



Furthest South



Volume 23 Number 4

Newsletter of The Arthur Ransome Society in Australia and New Zealand



Fremantle Harbour.

5th February 1987.

"Island Princess" "Vistafjord"

"Coral Princess"

"Royal Viking Sky"

"Achille Lauro"

"Sea Goddess I"

Out there at the America's Cup

John Parsloe

Snap! A lanyard gone, a sail flapping free. 'Ooooh!' from the crowd by the rails of our listing ship 'out there'.

Out there in early 1987, watching a race in the finals of the America's Cup off Fremantle, Western Australia, from our ship, *Sir Walter Raleigh*. Our vessel had been hired out to be a viewing platform 'out there' for the duration of the Cup. On any racing day, we would steam from the harbour to our designated position in the line-up of watching passenger ships and launches to view the duel between challenger and defender tacking it out for victory in that race, 'out there.'

We had spent Christmas in Melbourne, before sailing on to Fremantle for Cup duties. Our official host was the Australian Naval base, HMAS Stirling, at Garden Island in Cockburn Sound, 50 km south of Perth. We had initially berthed at the base to spend time sprucing up our vessel and preparing for its role as a large floating grandstand out there on the yachting race circuit. While we were there, those who needed them were offered the opportunity to buy new white uniforms, at navy prices. As the Officer-In-Charge, I too took the opportunity to join the queue – in preparation for the 'party time' cruises we were going to do as fundraisers for our ship during the Cup period.

Captain 'Bombie Tommy' had rejoined the vessel in Melbourne as Master, to take the ship as far as Fremantle so he could then join in the party scene. He had been the Master when on the Pandora Project in northern Queensland. This is

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where he received his nickname, dodging the bombies (coral outcrops) with *Sir Walter Raleigh* around the Pandora wreck site. In Fremantle Tommy's old mate, Jim, had also rejoined as Chief Engineer, with his wife, for the onward trip to their old hometown of Hull, U.K. This was also the homeport of our vessel and the final destination. During this period a notable visitor to Fremantle was Princess Anne – there was to be a reception for her at the Flying Angel Seamen's Mission in Fremantle. For Tommy, this was a must-be-there: he employed a local photographer to tag along to get a good photograph of him, in full uniform, with Princess Anne – the Glasgow boy made roguishly good, out in Queensland, Australia!

When prepared, we moved the ship to the port proper at Fremantle, where all the other passenger ships had gathered, plus a sailing ship or two. We were the minnows of the real estate. The Fremantle berth made us more accessible to our sponsors and our ever-helpful Agent. Sarah, an ex-Venturer and now Chief Steward, would spend her day at the Agent's office, organising sponsored provisions for the ship for the homeward voyage to Britain. Shell Oil, a strong supporter of Operation Raleigh, the international youth organisation charity our vessel belonged to, was going to supply the fuel. In exchange, they had the use of the ship for crucial races of the Cup - they were flying in guests from all over Australia and the world to view the races from our vessel. We would provide continuous lunch and refreshments on the main Reception Deck area, with our smartly-dressed ex-Venturer crew members as waitresses and waiters.

Fremantle had changed dramatically since I was last there, for the America's Cup had caused a transformation of the waterfront area. This was now the place to be seen and to wine and dine. Fashionable shops had sprung up where previously there were watersiders' humble cafes and the like. By the beachfront were half-built Alan Bond extravaganzas. On one of the small lanes off the esplanade area was an old limestone-walled warehouse of a 'Cape Dutch' architectural style from the early 1900s. A New Zealand couple from Nelson had converted the small warehouse into a magical wooden toys workshop (for him) and children's bookshop (for her). Her bookshop even included some of the *Swallows & Amazons* books! I bought a wooden toy soldier and a wooden cannon, to become mementos for the ship of the Pandora Project we had recently come from in northern Queensland. A small silver plate was engraved and attached to the cannon to commemorate that project. From time to time, the Agent took me out to his Club for lunch. It was near his office, tucked away out of the hustle and bustle of the new town, in peace and quiet. And yet, it was so close to all that activity.

We also made a few celebrity trips between the Garden Island Naval Base and Fremantle. Jimmy Edwards, the comedian, was staying in Perth for the summer and he joined us for one

cruise, quite scruffy-looking and not much humour on display. He possibly found the ship's motion not to his liking? He sat in the pilot's seat for most of the time, while taking part in a live talkback show with a local radio station. Another of the cruises was as a 'thank you' to our navy hosts. On this occasion, it was the smartly-dressed Vice Admiral in charge of the Australian Navy out in Western Australia who sat in the pilot's seat for the trip.

It was now time for me to have a break. So I flew off home to New Zealand for a few weeks, until the finals of the Cup. After that was over, there was going to be the long, challenging, homeward voyage to the United Kingdom for the vessel. And for me uncertainty as to when I'd finally be returning to New Zealand.

When I rejoined the ship after my break away, the Cup finals were just starting. Each race-day we would join the queue of passenger ships sailing out of Fremantle to take our pre-arranged positions around the yacht racing circuit. On one trip, we had a Fremantle photographer on board who had asked if we would be the last ship to return to port that day so he could get an interesting photograph of all the other vessels lined up back at their berths in Fremantle. This we did; the only acknowledgement that we were part of the scene was our little red rubber duckie inflatable in one corner of the photo, taking crew members ashore for mooring-up duties when we berthed at the far end of the queue!

Then it was all over. 'Out there', there had finally been a winner and the victorious challenger was taking the Cup back home to America. The party was over and it was now time for us to leave. We would be off to Cape Town via Amsterdam Island. A birdwatcher from Melbourne and a seaweed scientist from Townsville had joined us to visit that French island.

So we departed, off to chase the elusive Amsterdam Island Albatross somewhere 'Out There' in the southern Indian Ocean.



AusTARS – a brief history

Jan Allen

Dr Jim Hawkins was the first Australian to join TARS, in 1990, soon after its formation. Jim, who inaugurated and donated the AusTARS Cup award, acted as Coordinator for Australian members as our numbers grew steadily throughout the 1990s. Some of these early members are still active in TARS, nearly thirty years later. During those years, members' involvement in TARS was limited to communications to and from TARS UK.

Despite never meeting face to face, AusTARS at this time had access to a growing body of fascinating publications about AR, his writings and his life, as researchers such as Ted Alexander, Roger Wardale, Christina Hardymont, Ann Farr and others unearthed a plethora of information of interest to TARS about AR and the writing of *The Twelve*. Several members of the Altounyan family offered their involvement, with Brigit Sanders acting as President for a number of years. Some of the current owners of AR's extant boats, such as Ted Evans, also added further dimensions to TARS.

Online communication between members grew throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, as platforms providing for the sharing of information and experiences, and a forum for discussion, became available to UK and overseas members. Points were hotly debated, on formal and informal sites, as opinions varied!

In late 1998, some Australian members, comparing their isolated and solitary fandom with the rich program of activities available to members in the UK regions, proposed a gathering of members from different states in Hobart, whilst the Wooden Boat Festival was being held (in those days, it was a November event). With a good number of Australian members owning or sailing boats, and some exhibiting them at the Festival, it was



thought there might be a good response to the suggestion. The group of members, who came from several states, enjoyed a full program of activities and discussion and the weekend was a success.

From that gathering arose ideas for a newsletter, events in different states, and the general plan to create our own TARS fun here. Quite a few members had attended IAGM weekends held at AR-related sites in the regions of the UK and shared experiences and ideas from their visits. TARS in NSW and Victoria were invited to picnic gatherings in early 1999, and those who

met then formed the nucleus of subsequently active groups of members in both states. Ralph Seccombe initiated Corroboree Weekends at Jindabyne, attended by members from three states, with sailing a focus, while southern members gathered at a variety of events held in Victoria.



Over the next decade, I found it rewarding to be able to plan our program of activities, with the assistance of other mem-

bers, and I was able to travel to weekend gatherings in WA, SA, NSW, and Tasmania when they took place. Members offered their homes, boats, expertise and ideas. As well as older members, there were several families involved, with very keen and creative juniors contributing to some enjoyable themed weekend camps. There were then around sixty AusTARS members. Often they were prepared to travel from interstate to events. In the next decade, a memorable weekend was held on Coochiemudlo Island, near Brisbane, for QTARS and some WaraTARS, but, as families grew up, the time for these 'corroboree' gatherings began to pass, though lasting longest in NSW.



I have enjoyed my long involvement with *Furthest South*, from its beginnings, and as its editorship passed in turn to other members I have remained as copy editor. Eventually, after some urging by the overseas groups, TARS UK became aware

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of our activities 'down under' and we were able to be recognised by some representation in *Signals*, via selected material from our newsletter. The newsletter remains an important communication link between all of our far-flung TARS and continues to offer members in Australia, and now in New Zealand, a voice and the opportunity to publish research and comment on all things TARS.



Despite many people being aware of AR and the books, especially within the sailing fraternity, not all folk appreciative of AR have desired to acquire membership of TARS, despite the best efforts of members to publicise TARS and recruit more members; thus, members came and went, and although our membership remained small but fairly steady for some years, it has been steadily declining over recent years and our demographic is an ageing one. The books are no longer held in libraries or schools, and the technological age has altered childhood experiences and the role of reading enormously, so reaching and appealing to younger generations and busy families is more difficult now.



Another factor in AusTARS' evolution has been the modern concern with Health and Safety requirements, now also reflected in TARS UK's direction. Some years ago, our then Coordinator, David Bamford, assisted by other members, who thereafter formed a committee, incorporated AusTARS in Victoria as a not-for-profit organisation, in order to facilitate compliance with the expected legal and other requirements for the protection of members. AusTARS and TARS UK now have policies in place to ensure the safety of members. Planning for events is subject to rigorous scrutiny and guidelines. Mother can no longer light-heartedly wave her offspring off for parentless adventures in *Swallow!* It has also become more difficult to find sites allowing free camping and access to water for events such as those held in the past at Myall Lakes and Berri-ma.

David Bamford also created AusTARS' initial website, and now internet communication and presence is an essential part of any organisation's modus operandi.

On the plus side, despite the curbing effects of the pandemic on our activities over the past two years, AusTARS in all states probably now know each other far better than was possible previously, and have certainly enjoyed friendly discussion and companionship via our pandemic-inspired Zoom sessions. The bond established with our friends 'across the ditch' is valued and it has been rewarding also to establish closer links with other members overseas, including the TARS Board.

Over the years, many members have made enormous voluntary contributions to develop and improve what we are able to offer our members. There are too many people to list here, but I am grateful to them and to all members for their continued support and for the shared pleasures that membership of TARS continues to bring to me. We are very fortunate that our small but lively literary society still has a valued and relevant place in the world today.

Quiz: how well do you know *The Twelve*?

Jan Allen

Here are a couple of challenges for you to see how familiar you really are with the books, after all those re-readings!

1. Can you supply the missing words in these excerpts from *Peter Duck*? If you need some help, quite a few of the missing words are listed below, at random, following these three paragraphs.

‘It was a dark night and they could see outside the bulwarks except the.....lights on Start Point and the Eddystone L..... Sky,and sea were all, though patches of star-sprinkled sky showed now andbetween the blackoverhead.’

‘They hurriedagain to get into theirthings for washing, as on the old, happyof the outward voyage. They soused each other withof salt, and tookin driving the water along thewith the long-handled

‘And just then the copperclosed over them. Thewind from the seafell away to nothing. Then came a hotas if the cloud were throwingbefore it, abreath along the, from the south, where, already, the feathery greenwere fading in a ruddy brownas if they were behind aof coppery silk.’

Some words to help: heat trade nothing bathing suddenly haze clouds decks flashing

2. Also from *Peter Duck*, can you choose the correct option from (a), (b) or (c) to complete the sentences?

<p>1. She saw Peter Duck swing the mallet (a) straight at Black Jake’s head. (b) and smash the heavy box. (c) and strike the belaying-pin out of the link.</p>	<p>3. ‘I want one of them to take the wheel from Mr Duck, (a) and try a turn at steering.’ (b) while we’re hearing what the passenger has to say for himself.’ (c) so he can take a look at the chart with me.’</p>
<p>2. A few moments later, the water was pouring in on them through the seams of deck and sides, (d) and the wreck was getting wetter and wetter around them. (e) and they were desperately trying to keep it out of their sleeping bags. (f) and they put their heads inside their sleeping bags to keep dry.</p>	<p>4. So they sat down and fell to, Roger, Titty, Peggy and poor Bill, (a) who had to cut everything up into small bits. (b) who could only drink cocoa. (c) who was unable to eat anything.</p>

I am sure that you will be able to find the answers in your copy of *Peter Duck*!

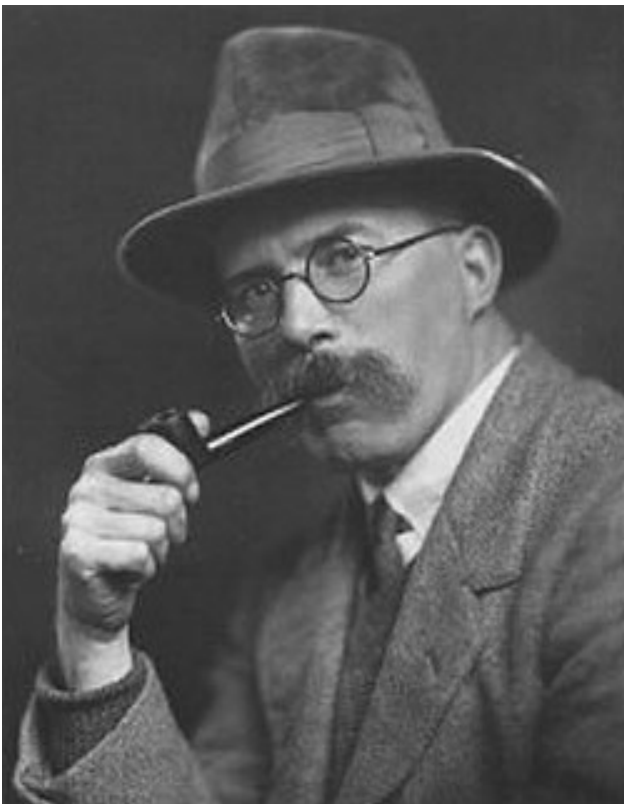
Arthur Ransome - influencer

Jan Allen

'Influencer' – a modern term for an effect as old as the hills. No, don't think fashion, Instagram, or the latest in cool whatever; instead, cast your mind back to your childhood and the excitement and passion aroused in you by, perhaps, a wonderful new experience, a fascinating person or a book or film that reached out and grabbed your consciousness and sensibilities and took them to a whole new level. Can you remember that feeling?

Everyone can recall pivotal moments in childhood that seared themselves into the psyche and altered the course of one's thinking and, often, the subsequent direction taken in life (I am only going to refer to the good things here; this isn't a therapy session). Perhaps they came from the first time you rode a horse, saw a ballet, had an outdoor adventure with Scouts, heard a piece of music or experienced the thrill of speed. Or, maybe, read a book.

Then you may have pestered your family to let you do whatever it was that had taken hold of your mind and heart, be it via lessons, new activities, or simply joining a library. Often, that dream could be unattainable. Not too many families were likely to provide the sailing dinghy desired by the young 1950s Ransome fan, or even the (then) expensive books, let alone the parentless island camping. But the seed was planted and the



yearning remained deep within, to be expressed and fulfilled in various ways in later life, even if subsequently curbed and limited by circumstance. So it is with reading any of *The Twelve*.

AR leaves his mark in many ways. That apparently straightforward but subtly eloquent prose absorbed by the young reader leads beyond the mere stirring of the adventure tale to an appreciation of particularly fine visual writing ('Softly, at first, as if it hardly meant it, the snow began to fall.'), of nuanced characters (Squashy Hat, the doctor), and of the ability to see clearly in the mind's eye his Lake country or Broadland settings so that they are instantly familiar when seen in photographs or eventually visited in reality.

You are also learning how to live. You don't realise this at the time, but, through his characters and their interactions and activities, AR shows you many things that *matter*: how to be well-mannered and considerate to others, to be courageous and steadfast in frightening situations, to be resourceful and independent, to show responsible leadership, to read situations, and to develop tact. These are important characteristics to acquire when growing up. And you thought you were just reading a good book!

Reading AR is starting to sound like tackling a treatise on morality. But he also shows you how to have FUN. Even the simplest or most boringly necessary parts of the adventures, such as wood-gathering, scrubbing the frying-pan or the ship's decks are packaged, not as tasks, but as reminders of the fact that just to be able to do these mundane chores means the characters have the privilege of enjoying the carefree freedom of their 'real world', away from the quotidian demands of school and the controlling world of adults. Nancy's schemes fire the imagination of the others, and everyone in the books goes on to make the most of all situations. This is an attitude that can be taken into adult life. And I find that that is exactly what many TARS of my acquaintance have done.

Some of you may now be sailors. Some may be adventure-seekers. Many will be exemplars in their chosen paths in life. You have probably learned to make the most of opportunities offered ('Grab a chance...') and to develop skills across many areas. You may be able to look back to your childhood reading of AR and see from where your life's interests, vocations and appreciations have stemmed. And you still know how to have fun! What gifts to have received.

Thank you, Arthur Ransome – influencer without peer!

Profile: David Batho, WaraTAR

I have decided to do my profile in the form of an 'interview' (where I interview myself).

Who am I?

I am a recently retired secondary teacher. I taught English and History, and occasionally Geography, for thirty-five years (from 1985 to 2020) at a government single-sex secondary agricultural boarding school in Tamworth, known as Farrer. I spent my entire teaching career there, so I must have liked it!

I grew up in Hornsby which, for those who don't know Sydney, is on its northern outskirts. I remember the circus coming to town, and setting up where there is now a hotel and shopping centre, and also remember a blacksmith on the other side of the railway. Hornsby changed a lot in the twenty-five years I was there, and even more in the thirty-six years I've been in Tamworth! (And no, I'm still not considered a local here!)

Family?

I am separated from my wife (of thirty-one years), and I have two children: a daughter, Cate, who is twenty-one, and a son,



Adam who is eighteen. My son loves Ransome. I'm not sure about my daughter, but give her time...

How did I come to know Ransome?

For that we have to blame (that is, thank) the teacher-librarian at Waitara Public School (which is actually in Wahroonga!), Mrs Simpson. She had the insight to think I would enjoy

Swallows and Amazons, and she was right! After reading the first one, I was delighted to discover there were more. (I think Mrs Simpson deserves credit as an evangelist for Ransome, as I know she introduced a lot of children at Waitara to his books.)

One of my greatest pleasures was being able to buy all the books from Mary Martin's, when it had a branch in Sydney. They were cheap, especially important to a university student on a tight budget, and they were the **hardback** editions. The only one I didn't buy then, much to my regret, was the first in the series as I already had a copy in hardback from September 1944, but without a dust jacket, so I was very pleased to find they were still available. Just out of interest, I note that this was its twentieth reprint since the illustrated edition appeared in 1931. (I'm guessing that the first edition didn't have illustrations.)

What other interests do I have?

Well, there are trains, trams, steam engines (get the picture...), so Ransome would probably be disappointed in me when I admit I'm rather fond of steamships, too... Oh, and model trains in TT scale (that will only make sense to fellow railway modellers).

Favourite authors (apart from Ransome)?

There are so many: can you have too much of a good thing? Chaucer, Dorothy L Sayers, PG Wodehouse, to name a few.

For writers about the sea, apart from Ransome, I am very fond of Nicholas Monserrat, especially *The Cruel Sea* (one of my all-time favourite books), Alistair MacLean, *HMS Ulysses*, CS Forester, *The Good Shepherd*, and Brian Callison and JE MacDonnell (an Australian who wrote several hundred books, mostly fiction). They not only seem to write from lived experience, but their characters are believable.

Regrets?

Probably lots...

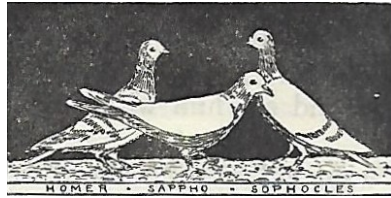
Scuttlebutt

David Batho found this interesting snippet in Wikipedia.

Scuttlebutt in slang usage means rumor or gossip, deriving from the nautical term for the cask used to serve water (or, later, a water fountain). The term corresponds to the colloquial concept of a water cooler in an office setting, which at times becomes the focus of congregation and casual discussion. Water for immediate consumption on a sailing ship was conventionally stored in a **scuttled butt**: a butt (cask) which had been scuttled by making a hole in it so the water could be withdrawn. Since sailors exchanged gossip when they gathered at the scuttlebutt for a drink of water, scuttlebutt became Navy slang for gossip or rumours...

Furphy, World War I Australian Army slang having the same meaning and similar provenance as above.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scuttlebutt>



The Pigeons' Posts



John Parsloe tells how he and Sylvia have so far 'survived' Covid and Lockdown!

We are fortunate in that we live in a small patch of bush on The Downs overlooking the country town of Geraldine, South Canterbury. The Council now tell us we are a 'site of natural significance'! What this really means is that when Covid came and lockdown followed, life didn't change too much — with such a property there is always something that needs to be done to help keep you fit for those more adventurous activities when away from the property. These have stopped, but for me there is now more writing and research time without feeling guiltily that I should be doing something else outside! Sylvia is far more social and creative than me, so she has found it a little more difficult to restrain herself to the property. It has meant some further 'garden design' in our bush, with encroachments of more garden beds into our glades of grass in the bush — N.Z. bush is rather green, but with Sylvia's vision we will be acquiring more splashes of colour in it in a natural way!



Congratulations to VicTAR, **Amie Cousins**, on the recent publication of *Aurora's End*, the final book in her young adult fantasy trilogy! Amie writes as Amie Kaufman, jointly with Jay Kristoff, and their latest title has received enthusiastic reviews. She tells us her next venture will be published in 2023 and will be set on a boat.



Young VicTAR **Bradley Spiers** has completed his first year of engineering study at university and is aiming for a career in aerospace. Influence of Dick?



During lockdown **Jan Allen** has had plenty of opportunity to observe the wildlife. She notes: 'There is now a mob of kangaroos resident locally, occasionally to be seen hopping down the road past the house, something not seen in previous decades. Sometimes a wallaby passes. The echidnas are very active in the clay banks, seeking the plentiful ants. Wombats are out after dark. Deer are now a local problem, as are still rabbits and foxes. Last year's young eagle seems to be living independently and it and its parents are seen regularly. A cuckoo is irritatingly vocal, night and day. Needs to find a mate! A powerful owl is sometimes heard. Magpies and currawongs have raised young this spring. The wildflowers have not been as abundant after a cold, wet winter and spring, but the wattle season, though late, was glorious and the olearias are making a fine show at present. Skinks are enjoying the warmer sunny days. Bees have been everywhere in the garden and we are watching for native bees as well. The mosquitoes have appeared, unfortunately, and a black variety of blowfly seems to have gained dominance. Worms are flourishing - good for the garden!



Cheryl Paget is keeping busy with more research on Ransome-related topics. We can look forward to seeing the results of her probings in *Furthest South* before long.



Phoebe Palmieri has been fascinated by watching the live stream of Melbourne CBD's pair of peregrine falcons that nest every year high up on a building in Collins Street (you probably read David Stamp's article in FS last year). This year they produced a brood of four chicks, three of which fledged successfully and have now gone on to adult life.



Library News: a recent addition to our AusTARS Library is the 1996 Amazon publication, *Ransome at Home: Snug Berths and Temporary Moorings*, by CE (Ted) Alexander. AR was a serial house-mover, and this is a fascinating account of his peripatetic life. Thanks to Catherine Lamont for this donation to the Library.

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Former AusTAR **Paul Rodwell** has relocated to the UK to live nearer his family. In recent emails he tells of his new life there:

It is great to have my son only a few minutes away and my daughter less than two hours' drive up the main road. So, sadly, I don't expect to ever visit you good people 'down south' and I won't be writing articles 'from the lake in the north'. Both my sailing boat, *Missee Lee*, and my houseboat, *Rosie Lee*, are still on the lake, giving pleasure to new owners.

At the end of most of the books there is something about what has just ended but a looking forward to it continuing into the future, but then the next adventure is different. So, for me, a new adventure begins.

Three cheers for the AusTARS!

And a little later in his email Paul continues:

I have been here nearly six months and am getting to gris with the new phase of my life. While I was 'self isolating' after arriving I thought I would read 'the books'. There were distractions, including other books recommended by family. I am now more widely read but I did get to the end of *Great Northern*?

It was an interesting experience: I thought I knew the stories but I found all sorts of new things; little pieces here and there that added to the characters. I found I was often angry with Nancy and those who gave way to her! Also I hadn't noticed how she and Daisy plotted together in *Secret Water*. I was always impressed by Dot in *The Big Six* but I found more to her and her literary aspirations as I read book by book. Altogether a good read.

During the six months I have been reunited with my boat, *Blue Dolphin*, but have decided it is time she went to someone else. For a while I plan to be less nomadic and hope to set down some roots here in Cornwall. *Blue Dolphin* always was primarily a place to live while I was in the UK; the boating aspect was a bonus. Now I have a permanent dwelling, it's small but adequate for one and close in to an interesting village, St. Columb Major.

Cornwall has similarities to Cape York Peninsula where I lived in Queensland, the biggest being its distance from the rest of the country (of course the distance here is smaller but relatively it is a long way to the rest of England). I have made contact with TARS south-west but so far haven't met any of them. All the activities thus far have been too distant to get there and back in a day by public transport!!! I'm hoping to go to Arthur's birthday celebrations which, although only an hour and a half away in a car, may take me three or four hours on a bus and two trains! The great plus of using buses and trains is that you see all sorts of countryside in comfort and while leaving the stress of handling the racetrack to someone else. After the open roads of North Queensland I am terrified at the thought of entering into the traffic here!

I will end with a little fishing story. I had moored for the night at a staithe on the river Wissey in Norfolk. Three fishermen arrived, an older man and two teenagers. The older one was casting a spinner and you could see it cutting through the clear water, shining in the afternoon sun. Then all of a sudden there was a big flash of silver, a swirl of water, the spinner had gone and the line was tight. There was a pike on the lure. It was fascinating to see and probably only possible because of the clear water and the angle of the sun. The pike was big enough but nothing like 'the world's whopper.'

We send our best wishes to Paul for his new life in the UK. –Ed.

VicTARS Christmas piñatas

Phoebe Palmieri

VicTARS always enjoy a party, and a Christmas party not least. Like many people, we are planning to make up for the lost two years by celebrating with more joy and relief than ever. As always, the main event will be dinner, but this will be interspersed with activities planned by Jan Allen. We now have a more or less traditional agenda. There are carols, sung by those who feel able and applauded by those who don't; perhaps a game or a quiz; ceremonial lighting of sparklers; readings from Christmas-related stories by members; and the home-made piñata. This last is always the subject of much hilarity as we take it in turns to take blind swipes in what we hope is the right direction. Will it be smashed with the first swipe, or will it prove so tough that everyone has to have two turns? What will it be this year? The first two were a lorikeet and a cat, but the piñata-maker was distressed to see these creatures bashed to pieces, and now only makes inanimate objects, as you can see in these photos.



Snowman (before)



Captain Flint's trunk



Lorikeet (previously unknown species)

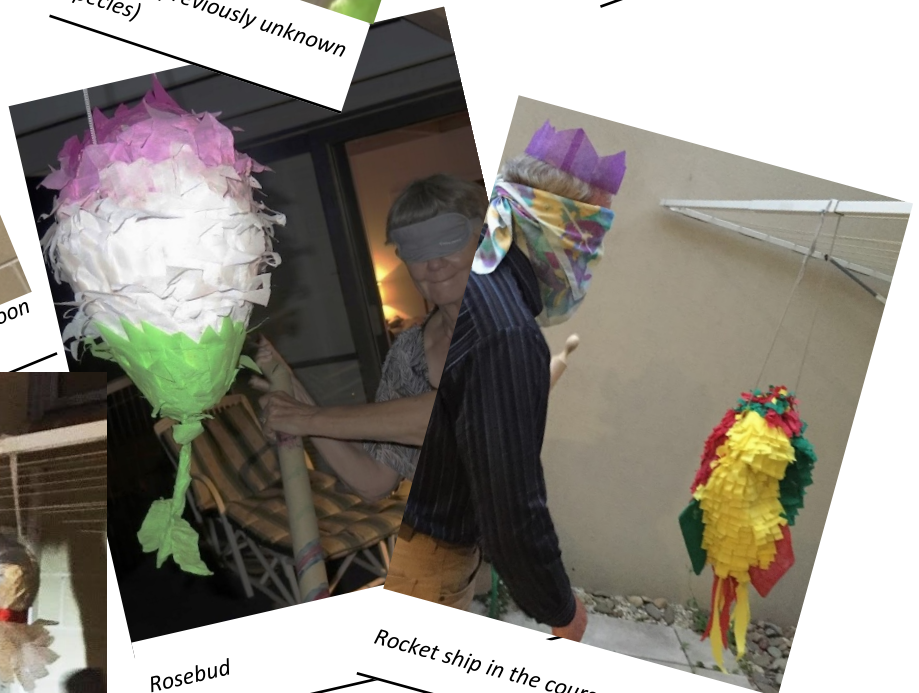
Strawberry



Hot air balloon



Snowman (after)



Rosebud

Rocket ship in the course of destruction

Proposed calendar of AusTARS events for 2022

* All scheduled events will only take place as COVID regulations permit.

Victoria

Saturday 22 January	AR Birthday Party	Emerald	
Saturday 19 February	AGM (11.30 am) and Beach Picnic	Brighton	Additional events may be added during the year, including gatherings in other states if these should prove feasible.
Sunday 6 March	Skating on the Tarn afternoon	Moorabbin	Any changes to dates or other necessary changes will be advertised in <i>Furthest South</i> or directly to members.
Saturday 2 April	Picnic by the Lake	Ballarat	
Sunday 1 May	Rowing Afternoon	Fairfield	
Saturday 4 June	PM/ML Day	Bendigo	All participants in AusTARS events must have proof of vaccination and adhere to state COVID regulations.
Saturday 16 July	Pirates and Plays Afternoon	Emerald	
Saturday 13 August	AR and the Romany Life	Tecoma	Members are most welcome to offer suggestions for events for consideration by the committee.
Saturday 10 September	Birdwatching Day	Werribee	
Saturday 29 October	Butterfly Day	Cranbourne Botanic Gardens	J. Allen Secretary jp8fillyjonk@bigpond.com
Friday 9 December	Christmas Party	East Ivanhoe	

Book review: The Invention of Nature: The adventures of Alexander von Humboldt, the lost hero of science

Jim Hawkins

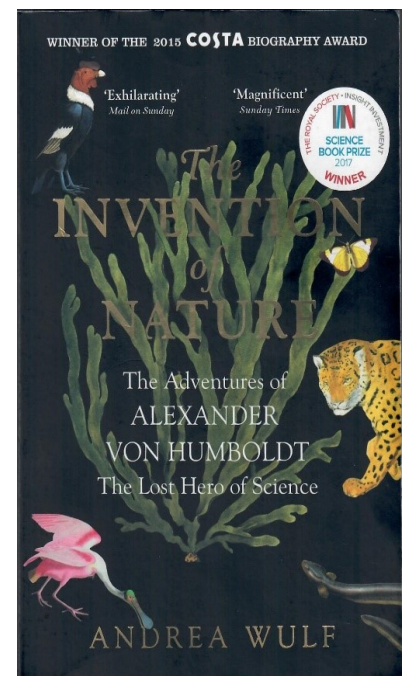
Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) came from a wealthy Prussian family. After studying science and mathematics at Gottingen he completed his studies at Freiberg, learning geology and preparing for a career in the Prussian Ministry of Mines. Imbued with a fine inquiring mind and a private income, Humboldt was never employed but went on to become a genuine polymath, a riveting lecturer and arguably the world's first ecologist.

In this readable and comprehensive biography, the author describes Humboldt's career and the enormous numbers of his scientific publications. He invented isotherms, the lines of temperature and pressure seen on weather maps, and the magnetic equator. In today's terms his most relevant discovery was the recognition of the connection between the natural world and the environmental consequences of humankind's mismanagement. After visiting South America in 1800 he showed how plant life was distributed according to altitude but was also able to see, at first hand, how poor agricultural practice rendered land infertile.

The story of the scientific and personal life of Humboldt, 'the man who made science accessible' is described in detail. The late 18th and early 19th centuries were momentous for many reasons, and the book outlines what was happening, historically and socially, in the context of what Humboldt was doing. It also details his friendship with Johann von Goethe, Thomas Jefferson, Simon Bolivar, Joseph Banks and Charles Darwin, to name just a few of the best minds of that era. It is comprehensive: 327 pages of Humboldt's life and times, 85 pages of notes relative to each chapter and a bibliography of 20 pages.

There is much information packed between the covers (I found it best taken in moderate doses). Recommended.

Wulf, Andrea. 2015. *The Invention of Nature: The adventures of Alexander von Humboldt, the lost hero of science*. London: John Murray.



High Topps and the Gulch copper mine

Garry Wood

In *Pigeon Post*, the Swallows, Amazons and D's, as young prospectors, thought they had found gold in their Gulch Mine on High Topps. When Captain Flint's chemical test showed it was copper instead of gold, it caused an unexpected twist to the story which carried on into the subsequent *The Picts and the Martyrs*. Surprisingly, Captain Flint's character, whose real interest was in the mining of copper, made only a small appearance in *Pigeon Post*, and none at all in *The Picts and the Martyrs*, but had a considerable influence on how both of the stories evolved.

As an adventurous youth, Jim Turner, as he was then, no doubt spent time roaming and investigating the old mine workings which were strewn across the Tilberthwaite Valley and adjacent areas. We are not told much about his youth, though in 1901 (*Swallowdale*, p. 338) he climbed the 'Matterhorn' (in reality Coniston Old Man) with his sister Molly and her future husband, Bob Blackett. After this, Jim apparently went on to study at Oxford University, but as he said in *Missee Lee*, p. 213, 'chucked Oxford before it chucked me, and went off to see the world instead'. This was probably in the Far East, as he mentioned being in Penang, Malaya in *Peter Duck*, p. 246, and Java, East Indies in *Swallowdale*, p. 101, when he said 'it was when I'd come a nasty bump in a ship's gig against the coast of Java.' In the 1920s he evidently decided to leave the sea and return to the Lake Country, where he purchased the houseboat for accommodation and settled down to write a book on his travels titled *Mixed Moss*, by *A Rolling Stone*.

Then he became interested in mining, and, with a renewed urge to travel, set off for Peru to look for gold. It was here that he met Timothy Stedding, the 'Squashy Hat' of *Pigeon Post*. Timothy was a prospector and miner, and would have studied mineralogy at university, and probably practical mining at a school of mines.

This joint expedition in Peru with Captain Flint was unsuccessful in finding gold, so while there they discussed returning to the Lake Country to look for copper deposits which old-time miners before them had missed. 'There was something I remembered seeing above High Topps', said Captain Flint, referring to the decomposed ore called gosson (or gossan), *Pigeon Post*, p. 376, which can give a good indication of minerals below.

In a *Mixed Moss* article discussing the place names AR had



Slater Bob and his light truck, with Timothy as passenger, and a wooden crate from Beckfoot on the rear deck, charge up the dusty rough track from the Dundale Road.

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Trans-Tasman Zoom Sessions

Phoebe Palmieri

At the beginning of this year the AusTARS Committee (like many of us) pondered the prospect of another year without social gatherings, TARry or otherwise. It was decided to try a video meeting via Zoom as a way of keeping in touch. The first session attracted participants from NZ and all over Australia, and was judged a success. Three further sessions were held during the year. In some of them we were delighted to welcome TARS from the UK and North America, in spite of the unsociably late or early hour in their time zones. Many people noted how enjoyable it was not only to catch up with old friends, but also to 'meet' people whom we'd previously only known as names or photographs.

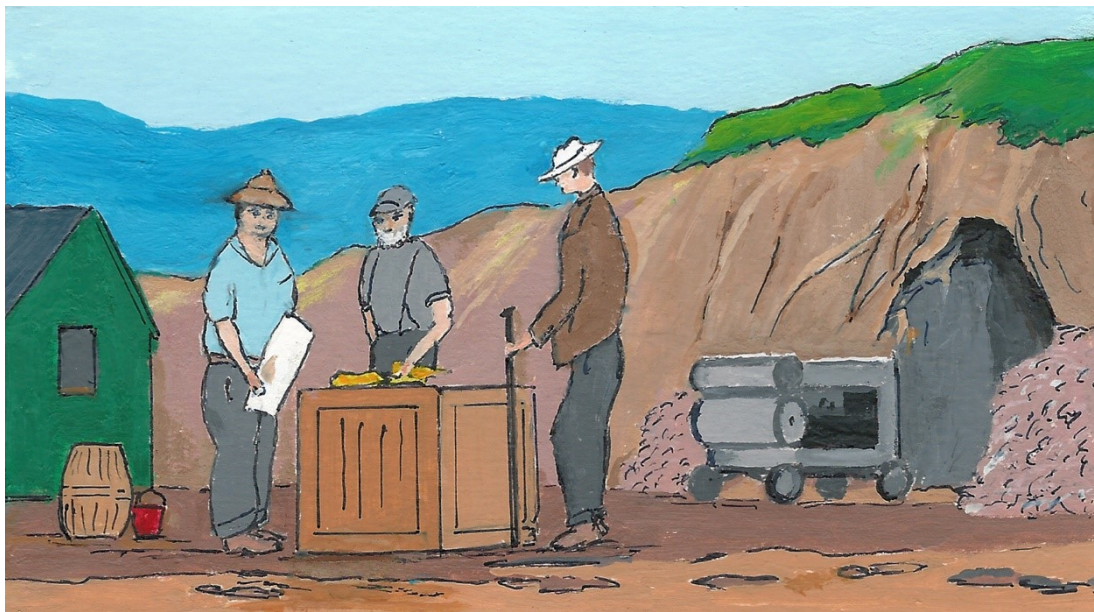
We plan to continue Zoom sessions in 2022, in March, June, September, and December, with international guests where possible. Dates will be advertised in the next *Furthest South* and will be at weekends.

invented for his Lakeland novels, the writer Matthew Townend (1996) describes how High Topps was derived from Old English *top*, 'hill top'. He was unable, however, to suggest why AR should insist on spelling the element with a double rather than single *p* as in the common noun, as this is hard to parallel in modern place-name forms.

The writer Christina Hardyment visited the Lake Country looking for clues to where *Pigeon Post* was actually located (Hardyment, 1984). In her book she gives descriptions of climbing Coniston Old Man, and also a not-far-off peak called Wetherlam. She found that 'High Topps', then, was not on the south-eastern slopes of the Old Man but on the south-eastern slopes of Wetherlam, the hill of a hundred (mining) holes. Maps on her book's front paper, and on p. 83 demonstrate this. Also 'the cliff-like sides of Wetherlam looked right for Ransome's Grey Screens'. These, of course, in the novel, gave a place for Timothy to paint his white spots as he traced the line of gosson down to the plateau.

AR does not give any dimensions for his High Topps, but a guess at his sketch map at the beginning and end of *Pigeon Post* suggests it would be about one kilometre long by five to six hundred metres wide.

The late Roger Wardale, in his three books on the Lake Country and elsewhere, shows a single photograph of the Wetherlam plateau in each book, p. 84 (1996), p. 96 (2000), and p. 97 (2010). Each gives a rather different aspect of the place, one of gently undulating hills, another of rough rocks and dry grass, and the third a wide level area of stubble, being the most like that of a true plateau. None of the photographs gives a precise



At the Gulch copper mine Captain Flint, Timothy and Bob meet to examine quartz/copper samples, and to discuss progress with the mine tunnelling.

name to the area, though some maps vaguely refer to it as 'Coniston Moor', or perhaps part of an area known as 'Above Beck Fells' (Wardale 1996, p. 97).

When Captain Flint arrived at Beckfoot from overseas he examined the samples Dick had brought from the Gulch and said the yellow ore in them looked like copper pyrites. He then did a chemical test which confirmed it was copper. Adam Quinan, in a related article in *Mixed Moss* (2006), explains that 'copper pyrites' is a mineral compound of iron and copper sulphide (CuFeS_2) also known as chalcopyrite. It is not a pure metal and is softer and more brittle than either gold or copper metal. This is one of the richest forms of copper ore, and so no wonder Captain Flint was so pleased!

Captain Flint noted that the copper was embedded in a vein of quartz. Adam says, 'Quartz is chemically identical to beach sand, silicon dioxide or SiO_2 . The only difference is that when the quartz becomes broken up it turns to grains of sand by weathering'. In *Pigeon Post*, it was where, in the Gulch the young prospectors found, between two side-by-side rocks, a thin vein of quartz, and in it was the yellow sparkle of minerals.

Captain Flint's obvious enthusiasm for High Topps, once he had seen the copper samples Roger Walker had found, would see him wanting to start mining as soon as possible. However, there was the question of who actually owned the area. Possibly it was the Crown, and, if so, it is likely he would have had to get some sort of mining licence to proceed. There are several mentions in *Pigeon Post* of sheep tracks through the heather on the Topps, but no mention of sheep being there. Perhaps Atkin-

son's farm leased the area for grazing sheep, but because of the drought conditions and lack of feed had withdrawn them down to their own farm on the lower side of the Dundale Road. Just as well, considering the fire which later razed the area.

When permission to go ahead with the mine was obtained, Captain Flint and Timothy brought the slate miner Slater Bob in to commence the tunnelling required. Bob had an extensive knowledge of copper mining in the

district, having worked in a copper mine as a lad. In *Pigeon Post*, relating the history of the ore, he said, 'folk had been mining the fells for some 500 years ,but was incorrect on one point, saying Queen Elizabeth I and her Dutchies had been there. Elizabeth I may have been there and did indeed import skilled miners to Cumbria to increase copper production, but they came from the Austrian Tyrol, rather than from the Netherlands (Cameron and Withey, 2017). Nevertheless, Bob was a busy worker and soon began extending the level. As he progressed with the tunnel, Captain Flint numbered sections, probably with paint on the level wall, and from these sections Timothy collected samples for his chemical analyses.

To get the mining under way, access to get equipment to the mine was one of the first considerations. That required a track or rough road constructed up from the Dundale Road to the Gulch. Bulldozers, first invented in Kansas, USA, in 1923, could do the job, though it is not known if any were present in Cumbria in the early 1930s. Alternatively, tractors or draft horses hauling ploughs and then discs could do the same if avoiding the more stony areas. Remember the two huge wooden crates which arrived for Captain Flint at Beckfoot labelled 'International Mining Equipment Corporation' (*Pigeon Post*, p. 281). Dick wondered what was in them, and we can only guess. Possibly an air compressor and equipment for drilling holes in rock for explosives. Also, a stone crusher for separating copper ore from unwanted quartz or stone. Further, a prefabricated shed for storing these items when not in use.

All of this could be brought up from Beckfoot in the light truck that I suggested (in a *Furthest South* article [Wood, 2021]) that Bob owned. It can be imagined Bob and Timothy driving up the Dundale Road which in those days was unsealed, pot-holed and dusty (remember Captain Flint driving Rattletrap at speed up it).

When Bob and Timothy reached the Topps, they turned onto the Gulch track for an even rougher ride. Their light truck lurched over ruts and loose stones, brushing aside the clumps of heather, and startling any grouse there into flight, and so on till they reached

the Gulch. Bob would also need the truck for getting from his cottage in the morning, and returning at night.

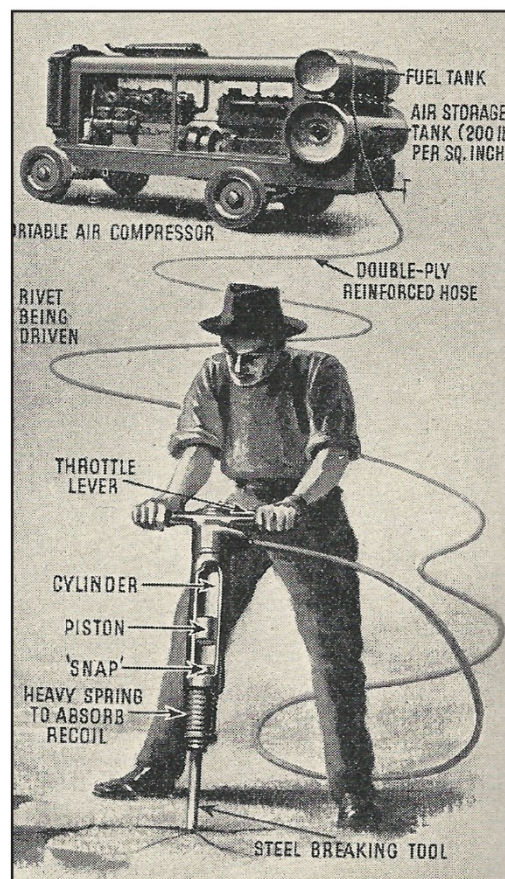
When the decision was made to commence exploratory mining of the copper, Captain Flint, Timothy, and Bob met at the Gulch to decide how to go about it. The three of them examined the rust-like gossan that Timothy had found on the hillside and reasoned that it gave a good indication that mineable ore lay below it, and that a tunnel driven beneath could intercept the vein. Bob then examined the rock on the inside of the long-abandoned Gulch mine, and said that it was all hard rock and would not need any shoring.

When, in *The Picts and the Martyrs*, the Amazons, D's and Timothy visited the Gulch a year later, they found Bob in the process of setting off explosives to bring down more rock and ore. After the rock dust had settled, they entered the cave, which had become a miner's adit. The level formed from this would be about 50 to 100 metres in length, depending upon how hard the rock was to bring down. Bob explained to Dick that narrow grooves in the rock walls had been the results of

drilling to place explosive cartridges. These grooves showed that the holes had been drilled mechanically, rather than laboriously by hand. Captain Flint must have bought a petrol-engined portable air compressor which was placed outside the mine adit. From this, a flexible pipe ran into and along the level where it was attached to a rock drill, which had some similarities to a pneumatic jack-hammer, but with a rotating drill-head instead. The rock drill was sometimes mounted on a tripod to keep it steady when grinding its way through the rock. Alternatively, it could be attached to a temporary steel pylon between the tunnel ceiling and floor.

Working alone, Bob, outside the mine, would start the air compressor motor and leave it running, and go back into the mine and start drilling out cartridge holes in places he had previously marked. He would then return to the adit, shut down the motor, go back and start putting cartridges in the holes, attach the fuses, and then retreat a safe distance, and light the fuses for the explosion.

AR's illustration of the mine entrance shows a wheelbarrow. Presumably this had been used to shift quartz and unwanted rock from the mine. It did not seem to



A portable air compressor from the 1940s era, and a pneumatic hammer for road breaking. The airline could be fitted with any suitable tool, which would probably include that for mine rock-breaking or drilling.

be a very practical method, so if the mine proved profitable, perhaps Captain Flint obtained some disused light railway track and wooden sleepers, together with a rail trolley, and used these as an improvement. Also present is what AR calls 'some sort of stone crusher'. Whether this was machine- or hand-powered is not known (there are several methods of crushing quartz [Moore et al, 1996, p. 31]), but its primary use would be to provide crushed copper ore for Timothy's chemical analysis work in the houseboat.

When the visitors came to view the mine, Bob took them up the steep slope of the screes to where Timothy's white spots had been painted. Here there were now shafts going down into the hillside. Why they had been made is a bit of a mystery. Perhaps to see if the line of gossion did indeed lead to a vein of quartz not far below, and, if so, whether the vein connected with the Gulch vein, which was some three to four hundred yards away from the lowest white spot (*Pigeon Post*, p. 235). The steepness of the hillside made for difficult working. Because of the hard rock mentioned in the area by Bob, in order to drive vertical or near vertical shafts where the white spots had been, compressed air from the compressor below was brought up the hillside by flexible pipe to drive a pneumatic hammer (pictured on p. 14). This fractured the rock (Anonymous, 1948), which could then be excavated in buckets sometimes known as 'kibbles'. The shafts would need to be wide enough for an access ladder, and for the bucket and hauling line to pass.

A windlass at the surface was used for the bucket hauling. The windlass had a wooden roller with a crank at one end, which, when turned, rolled up the line around the roller, so raising the bucket (Moore et al, 1996). Unwanted rock and rubble were dumped outside. If a shaft did reach the quartz vein, a cavern called a 'stope' could be excavated, and from this, extended levels made to give an indication of the amount of copper present.

With the normal moist climate of the Lake Country, it would be difficult to prevent ingress of water causing flooding below. To overcome this problem, the old-time miners in the Lake Country cut a half-circle in the rock around the upper side of their shafts, to divert rainwater away on either side (Cameron and Withey, 2017, p. 52).

The results of Timothy's quantitative analyses of different samples of copper from the mine, done in the houseboat, were rather variable, which is why with Dick he collected more samples for assay (*The Picts and the Martyrs*, pp. 17 and 221). Prior to this, Timothy would have checked to see if pyrites was the only copper ore in the Gulch mine. There are a number of minerals that serve as copper ores in the copper mining process (Anonymous, 2021). As an example, in the late 19th century, cuprite (Cu₂O ore of copper oxide) was mined from

the Pave York Mine high on the slopes of the Wetherlam peak (Cameron and Withey, 2017, p. 35), not that far distant from where the Gulch mine would have been located. The Pave York Mine only worked till 1917 until yield declined and it was abandoned.

So how successful would the Gulch mining have been? It is possible that, as Bob's tunnelling proceeded further, and the yield of copper declined, the mine was not likely to be commercially viable. To fully develop the mine, considerable capital would have been required, and as the book is set in the Great Economic Depression of the 1930s, it could be difficult to obtain investors for this. AR, in writing the two related novels, does not give any indication as to the ongoing future of the mine, leaving it to the readers to decide for themselves whether there was a 'bonanza' of copper, or too little for continued mining to be an economical proposition, and the mine thus abandoned.

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**Very best wishes for Christmas, Hanukkah and the
New Year
to all our readers**

**Our thanks to all those who support *Furthest South*
by sending us articles and items of news**

The next issue of *Furthest South* will be published in March 2022.

We welcome articles, long or short, about anything AR-related, even if
distantly, and snippets for the Pigeons' Posts about anything you are doing
or that has interested you lately.

Send your articles to
Jan Allen (jp8fillyjonk@bigpond.com) (Australia)
by 1 February 2022, please.

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