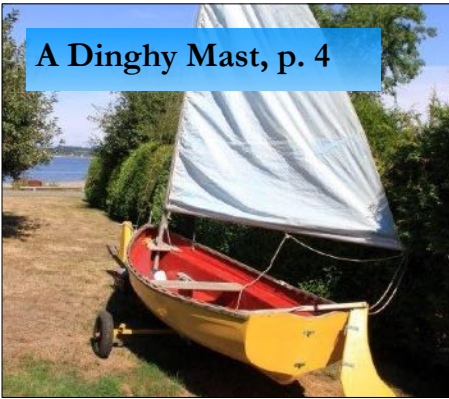




# Signals from TARSUS & North Pole News

September 2023

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

### Can North Americans Start Getting Together... In Person or Virtually?

A question in the member survey we sent out in January asked if North American members would be interested in meeting each other, either in person or online. Almost everyone (95%) was perhaps interested in face-to-face meetings, while 53% thought online meetings might be an idea.

#### Can We Organize Face-to-Face Meetups?

In several areas – the Pacific Northwest, B.C., San Francisco, New York, Toronto, and others – we have four or five members, perhaps enough to support the occasional face-to-face get together. (The [Google map](#) I created at the time will let you see where we have members.)

So in August I sent out an email to 15 individuals in those areas who I thought might be interested in organizing local activities or participating in online activities – I called it “a proposal, or a suggestion, or perhaps just a question”. In it I said:

“I have looked at the membership, and in each area where we have several members, I have chosen one or two to ask if they would be willing to try to organize some sort of informal get together, just so that members could get to know each other.

I am sending this letter to people who I thought might be most interested, but of course it is up to each of you.

If you like the idea of organizing a local meetup, please let me know.”

I received six responses from people who might, just maybe, be interested in helping to organize a meeting, or perhaps just in participating. Several actually said, well, maybe, but not right now. Perhaps in the fall?

Meanwhile Ian Sacré in B.C. is trying to organize an informal lunch for members close to Vancouver.

I will keep working on this and hopefully will have more solid news in a future issue.

#### What About Zoom Meetings?

As for possible online meetings, in June I contacted Gill Metz in Australia to see what she could tell me about the Zoom meetings they have organized for members across their equally spread-out area. She explained that only in Victoria state do they have enough local members to support

face-to-face meetings, which they hold once a month.

They hold informal Zoom meetings two or three times a year. They last no more than an hour, and the number of participants varies.

Gill says that topics have included:

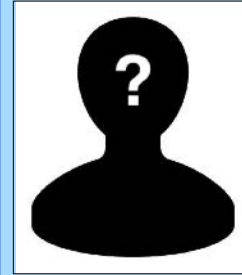
“Guest speakers.

An AR birthday party - people made cakes to represent the books, had quizzes, shared their favourite parts of the stories, etc.

We do quite a few quizzes on the Zoom meetings.

Story telling of how you became in-

#### We Still Don't Have a U.S. Coordinator



No one has yet come forward to take on the role of U.S. coordinator. This is not too surprising, since exactly

what that role entails is not very clear at the moment.

Now that most members can renew online directly on the TARS website, and TARS U.K. is trying to deal directly with members who need to renew, a U.S. coordinator will not have to worry too much about renewals.

Perhaps more interesting is the idea that a coordinator can make efforts to promote connections between existing members and encourage new memberships.

What do you think?

involved in the AR society and when and how you first came across the books.

Story telling of activities you have done recently and that have a connection to the stories.

Sharing experiences of visiting the Lake District and the Broads.”

So what about it?

Perhaps we can organize something similar? It may be easier for most of us than setting up a face-to-face meeting.

I will keep you posted.

Simon Horn, Ed.



## Greetings from the North

By Ian Sacré, TARS Canada Coordinator  
3965 Marine Drive, Royston, BC V0R 2V0  
[gallivanterthree@shaw.ca](mailto:gallivanterthree@shaw.ca)

Greetings Canadian TARS Members!

Summer seems to have flown by for me and others to whom I have spoken.

Some of the deciduous trees in my neighbourhood, at

least, are already showing the early stages of their fall colours. Perhaps this is exacerbated by the extremely dry weather we have experienced here on the Coast. The forest fires which have menaced many parts of the country will, I am sure, have caused major travel plan changes for many. But I hope everyone has made the best of it and enjoyed the summer time to the fullest extent possible.

I am delighted to welcome Richard Helm and his family to the Society. Richard joined this summer and lives on Bowen Island, B.C. This keeps our

membership numbers steady at twenty one. Sadly, the overall Society worldwide membership numbers continue to dwindle every year. This we suspect is caused by the aging of the existing membership and the lack of interest from many young people, so many of whom seem addicted to their smart phones and social media rather than devising their own real life, unsupervised but safe adventures along the lines of Swallows and Amazons.

I visited a number of provincial parks this summer and could not help but

notice fewer tents than one would have seen years ago. They seem to have been replaced by what amount to mobile condominiums with all the latest mod-cons. The children of their owners will never experience the sound of heavy rain on their tents at night and the drippy leaks wetting their blankets or sleeping bags because they did not have the foresight to apply fresh waterproofing to the tent fabric before setting out. A lesson once experienced but not forgotten again.

Simon Horn our hard working editor is always on the lookout for new material. With this in mind I do hope you will consider committing your activities and past and present adventures to paper and sharing them with us, through the medium of this publication.

Warmest regards,  
Ian Sacré  
Canadian TARS 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 September 2023. As always, thanks to the contributors.

### In this issue

First I report on my attempts to find North American members interested in organizing or participating in face-to-face or virtual TARS meetings.

In *The Professor's Laboratory* **Ian Sacré** tells us about his latest nautical acquisition – it needs a new mast and sail!

In *Kanchenjunga's Cairn* **Maida Follini** describes a lifetime of “Mountain Walking” and **John Pappas** presents “Some Pictures from the Lakes”.

In *Dipping Our Hands* **Andrew Fisher** asks if Nancy Blackett really thought

Roger Walker was a “lazy little beast”.

In *Captain Flint's Trunk*, **Alistair Bryden's** “Stout Cortez” tells us how Scotland's attempt to build a colonial empire in Darien fizzled out (and how Cortez was not actually the first European to see the Pacific).

In “Separated by a Common Language”, **Molly McGinnis** provides

recipes for biscuits, both British- and American-style, in *Beckfoot Kitchen*.

Finally, in the *Ship's Library* your editor talks about another Amazon Publication, the 2014 *Drawn at a Venture*.

\* \* \*

The next issue is set for January 2024, so start thinking about your contribution now. You can expect a reminder about December 1.

At only 19 pages, this issue is a bit thin. So please think about possible future articles, comments, questions or pictures that other TARS might find interesting, and send them in.

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

## The Professor's Laboratory — Ideas, instructions & fixes

### A Dinghy Mast

By Ian Sacré (Royston, British Columbia)

On a recent balmy summer afternoon I was sitting in a deckchair in my garden, literally in the shade of an old apple tree, contemplating life in general and my old dinghy in particular. The dinghy, painted bright yellow, is often referred to as the 'Yellow Peril' and joined my fold of sundry boats after it was salvaged, lying all forlorn and lonely, and slowly dying upside down at the bottom of a lady's garden where it had lain unused and deteriorating for several years. Over those several years I had often walked along the lane in front of the property and admired from a distance the sweet lines of the lapstrake or clinker-like fibre-glass hull.

One day, driving past the property, I noticed an elderly lady working in the garden so stopped the car and walked over and introduced myself. Half an hour later, I was the owner of another dinghy which I really did not need but who had spoken to me in her hour of need! *Yellow Peril* was a sailing dinghy who had nurtured the lady's family for

many years until they had all grown up and left. Her sail was all bagged out and what was left of her mast and rigging should not be talked about. But more importantly the old girl was salvageable. The crews of *Swallow* and *Amazon*, and Captain Flint, would heartily approve!

The reason behind my afternoon contemplation was the fact the boat was sorely in need of a new sail and mast, and I wanted to re-rig the little craft with a new tanbark standing lug sail and a wooden mast and gaff. The reasoning for selecting a standing lug rig lay in the rig's simplicity. Mast and gaff can be stowed in the boat when they are not in use, and besides, I am very much a traditionalist and have a fondness for gaff rigs.

I wanted to keep the actual square footage of the new sail the same as the original Bermuda type sail, which was approximately 50 square feet. But, I contemplated, how long and what diameter should the new mast be?

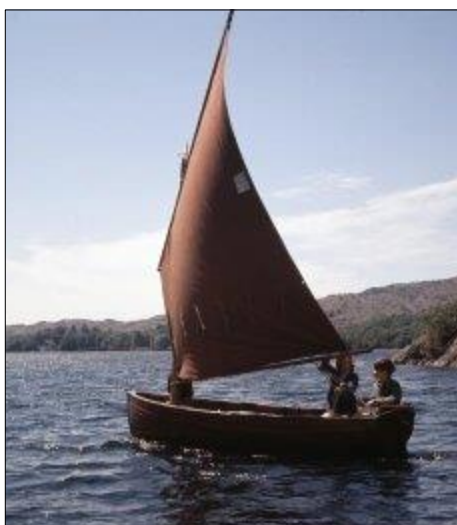
Among the books I had recently purchased was *The Boats of Men of War* by Commander W.E. May. It is a superb reference book covering the various hull forms and construction and rigging of the boats carried by Royal



Yellow Peril - stern view

Navy ships in the past several hundred years. It covers Captain's Gigs, Admiral's Barges, Cutters, Whaleboats, Pinnaces and much more.

In determining the scantlings (scantlings are a naval architect term for the dimensions of materials used to build boats, ships or masts and yards.) for masts it appears that the old boat and mast builders in the naval dockyards based nearly all their measurements on proportions. This made ample sense since there were few measuring tools back in the mid 1700's. The



Swallow on Coniston



Yellow Peril - baggy sail

craftsmen used data which, through trial and error, had been found to work, together with skills and knowledge that had been passed down from father to son and journeymen to apprentices. So what were the base lines used to figure the dimensions of a mast in naval dockyards? It was the beam of the boat requiring the mast! Different types of boats used different proportions.

Longboats for example had a main mast whose length was twice plus one half the breadth of the boat. The foremast would be seven-eighths the length of the main mast. The bowsprit would be half the length of the main mast. The main yard would be five

eighths of the main mast and the fore yard would be five eighths the length of the foremast.

What about diameters? Well they were in fractional parts of an inch for every foot length of the masts. So the mainmast would have a diameter of one quarter inch for every foot of length. A twenty foot mast for a longboat for example would have a mast 5 inches in diameter at a point just above the mast partners (mast partners are usually pieces of hardwood framed around the mast at deck or gunwale level which support the mast laterally at that point).

My next thought was, what would happen if I applied the old naval dockyard method of designing a new mast to my dinghy? So out

with the tape measure and I found the beam of the dinghy measured fifty four inches. Fifty four (the beam) multiplied by two and a half (beams) equalled one hundred and thirty five inches or 11 ft. 3 inches. My dinghy measures 11 ft. 4 inches overall so the mast should just fit lying flat in the boat. Great! Now what about the diameter of the mast? Well, the old dockyard proportions said to allow one-quarter inch for every foot of mast length. Eleven quarter inches equals 2 -3/4 inches in round figures. Again, a perfect diameter!

The standing lug sail to be fitted is loose footed and without a boom, even though proportional allowances are available if a boom were to be rigged. The gaff for the 50 square foot sail is so short it's diameter will be less than two inches.

So now I have the dimensions for the new mast... all I have to do is find the energy to build it!

Standing lug sail under construction



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

### Mountain Walking, East and West

By Maida Barton Follini (Halifax, Nova Scotia)

“Kanchenjunga” or Coniston Old Man, the peak that the Swallows and Amazons climbed in Swallowdale, is, at 2,632 feet the highest point in the historic county of Lancashire. The Swallows & Amazons named it “Kanchenjunga” after the mountain that rises to a height of 28,168 feet across the border area of India and Nepal, the third highest mountain in the world. Kanchenjunga had been attracting explorers and climbers since the 1840s.

Previous to the S & A’s expedition to their “Kanchenjunga” in 1931, there had been a spate of attempts by teams from different nations to conquer the real Kanchenjunga: in 1929, two expeditions, one a German team, and the other an American climber; in 1930 an international team; and in 1931 a second German team. But none had succeeded in reaching the summit.

No wonder the S & A’s in 1931 had named their local peak after the unconquered Himalayan summit. It was not until decades later, in 1955 (long after Nancy, John and the others



Kanchenjunga (Photo: Wikipedia)

would have grown up) that a British expedition led by Charles Evans and a crew of eight, succeeded.

When Roger found a small brass box in the cairn at the top of Coniston Old Man, the Amazons were connected to their own history. The note inside said, “August 2nd, 1901. We climbed the Matterhorn.” and was signed by Molly Turner, J. Turner, and Bob Blackett. Nancy and Peggy’s parents and uncle had made the same trek as children that the S & As had just completed.

by an accident involving a fall and a broken rope on the descent, which took the lives of four of the team.

Since 1865, hundreds of climbers have reached Matterhorn’s summit at 14,692 feet; but not without peril. Several climbers still die each year in the attempt.

The first mountain I ever ascended was Mt. Megunticook near Camden, Maine, in 1941, when I was 10 years old. I hiked up the trail with my father and two older brothers.



The real Matterhorn, a strikingly prominent mountain on the border between Switzerland and Italy, had been ascended by a British team led by Edward Whymper in July, 1865. This success was darkened

The name has its genesis with the Penobscot Abenaki Indians who called the area Megunticook, which means “great swells of the sea.” The Megunticook area includes a lake, river and mountain, all named Megunticook. At a height of 1385 feet, Megunticook Mountain is the second highest mountain along the North Atlantic seaboard.

Cairn on Coniston Old Man (Photo: Wikimedia Commons)



Penobscot Bay, as seen from a rocky overlook on Mt Megunticook (Photo: Google)

The trails make it an easy hike, and the mountain never rises above the tree-line.

The highest mountain on the eastern seaboard is Mt. Cadillac, height 1530 feet. My family has also been up Mt. Cadillac, but not by climbing. We drove up the paved road in our old Plymouth sedan. Here we had a wonderful view of Frenchman's Bay and the islands of the Maine Coast. The area of Mt. Cadillac and Mount Desert Island was formerly part of the Wabanaki Confederacy lands, where the tribes – Abnaki, Maliseet, Mi'kmaw, Passamaquoddy and Penobscot – traded, hunted and fished. The first name of Cadillac Mountain was Wapuwoc, a Passamaquoddy word meaning “White mountain of first light”, and it is the place in the United State where, from October 7 to March 6, one can first see the sunrise. The Penobscot indigenous people still reside in Maine with a center at the Penobscot Island Indian Reservation along the Penobscot River.

As one of the first sites from which you can see the sunrise, Cadillac has long received attention from sun-

worshipping tourists. It once had a hotel and a cog railway up to the summit! But the hotel burned down and the cog railway was moved to Mt, Washington. The paved road however brings accessibility to old and young.

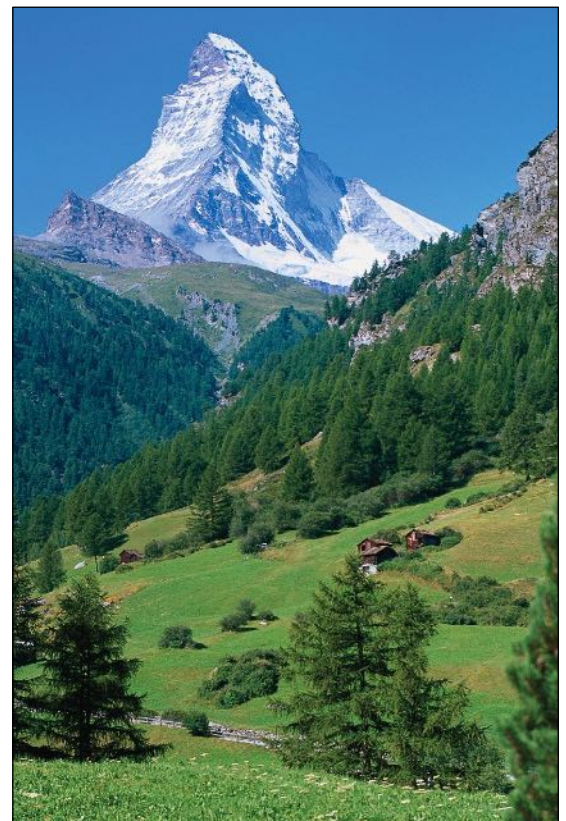
Cadillac Mountain is in an area which was once part of Acadia in New France, and it was named after a French explorer, Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac. He was granted the island of Mount Desert by the governor of New France. Of course, in the French and Indian War, the British defeated the French colonials, and later the American Revolution freed what is now the United States from Britain. What had been part of French Acadia, now became part of the State of Maine and the U. S. Acadia National Park was created on Mt. Desert Island, with Mt. Cadillac as its high point.

Those who climbed the Matterhorn and Kanchenjunga, and

later, Mt. Everest, were serious mountain climbers, dedicated to their activity of conquering mountain heights. Many of us who enjoy mountains are really mountain walkers, rather than climbers. We take advantage of finding ourselves in an area with mountains, and set off, with little equipment – some good hiking shoes and a map, perhaps, a canteen of water, and a sandwich – to see how high we can go.

My third mountain faced me when I was in Salt Lake City, Utah, on a summer child-care job. On weekends I was free, and I decided to visit Timpanogos Mountain.

A bus took me to the trail that led up the Mountain, and I started hiking



The Matterhorn, overlooking a Swiss valley (Photo: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Matterhorn-mountain-Europe> Accessed 25 August 2023)



Sunrise from the summit of Mt. Cadillac (Photo: Wikipedia)

through the trees. The rise was gradual and the weather a sunny, pleasant July morning. After a hike of an hour or so, I came to Timpanogos Cave National Monument, where a park ranger was leading tours. Not one to miss an opportunity, I joined the tour and entered a narrow passage between rock walls. In some places the tunnels were narrow between chambers and the tour group had to go in single file, and flatten themselves against the rock walls. It soon opened out into chambers which were decorated with stalactites hanging from the ceiling, and stalagmites rising from the floor. Spectacular colors surrounded us, in unusual formations, which the ranger explained were made by the slow dropping of water through the limestone rock which made up the mountain. As the water evaporated, it left behind the different chemicals embedded in the limestone - lovely purples, greens and yellows, in star-shapes, and twists and flower-like petals. The Park authorities had lit up these chambers with strings of lights.

After leaving the Cave I hurried to get back to the main trail, as it was now afternoon, and I wanted to see as much of the mountain as I could. Around 5 p.m. I came out of the trees,

onto a fairly flat area and right in front of me loomed the summit of Timpanogos.

I had reached the tree-line, but looking up at the rock wall that led to the summit, another thousand or more feet above, I knew I could never achieve the

peak but would have to start down if I were to reach my accommodations in Salt Lake before dark. Below the massive treeless stone heights, the trail followed a level course dividing the trees from the bare rock above. My map showed that it met with another path leading downwards, so I followed along, soon shaded by the massif which reared to impossible heights beside the trail. Yes, here was the junction with the descending trail.

I was soon on my way down, and below me was a green pasture on the hip of the mountain. A large flock of sheep were guarded by a horseman with his dog. I had heard that Basque shepherds from the border country of Spain near France, had been brought over so that experienced sheep herders could look after Utah's sheep. I went quietly around the edge of the unfenced pasture, so as not to disturb the sheep or the shepherd, and once more the trail plunged into the trees. It was getting dark under their shade, and I was worried about being benighted when it would be hard to see the trail.

After hurrying along, I was relieved when the trail came out on a paved road! I resolved to hitch-hike down to civilization. But for a while no cars came down the road. At last I heard the sound of an engine. I was lucky. The kind driver saw me waving my thumb for a ride. In a short time I was back among the streets of Salt Lake, and was dropped off not far from the YWCA where I was staying. I felt quite satisfied with my adventure, although I had not reached the top of Timpanogos - altitude 11,753. The visit to the Cave, and the reaching of tree-line were, to me, sufficiently adventurous. Since I am a mountain-walker, rather than a true mountain-climber, I was content with my day.



Summit of Mount Timpanogos in the Wasatch Range of Utah (Photo: Utah Public Radio)

I have since walked up other mountains, including Mt. Monadnock in Massachusetts, and Mt. Washington in New Hampshire, but I will leave the stories of these adventures to another day. Each mountain has its own beauty, and presents its own challenge. The challenges teach us something about our abilities and our limits. The beauty gives us unforgettable images of the best of our world.



## Some Pictures from the Lakes

By John Pappas (Stockton, California)

*Member John Pappas thought we might like to see some pictures taken during a trip to the Lake District some years ago: Ed.*

In 2006, my wife Paula and I visited our friends in England and then spent about a week or two up in the Lake District and at York. It is something we had always wanted to do.

I discovered the book *Swallows and Amazons* in my neighborhood library in San Francisco when I was about 10 years old. The library didn't have all the books, but much later as an adult I ordered a full set.

When our children were little, I read one chapter to them at bed time every night until we had finished all the books.

Anyway, at Coniston Water we stayed at Holly Howe for a few days (had a wonderful room with super views).

At Coniston we took a boat tour of the lake, hiked a little ways up to some of the old copper mine buildings in really rainy weather, and also went to the Windermere boat museum (before it was transformed from the Windermere Steamboat Museum into the Windermere Jetty).



John reading from his S&A collection.



Holly Howe (Bank Ground Farm) on Coniston Water, with the field running down to the water and the boat houses (and the sheep)..

The view from  
Holly Howe



Holly Howe boat houses

Ransome's presence can be felt at Holly Howe



The Holly Howe reading room



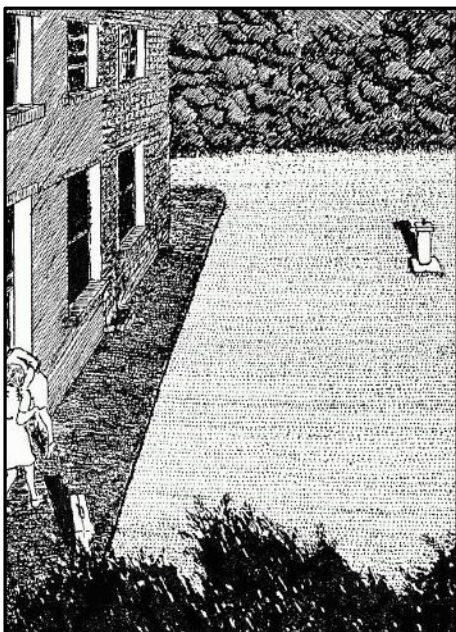
## Dipping our Hands — Personal relationships with the books

### Is Roger Walker a “lazy little beast” in Nancy Blackett’s Eyes?

By Andrew Fisher (Evanston, Illinois)

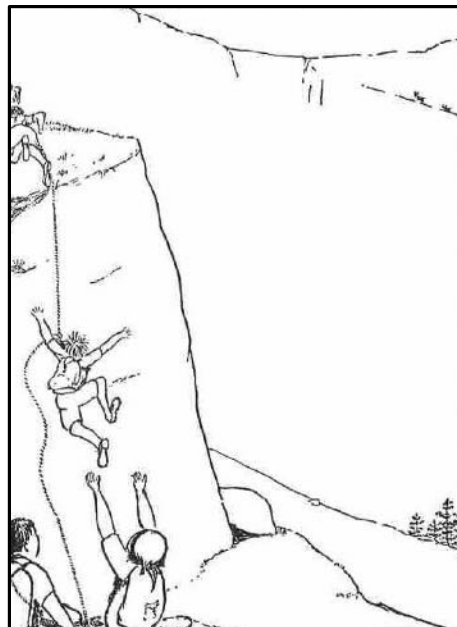
In *The Picts and The Martyrs*, in the chapter “Plans and Change of Plans”, Nancy is describing to Timothy, Dick and Dorothea a bit of a row they had with the Great Aunt because the aunt suspected the Swallows were around. The Great Aunt remarked how much Nancy and Peggy had improved since she was at Beckfoot in the summer two years ago. Then the Great Aunt asked who the children were camping at the south end of the lake at that time, and Nancy said, the Walkers. Then the Great Aunt said then that the Walkers must have a “very bad influence on them and it was a very good thing they weren’t here now . . .” Well Nancy blew up and said “just think of Susan or John or Titty or *even* Roger being a bad influence on anyone!” (my emphasis).

But Nancy seems not quite sure that Roger might not be a bad influence,



and I believe there are at least five reasons for this:

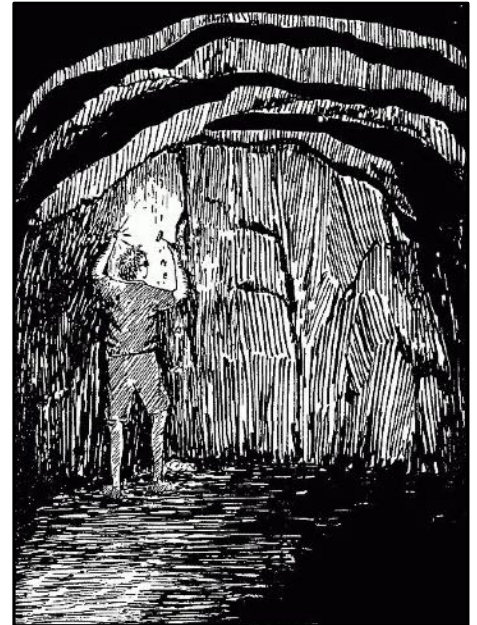
1) In *Swallowdale* they are climbing Kanchenjunga and are at a steep cliff. Roger is in the middle of the cliff and suddenly shouts and points to wild goats. This makes him slip and only



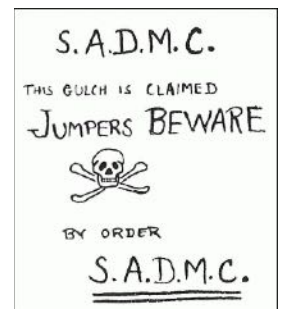
the rope holds him up. When later he sees goats again, just in time John tells him not to point at them. Afterwards when they are all safely at the top of the cliff, John and Peggy confirm that there were goats, but Nancy simply says “Goats. But not such goats as some people I know.”

2) In *Pigeon Post*, Roger is so sick of combing the Topps that he sneaks off by himself and ends up finding the gold (copper). Of course, the whole mining company is terribly worried. In “What’s Become of Him?” Roger comes in late, sniffs and says “Cannon balls. I’m jolly well glad I wasn’t late”.

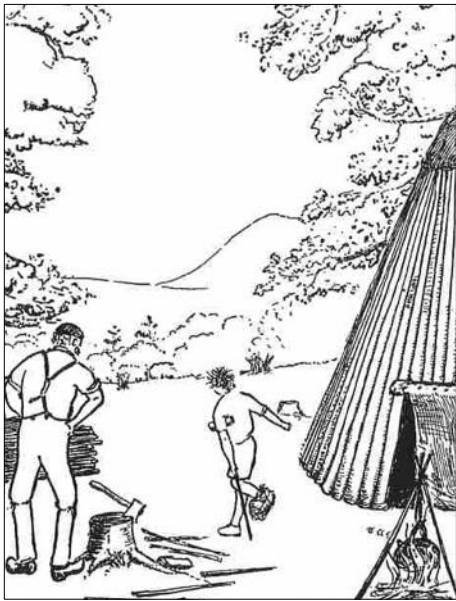
“Shiver my timbers” said Nancy. If you were a ship’s boy in my ship or an able seaman”! Roger steps forward slowly with the gold (copper) hidden behind his back.



3) Later in *Pigeon Post*, when they are staking their claim, Nancy, pressing the exercise book against the rock wrote: “S.A.D. MINING COMPANY” “What does it mean?” asked Roger. “Swallows, Amazons and Ds Mining Company you bone headed young galoot”. “But why sad?” asked Roger skipping hurriedly out of reach. Nancy laughed and crumpled that leaf up. “Sorry Dot, I’ll have to take another in case there are more donks about.”

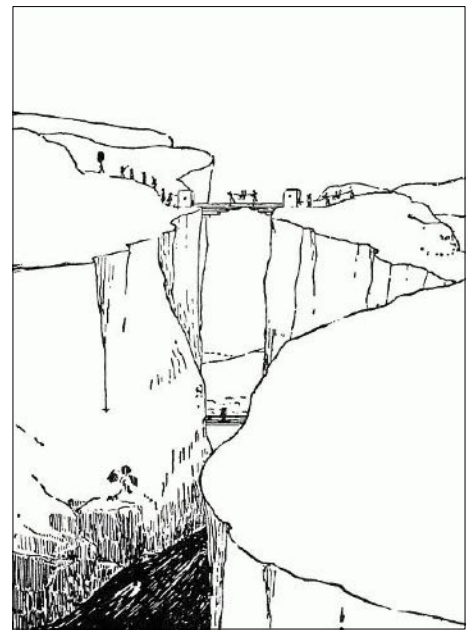


4) In *Secret Water*, when they are describing the letter the other Eels sent to the Mastodon and the people who motored over to their island, Roger says “two females”, with a grin, and Nancy scowls at him.



5) In *Missee Lee*, Roger is top of the class, since he knows the most Latin, while Nancy is at the bottom, since she knows none. Much later, when they learn they must escape from the Three Islands, Nancy makes her feelings clear: “No more beastly Latin. That’s one thing. No more listening to a ship’s boy cockily spouting Latin ... Jibbooms and bobstays! Won’t we mates and captains make you work,” said Nancy, who, even if she was sorry to be leaving a pirate island, had not much enjoyed being bottom of a class in which Roger was top. “Latin!” she added scornfully. “Polishing brass work’ll do you good.”

To sum up, in *The Picts and the Martyrs*, when they all are up at the mine on the High Tops, Timothy says to Dick “wasn’t it you who found the mine?”



Dick replies “It was Roger”, while Nancy adds: “Thanks to being a lazy little beast.”

## Captain Flint's Trunk — News from abroad... and history

### “Stout Cortez”

By Alistair Bryden (Calgary, Alberta)

As we all know, the very first words in *Swallows and Amazons* are:

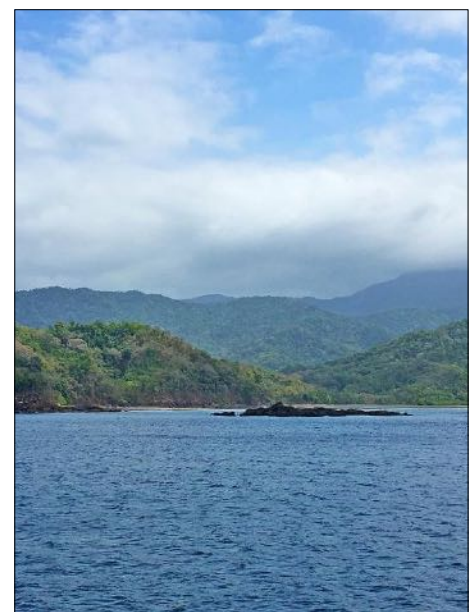
*“Or like stout Cortez, when with eagle eyes,  
He stared at the Pacific – and all his men  
Looked at each other with a wild surmise –  
Silent on a peak in Darien.”*

Darien is of course a real place. Almost the narrowest part of the Panama Isthmus, it is just north of the South American mainland where Colombia meets Panama. It is famous for the Darien Gap, a 100-kilometre gap in the Pan-American Highway, which planned to connect North and South America.

The Darien Gap contains some of the wildest and most challenging country

anywhere in the world, with no law enforcement. The coast is wet and marshy. Today, sad columns of hopeful migrants try to trek north along muddy trails with daily rain. Many don’t make it. So we can only marvel at the fortitude of Cortez and his men<sup>1</sup>. But this lonely wilderness fundamentally changed the modern world, and influenced the development of countries across the globe.

In the late 1600s, Scotland was a poor and remote country on the outer edge of Europe. There had been crop failures and famine as a result of sustained cold weather. The economy was in tatters with no defence against English imports. Perhaps the biggest



Darien Gap on the Pacific Coast of Panama (Photo: Wikimedia Commons, David Broad)

export was mercenaries. Scotland was officially ruled from London by the joint monarchy of William and Mary, but they had little or no interest in looking north. And of course Scotland was still a separate country with its own Parliament.

Scotland needed a major boost and the leaders of the day made a lot of positive steps which ultimately paid dividends: they invested in education and incorporated the Bank of Scotland. But they made one critical blunder, they wanted a get-rich-quick scheme.

Other countries of Europe were prospering from colonisation and ventures such as the East India Company and the Dutch East India Company, but Scotland had no colonies. So Scotland decided to join the bandwagon and created “The Company of Scotland Trading to Africa and the Indies”. Unfortunately many or most of the good spots for colonies were already taken.

Nothing daunted, the Scots decided to plant a colony in Darien. Why Darien? Well no one in Scotland knew much about Darien, but the Caribbean and the Spanish Main were the source of legendary wealth and the sugar trade was starting to develop. The plan was to develop and control



Arms of “The Company of Scotland Trading to Africa and the Indies”(Wikipedia)

a trade route across the Isthmus. Scotland had fine soldiers and could surely carve out a lucrative colony in the area.

Almost every family with any wealth in Scotland invested in the scheme. Estimates of the capital invested range from 15% to 40% of the total capital in Scotland. In 1695, a fleet of five ships set sail with other reinforcements to follow.

To cut a long story short, the expedition was a total disaster<sup>2</sup>. Many lives were lost and all of the funds invested were lost as well. This led directly to a takeover of Scotland by England in 1707. While somewhat dignified by its description as a Union of the Parliaments, in reality Scotland had no choice, it was bankrupt and out of options.

So how did this affect the modern world? Well, after 1707 Scotland doubled down on Empire, only this time it was a British Empire rather than a Scottish Empire.

All of those investments in education? Scotland became the most literate country in Europe and exported its sons and daughters across the world to every far flung country of the British Empire: Canada, India, Australia and the United States (part of the first British Empire). Political and business leaders across the world have Scottish heritage. Neil Armstrong, the first man on the moon was of Scottish decent. Arguably the Scottish diaspora is one of the most influential in history. All because of a disastrous investment in Darien.

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<sup>1</sup>Actually the first European to make it across the Isthmus was Balboa, and Cortez was in Cuba at the time. Keats may have confused Balboa’s account with Cortez’s first sight of the Vale of Mexico, or maybe he thought it scanned better. No word on whether either Cortez or Balboa were stout.

<sup>2</sup> Ransome fans will be intrigued to know that one of the Darien venture’s early and few successes was to capture Crab Isle off Puerto Rico.

## 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/)

## Beckfoot Kitchen — Eating with the Swallows and Amazons

### Separated by a Common Language

by Molly McGinnis (Manteca, California)

*England and America are two countries separated by a common language:* George Bernard Shaw

...as any North American who's tried to make dishes from the Swallows and Amazons books quickly finds out.

### Have a biscuit

But which biscuit? A thin, crunchy, slightly sweet tidbit served with tea or coffee, or a thick quickbread to split and slather with butter and honey or blanket with sausage gravy?



English digestive biscuits



American biscuits

Both kinds are easy to make (see the recipes on the next page). You simply blend butter into flour and leavening (baking powder or baking soda), then add a little salt for American biscuits, or a little sugar for British biscuits, scones or shortcake. The dough is moistened with egg, milk, cultured milk (kefir, buttermilk, yoghurt) or a mixture. Then you roll, drop, or pat out the dough and shape it into rounds, squares, triangles or fancy shapes. All are baked in a moderately hot oven: 375- 400°F (190-200°C).

They can be baked on a cookie pan, pie plate, or even a doubled piece of heavy-duty aluminum foil.

British breads of all kinds are usually made with part whole wheat, and I like to use part whole wheat for flavor, even in American biscuits. Soft whole wheat pastry flour and all-purpose flour are the kinds to use.

The method is the same for all: mix dry ingredients (except sugar) and butter to make little crumb-sized lumps. You can make the dough in a

food processor with short bursts of the metal blade, or mix with your fingertips and a fork.



Crumb-sized flour/butter mixture



### Of course you can buy biscuits!

With British biscuits just open the packet and serve. With American biscuits just buy a tube, whack on the counter, separate the biscuits and bake. It's fun!

*(But read the ingredients; you may decide to try making your own.)*

## Make biscuits

### *British Tea Biscuits*

Use all or half whole wheat pastry flour for traditional (and popular) digestive biscuits.

Mix:

2 c flour (half or all ww pastry flour)

1/4 tsp baking soda

Dribble over dry ingredients and mix in:

4 T (1/2 cube) melted butter

Stir in:

2-4 T sugar

Moisten with:

a standard large egg

first beaten with a fork enough to mix white and yolk.

Add a little at a time to make a dough firm enough to roll out. Finish with milk if the dough is too dry to hold together. One large egg worked for me.

Roll out thin (1/8", height of 2 stacked quarters) or thicker (1/4", the handle of a wooden spoon or the square end of a Chinese chopstick are close). If you don't have a rolling pin you can roll out with a wine bottle.

Cut out with a round cutter (a 1-cup measuring cup was about the right size), transfer to a cookie pan with a spatula. Push the remaining scraps together, and roll out again. You can make both thicknesses to see which you like best.

Bake at 375°F until lightly browned, about 15 minutes.

Fancy it up: Roll sugar into the tops, pile a few chocolate chips on each biscuit toward the end of baking, spread over half the biscuit when done. Sandwich two thin biscuits with jam or chocolate bits melted as above; add powdered ginger, candied ginger bits, candied lemon rind or nuts, chopped fine, to either.

### *American Dinner Biscuits*

Mix:

2 c flour, 1/2 tsp salt

1 1/2 tsp baking powder (if using milk)

or

a scant tsp baking soda (if using cultured milk).

Dribble on 2 T melted butter and mix well.

Have ready to add, a little at a time,

3/4 c milk or cultured milk

When the dough starts to come together in big lumps press them together. Add a few drops more liquid if the lumps won't stick to themselves.

Dust a surface with flour, pat out to a rough oval about 1" thick, and cut circles or squares. Crowd the biscuits if you prefer soft sides, space them out for more crunch. For a sloppy dough to drop by spoonfuls into a pie pan or to bake over a stew, add 1-2 T more milk.

To make scones: Add about 2 tsp sugar. Pat out to about 1", cut into triangles.

To make shortcake: Pat scone dough into baking pan, 1 to 1 1/2" thick. Bake 375-400; cut squares, split, then heap strawberries onto the middle and top to serve. Whipped cream over all is traditional.



### **Are British Biscuits Cookies?**

Molly says no: "I looked at 70 of the most popular American cookies. Not a crunch among them..." Cookies are all soft, full of sugar and salt.

As a Canadian, I think our situation is a little different. As in many things,

Canada floats somewhere uncomfortably between the U.K. and the U.S.A. on the biscuits/cookies question. Crunchy cookies are easily found on our supermarket shelves, but so are crunchy biscuits: "Dads Oatmeal Cookies" vs. "Peak Freans Digestive Biscuits", for example.

Of course a look at Tesco's website in the U.K. finds a confusing mixture of "biscuits" and "cookies", thanks to the ubiquity of American brands, so who knows.

My favourite example there is "Oreo Vanilla Cookie Sandwich Biscuits"!

**Ed.**



## What about meat pies?



It was a cook's pride to be known for such a hand for pastry that she could raise the soft pastry for a pork pie like those Mrs. Dixon makes (left). Aunt Maria might have accepted a pie like this for a picnic, but never for the dinner table. The meat pie in whose juice Nancy and Peggy dipped their fingers "to try what it was like" in *Swallowdale* would have been like steak and mushroom pie (shown in the middle), a thick stew with a pastry crust.

There are meat pies in every book but *Great Northern* (did Uncle Jim forget to put meat pies on his grocery list?).

Mrs. Dixon's pork pies are distributed to friends and neighbors, and other meat pies are eaten often and throughout. Everyone eats them, and more than once. Tinned steak and kidney pies, pork pies from Rio shops, hot pies from a seal, Cook's meat pies, and more.

But here's a strictly American version to bake with biscuit dough (right). My father-in-law, who lived in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin when he invented it, called it: "Tosa Sausage Chowder:

**Note:** Any of the Ransome crews could easily have made this chowder afloat or ashore, perhaps using cut up sausage links browned as above. Cook might have wilted a minced onion with the drained, browned sausage, and added cut up garden vegetables – a few cut up green beans, a handful of peas, perhaps a diced carrot, and a bay leaf. But did Cook ever have bottled tomatoes?

### Or a slice of pie

I wouldn't anyone not desperately homesick for a taste of Britain to try to make a raised pork pie, but pastry-topped savory pies made with anything from mince to mushrooms are also popular in Britain.

The filling is always a thick precooked stew and the crust can be any kind of

pastry, from rolled out biscuit dough to many-layered puff paste to a store-bought pie crust. Bake under mashed potatoes and you have shepherd's pie. A thick topping of bread crumbs toasted with butter can be delicious but does that make a stew a pie?

American supermarket freezers have

### 'Tosa Sausage Chowder

First, in a deep saucepan, brown:

1 lb of the best bulk pork sausage you can buy  
Break it up as it cooks. Drain off the fat. Meanwhile, open cans.

Add:

1 28 oz can (the large size) tomatoes  
a tomato juice can of water (or more)

Drain the juice (it's too sweet to add to the chowder) from:

1 can kidney beans  
1 can corn (I use frozen, about 1/2 pkg)

Bring to the boil, simmer a few minutes, and serve.

For a 'Tosa Chowder Pie, put the hot chowder into a casserole, drop spoonfuls of firm biscuit dough (or round biscuits) over the top, and bake at 375°F to cook and brown the biscuits, 15 minutes to 1/2 hour.

sort of a poor relation to British savory pies: "pot pies" with a small portion of some kind of stew baked in piecrust. I expect an individual size of any hot meat pie would freeze well and taste better, if baked in a foil pan (and was well wrapped before freezing).

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

### *Drawn at a Venture* (the 2014 Amazon publication)

Ransome's "Saturday articles" for the *Manchester Guardian*, 1929-1932, edited by Paul Crisp.

By Simon Horn (Montreal, Quebec)

*Neither the countryside that a man knew as a child nor the book that he loved can be indifferent to him as he grows old. Even if he now lives far away from that country the child wakes in him when he thinks of a friend going there. If he lives there the child in him is never more than half asleep. In the same way, when a man has greatly loved a book he read in childhood he gets the pleasure from seeing new children reading it that he gets from seeing them gathering chestnuts or galumphing (from gallop and jump, the action being a combination of both) long after chestnuts have lost their value for him and there is no longer that spring in his heart and his muscles that made him once prefer galumphing*

From July 1929 to January 1932, Arthur Ransome wrote a regular "Saturday article" for the *Manchester Guardian* newspaper. This despite the fact that he had ostensibly resigned, continuing his "Rod and Line" fishing essays until mid-September but refusing a possible post first as *Guardian* Berlin correspondent and later as the newspaper's literary editor.

Ransome had decided that the time had come to do what he really wanted and, after giving notice to the newspaper on March 19, began writing *Swallows and Amazons* on March 24. The above quote from his November 30 article perhaps makes clear what he was about, and helps explain why he went on to create a much-beloved series of classics stories.

But wait, you say! Hadn't he resigned? How did he end up writing a weekly article for the *Guardian* for almost three more years? A good question, and one which Paul Crisp answers in his extensive introduction to *Drawn at a Venture*, which collected all of Ran-

*to any other form of progress. He gets that pleasure and rather more, because though he does not want to gather chestnuts or galumph he can read that book again, and reading it can shrink in weight and knowledge and be himself what once he was before ever he was submitted to the assault and battery of the world, which, when he considers it, he is surprised to have survived. Reading that book he recovers his own childhood. And to see a child reading it is to be himself a child, looking over the other child's shoulder and sharing page by page the old enchantment.*

from "Thorstein's Country", Ransome's Saturday article for November 30, 1929

some's Saturday articles for Amazon Publications so that we could read them now, much later.

The short answer: Ransome felt an obligation to the *Guardian* and to its new editor, his friend Ted Scott.

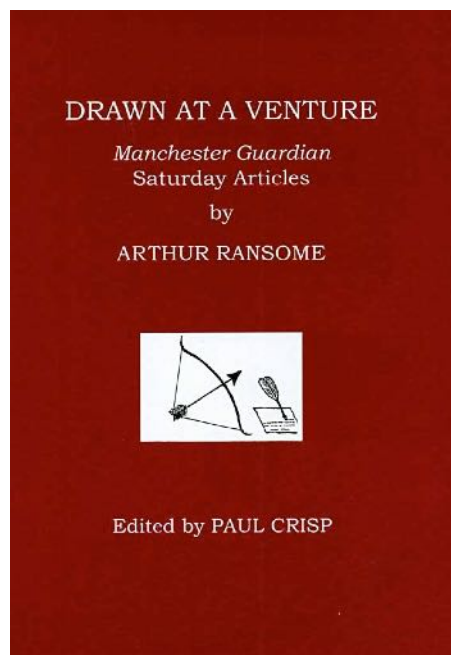
Crisp goes into great detail about the whole process, and then explains the origins of the "Saturday article",

which were a *Guardian* tradition. Crisp then talks about his own history of writing regular articles of a similar sort – and its difficulties – then goes on to discuss other people who have done so, such as Alistair Cooke, Clives James, etc.

I found myself thinking, this is all very well, but let's move on to Ransome's articles...

To be fair, Crisp does provide an important quote from Ransome, who later said in his *Autobiography*:

"The same old trouble of thirty years before showed itself again. I could not at one and the same time write stories and essays. Mine is a stiff and woodenish mind unable to vault from groove to groove. Further, the essays were taking a great deal more time than they were worth. I used to spend as much as three days in writing and rewriting. Then, the moment one of them was on the way to Manchester, I was worried nearly off my head in head in planning the next."



Crisp then presents some of his favourite articles, including “Speed and Travel”, “Keeping Fit”, “Lilliput Cricket”, “Visitors from Town”, “Pantomime” and “It Takes Two”. (Following the articles themselves he sometimes provides useful “footnotes” where he thinks today’s reader might need an explanation of people or ideas from 80 years ago.)

As you can see from the titles alone, the Saturday articles were meant to be light and varied. Ransome, in his first article, explains it as follows:

“The Saturday article as I understand it evades any close connection with rapidly decomposing news. It should not need at all costs to be read at once before the news is stale. It assumes in its reader a temporary freedom from the treadmill of economic compulsion. It may discuss things of to-day or to-morrow or yesterday, but it harks back for its mood to the time when the reading of a newspaper was a leisurely affair.”

Among my many favourites, other than “Thorstein’s Country”, are “Between Two Lives”, where Ransome looks at the different personas we take on while travelling and how some people like that and some people don’t; “Decided Opinions”, about the dangers of examining decided opinions, and the influence family, class,

and digestion can have on them; and “Forgettory”, as opposed to memory – Ransome quotes a “Rowley of Ancoats”, who said, “I had a good memory; lately I have developed a forgettorry”.

If you are not lucky enough to have a copy of *Drawn at a Venture*, you can read the whole of Ransome’s first article on the *Guardian* newspaper website here: <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2015/jul/13/arthur-ransome-on-writing-saturday-articles-1929>

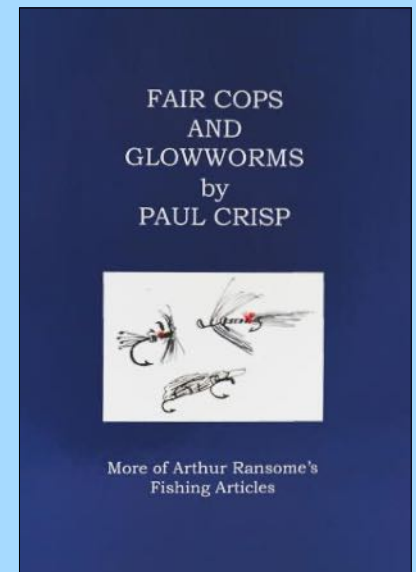
Unfortunately, all the others are harder to get. They are no doubt available in the *Guardian*’s archives at <https://theguardian.newspapers.com>

But that costs money: \$9.95 US a month for a subscription, apparently to thousands of newspapers around the world if you need them. (Of course there is a 7-day free trial, so if you worked very hard you might find all of the *Drawn at a Venture* articles in a week!)

As for the book itself, *Drawn at a Venture* does not appear on the TARS Stall page on the TARS website, so I assume it is out of print. You can find it on [abebooks.com](http://abebooks.com), and when I looked (on Sept. 21), four copies were listed, all in the U.K., but the cheapest was \$55 US shipped to Canada.

I am only part way through – it is a long book – but I shall go on to the end, enjoying Ransome’s combination of knowledge, insight and gently biting wit. Get a copy if you can.

### Fair Cops and Glowworms



Paul Crisp’s other anthology of Ransome essays is *Fair Cops and Glowworms*, published by Amazon in 2011. It collects Ransome’s essays on fishing that have not appeared elsewhere

I do not have this book, but it is still available on the TARS Stall, and it costs only £10 plus shipping. If you want it, check it out [on the website](#) (you will have to log in as a member).

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

The position of TARSUS coordinator is open; if you are interested, [please volunteer...](#)

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Please send contributions, questions and suggestions for the newsletter to the editor.