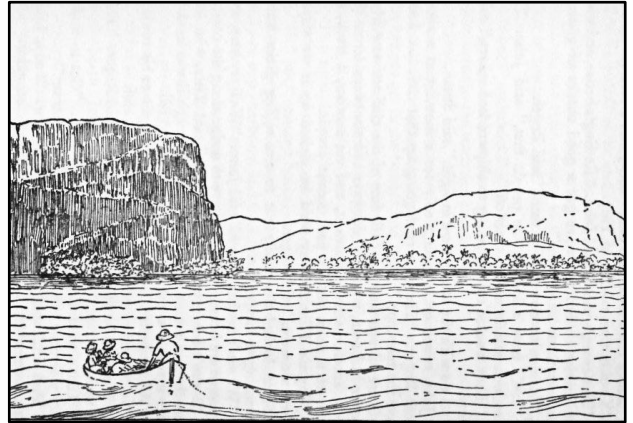
I think this misunderstands the books — all 12 — and what it is in all of them that appeals to their readers.

Yes, no one denies that *Peter Duck* and *Missee Lee* are different. Even Ransome drew a distinction here.

When I wrote to him at about age 12, I asked the classic question. I think I said something like, are those books based on fact?, i.e., did they really happen? Ransome replied, “If you look at the title-pages, you will see that two of those books are of a different kind of reality. If they seem real to you while you are reading them, nothing else matters.” By which he meant that *Peter Duck* and *Missee Lee* were different from the others, real but not the same.

Now I was a bit miffed at that, because I knew that PD and ML were different, and I was really asking about the others. My fault for not being clear.

But even so, Ransome was not dismissing those books: he did say, “nothing else matters”. I think that characterizing PD & ML as “fantasy” fundamentally misunderstands his



work, and its appeal to generations of children.

I put it to you that the characteristics that make these books classics are present in all 12, and there are many more similarities than differences between them. What’s more, in my opinion the similarities are what really count.

### Ransome’s strengths

So what are Ransome’s strengths? To begin with the reader can, and does, identify closely with Ransome’s characters. Perhaps the best way I have seen this expressed came from some of his young readers themselves.

When *Peter Duck* was published in 1932, a reviewer in *Time and Tide* expressed their “sad disappointment” with it, giving the opinion that only young readers who were not familiar with *Treasure Island* would enjoy it. Three angry young readers soon wrote in “to protest very strongly against this review of *Peter Duck*”:

We have all read *Treasure Island* and like it but we do not feel it can be compared with this book. The adventures in *Peter Duck* might happen to any boy or girl nowa-

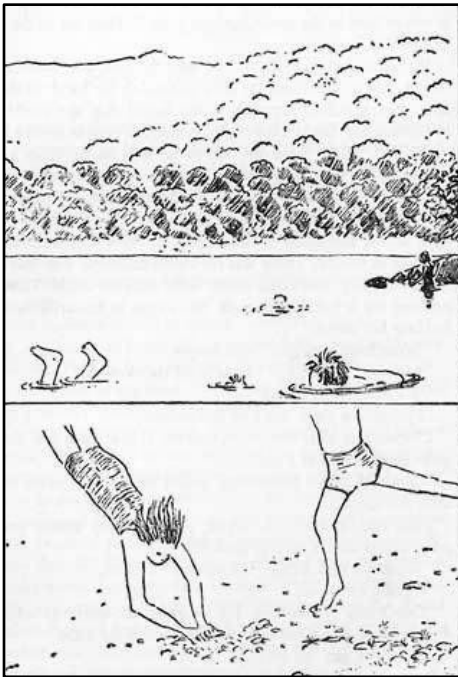
days, whereas *Treasure Island* is not so real to us. *We feel we are with the children in Mr. Ransome's books, and that we know them as friends.* (My emphasis.)

They concluded:

We suggest that the reviewer should have read the other two books carefully before she was sarcastic about one of the best books we have ever read.

Yours sincerely,  
Colin Bradley-Williams (age 11)  
John Craster (age 10)  
Anthony Hancock (age 9).

(from *Signalling from Mars*, p. 211)



As Myles North, who suggested the plot of *Great Northern?*, put it in a letter: “I like the people you write about, and their quite remarkable ‘aliveness’ and characterisation. Given any set of circumstances, the reader knows just how Nancy or Roger or Susan would feel.” (*Signalling from Mars*, p. 314)

Catherine Lamont describes this in another way:

By exposing (or speaking from) his heart in his writing, Ransome did something very special and unusual for the time: he validated the emotional and spiritual lives of not only children but also the adults who read his books in an artistic, non-didactic way.

(“Emotional Intelligence in Children’s Books” in *Mixed Moss*, 2020, p. 13)

So clearly Ransome’s readers identified with the author’s characters. But alongside the approachability of his characters, Ransome’s books were also invariably realistic and, what’s more, practical. As North said in the same letter:

Your parts about sailing and seamanship give me the greatest pleasure, and my goodness, it’s practical! This line is your forte of course, but the motive of practicality runs through all your stories and is one of their great charms. Everything works.

(*Signalling from Mars*, p. 315)

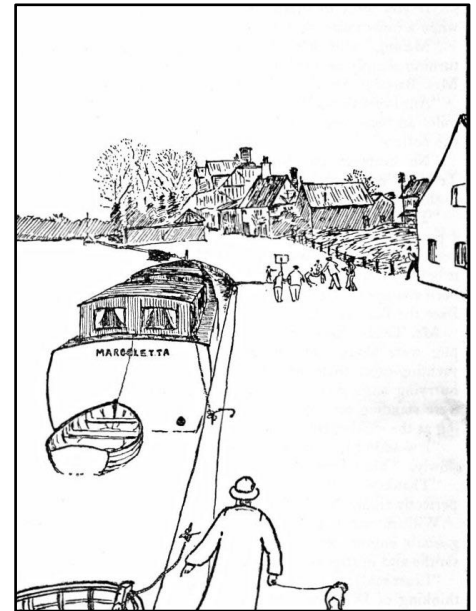
Like many others, rightly or wrongly I consider that I learned to sail by reading Ransome (although I have had little opportunity to put this “book learning” into practice) and while I have never “tickled for trout”, thanks to *The Picts and the Martyrs* I think I would be able to have a go.

### More or less credible?

The *Swallows and Amazons* series develops along several lines, and I think each book is more or less — well, not realistic, they are all realistic — credible perhaps or, maybe, everyday in tone.

*Swallows and Amazons*, *Swallowdale*, *Winter Holiday*, and *Picts* are everyday adventures which a child (or adult) might easily see as eminently possible.

*Pigeon Post* has the children prospecting and mining for gold, not very likely perhaps, but still eminently realistic and practical.



*Coot Club* is a thriller (though a children’s thriller) and *The Big Six* is a detective story. But is it likely that the Hullabalooos would have been so determined to catch Tom that they were prepared to chase him all around the Broads? Would George Owdon have really come up with such a complicated plot of revenge? Taken in the abstract, these plots may seem a bit unlikely, but both books are nonetheless realistic and practical in their delivery.

*Secret Water* seems a bit less credible — would parents have marooned their children? — and *We Didn’t Mean to Go to Sea* even less likely, while *Great Northern?* asks us to believe in egg-collector skullduggery in the Hebrides and (apparently) dangerous Gaels. But, like *Peter Duck* and *Missee Lee*, all three books work because of Ransome’s powers of characterization and his practical and realistic treatment of the events.

## Peter Duck and Missee Lee

Finally, we have the “fantasies”, *Peter Duck* and *Missee Lee*.

Clearly, no one could really have crossed the Atlantic in the 1930s in a small schooner in search of treasure, pursued by thugs who were quite prepared to carry out theft and assault and perhaps even murder in order to steal said treasure.

Perhaps not, though I am far from certain of that. Let’s just say it was less likely than camping without parents on an island in a northern lake.

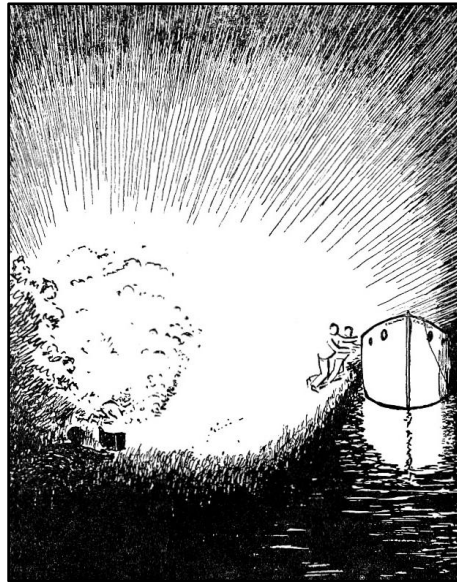
And of course, no one could really have gone around the world in the 1930s in a small schooner, lose that schooner thanks to a firebug monkey, and be captured by Chinese pirates led by a female Cambridge graduate.

Again, perhaps not. Let’s just say, more unlikely than searching for gold on High Topps.

Both books may be the least credible of all, but they are pulled back to earth by Ransome’s fundamental strengths: the reader can identify with the characters, and, in every case, learn many things thanks to the author’s underlying realism.

The point is, PD and ML are stories like the others. Ransome started with *Swallows and Amazons*, where two groups of children camp on Wild Cat Island and have a series of adventures created out of their own imaginations. *Swallowdale* and *Winter Holiday* continue the series in the same location and using the same approach.

Ransome wrote *Peter Duck* because the Altounyan children wanted pirates. He wrote much of *Peter Duck* while visiting the Altounyans in Syria,



and, to quote Christina Hardyment, “in the next six weeks, with *Treasure Island* and the *Channel Pilot* by his side, he wrote over three hundred pages”. (*The World of Arthur Ransome*, p. 88)

Note his reference material: the greatest classic pirate tale and a practical guide to navigating down Channel.

You can, of course, argue that he had difficulty with *Peter Duck*, and worried about the danger of straying from the S&A formula. As a result he finished *Swallowdale* first, and when he got back to *Peter Duck* he first attempted to frame it as a story written by the children themselves. Fortunately, he realized that this device would cripple the book and he dropped it, giving us the *Peter Duck* we know. It became a best-seller of its type and contributed to increasing sales for the first two books.

Perhaps Ransome did not return to another “fantasy” before *Missee Lee* in 1941, but I am sure that he had carefully learned the lessons from *Peter Duck*’s popularity when crafting the plots of books four through nine.

*Missee Lee* was encouraged by Ransome’s publisher: “Cape felt that something escapist would comfort children confused by the upheavals of war.” (*The World of Arthur Ransome*, p. 128) And Ransome had the background for a realistic tale set in China: “Ransome had been to China, in 1926, and the the book he wrote about the political situation there, *The Chinese Puzzle* (1927), describes warlords as ruthless as Wu and Chang — or Missee Lee and her father.” (*Arthur Ransome and Capt. Flint's Trunk*, p. 170).

Yes, its a story, but as always Ransome was careful to make the action of the story, and the background, realistic and credible and practical. Ransome’s realism and practicality made the book a full-fledged part of the series, despite the unlikeliness of the situation.

To my mind, perhaps the real question is, How do you read *Peter Duck* or *Missee Lee* to your children?

Do you start by saying:

“No, I will only read you things that could have happened.” Of course not.

“This next one is different. It isn’t real.” Of course not. Was *Swallows and Amazons* “real”?

“Did it really happen?” says the eight-year-old. “It might have,” says you.

“Did it really happen?” says the twelve-year-old. “Probably not, but you never know,” says you.

To end with Jon Tucker: “Certainly to me and my family, *Peter Duck* is more fact than fiction.”



## Dot's Latest Story — Writing by our members

### Snake vs Cat: Who Would Win?

by Paul Nelson (New Orleans, Louisiana)

They can move across the ground; but, they have no legs: Bizarre.  
They can climb up trees; but, they have no arms: Strange.  
They can swim; but, without those legs and arms: Crazy.  
And, even in the Bible, Genesis 3, they are not given a kindly review.  
Yet even with all of those weird and, somewhat unfriendly, attributes, some people like them.

One person in particular: Evgenia Shelepina. Yes, as documented in Ransome's second cruise in his yacht *Racundra*. This snake even has a name: Oureberes. It is over three feet long, eats frogs, and sleeps with Evgenia!

So here is the question: How would this type of snake fair in a conflict with a large wild African cat? Who would win?



The Wilson family had a nice life here in America until his company relocated him and his family to South Africa. The wife, Margot, was not happy about this but her husband, Robert promised to give her a wonderful present when they arrived and got settled into their new life.

The schools were chosen and mothers of classmates set up a carpool so that each mother would only need to drive one day a week, bringing her own daughter home plus the four others in the carpool. But there was a problem. As part of the move, their old car had been sold so they had no car. In fact, the husband's wonderful gift was a new car with four doors, big

enough to take five students.

The Wilsons arrived in late December, and all was going well until the Christmas holidays. It seems that the daughter's class pet was... a grass snake, Sam, that could not be left at school for the holidays. Some student needed to bring it home until school resumed. Their daughter, Alice, volunteered to bring home Sam the snake.

The last day of school was hectic with the five girls tossing their homework bags in the trunk... along with Sam in his cage. After delivering the carpool girls, Margot and Alice arrived home, but when Alice opened the trunk to pull out her bag, she noticed that

Sam's cage had been knocked over and fallen open; Sam was missing.

Margot screamed, Alice cried. Sam was gone; he was hiding somewhere in their new car.

Margot absolutely would not set foot in the car until the snake was removed. Robert could not find it, even the auto dealership could not find it. So, after only two weeks, the dealership took back the car, and letting the Wilsons purchase a new car using the original car as a trade in.

So there it is: the snake was victorious over the car. And the car?

You'll have guessed it by now? Right! A model XJ6 Jaguar!





## Beckfoot Kitchen — Eating with the Swallows and Amazons

### Bringing Home the Catch

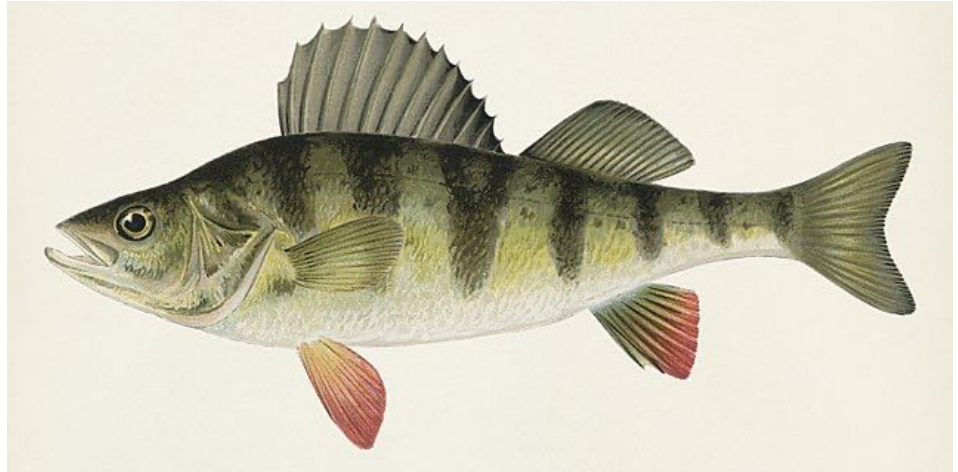
by Molly McGinnis (Manteca,

You return from camping with yet another nice string of panfish. Perch if you were lucky, or one of its cousins – perhaps Bluegill, Crappie, Sunfish, Pumpkinseed. Maybe, if you were really lucky, a few Walleyes, a larger, meatier member of the perch family. Or a trout or two. You've scaled and cleaned them and they're ready to cook.

Have you tired of camp-style butter-simmered panfish? Of fish or filets coated and pan-fried in oil and bacon grease? Steaming on a plate brings out the flavor of the fish with minimum mess and cleanup. Especially, no grease to clean up! Minimum prep time too, if you opt for simply stuffing the fish with the roughly cut flavoring peels and leaves and stems. Elegantly slivering and slicing the flavorings and slashing the fish doesn't take much more time, if your tools are sharp.

#### You will need:

- A plate for the fish.
- Cooking string (flavorless, tasteless, and safe with food) to make a harness for lifting the plate. (Chinese stores have wide wire "tongs" for lifting plates and bowls from steamers.)



- A wide fairly deep pan that will hold the plate of fish, and a lid. The lid can be smaller than the pot as long as there's room above it for the fish on the plate.
- Something to support the plate and hold it above the boiling water. I use three or four metal Mason jar rings.

The lid can be anything. I've even used a sort of tent of aluminum foil, in camp, fitted between the plate and the pot wall so the condensation drips down its sides and off the plate.

But then... a bamboo steamer is the very best, and good for much more than a plate of fish. Mine is still going strong after years of use and abuse.



Bamboo steamers were made to use with a wok, but you can use any pan. One not much wider than the steamer will work the best, and it's well to keep the bamboo off the bottom of the pan – use a wire rack, or distribute a couple of table knives or jar rings around the edges. The pan should hold enough water to come almost to the bamboo rack inside.

If you have an Asian grocery nearby you may find a selection of bamboo and stainless steel steamers. Online, World Market (<https://www.world-market.com>) has the only one-tier steamer I found, with 10-inch-wide basket and lid, for about \$15 USD. Ikea (<https://www.ikea.com>) has great photos and videos to go with their \$15, 9-inch, 2-rack steamer, which may or may not be in stock.

#### Prepare the seasonings

The fastest way to add a little flavor to steamed fish is to rub salt into the body cavity, then cram flavoring vegetables into it. Any or all among celery strips, scallion (tops and white),

lemon peel, bay leaf, bacon... Or use roughly cut up Asian seasonings: lemongrass, scallions (both white and green parts), ginger, Kaffir lime leaves. The fish may cook before the vegetables – but you won't eat them and they'll flavor the fish. You can slash fish stuffed with flavorings or not. If you do, sprinkle pinches of salt and pepper into the slashes and pare some butter over them.

Also, Asian seasonings go wonderfully well with any fish. Make a mixture of soy sauce, sugar, lemon or lime juice (or orange juice, but omit sugar) or rice vinegar, and a drop of sherry or marsala if you have it. Proportions depend on the kind of soy sauce and acid liquids. Chinese soy sauce is light in color and flavor. Japanese shoyu and Tamari are dark and relatively complex in flavor. The following amount will season a big pan of fish with some left over to pass around the table.

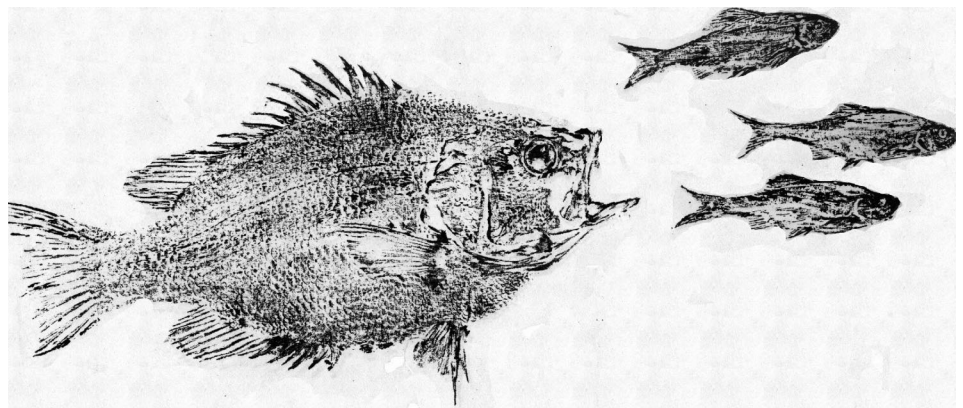
1/2 c soy

1/4 c lemon (or lime) juice or rice wine vinegar

1 - 3 tsp sugar

(Orange juice is good too, but cut or omit the sugar.)

For seasonings to strew over the top, use any or all of lemongrass (white bases only, sliced as thinly as you can manage), ginger root (peel with potato peeler and slice or sliver), scallion (green onion) tops cut about 1 1/2" long (good with stronger flavored



fish), even slivers of green pepper (thin-fleshed Shisitos especially). Add chopped cilantro and perhaps a very few drops of Oriental-style toasted sesame oil just before serving.

But really, try anything. Finely diced celery stalks with lemon or orange peel or lemon thyme or... Make strips and curls with a slot potato peeler if you don't feel like julienne-ing. Try a bay leaf or two with stronger flavored fish. You'll need salt and probably pepper with European mixtures like this, and you can use lemon juice or a little wine to dissolve it, or just sprinkle it into the slashes before you lay the other flavorings on top. Or lay strips of bacon over the slashes. Put some of the flavoring in the body cavity if you want.

Heavy seasonings and sauces are for fishermen who have their catch for dinner every weekend and holiday and in between. Where I live, we get decent fish so seldom that we want to taste mostly fish. A sprinkle of salt, a grind of pepper, and some shavings of butter (get out that potato peeler again) suit us just fine. Try it.

#### Get the fish ready

First cut up your season-

ing vegetables so you can get them into the body cavity.

Cut celery lengthwise into thin strips, but otherwise, cut scallions or lemongrass into shortish lengths (base and some leaf for both), slice peeled ginger root and chop roughly, add citrus peel right off the potato peeler. Lay the fish on a plate or plastic cutting board or sheet. Rub salt or a bit of the soy mixture into the body cavity, then cram seasonings into the body cavity.

Or, instead — this is prettier and more flavorful — lay the cleaned fish out on a plastic cutting board or cutting sheet and make diagonal slashes about 1/2" apart and through the skin with your sharpest knife. Try to keep a little above the bone (not always easy with flat sided fish like bluegill!). You'll season the slashed fish on the cooking plate after you set it up with a harness.

#### Get the plate and pan ready

Put the pan on the burner but don't turn the heat on yet. Make sure its lid is to hand. Arrange your jar rings so they'll be under the plate (test with the plate if you're not sure), or put the bamboo rack onto a wire rack if that's what you're using.

#### The harness

If there's room enough between plate



and pan to get the plate out with potholders, you don't need the harness, but there never is. So, cut two or three lengths of string to at least 3 times the width of your plate. Double the strings and twist-tie the middle together, or put a half-hitch in one of the strings. On a flat surface, lay the (empty) plate on the string as nearly centered as you can. Spread out the string with more or less equal distances between the individual strings.

Arrange the roughly stuffed fish on the plate. Throw any leftover seasoning onto the top.

For slashed fish and elegantly cut seasoning, sprinkle about a fourth of the seasonings on the plate (stay away from the edge), arrange the fish on the plate, dribble a spoonful of the soy mixture over the fish and into the slashes, and sprinkle the rest of the seasonings over the top.

Now bring the ends of the string to the middle, tie them all in an overhand knot so that there's some distance between knot and plate, and test lift and adjust the plate so it's as level and steady as possible.

### **Just add water?**

Pour water into the pan just to the top of the jar lids or to a bit under the

bamboo rack and turn the heat high; when the water boils, turn the heat very low (or even off) for a moment while you put the fish in. Carefully lift the harness, steady the plate, put it over the supports or bamboo rack, and cautiously lower it into the pan. Put the knot to one side, pop the lid on, and immediately turn the heat up.

You should see steam in a few moments. Lower the heat to keep the water gently boiling. If you can't see steam escaping, crack the lid for a moment and adjust the heat if necessary. Look at your watch and check for doneness in about five minutes for flat fish like perch or bluegills, seven for thicker fish like trout. (In theory, 10 minutes per inch of thickness.) As always, you want the flakes to just separate at the thickest part when you tease them apart with a fork, and be opaque almost to the bone.

Have a towel or big platter ready to lay the fish plate on, as near to the pan as you think safe. The moment the biggest fish is almost done, turn off the heat. Take off a metal lid to let steam escape. Pass your hand cautiously close to the edge of the fish plate to see if you'll get scalded, center the harness knot over the plate, and carefully lift it out of the pan and onto the towel. This is a place where a thick

cotton glove or a thin old potholder can be useful, to help steady the plate. You don't want to lose any of the savory juices (or mop them off the counter and floor). Cut the strings and get them off the plate. Sprinkle any additional garnish or seasoning vegetables over the fish or remove the ugly rough cut stuff, take the potholders and carry the plate to the table.

### **Serve with...**

You don't need much for the fish: the rest of the soy mixture, or a few lemon wedges for European style fish. If you want to get fancier, cut up some extra cilantro or parsley and have it ready to add, and a bottle of Oriental toasted sesame oil or butter heated until it starts to brown, with a bit of lemon juice or wine vinegar added at the end. For the rest, rice or a small pasta like orzo, perhaps a salad of mixed greens or some braised snow or sugar snap peas.

### **Cleanup**

A snap. Throw the string away. For metal utensils, a little scouring at the water line and a quick wash and rinse or into the dishwasher. Same with the plate. For bamboo, use a dish brush with a little detergent (unscented if possible) and rinse. A good rinsing will probably do for the lid. Air dry.

## **Are You on Facebook?**

Despite the many problems with Facebook, it does enable groups of like-minded people to share and exchange. (These are the groups I can find. Let me know if you find any others — Ed.)

**The Arthur Ransome Society (TARS) Facebook Group:** [www.facebook.com/groups/762560473886537/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/762560473886537/)  
(This is a closed group, so you will have to ask to join.)

**Arthur Ransome's Swallows and Amazons in North America:** [www.facebook.com/groups/tarsfriends/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/tarsfriends/)

**The Arthur Ransome Society in New Zealand & Australia:** [www.facebook.com/tarsnz/](http://www.facebook.com/tarsnz/)

**The Arthur Ransome Group:** [www.facebook.com/groups/2612950856/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/2612950856/)



## Pieces of Eight — The Junior Pages



### Go Fish!

by Molly McGinnis (Manteca, California)

When we think Swallows and Amazons we think “sailing.” But Ransome loved to fish, and fish and fishing are featured in almost all the books.



Before they'd been close to the island, or sailed by themselves:

*They had been out in the rowing boat with their mother, but they had always rowed the other way so as not to spoil the voyage of discovery by going to the island first.*

After they sent off the letter to their father, and Mother had decided to make tents no matter what the answer...

*...the others were fishing by the boathouse...*

Nothing said about anyone catching a fish!

Meanwhile:

*Mother ...had been working at tent-making every day*

*(Swallows and Amazons, Chapter II)*



Ransome was a fisherman all his life. He fished in the Lake — and the other lakes, tarns, becks, and rivers of the Lake District — he fished in Russia, and later he fished for joy and for a living, writing a weekly column about fishing. He fished for small fish, large fish, game fish, rough fish, panfish...

and made sure the children all had fishing rods from the very beginning of *Swallows and Amazons* so they could do the same.

Even when there's no fishing, Ransome can't resist writing in a fish or two. When Roger and Titty explore on land:

*“There,” said Roger. “By the stone with the moss on it. Look! He's sticking his nose out.”...There, in the clear water, she could see a small speckled fish which stayed almost in one place”*

*(Swallowdale, Chapter IV)*

And when the Lake is frozen over:

*“Look!” said Dick. “There's a fish in the ice.” It was a little perch, close to the surface, looking as if it were swimming in glass.”*

*(Winter Holiday, Chapter VIII)*

### Ransome Shows How to Fish

*“Tomorrow we'll fish, and we'll live on the fish we catch.”*

*“I wish we had a tame cormorant,” said Titty.*

*“We've got fishing rods,” said John.*

*(Swallows and Amazons, Chapter 6)*

Next day, when John and Roger fetch the fishing rods from Holly Howe, we learn a little about caring for tackle:

*They took the four rods to pieces and put each one in its own bag. They packed the floats and books and reels in a big coffee tin.*

*(Swallows and Amazons, Chapter 6)*



Titty tries swimming underwater like a cormorant to catch a fish, but:

*There was no doubt about it. The fish could see her coming, and could swim faster than she could. There was nothing for it but fishing rods.*

*(Swallows and Amazons, Chapter 7)*

Finally...

*“Are we going fishing?” asked Roger. “Yes,” said Captain John. “Mr. Dixon gave me the worms. He says there are lots of perch between here and his landing-place. He says we'll do better with minnows than with worms, and he says we'll find the perch anywhere where there are weeds in the water.”*

*...they fished for minnows in the shallows, and caught a good lot of them.*

*(Swallows and Amazons, Chapter 7)*

Mr. Dixon was right. Tiny fish forage for minute morsels in the shallows, medium-sized fish like perch (or in America, bluegills and sunfish and other perchlike fishes) hide in the weeds and forage for bugs and worms, and big fish like pike (and in America, Muskellunge and Walleyes

and other fish-eating fish) lounge around in the weeds and catch smaller fish.

John rows until they find a good place: *“There’s grass on [the bottom]. That means sand. And it’s close to the weeds. We couldn’t have a better place,”* says John.

*(Swallows and Amazons, Chapter 7)*

After several pages of learning how to place their rods and adjust the floats (we called them bobbers) to get the bait just deep enough, John catches the first fish:

*...a fat little perch with bright red fins and dark green bars on his sides.*

That’s the beginning. But as the others are busy with perch, it’s Roger (who else) who has the adventure of the day...

*...there was a great swirl in the water, and his rod suddenly pulled down again... his rod was bent almost into a circle.*

*“It’s a shark! It’s a shark!”*



*...For a moment the great fish lay close to the top of the water... Then, with a twist of its tail that made a great twirling splash in the water, it was gone.*

*(Swallows and Amazons, Chapter 7)*

### Cooking Fish

The crews don’t quite “live on the fish [they] catch,” but they fish more days than not, and learn to cook the catch:

*The mate tried to scrape the scales off the first of them, but soon gave it up. She fried them in butter in their scales, first putting a lot of salt in them. When they were cooked the skin with the scales came off quite easily, and there was the perch ready to be eaten.*

*(Swallows and Amazons, Chapter 7)*

A very good way to cook the little perch, given that it’s summer and there’s plenty of butter from the cows on the farm. Those who have to buy butter can hold a fish under a stream of hot water until the skin pulls off, or scale them with a big spoon, before the quick sizzle in plenty of butter.

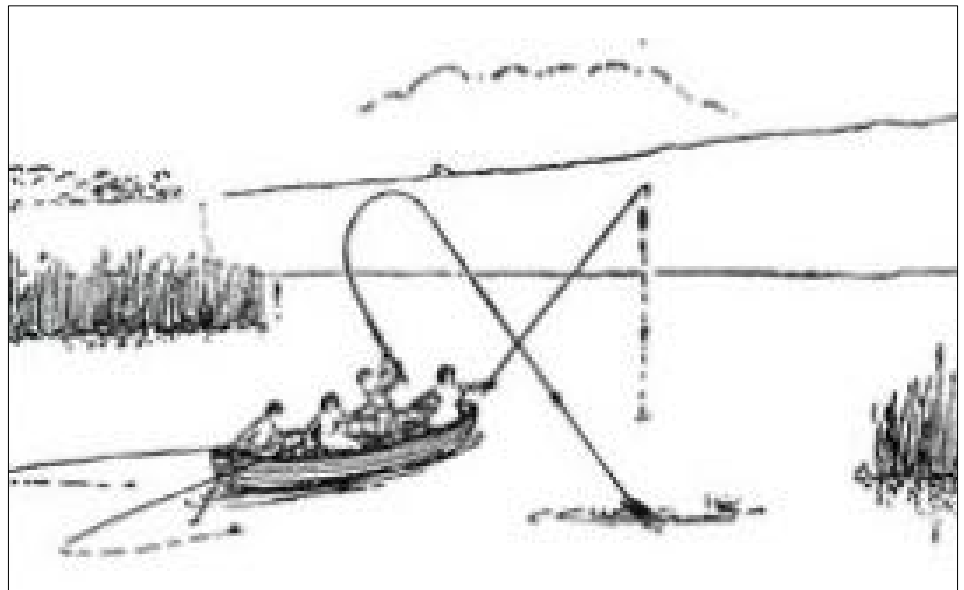
Almost at the very end of the book another pike makes a brief appearance:

*“Shark?” said Roger... “Did you get a shark?” “A wallop,” said Peggy.*

*(Swallows and Amazons, Chapter 29)*

Soon after the feast the storm comes: “Nobody could go to sleep. They became shipwrecked sailors.” *(Swallows and Amazons, Chapter 30)*

In the morning, natives arrive with porridge and and take the soaked tents and “everything not wanted for the day,” *(Swallows and Amazons, Chapter 31)* in their big boats, and the shipwrecked sailors bail out their dinghies and sail from the island for the last time... for that year.



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