



Signals from TARSUS & North Pole News

January 2023

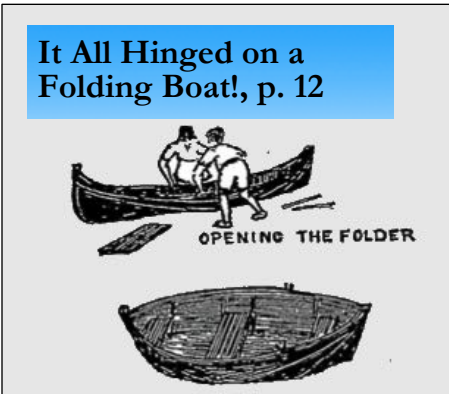
Contents



Adventure in the High Sierra , p. 4



Swallows & Amazons in Vancouver?, p. 8



It All Hinged on a Folding Boat!, p. 12

Ship's Papers: pg. 2-4

[NEEDED: a New Hand for the U.S. Helm](#)

[The 2023 North American TARS Member Survey](#) — Simon Horn

[Greetings from the North](#) — Ian Sacré, TARS Canada Coordinator

[A Note from the Editor](#) — Simon Horn

Kanchejunga's Cairn:

[Adventures and Misadventures in the High Sierra](#) — Maida Follini pg. 4

Dipping our Hands:

[Did the Swallows and Amazons Visit Vancouver?](#) — Martin Beech pg. 8

[Old Man Loves Swallows and Amazons...](#) — Andrew Fisher pg. 10

[Conch Shell](#) — Kate Crosby pg. 12

The Professor's Laboratory:

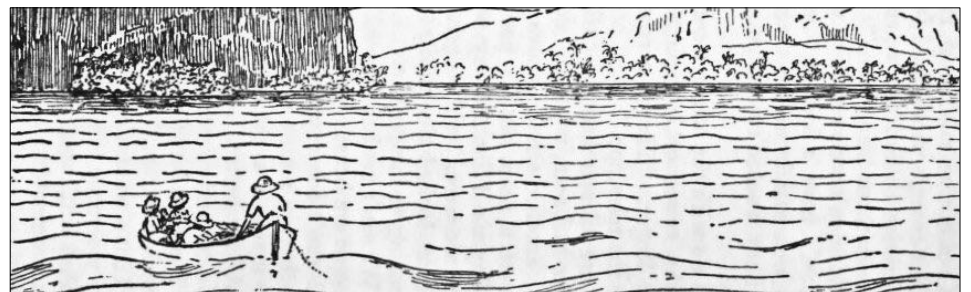
[It All Hinged on a Folding Boat!](#) — Ian Sacré pg. 12

Beckfoot Kitchen:

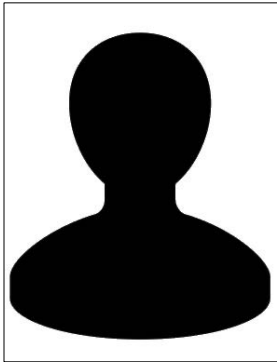
[Real Recipes from Imaginary Stories](#) — Molly McGinnis pg. 15

Pieces of Eight:

[Snakes Rehabilitated](#) — Maida Follini pg. 18



Ship's Papers — Important information for the Crew



NEEDED: a New Hand for the U.S. Helm

As Robin Marshall explained in his last “A View from the Helm”, he has decided to step down as TARSUS coordinator after many years of service.

As he said, “I am preparing to say goodbye to TARSUS... Owing to aging and other personal problems I feel unable to continue as coordinator.”

I would like to repeat my sincere thanks to Robin for all his years of effort on behalf of the Association and

its American members. as I said last issue, “TARS is a volunteer organization, and without people like Robin it quite simply could not function.”

In the Jan-April 2023 *Signals* from the UK, Overseas Coordinator Krysia Clack calls for volunteers for the role of U. S. coordinator, and she adds an explanation I wrote for *Signals*:

“Traditionally, the two Regional Coordinators for the United States (Robin Marshall), and Canada (Ian Sacré) have organized membership

payments and renewals on behalf of their TARS members. With the new centralized payment system this role is no longer needed as it was before.

In the UK, the regions have enough members that local activities can and are regularly organized. Unfortunately, here in North America we are just too few and too widely spread out to support face-to-face activities.

However, if the pandemic has done one thing that can be considered positive, it has led people to start using

remote forms of communication such as Zoom to get together, even if they cannot meet face to face. Perhaps here in North America we could consider organizing such activities.

Although the payments role may now be unnecessary, a contact is still needed to maintain the connection between the U.S. membership and TARS central in the UK. And someone is needed to field queries from the membership and perhaps to look into occasional Zoom sessions that would allow us to chat despite the distances.”

So, is anyone interested in taking the tiller as Robin takes on a well-earned retirement from that role?

If you would like to volunteer, or need to discuss it, please contact our overseas coordinator in the UK, Krysia Clack (steve@ksclack.plus.com)

Simon Horn, Ed.

Your Dues Are Due!

It is that time of year again. If you have not yet renewed your TARS membership, now is the time.

If you are able to renew online using PayPal, please go to

the members area of the TARS website and log in:

<https://members.arthur-ransome.org>

If you need help, please contact Overseas Coordinator Krysia Clack (steve@ksclack.plus.com).

Your Opinions Matter!

The 2023 North American TARS Member Survey

Robin Marshall's recent decision to withdraw from his role as U. S. coordinator led Canadian coordinator Ian Sacré and I to start discussing TARS in North America and its future. We quickly decided that we needed to know what you, the membership, think of both the current situation and the future.

So I have prepared a web survey, using Google's “Forms” program, to

find out about you and to get your opinions about membership renewal, TARS activities, the Society's publications and internet presence and, last but definitely not least, what you think of this newsletter.

This survey is for members only, and you will be asked to enter your email address so that we can keep track of responses. I will report on the results in a future issue.

To fill out the survey, go to this web page, <https://forms.gle/TDfx-HuzoCxNYt7ij9>, and follow the steps. A few questions are required, and marked with a red asterix; most questions are important but optional.

Please fill out the survey, we need to know what you want and what you think.

Simon Horn, Ed.



Greetings from the North

By Ian Sacré, TARS Canada Coordinator
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gallivanterthree@shaw.ca

Greetings Canadian TARS Members!

Autumn has passed and winter is now truly upon us with its accompanying wind, rain, blizzardly snow and freezing conditions that may make travel sometimes

challenging. Altogether a good time to catch up on indoor pursuits and perhaps to re-read some of Arthur Ransome's stories.

Sadly our TARS membership numbers in Canada and elsewhere continue to dwindle. Here in Canada we are now down to 20 at this time of writing and I worry what the new year will bring. We know that membership aging is one factor. Another may be the relevance of the story material in relation to this day and age. The events

depicted took place nearly eighty or ninety years ago and are hard pressed to compete with Harry Potter, Star Wars and the Tolkien series movies and the addiction to social media.

Some time ago, I had an email from a school teacher who asked if thought could be given to changing Titty's name in the AR series because her name conjured images of female body parts in the minds of her students! So much of our famous classical English literature is filled with what is now

considered sexist or racist material, but which modern readers surely must relate to the age in which the material was written, realizing that what was socially acceptable then has no place in modern 2023 society. At the same time surely this does not mean we should scrap the material? I am sure AR would have been mortified if he had thought Titty's name was intended as anything more than a nickname for a little girl.

If any of you have ideas as to how we can improve TARS, please do not be shy in telling us how the Society could be made better. Thoughts on how to attract new members would also be welcome.

Stay safe and wishing you fair winds and calm seas.

Ian Sacré
Canadian TARS Coordinator



A Note from the Editor

By Simon Horn, sjhorn@gmail.com

Welcome to *Signals from TARSUS/North Pole News* for January 2023. Thanks to everyone who contributed.

In this issue

In *Kanchenjunga's Cairn* **Maida Follini** remembers a long-ago adventure in the California mountains in

“Adventures and Misadventures in the High Sierra”.

Dipping our Hands has several contributions this issue. In “Did the Swallows and Amazons Visit Vancouver?” **Martin Beech** speculates that the *Wild Cat* visited Canada's west coast on its way to China in *Missee Lee*.

Andrew Fisher shares some of his favourite chapters in the 12 in “Old Man Loves Swallows and Amazons

even though They Were Written for Children”, while **Kate Crosby** presents her poem, “Conch Shell”.

In *The Professor's Laboratory*, **Ian Sacré's** “It All Hinged On a Folding Boat!” explains folding boats like the one Dick uses in *Great Northern?*.

Beckfoot Kitchen has **Molly McGinnis** sharing meals inspired by *Missee Lee* in “Real Recipes from Imaginary Stories”.

Finally, on the possibly spurious reasoning that young people like snakes, I have put **Maida Follini's** article “Snakes Rehabilitated” in *Pieces of Eight*. Maida talks about snakes in folk tale, in reality, and in Ransome.

If you are a junior, or live with one, why not see if you can come up with something for the next issue...

...which is due in May 2023. As always, only your contributions make it possible.

Expect a first reminder at the beginning of April, but think about contributing right away. And don't forget the member survey ([see page 2](#)).

* * *

All the best from me, to all of you.
Simon

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

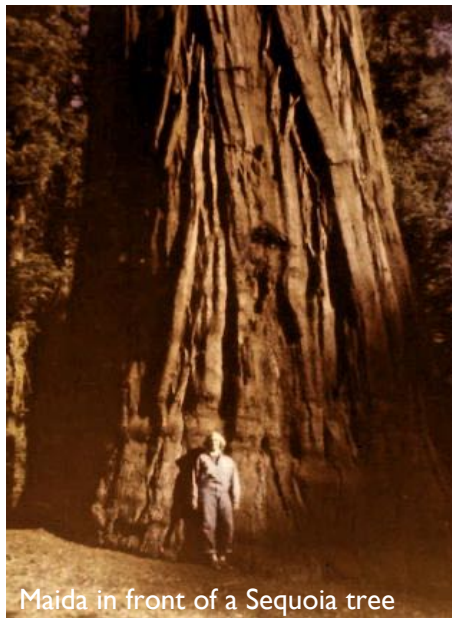
Adventures and Misadventures in the High Sierra or, How NOT to prepare for hiking in the wild

By Maida Barton Follini (Halifax, Nova Scotia)

I am ninety-two and adventures for me are mostly in my memories. One of these memories was from my 20s, when I travelled to California to take a course. After finishing the course, I thought that, like the Swallows and Amazons who climbed “Kanchenjunga” in the Lake District, I would head for the mountains, in this case the High Sierras of California. So on August 2, 1958, I set off with a sweater in my knapsack along with a week’s food, a canteen of water, and a blanket strapped to the knapsack. Also a topographic map of the park and the surrounding mountains. I thought I was well-prepared!

I did not know what a hare-brained excursion I had undertaken, without knowing how to properly equip myself for a trek in America’s High Country. Hopefully this article will be a warning to others!

August 2, 1958: A bus took me to the Giant Forest Campground in the Sequoia* National Park, and after a sandwich supper, I stretched out on my blanket, preparing for a night’s sleep before the start of the hike next day. Other campers were cooking their suppers outside their tents, and the aroma of steak was in the air. Pretty soon, other beings besides campers were moving. A dark shadow lum-



Maida in front of a Sequoia tree

bered by, about 100 feet away. I sat up, alarmed. It was a bear. And it was huge! [This was my first misadventure!] I watched it as it came to the opening of a tent, sniffed at it, then moved on. Ahh! relieved, I was going to lie down again, when two more bears appeared. One stuck his head into a trash can, the other went over to the remains of a camp cooking fire and pawed through the leavings.

No other campers seemed worried by the bears - but they were somewhat protected by being inside their tents, while I was under the open sky. My fears got worse as a fairly constant stream of bears wandered through the

camp grounds, some only 20 feet from my blanket. I eased myself quietly over to a camper’s tent near me. Could I join them? No, they had not room! Nevertheless I put my blanket right beside this tent, hoping it would protect me. I never saw any of the bears attack a person, or claw at a tent. But bears are still wild animals, and every year or so you hear of a bear mauling a person somewhere. I had no sleep that night.

August 3: Next day I asked a ranger why bears were mixed with campers at this site! His answer was not reassuring: “The bears were here first,” he said. One helpful piece of information he gave was that once you go up high on the Sierra Trail, you leave the bears behind as they are usually found at more moderate altitudes.

After taking a few photos of the giant sequoia trees, I hurried to start my hike and get high enough to avoid bears. I started at the entry to the High Sierra Trail at Crescent Meadow. At the beginning of the trail was a sign: “Emulate the cat; dig a hole and bury it”: advice to hikers of how to manage without a flush toilet in the wild. The trail was a well-beaten path through evergreens, running mostly along the side of a ridge — with very few up-and-downs. I was still weary from being awake all night watching for bears. So at the end of the day, I had only hiked seven miles to a single campsite, a cleared level area above the trail where I could make a fire to cook supper (hot dogs and peas). I was tired,

* Sequoia: named after Sequoyah, (c. 1770 - 1843) a member of the Tuskegee Cherokee Nation who invented an original, effective writing system for the Cherokee language which helped unite the Cherokees who had been dispersed from their original homes by the white settlers. The giant Sequoia trees were also named after Sequoyah.

the sun was setting fast, and I wrapped my blanket around me and settled to rest.

After sunset, the air cooled and I found myself shivering under the blanket. [My second misadventure!] It had been so hot in Los Angeles (90-100 F) that I had not imagined the temperature would be any different in the Sierra — I had never yet been in any really high mountains.

What to do? There were still coals from the campfire. I filled my small aluminum camp pot with hot coals, wrapped it in a towel and pulled it under the blanket with me. Aah! Just like a hot water bottle! As I lay there I could look up at the evergreen trees that loomed over the campsite. And something caught my eye. Up in the branches, among the needles, were little lights! How could that be? Had the park rangers put in electricity at the camp site? As the evening darkened there were more lights showing, like sparks among the pine needles. And as I watched, in the silence of the dusk, I heard little chirps and tweets, and I realized what I was seeing. It was the eyes of birds, reflecting the light from the campfire, gathering above the heat from my campfire's warm coals! I wasn't the only one who had felt the chill of the evening. My fire had attracted the feathered ones, who gathered in the branches above, to warm their small bodies from the heat waves rising from the coals. It was a miracle: sharing my campfire's warmth with this community of avians.

It was also comforting to be among friendly beings. I was able to sleep that night without fear.

August 4: Next morning, as I shook out my blanket, I startled a deer! I was



At the Bearpaw Tent Camp

the scarer, this time! The trail continued along the ridge for perhaps 4 or 5 miles, when, lo and behold, I came upon the Bearpaw Tent Camp (altitude 7700 feet) where meals and overnights were for purchase from the proprietors.. Here I had a hearty supper along with two other hikers, a park ranger, a naturalist, and a trail worker. Sleeping that night in the provided sleeping bag led me to rent a bag to take with me. One blanket was clearly not enough.

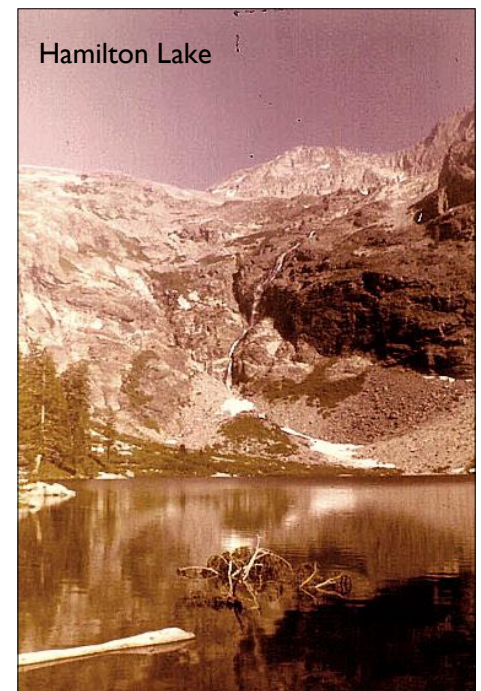
August 5: As I set off after a peaceful night under canvas I was encouraged that my topographical map showed the trail went down from Bearpaw Camp to the Kaweah River Valley. And thence, as I interpreted the contour lines, it went down some more towards Hamilton Creek, and Hamilton Lake, where I planned to camp. So I tramped along the trail (my rented sleeping-bag strapped to my knapsack) with a cheerful heart. Going down is easier than going up, so long as the slope is not too severe. I was making good time until I reached the Kaweah river.

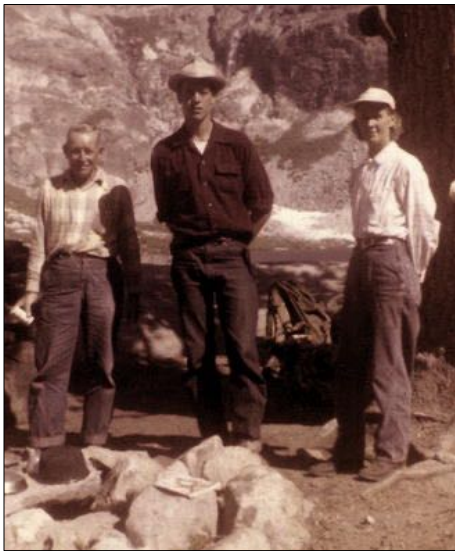
Crossing the river's rustic bridge, I was now only four or five miles from Hamilton Lake. But what was hap-

pening to the trail? Instead of continuing down, as I had thought, now it was going up! Maybe this was a temporary bump. Perhaps around the next bend it would go down again. But no! The trail rose more sharply than ever above the Kaweah River, making it harder to toil up over the rocky path.

Looking at my map again, I realized that the contour lines reflected a rise, not a decline! I had to proceed up for the next four or five miles, before reaching my chosen campsite. [my third misadventure.] I became increasingly more exhausted. I couldn't go back, because the slope I had just come down would now be an upward stint. I couldn't just camp here, on the bare rocky trail. I had to keep on.

When you have to, you have to. I arrived at dusk at Hamilton Lake, exhausted! Still, I was welcomed — by a family of hikers: Charles Shoemaker, Sr., his wife Ida, and their son, Charles, Jr. They revived me with a cup of strong coffee, and shared with me a fresh-caught trout from Hamil-





The Shoemakers

ton Lake. They told me the lake is stocked with Rainbow Trout by a plane dropping cakes of ice containing the fish!

At an altitude of 8300 feet above sea level, Hamilton Lake is one-half mile long and one-fourth mile wide. It is fed by perpetual snows [at least they were thought perpetual in 1958!] from Mt. George Stewart and Kaweah Gap. The lake is in a circular valley with precipitous walls, a huge pothole in the mountains.

In my exhausted state, only partially revived by the meal provided by the Shoemakers, I quickly made camp, spreading out my (marvellous) sleeping bag, putting the blanket under my head for a pillow, and soon was asleep.

August 6: Next morning I slept late, until around 10 a.m. I made a fire to cook breakfast, but when I saw the toasted muffin and bacon, I felt repulsed by it. I couldn't eat it. I felt nauseous. What was wrong with me? I could hardly stand up and walk. I had a strange compulsion: I put water into my cooking pot, then took out

my supply of sugar, and spooned a lot of it into the pot, stirring it in to make syrup. Once the sugar had melted into syrup, and it was cool enough to eat, I carefully spooned some into my mouth. In a few minutes I had taken it all. I no longer felt nausea. But I lay down in my sleeping bag for the rest of the day.

On thinking it over, I realized I must have had altitude sickness. I had never been this high before. And combined with extreme exhaustion, it had brought the sickness on. [my fourth misadventure]. I have since learned that going above 8000 feet can bring on altitude sickness, especially if you have not acclimated to the heights by proceeding slowly over a few days. And that foods high in carbohydrates can help reduce altitude sickness symptoms — and sugar consists of simple carbohydrates. My body knew it, hence my compulsion to consume sugar — even though my brain did not know why!

August 7: The next day, I felt well enough to go swimming in the lake



At Hamilton Lake

Camp arrived, on his way to the Continental Divide at Kaweah Gap. Joe

with the Shoemakers, took some photos of the area, collected some wood for a fire, and ate moderate meals. One of the hikers I had met at Bearpaw

Murray was a retired U.S. Navy Officer who served in World War 2. He was now a law professor at Berkeley, and he was pursuing his hobby of bird-watching on this hike. I had also wanted to



Joe Murray

see the Continental Divide, so now, feeling thoroughly rested, I joined him for the upward path. As we climbed up to Kaweah Gap, we could drink from the many streams which crossed the trail, and I could refill my canteen. We passed the two Upper Hamilton Lakes, the highest one frozen over with bright blue patches on the ice. Higher up there were many small ponds and one green bog, interlaced with channels. And also swarms of mosquitoes!

The juniper trees up here in the heights were only about three feet high, old and twisted. I could identify many alpine flowers including lupine, columbine, & mesquite bush. Joe identified a Sierra Nevada Rosy-Breasted Finch, and a Green-tailed Towhee.

The trail switchbacked as it climbed toward the Continental Divide. We were above the tree line, now. We had crossed two snow patches.

The water from the west side runs into the Pacific, while that on the east side runs into the Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico.

Looking east, the range after range of mountains made a daunting barrier

for those wishing to cross. I had greater respect for the pioneers who had made it over the High Sierra, looking for “Gaps” or Passes, to be the slightly lower doorways leading to California.

After achieving our goal of a view of the Divide, we could go back down trails that were familiar to us.

August 8: After another stay at Hamilton Lake, I packed my lightened knapsack (as I had eaten most of the food in it) and started down with Joe on the now-descending trail which had so exhausted me on the way up. We said farewell to the happily fishing Shoemakers and plunged down towards the Kaweah River, and then up to the luxury of tents at the Bearpaw Tent Camp.

August 9: I returned the sleeping bag (which had kept me comfortably warm) to the proprietors, and we were on our way. We stopped once for a bite of lunch at the 7 Mile Camp site, where I had stayed on my first night on the trail. A deer kindly posed for me to take a photo - perhaps the same deer I had scared away when shaking out my blanket. I told Joe about the flock of birds which had warmed themselves above my camp fire.

Soon we were back at Giant Forest, which seemed like a thriving city, in comparison to the long trails almost empty of humanity. Joe got into his car and headed back to his family and law office in San Francisco. I enjoyed the a good dinner, warm bed, and running water at the Park’s Lodge.

August 10: The bus took me back to the heat of Los Angeles, where I gathered my stuff to board the plane taking me back East.



Looking east from the Gap to the Continental Divide

As the title of this account stated, I had both adventures and misadventures on this hike.

My misadventures:

1: Bears can be found anywhere in North America. And they are not the only predators: mountain lions and coyotes can also harm you. Teddy Roosevelt’s “Speak softly and carry a big stick” is good advice both for international conflicts and for hiking in the wild. But add bear spray to what you should carry.

2: I did not appreciate that altitude decreases temperature, and that I needed more than one thin blanket to keep me warm. Get the best sleeping bag available. If it makes you too hot, just zip it open. But if you are too cold, woe be to you! (unless you have taken Susan’s instructions to Roger and put on two of everything!)



Deer at Seven Mile Camp Site

3: Not interpreting a topological map correctly can really throw you off! Contour lines can mean the land sinks down, or the land rises up! I should have studied how to read a map correctly before going to the wilderness.

4: Altitude sickness? What’s altitude sick-

ness? Now I know that if you go as high as 8,000 ft, you can suffer. Hikers are advised to acclimatize themselves by spending a few days at heights lower than 8,000 feet, and going higher at a slower pace, perhaps over several days. (People don’t suffer from altitude sickness in the United Kingdom, because the highest mountain, Ben Nevis in Scotland is only 4,412 feet high.)

Much has changed since 1958 when I hiked on the High Sierra Trail. Visitors should check with current conditions — campgrounds may have closed and new ones opened. The Park has provided steel bear-proof lockers for campers to lock up the food that attracted the bears when I camped there 64 years ago. But bears still roam freely in the National Parks campgrounds.

In spite of misadventures, I have very happy memories of this trek, taken when I was an inexperienced camper. The good fellowship of hikers helped me — a little community of like-minded, nature-loving people. Most of all I remember the magical evening that the birds perched above me, their eyes shining, reflecting the campfire light as they shared the warmth.

Dipping our Hands — Personal relationships with the books

Did the Swallows and Amazons Visit Vancouver?

By Martin Beech (Courtenay, Vancouver Island)

Missee Lee is Ransome’s tenth book in the Swallows and Amazons series. Published in 1941, after *The Big Six*, it is far from clear where the story is supposed to fit in to the timeline of the other adventures. No mention, for example, is made of the two Ds, Dick and Dorothea Callum, which implies a setting prior to *Winter Holiday* (published in 1933), and nor is any mention given to Peter Duck, although there is a nod to *Swallowdale* (published in 1931) when Roger wonders at one point if the pirate, and twenty-two gong taicoon, *Missee Lee* would be anything like the Great Aunt.

Nor is any parallel drawn between the storm that followed the sinking of the *Wild Cat* and that experienced by the Swallows during their North Sea crossing, in the Goblin, in *We Didn’t Mean to Go to Sea* (published in 1937). Likewise, no mention is made of the

world cruise during the Hebridean adventures of the *Sea Bear*, in *Great Northern?*. Indeed, Ransome gives very little away with respect to the time and location in which *Missee Lee* is supposed to be set, and as a result it floats ambiguously amongst the other adventures experienced by the Walkers and Blacketts.

Chapter 1 of *Missee Lee* opens with the explorers in their 100th port of a world cruise, dining with the harbour-master onboard the *Wild Cat*. The talk soon turns to the plan of “having a look at China”, an action which the harbourmaster strongly advises against: “can’t think why you don’t make straight for Singapore”, he warns. Captain Flint suggests that they will be heading for a Treaty Port, noting that, “Swatow’s all right” and that he has an “old friend there”. In those days the treaty ports were those

open to foreign trade, and Swatow (actually Shantou) was historically the location of American and British consulates. No indication of the actual location of the 100th port is presented to the reader, but given the textual hints that China is “so near”, and that a straight path could be taken to Singapore, it suggests that the adventurers are in the Philippines – possibly in the capital city Manila.

Chapter 2 brings about the loss of the *Wild Cat*, and the storm that blows Swallow and Amazon, along with their hapless crews, onto the Chinese coast, close to the three islands location under *Missee Lee*’s rule. Eventually, after much confusion, bartering, planning, Latin classes and a Dragon festival, the Swallows and Amazons undertake a harrowing escape in the *Shining Moon*, *Missee Lee*’s personal junk. Here the story ends, and the final



paragraph indicates that the crew sailed on to Singapore, from where they sent telegrams home indicating a change of ship, but few other details. And, finally, we are informed that the British newspapers were intrigued to report that the, “the people of St. Mawes, in Cornwall, woke one morning to find a little Chinese junk, with a monkey at the masthead, anchored in their harbour mouth”.

Of the other place names appearing in *Missee Lee*, we hear of Oxford and Cambridge universities, Great Marlow (UK), San Francisco, Hong Kong, Macao, Hainan, Yokohama (a then treaty port in Japan), Formosa (Taiwan), and Papeete (capital of Tahiti and French Polynesia). Cambridge University and Great Marlow relate to Missee Lee’s schooling in England, and Oxford to Captain Flint’s, who also, by way of bargaining with his captors, claims to be the Lord Mayor of San Francisco. However, it is Titty’s memory of their earlier visit to Papeete, when she is alone on the foredeck after leaving their 100th port, that causes me to question how the world cruise of the Swallows and Amazons might have been planned out.

Unlike other Ransome books, the endpapers of *Missee Lee* show no chart of the entire story, only a map of the three islands. The fact that Papeete had been a stop prior to their 100th port, and that after escaping from their captures the crew sail on to Singapore, it seems clear that the *Wild Cat* was crossing the Pacific Ocean from east to west. Accordingly the question now becomes: how did they enter the Pacific Ocean? I would suggest that they entered the Pacific through the



Sunset on the Strait of Georgia (by [Mykola Swarnyk](#) is licensed under [CC BY-ND 3.0](#))

Panama Canal. This route would have been chosen because Captain Flint, no doubt with objections from Nancy, would have avoided sailing round Cape Horn, at the southernmost tip of South America.

The voyage started, therefore, in a similar manner to that in *Peter Duck*, with the *Wild Cat* crossing the Atlantic to the Caribbean islands. After moving through the Panama Canal, the *Wild Cat* could move either north or south. Certainly, they could have cruised down the west coast of South America for a while, but I suspect that they travelled northward, heading up the western coast of Mexico and on towards the United States, visiting many ports on the way (at least 98). Having moved up the west coast to San Francisco, the most logical next step would be to visit Canada, and that, of course, would bring them to Vancouver Island, and the Strait of Georgia. On this basis, it seems entirely reasonable to propose that the Swallows and Amazons, along with Captain Flint, did indeed visit Vancouver, or Victoria, and possibly both. Who knows, they may even have sailed on to Comox.

Upon leaving Vancouver, the next long leg of the voyage would take

them across the Pacific to the Hawaiian Islands, then due south to Papeete and Tahiti. From Tahiti, the *Wild Cat* could travel to any number of locations. Perhaps south and west to New Zealand, calling in at Auckland on the North Island, and then, perhaps, on to Sydney, Australia. Travelling northward up the eastern coast of Australia, they could have (carefully) explored the Great Barrier Reef along with New Guinea and Borneo, with a final arrival at their 100th port in Manila.

From there, after looking-in at Shantou (and perhaps Hong Kong) the voyage could have continued on to Singapore and Malaysia. Captain Flint even admitted to, “fooling about in Java years ago”. The intention might have been to visit many more of the Indonesian islands. Indeed, at one stage after their capture, Captain Flint soothes a worrying Susan (that “mother” would be missing them) by noting that, “there are those Dutch Islands [Aruba and associated islands – the old Dutch West Indies] we might have gone to. There’s Formosa [Taiwan]. They know we’re not a liner and don’t work to a time-table”. This all reinforces the notion that the cruise was only loosely planned out before the *Wild Cat* left home port.

With the journey interrupted by the loss of the *Wild Cat*, and the eventual adoption of the *Shining Moon*, the explorers would eventually proceed from Singapore into the Indian Ocean. From there, since the time available does seem to have been more or less infinite, the cruise could have called in at multiple Indian ports, and perhaps the Maldives.

Once again assuming a now much more cautious Captain Flint, rather than trying to round the Cape of Good Hope in a junk, I suggest he steered the *Shining Moon* towards the Arabian coast, eventually travelling up the Red Sea to Suez. Traversing the Suez Canal, the *Shining Moon* would

then proceed through the Mediterranean Sea, exploring the North African coast, out through the Straights of Gibraltar, rounding Portugal and Finisterre, crossing the Bay of Biscay, and on to St. Mawes.

There are, of course, many ways to sail around the world, and the one explored here is just a flight of fantasy. That, however, is the point – it is a flight of fantasy based upon a reading and indulging in a piece of metafiction; an oddly placed story, in both location and time, within the Swallows and Amazons series. From a young age I have traced, followed and re-followed (in body and mind) the Walkers, Blacketts and Callums

across lakes, rivers, fells, islands, the Norfolk Broads, and even deep oceans, but in *Missee Lee* one can follow them (in the mind's eye) across the globe. Just as we are told that the Swallows and Amazons composed *Peter Duck*, as a winter-time story and diversion, so *Missee Lee* allows us, the reader, to co-explore their world (a rapidly changing world at that) and imagine, during a rainy Vancouver Island winter's night, how the world might be circumnavigated, with helpings of marauding pirates, a salting of shipwrecks, and a seasoning of exploration being thrown-in, just to spice things along, where and when required.

Old Man Loves Swallows and Amazons even though They Were Written for Children

By Andrew Fisher (Evanston, Illinois)

I just turned 72 but I still love reading and re-reading the 12 original Swallows and Amazons classics. Every time you re-read, you find out something new.

Just last year, 2022, I read *Winter Holiday* for the 15th time, and learned for the first time that it was Titty from Holly Howe who first observed the Ds signalling to Mars from up in their observatory.

I like all the books, but the ones I've reread the most are *Swallowdale*, *Winter Holiday*, *We Didn't Mean to Go to Sea*, *Secret Water*, *The Big Six* and *The Picts and the Martyrs*. Still, I have favorite passages in all of them, and here are some of them:

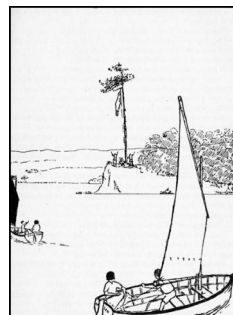
In *Swallows & Amazons*:



“Swallows in the Dark”: where they first discover Octopus Lagoon then steer home by counting to 100 on each tack and fortunately tie

up to a landing stage before disaster can happen.

“The White Flag”: where the Amazons, marooned on Wild Cat Island, surrender, tell of the lights in the houseboat, then

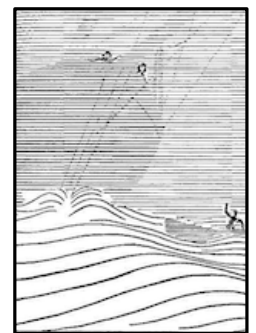


rush home (where they should have been in bed) just in time.

In *Peter Duck*

“Washing the Anchor”: where Peter Duck lets loose the anchor with Black Jake on it.

“Blind Man's Bluff” where the *Wild Cat* deceives the *Viper* in the fog then Bill, hooting the *Viper's* fog horn from its dingy, comes aboard.



In *Swallowdale*

“Surprise Attack”: where the Amazons try to surprise the Swallows in Swallowdale, but are totally surprised



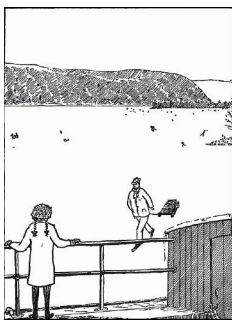
themselves instead (thanks to the cave).

“The Noon Tide Owl”: where John’s owl call at Beckfoot makes the Great Aunt

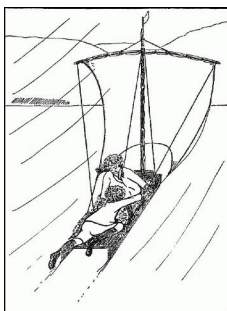
want to write to the natural history museum.

In *Winter Holiday*

“Captain Flint Comes Home”: where he finds total strangers living in his houseboat, the terrible mess there from sheepskins, and all his food eaten.

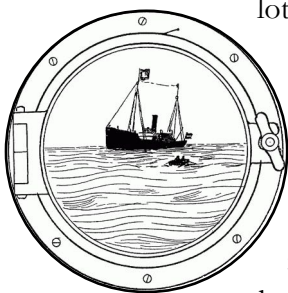


“Flag at Beckfoot”: where Dick gets his new mast and sail to work and they go flying off north in the blizzard.



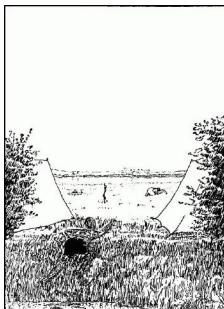
In *We Didn’t Mean to Go to Sea*

“Surprises All Round”: where the pilot learns that the boy, John, is actually the captain, and all the Walkers meet their father, who makes a pierhead jump from the steamer.



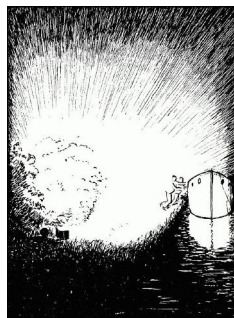
In *Secret Water*

“Eager Prisoner”: where Bridget first shows Daisy she knows the password, and how Daisy always mispronounces it, about human sacrifices, not being skinny like Daisy and then goes happily off with the savages because they will let her be a human sacrifice after all.



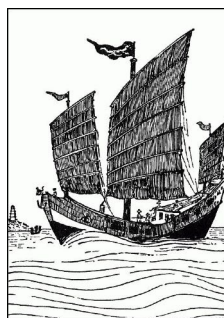
In *The Big Six*

”The Legal Mind”: where Mr. Farland first believes the Coots are guilty and that all their “evidence” is circumstantial, as George Owden and Ralph lie about seeing Bill pushing off the *Cachalot*, but where finally Dick and Pete come in and Dick shows Mr. Farland the finished photo that turns everything around. The Coots are innocent!



In *Missee Lee*

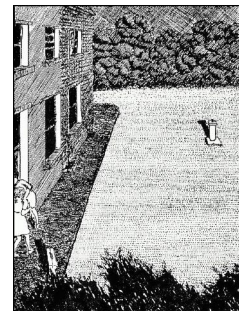
“Miss Lee Explains”: where they learn how the three islands work together, how she went to school in England and learned Latin, and how Roger’s writing in her dictionary saved them.



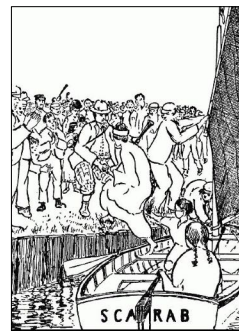
“Little Dragon Alone” and “The Only Way Out”: where Miss Lee steers them through the gorge.

In *The Picts and The Martyrs*

“We’ve Never Been Burglers Before”: where Dick hides in Timothy’s sleeping hutch while the Great Aunt searches the study.

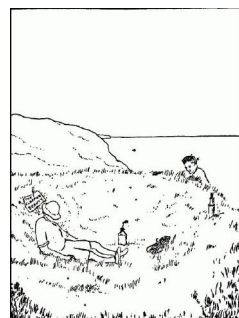


“Great Aunt Maria Faces her Pursuers”: where the Great Aunt criticizes Colonial Jollys, the police, and Timothy without giving anyone else a chance to give things away, and meanwhile Dick and Dorothea have silently drifted away safely into seclusion.



In *Great Northern?*

“A Good Look-out”: where Roger sleeps in the pict house and native highlander Ian cleverly labels him as “The Sleeping Beauty”.



“Too Late”: where Dick goes straight down to the loch and discovers the Mr. Jemmerling has missed with both shots and that the birds are still alive.

There are too many other great spots to list them all here, but I do have three questions about the way Ransome made everything turn out:

1) In *Winter Holiday*, as the Ds are skating north past the houseboat in “Flag at Beckfoot”, isn’t it convenient that the sledges are hidden behind the houseboat and the stove fire has drifted down to almost nothing?

2) In *We Didn’t Mean to Go to Sea*, how was daddy able to make that pierhead jump?

3) In *The Picts and the Martyrs*, why didn’t the Great Aunt actually ask Dick and Dorothea “do you know my nieces?” after she had asked them about the Walker children?

I’ve loved to sail all of my life, and just this winter I loaned *We Didn’t Mean to Go to Sea* to my old sailing friend. I’m sure he will enjoy it if he reads it.

Conch Shell

By Kate Crosby (Esmont, Virginia)

Can you hear the sea?

Beached in my bathroom,
A dollar at a yard sale years ago.
Before that, a Caribbean cove?

Now lips still pink
Guard a murmured memory
Of a sigh on sand.

Can you hear the sea?
Always.

The Professor’s Laboratory — Ideas, instructions & fixes

It All Hinged On A Folding Boat!

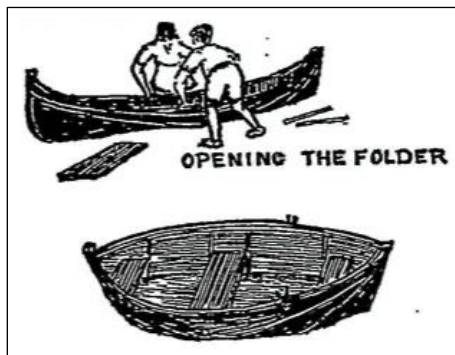
By Ian Sacré (Royston, B.C.)

*Aboard the **Sea Bear** everybody was lending a hand in making the folding boat ready to take the water.*

The folding boat was made of wood and canvas. When not in use its canvas sides collapsed like Captain Flint’s accordion. When open, it made a sort of coracle with pointed bow and stern, and the thwarts that fitted across it kept it from folding up again.

“It’s not much use for more than one,” said Nancy. “Two at a pinch. John and I tried and when we took Peggy as well, we nearly put the gunwales under.” (Great Northern, p. 166)

Captain Flint was not impressed with the design and construction of the folding boat. He said “Mac ought to be ashamed of her, there are perfectly



From *Great Northern*?

good folding boats to be bought but he must go and make his own”.

In reality, designing a folding boat is not easy. The problem is that most boats consist of numerous compound curves, and compound curves do not lend themselves to being developed out of rigid sheets of material.

A thin sheet of plywood, for instance, can be bent fairly easily in one plane, longitudinally and, with more effort, transversely but it cannot be bent in both planes at the same time. No sheet of rigid material can. So when designing a folding boat one is left with only two possible options plus a compromise.

The first option is to use rigid material bent in one plane and connected to its neighbour by flexible material such as treated canvas or modern flexible fabric materials. The second alternative is to use flexible material to make a sort of cocoon and fit a rigid portable frame inside to hold its boat like shape. The compromise would be to use both rigid and flexible materials

for either/or decks, sides or bottoms.

Despite evidence that a form of plywood was made back in the days of the Egyptian Pharaohs, modern plywood was not invented and patented until 1865 by John K. Mayo in New York, and useful sheets of plywood were not really manufactured until 1905 by the Portland Manufacturing Company.

Woven, waterproof canvas has been around for a very long time and it, and its modern counterparts, make it the ideal flexible component of a folding boat.

Of course North American bull boats and the coracles of Ireland and the British Isles are lightweight boats that were often built on the spot next to bodies of water. But while very light and portable, they cannot be folded and thus do not fit into the folding boat category.



Native American bull boat

Inflatable boats are not included either. Of course, it might be suggested that if Arthur Ransome were writing *Great Northern* in this day and age he might well have chosen an inflatable boat or canoe such as an Avon, Zodiac or Grabner, which are popular collapsible boats among some boaters today but do not handle particularly



A Klepper folding kayak, assembled and partially assembled.



A Klepper folding kayak, disassembled.

well under oars, much like Dick's folder in the story.

Of interest is the Klepper collapsible canoe, whose history began in 1905 when a German architectural student named Heurich constructed a boat of bamboo and sail canvas which could be easily broken down for transport. A tailor from the town of Rosenheim, saw the potential, bought the patent from Heurich and started manufacturing collapsible canoes under his own name.

The 1936 Olympic Games had two folding kayak disciplines in which

Klepper kayakers took all six medals. It had a canvas shell and a wood skeletal frame. Kleppers are still made today.

Then there was the Royal Marines' Cockle Canoe, Mark 2. It had a plywood deck and bottom, so as to take rough handling, and canvas sides. It had a 80.0 cm. (31.5 inch) beam, was 41.0 cm. (16.25 inches) deep and 4.610 meters (15.0 feet) long. It could be collapsed to a height of 15.0 cm. (6.0 inches) so it could be passed down through the hatch of a submarine.

This two-person collapsible boat was



“Operation Frankton” canoes

the model used by the Royal Marines Commandos in “Operation Frankton”, where 10 commandos were launched from the submarine *HMS Tuna* in December 1942 off the mouth of the Gironde River. They paddled up river to Bordeaux where they placed limpet mines on enemy ships, but sadly only two commandos survived the raid.

The launching method adopted for that operation is of interest because getting into a bouncing kayak alongside a larger vessel in wave action is tricky at the best of times. Doing so from the casing of a submarine would have been horrible! This problem was solved by attaching a prefabricated beam to the barrel of the submarine’s deck gun with a tackle shackled to the end of the beam. The boat was brought

out of the submarine’s hatch, assembled and loaded on deck with gear and the two commando paddlers got in. The kayak was then hoisted with the tackle secured to the end of the beam and the gun was traversed until the kayak was over the side, above the sea. Then the tackle was used to lower the boat into the sea, which was then immediately paddled clear.

More recently, one can now purchase

the Porta-Bote. Made of polypropylene in California since it’s original design in 1969, it is made in various lengths and folds down flat to a package 4 inches thick and 24 inches wide. During the RAF Himalayan Expedition commissioned by the then Prince Charles in 2018, a lightweight folding Porta-Bote was carried up into the mountains on the back of a yak to 20,000 feet. It was taken there in case the expedition had to cross glacier-fed, meltwater lakes.

I think Arthur Ransome in his cruising days had obviously climbed into bobbing dinghies tied alongside and knew it could be a bit tricky for people as they get older. His descriptive writing regarding the tenderness and rowing problems with the folder indicates he had first-hand experience with such ungainly craft. Many of us who have spent years messing about in boats will quickly connect with the issues he portrayed and have interesting tales of their own to tell I am sure.



A Porta-Bote on Everest.

Beckfoot Kitchen — Eating with the Swallows and Amazons

Real Recipes from Imaginary Stories: *Missee Lee*

by Molly McGinnis (Manteca, California)

In *Missee Lee*, Captain Flint and the Swallows, the Amazons, their dinghies, and oh, yes, Gibber the monkey have sailed “three parts of the way around the world” in the little schooner *Wild Cat*.

As the book begins, the schooner and its crew are preparing to leave their hundredth port – Formosa’s busy Takow harbor (*perhaps... see Ed. note*). They’ve been to Papeete (capital of French Polynesia) and many other exotic ports, been introduced to curries and other dishes of India and Indochina, and stocked up for the next leg of the trip – “Hey for Hongkong and Singapore”.

But Nancy insists, “We can’t go round the world without just having a look at China,” so they head out for Swatow, about 200 nautical miles from Takow. “With luck, we’ll have someone at the masthead in four days’ time, looking

for the coast of China,” Captain Flint says as they settle down for their first night in the South China Sea.

But the wind dies and the *Wild Cat* lies sweltering in the tropical sun. As John and Captain Flint (with a little help from Gibber) are calculating their position from the noon sun, Peggy is making curried eggs. “If those eggs are hot enough we’ll feel cooler,” said Captain Flint. “Nothing like a good Malay curry when salamanders are fainting from the heat.” “And then oranges to cool our burnt tongues,” Roger says, having checked the galley.

This would be their last meal on the *Wild Cat* before, with the monkey’s help, the little schooner burns to the waterline and our mariners are shipwrecked on the coast of China.

“Malay curries” were (and are) popular throughout Asia as well as Europe. These and other styles of curry,

Then and Now
Formosa - Taiwan
Takow – Kaohsiung
Swatow – Shantou
Hong Kong, Singapore: ports south and west of Swatow; British control
Papeete - capital of French Polynesia

brought home from British-occupied India, were popular in England too, but ingredients at hand in Asian ports would have been quite different from supplies stocked in the *Wild Cat* as she left England (see table below).

Ingredients of supermarket curry powder (e.g., McCormick’s) and Malaysian mixes are similar, but as ingredients are listed by quantity on a package, the effect is quite different.

McCormick’s: coriander, fenugreek, turmeric, cumin, black pepper, bay leaves, celery seed, nutmeg, clove, onion, ginger, red pepper.

England	Takow	Comment
Chicken Eggs	Duck Eggs	2 duck eggs = 3 chicken eggs
Butter	Ghee	Ghee: butter with solids removed; keeps at room temp
Bread	Rice	Learn how to cook rice!
Bread	Chapattis	Thin, soft, tortilla-like graham flour flatbread; easy to make
Fresh milk	Canned/ dried milk	The dinghies had “Condensed” milk in their grub boxes
Curry Powder	Masala from bazaar	Choice of many spice mixes in Asia!
Curry Powder	Malaysian Mixture	See below
Ginger powder	Fresh ginger root	
Onions	Onions	
	Garlic	Never in England – would they like it by now?
Peanuts	Peanuts	For Gibber and for curry topping
Scallions	Scallions	Or sprouted tops from dry onions – for garnish
Hardboiled eggs	Hardboiled eggs?	Lots of hardboiled eggs in the S&A books

Malaysian mixes are packed with sweet aromatics: coriander, cumin, fennel, turmeric, white pepper, cinnamon, star anise, nutmeg, bay leaf, clove. And chili, always, in greater or less quantity. Some mixes are “tongue-scorchers” indeed.

I found McCormick curry powder in supermarkets everywhere, but a market with a good “ethnic” section would have curry powders and pastes

from many other countries.

Most markets have sprinkler jars of cayenne pepper for added heat at table. If you’re not sure of your diners’ tolerance for hot, make your curry mild and put a jar of cayenne on the table. Sprinkle carefully – if the dust gets in the air there will be sneezes!

Buttered Eggs Curried

My guess is that Peggy’s curry was based on that old standby, buttered

eggs. It’s easy to imagine Peggy breaking duck eggs into a quarter inch of ghee, adding a spice mix, stirring until the eggs curdled, then adding canned milk from the stores. The curry powder soaked the moistness from my buttered eggs, and duck eggs need liquid stirred into them so they won’t be tough and dry. Ashore, Peggy might have had “milk” squeezed from grated fresh coconuts.

My Buttered Egg Curry

The first step: dispersing the curry powder in the melted butter. I used two teaspoons of McCormick’s curry powder for one serving of three eggs.



The curry powder made dryish lumps with the last moistness of the eggs so I added a squirt of “half and half” with the heat off, then one more stir to mix it all up. My curry must have come out pretty well, because my son dropped by and scoffed the lot before I got my camera aimed.

Peggy could have chopped up some of Gibber’s peanuts to top the bowls. Chopped peanuts sound good to me, too. Tops of onions that had sprouted, too, maybe. I’m sure there would be some.

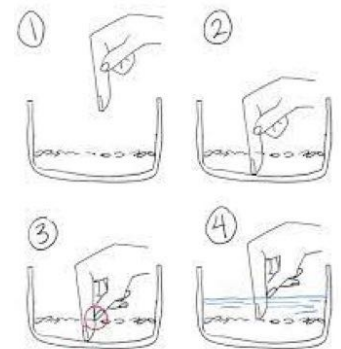
Rice is an obvious choice with curry; it would have to be cooked first and kept warm. I think Peggy would have mixed the rice with the eggs to serve in one bowl, easy to handle on deck. Someone would surely have shown *Wild Cat’s* cooks how to measure and cook rice after all this time in countries where rice was eaten at every meal. Peggy would no doubt have cooked the rice first and kept it warm, wrapped in a dishtowel, until the curry was ready.

Pieces of chapatti – tortilla-like Indian flatbread – often serve as spoons for eating curries. As would flour tortillas, especially whole wheat ones.

The dinghies had ‘biscuits’ – hardtack made with flour, water, and sometimes salt. It’s certain there was a big tin in the schooner. Pounded to fragments, soaked in boiling water, and tossed with the rice, a hardtack curry might be tasty as well as practical to eat on deck.

Back to rice. If I didn’t have a rice cooker, I’d have measured my rice as it’s done where rice is a daily staple. So can you. Follow the drawings.

Cover the pan, start over medium heat and turn down to a very slight boil. (You may need a fiber or steel “waffle” simmer plate.) Don’t peek for about 20 minutes. If the top of the rice has steam holes in it it’s time to try a single grain. If the grain is hard in the middle put the lid back on and cook for another five or ten minutes. Wrap with a dishtowel to keep warm. This proportion will make good rice from long- or medium-grain white rice in most pots.



British Colonial Era Curry

Missee Lee might have offered a mild Chinese-style curry at her feast, but with her pride in her British background, she'd might have chosen a British Colonial-style curry, made with a "white sauce" base. Peggy

could have done the same on board that last day, given that hardboiled eggs were a crew staple.

In Britain these curries were served with a great many garnishes, brought in one at a time by a servant. A 12-boy curry had 12 toppings.

This kind of curry my family knew, with us all thinking up more and more toppings. While our curry was always shrimp, a creamy sauce is great with hard-boiled eggs. On board, Peggy probably had some sprouted onions, raisins, and peanuts for topping.

The Curry

Hard boil two eggs for each person and a couple more "for the pot." Peel under a cold tap, then, cut in quarters, Take the whites from the yolks and break into bite-sized pieces. You'll add the yolks last.

Start the rice and get the toppings together and onto a big plate (or plates...). Raisins, peanuts, crisp bacon, potato chips... toasted coconut, cut up banana, orange segments, pineapple... anything goes (almost).

Whatever sauce you use, add curry powder and a good dollop of sherry (or any full-flavored dessert wine – Marsala or Madeira, for instance)

A simple white sauce is easy to make though you do need a heavy pan. A rounded tablespoon of flour will make



about two cups of this thin sauce.

Cook it lightly (don't let it color) with enough butter to make a loose slurry. Add curry powder now or later, and start adding milk little by little – the thick

paste will (with luck and a little skill) pull the lumps out of itself as you add liquid. Part milk and part coconut milk

(most supermarkets in my area now have fairly decent brands of canned coconut milk) is even better for curry.



Time to start adding milk! Still too thick. The sauce shouldn't quite stand apart when you run a finger down the spoon. Thin it with coconut milk if you're using it. Too thin is better than too thick – the rice and egg yolks will soak up lots of sauce.

Canned condensed cream soups would make perfectly good sauce base too. Mushroom would be good with eggs, but so would cream of chicken. Dilute with milk, but only about half a can. Don't forget the sherry! (If the mix is too thin, work a tablespoon of flour into a tablespoon of butter to make a soft ball and stir this Beurre manié into the simmering soup in bits.)

At serving time, add the egg white pieces, heat the sauce almost to boiling and gently fold in the crumbled or quartered yolks. Or save them to crumble (or sieve) onto the top of the sauce as you serve the portions. Pass the garnish platters and have fun!

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/
(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/

The Arthur Ransome Society in New Zealand & Australia: www.facebook.com/tarsnz/

The Arthur Ransome Group: www.facebook.com/groups/2612950856/



Pieces of Eight — The Junior Pages



Snakes Rehabilitated

by Maida Barton Follini (Halifax, Nova Scotia)

Somewhere in the TARS publications, I can't remember where, we are told that Arthur Ransome kept a snake in a cigar-box when he was in Russia. If so, it was a forerunner of the charcoal-burners' adder in a cigar-box that they showed to the Swallows on their visit in S & A.

Snakes have been given a bad rap, ever since Adam and Eve lived in the Garden of Eden.

In the Genesis story, a serpent conned Eve into eating forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and she also gave some to Adam. God cursed them, all three, the serpent, Eve, and Adam. He told the serpent, he would set up hostility between mankind and snakes. Eve's descendants "shall bruise thy head, and thou shall bruise his heel."

And his curse is borne out, for it is true that many women through the ages will scream when they see a snake and men will often kill any snake they come across.



Smooth green snake



Adder

But some folk tales passed down through the ages tell a different story about snakes. In one of Ransome's *Old Peter's Russian Tales*, "The Hunter and his Wife", the Hunter saves a snake from a fire, and in gratitude the snake (who must have had some magic skill) tells the hunter that he shall henceforth know the language of the animals and birds. But there is one condition: he must never tell anyone that he has this power. Not to spoil the story for future readers, I will not say how the hunter uses he power, but it does enable him to win out in several situations!

In *Swallows & Amazons*, when they go up the fell to visit the charcoal-burners, they are shown the adder, which

the old men are keeping for luck. In the charcoal burners' tradition their fathers and grandfathers have always kept an adder — believing that a snake has some magic power to assist in the making of the charcoal.

Old folk traditions about snakes include:

- If you wear the cast-off snake-skin of an adder it will protect you from rheumatism, and head-aches.
- If you eat the flesh of a snake you will be able to understand the language of animals.
- If you hang the skin of an adder above your hearth, it will bring you good luck and protect you against fire.

- If you cross the path of an adder, it will bring you bad luck.
- If you find an adder on your doorstep, someone in the household will die.

So we find that adders are sometimes seen as magical helpers, and at other times as omens of harm.

Detaching snakes from myth and superstition, science articles tell us that adders are the only venomous snakes native to Britain. While adder bites can be harmful, and sometimes even cause death, the effect of the bites can be reduced through timely treatment with anti-venom.

Ireland is famous for having no snakes, due, according to folk tradition, to St. Patrick banishing them. I understand New Zealand shares with Ireland an absence of snakes. Did St. Patrick happen to visit there? Perhaps our downunder TARS can speak to this.

But North America is teeming with snakes — not adders, but other

species, both venomous and non-venomous. Of the four varieties of venomous snakes, Copperheads are found in the eastern United States, as far west as Texas, Rattlesnakes are found across the North American continent, Coral snakes are found in the South, from Florida as far north as Kentucky, and Cottonmouths (also called Water Moccasins) are found in the south-eastern states.

Non-venomous snakes include the garter snake, the ribbon snake, the green snake, and the eastern black rat snake as well as many others.

Garter snakes are common in New England and the Maritimes. I found many in the lawns and gardens of my family home in Connecticut. My brothers and I would often pick them up and play with them for awhile before letting them go again. Other

common snakes are the ribbon snake and the green snake, the latter being hard to see in the grass due to their protective coloring. These snakes are all relatively small, from 12 to 36 inches long. In contrast, the black rat snake is the largest snake in New England. This snake can grow to five and



Garter snake

a half feet long. As its name suggests, the black rat snake is of value to humans, as it devours mice, rats, and moles, as well as insects. It is often found around barns and sheds, looking for its prey.

My first encounter with a black rat snake was when I was a child. While walking from our house to our barn I found a full-grown black snake stretched across the stone steps on the path, basking in the sun. My parents, when called, told me to leave it alone, and go around another way to the barn. Black snakes, although non-venomous, can bite if disturbed, they explained. And being cold-blooded, like all snakes, they gain needed warmth from lying in the sun. Needless to say, I gave that snake a wide berth.

Black rat snakes reproduce through laying eggs in holes under stumps, or in abandoned burrows. But garter snakes follow a different method. One day my mother called me to see an event which was taking place in our honeysuckle hedge which grew thickly over the stone wall at the edge of the lawn. There I saw among the leafy vines and sweet-scented blossoms,



Copperhead



Black rat snake

was what looked like a large knot of yarn, about 12 inches in diameter. But the “yarn” consisted of small brown and yellow snake-lets, all squirming around, in and out between each other, and the surrounding vine. There must have been 30 or 40 of them, with more emerging from the mother snake’s body, wriggling out, as we watched. They were no more than the size of large earthworms, at this time, but they were able to move and twist and turn, as they faced their first minutes in the open air.

The honeysuckle hedge was a good place for them to be born, as preying birds or cats could not easily reach them through the vine. By the next day when I went back to look at them again, only a few remained in that site. Most had slithered away to start their

own independent lives.

Copperheads are the most common venomous snakes found in New England, although thankfully not as far north as the Maritimes. My brother Dave and I used to take long “bird walks”, trying to identify different species of birds in the wild woods and pastures around our Connecticut home. But it wasn’t in the wild that we encountered a copperhead. We were returning from the woods along a tarmac road, when our progress was stopped by a large, long, purple-coloured snake across the road. He was basking in the sun, warming his body, and was still, as if asleep. The road was narrow, and he stretched nearly across it, and we quite rightly did not wish to walk anywhere near him. We could see the hourglass

markings of darker brown on his purplish skin.

But we had to get home, so my brother picked up a handful of pebbles from the shoulder of the road and began throwing them (from a safe distance) at the snake. It took more than one handful to rouse the snake, but he finally raised his head and slithered away.

Snakes are always a concern when you are out and about in rural areas, and even in settled places. The Swallows were quite right to make noise, and be alert as they went over the moors and through the woods to warn any adders of their coming. But most snakes you will meet in North America are non-venomous and if you take proper care, you will not get near enough a venomous snake to be attacked. In all the Swallows and Amazons books, none of them got bitten. Even if bitten, the important thing to remember is to seek treatment immediately. Antivenom treatments can reduce the harmful effects of the poison. Snakes, for the most part, are a benefit to human beings, helping to keep down the population of harmful rodents and insects. A fascinating and even beautiful species of life, snakes are not something to scream at, and try to kill, but to be respected as fellow-creatures in our world.

Signals from TARSUS/North Pole News is a joint publication of TARSUS (The Arthur Ransome Society USA) and TARS Canada.

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