



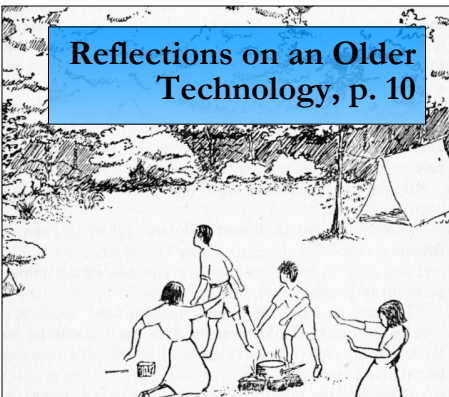
Signals from TARSUS & North Pole News

January 2024

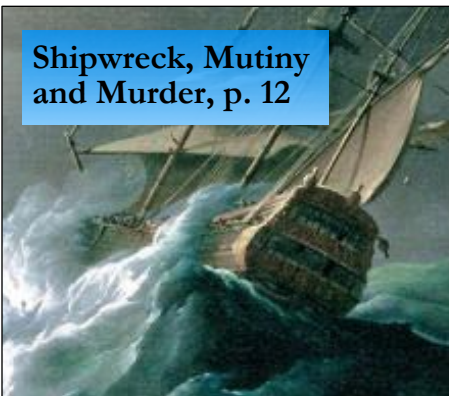
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Ship's Papers — Important information for the Crew



A Note from the Editor

By Simon Horn, sjhorn@gmail.com

As you can see, I have changed the order of *Ship's Papers* a bit in this issue, essentially because our American members still have no coordinator, so there is no U.S. coordinator's message.

I will continue to provide my brief summary of the issue, to guide you in your reading, but I will also present any information that I think our North American members might need.

Ian will continue to give his regular message to our Canadian members.

Your membership fees for 2024 are now due. In his message Ian explains how to go about renewing on the Society website, so take a look if you are not sure how to go about it.

In the last issue I raised the possibility of North American TARS trying to organize meetings among themselves, whether locally or virtually via Zoom, or some such technology.

Well, as you may have noticed, nothing has happened about that. I haven't done anything about it, and apparently neither has anyone else. Perhaps by spring and the next issue, I may have some better news.

In this issue

As always, many thanks to the contributors.

In *Dipping Our Hands*, **Eric Benke's** "After Great Northern..." takes a close look at Swallows and Amazons fan fiction, where enthusiastic writers consider what might have happened

to our favourite characters in the years following the Ransome books.

In *Kanchenjunga's Cairn* **Maida Follini** describes "Setting Up Camp", presenting a series of things that even today's campers can and should do.

Alistair Bryden's "Reflections on an Older Technology" continues with a look at how camping equipment has changed since Ransome's day, and not necessarily for the better.

In the *Ship's Library*, **Ian Sacré** presents "a tale of shipwreck, mutiny and murder" in his enthusiastic review of *The Wager*, which tells the story of the 1741 wreck of a British man-of-war in the Pacific and the fraught events that followed.

I then take a look at another Amazon Publication, *Ransome on Blue Water Sailing*. And if I spark your interest, this time the book is still available on the TARS Stall!

Molly McGinnis continues to stock the *Beckfoot Kitchen* with "Dinner with the Great Aunt". After a look at what the Amazons might not have liked about the Great Aunt's ideal meals ("No tapioca. Or sago. Never.") she gives us a recipe for an S&A staple: beef roll.

How Should TARS Use Susie and Di's bequest?

As Ian explains in his comments on page 3, Susie Cattley and Di Stockwell have bequeathed over £60,000 to TARS, and the Board would like your suggestions on how it should be used.

See the latest issue of *Signals* magazine to learn more. The Board would like to hear your opinions by February 14, so don't wait.

You can comment on the web at members.arthur-ransome.org/susie-and-di-fund or email Signals editor Peter Willis at peter-willis1144@gmail.com

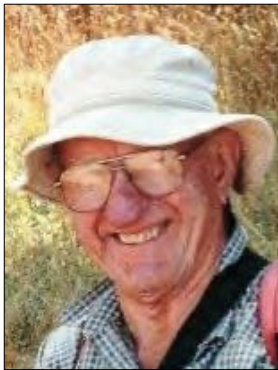
There are already some interesting suggestions and comments on the web page, so have a look.

* * *

The next issue is scheduled for May 2024. Please start thinking about your contribution now. The usual reminder will appear in your inbox around April 1.

This issue, like the last, is only 19 pages. So please consider what you might contribute: articles, book reviews, comments, questions or pictures. Anything other TARS might find interesting is more than welcome.

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



Greetings from the North

By Ian Sacré, TARS Canada Coordinator
3965 Marine Drive, Royston, BC V0R 2V0
gallivanterthree@shaw.ca

Greetings Fellow TARS Members,

The shortest day has now past and we can start to look forward to the lengthening days before us. The holidays

are also over and I do hope yours were all you had hoped for. Here on the West Coast we have had stormy weather, with lots of rain and gale force winds, and with accompanying power outages. Oil lamps and camp stoves were at the ready in the best Swallows and Amazons style!

The big news recently received from TARS HQ was the notice of Susie and Di's magnificent bequest to TARS of

more than £60,000! All TARS members have been asked by the Board for their ideas for how the bequest should be used. Please read some suggestions for possible uses for the bequest in the material sent to you.

It is most important that you take a few minutes to mull the matter over and submit your ideas directly to Peter Willis the editor of *Signals* at peter-willis1144@gmail.com More details

appear on page 9 of the January-April 2024 *Signals* that you have just received. Please note the 14th February deadline for your comments.

Another important item you should be aware of is that TARS subscription renewals for 2024 are now due. This should be done using the same process as last year by logging in to the Society payment site at <https://payment.arthur-ransome.org>, and clicking on the Overseas Membership Renewals link in the Existing Members column. You can then choose the category of membership you want, add it to the cart and then fill in the form.

Wishing everyone happy days with fair winds and calm seas.

Ian Sacré

Canadian TARS Coordinator

Ransome-Related Publications Available

As I mentioned in the May issue's *Ship's Library*, Montreal member Gordon McGilton has kindly given me most of his extensive Ransome library. As a result, I now have duplicate copies of several Ransome-related books, both Amazon Publications editions and some others.

I have no need of multiple copies, so I have decided to provide them free to any members for the cost of shipping alone.

The following books are available for the cost of shipping only (hardcover unless otherwise noted as paperback: PB):

Amazon Publications

- #5, *Ransome at Home* (1996) - PB
- #7, *Ransome the Artist* (1998)

#22, *Arthur Ransome's Long-Lost Study of Robert Louis Stevenson* (2011) - PB

#24, *Drawn at a Venture* (2014)

#25, *Collecting our Thoughts* (2015) - PB

#27, *Twilight Years - Hill Top* (2017)

By Ransome

Old Peter's Russian Tales (1974, Puffin Books) - small PB, illustrated

The War of the Birds and the Beasts (1984, Jonathan Cape)

The Autobiography of Arthur Ransome (1985, Century Publishing) - PB

Signalling from Mars: the letters of Arthur Ransome (1997, Jonathan Cape)

Other

Arthur Ransome and Captain Flint's Trunk (1984, Christina Hardyment, Jonathan Cape)

Nancy Blackett: Under Sail with Arthur

Ransome (1991, Roger Wardale, Jonathan Cape)

Arthur Ransome (1991, Peter Hunt, Twayne Publishers)

Arthur Ransome: A Bibliography (2000, Wayne Hammond, Oak Knoll Press)

If you are interested, please contact me by email at sjhorn@gmail.com.

I will only find out the actual shipping cost when I wrap up a book (or books) to send, but anyone who requests a book will be told the cost before I send it, in case you think it is too much.

I will probably request reimbursement of the shipping cost using PayPal, but you do not need a PayPal account to send money to an individual. I will provide full details to anyone who requests a book or books.

— Simon

Dipping our Hands — Personal relationships with the books

After *Great Northern?*...

By Eric Benke (Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania)

In his understated way Arthur Ransome created a set of distinct, believable, realistic characters in his stories. I grew up with my own images of these characters. Until I read the excellent “The TARS Guide to Fan Fiction” in the September/October 2020 issue of *Signals* by Peter Willis and Jill Goulder, I was unaware of the fan fiction phenomenon that has given the Ransome world further life. These writings spring from an impulse to know more about the Swallows, the Amazons, and the D’s. For me they opened a window into a world of speculative fiction that expanded my own sense of the boys and girls of Ransome’s world.

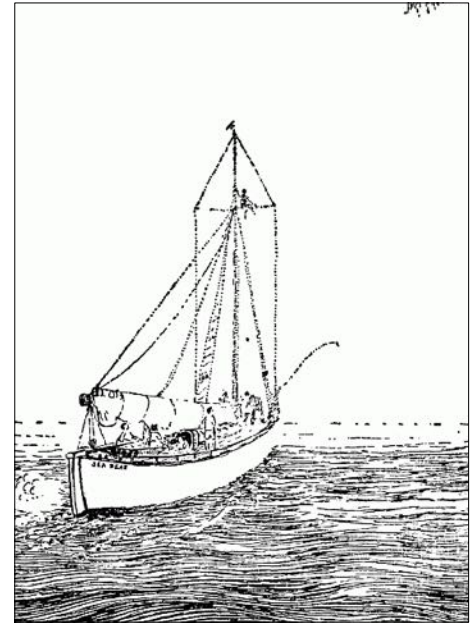
We can’t know what the originator would have done if asked to sketch in the details of his creations’ lives in WW II or after; our beloved S, A and D’s remain forever suspended in time. However, having read all the fan fiction postings I could find, I’m ready to report on the predicted future of each of the main characters. While a few are clearly completely speculative (“Swallows in Space,” for example), many are tied carefully to logical extensions of the characters Ransome drew. These futures, not surprisingly, reflect our own desires and inclinations and the times in which we live.

Having read and reread about 110 fan fiction listings, from one-paragraph posts to near-book-length stories, there are some suppositions that are virtually unanimous, and other areas where there is great disparity. Here, in

no particular order, and with no claim to scientific precision, are the conclusions I’ve reached. They are based on what the Ransome reader community foresees for the eight central figures who have become our dear friends.

John is the easiest to predict: everyone agrees he will be in the Royal Navy. Some mention naval college, and all agree he will soon rise to a command post. His seamanship and careful preparation for action make him admired by his sailors and peers alike. He continues his naval career past the war, like his father. And when it comes to his personal life, most writers agree that he will marry Nancy, live happily together, and raise children (daughters, in most cases) together. (We’ll discuss Nancy’s particular future in a minute). Some authors relate the growing closeness of these two as they grow into adolescence and young adulthood. Their friendship is unshakeable, and in various ways they come to realize their physical and emotional attraction is far beyond mere friendship. Most authors address the challenges Nancy would face when stuck in the role of housewife and give her various coping stratagems: either as a spy, a sailing instructor, or in other suitable pursuits. John is always sympathetic, supportive, and helpful.

One or two skeptics take a different tack, painting John and Nancy as too close, so to speak, to develop an amorous relationship, or too alike. In those cases, Peggy is the popular



Into the Mist (from *Great Northern?*)

choice as John’s mate. There is a single mention of John as a tortured homosexual, living in secret squalor. Dorothea is also mentioned as a mate for John, largely based on his specific mention of her after the fire in *Pigeon Post*.

Nancy, as mentioned above, is most popularly married to John, but many writers acknowledge the unlikelihood of the Amazon captain settling into a purely domestic life. There must be an outlet for her creative and physical energy, and so we see her depicted as a secret agent, an instructor, a writer, and an aviator.

Her life doesn’t always include marriage to John, however: there are several suggestions that she will discover her lesbian feelings with attachments to Daisy (from *Secret Water*), for example, or Dorothea. There is a consensus

that Nancy would have been desperate to take part in the war effort, and so she is often seen as a Wren and deeply involved in dangerous action.

Roger is almost universally assigned to the RAF, where he is an outstanding fighter pilot. A few project him as a naval officer. He is seen at times as married, most convincingly in the long story, “Roger and the Marlowes,” which is a fine example of cross-over fiction, in which fictional characters from different series interact. In a terrific and lengthy story, Roger meets, falls in love with and marries Rowan Marlowe (previously seen in Antonia Forest’s 1957 children’s novel *Falconer’s Lure*). He is also imagined as a recovering Japanese prisoner of war, struggling to regain his sanity under the care of his family.

Roger’s sister Titty apparently does not make a unified impression on readers. She is variously seen as an artist/illustrator, a nurse, a theater person, or a war correspondent. She is often seen as married to Dick in what is generally described as a marriage of like minds. She also is portrayed as a victim of several cads, requiring Dick to rescue her from unsavory situations.

Susan is most often pictured as a nurse, though a career in the Royal Navy is also imagined. She always remains organized, calm, and efficient. The natural friendship between two

The archiveofourown.org home page

mates is extrapolated at times into a more serious romantic relationship with Peggy. She’s also cast as the wife of Tom Dudgeon or of an Italian whom she marries to rescue from deportation. Her leadership qualities are reflected in visions of a very successful career in the Navy or in intelligence or in nursing.

Peggy, like Susan, is often seen as a nurse, usually stationed with her fellow First Mate. She’s also given a career as a Wren. Various writers predict a marriage to John, or Jim Brading, or relationships with Susan or another woman.

Dick’s remarkable intellect gets him into secret war research. And, as re-

marked above, the consensus is that he will marry Titty, who understands and appreciates him. His important defense work must go unreported for security reasons, though his work at times brings him into the company of Susan or Nancy in their respective military roles. In stories where Titty has made a terrible choice of a lover, Dick is there to rescue her and win her as his wife.

Dorothea receives sympathetic treatment from several authors. Not only is she paired with John in some essays, but she is married to nobility in at least two extended narratives. In one, a crossover story written by the talented author “constantlearner”, she meets and marries Gerry Wimsey, the nephew of Lord Peter Wimsey, created by Dorothy Sayers in a series of influential detective books. She often becomes a writer, perhaps by working as part of the war effort and then by finding success with her own stories. In another story, she meets and eventually marries Ian McGinty, the young new laird of the McGinty clan so prominent in GN.

There are also occasional speculative pieces about Mary Walker, Molly Blackett, Jim Turner, Timothy Stedding, and others, like the constellation of characters in the D’s adventures on the Broads.

The writing quality of these stories

varies considerably. As Jill Goulder noted in “Analysing S&A fan-fiction” (*Signals*, September-October 2020) “There can be painful failures to capture characters’ individual ways of speaking.” The most egregious to my ears are the descriptions of one or another female character “giggling.” I can’t think that giggling would ever come from any of the strong and smart Ransome women.

It’s worth mentioning as an example of excellent writing the work of “constantlearner” in the annals of archive-of-our-own.org, home of much Ransome fan fiction. Her ingenious cross-over stories are particularly fascinating, whether it’s Roger and the Marlowes or Dorothy and Gerry Wimsey. Well worth the time to read.

What can we make of this large body of work? First is the obvious love for Ransome’s characters that all this creative activity embodies. Second is how well some stories get at the nuances of each character. (There’s a wonderful scene of Nancy posing nude for Titty to sketch, for example, and responding to John’s unexpected entrance.) Finally, it points out the desire we share to know more about these young people – people Ransome brought to convincing life.

A reader will come to their own con-

clusions as to the likelihood of the stories. One can look at this two ways: first, might Ransome have approved? Or written something like the story if he had been able to continue his career? Second, is it plausible in light of what we know about the real world after the end of the stories? For example, it makes sense that Ransome doesn’t explore any homoerotic (or any erotic) impulses in his characters – it would be out of character for the times (and the ages of the characters) to do so. But as the Amazons and Swallows and D’s age through the course of the books, we can grant that further stories might have to acknowledge the physical and emotional maturation of all of them. The post-war era was a time of social change, as the first seeds of protest over racism and sexism were sprouting. So it’s fair to see fan fiction writers grapple with the implications of that change.

There aren’t many clues in the stories Ransome left behind about the inclinations or desires of his characters. I did notice that in GN John and Nancy are left to their own devices quite a bit with no explanation of what they did to pass the time while they were distracting Jemmerling’s accomplice. But in general, while we learn a great deal about their character, their skills, etc., we don’t hear much about their

understanding of their own relationships with each other; it’s not part of Ransome’s remit to pursue that line of inquiry. Much of the fan fiction has attempted to fill that vacuum.

Reading Ransome is an exercise in positive thinking: the young people are creative, energetic, and responsible. They make things work out, with the help of friendly adults on the periphery of the stories. That tendency is reflected in the many fan fiction stories in which the characters come through the war safely, find a perfect mate, and move on to satisfactory adult lives. It’s almost refreshing to run across the occasional pessimistic story in which widowhood or disappointment occurs; a reminder that the cataclysm of World War II was still over the horizon when Ransome wrote these stories. There were clouds gathering, but one can’t blame Ransome for not foreseeing the unprecedented consequences of the war years.

Fan fiction provides some insights into how the story of these beloved characters might have turned out. I found it fascinating to visualize these eight sturdy friends from my youth as adults. It seems for many current authors, as for me, they remain vivid, unforgettable people.

Are You on Facebook?

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

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

Arthur Ransome’s Swallows and Amazons in North America: www.facebook.com/groups/tarsfriends/

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

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

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

Setting Up Camp

By Maida Barton Follini (Halifax, Nova Scotia)

When the Swallows first landed on the shore of Wild Cat Island, Susan said,

“The first thing to do is to find the best place for our camp.”

“Not too easily seen,” said Titty.

“We want a flat bit of ground with trees to hold the tents up,” said John.

“And a good place for a fire,” said Susan.

Most tents today have built-in struts to hold them up, so we no longer have to fasten them to trees, but the basic campground needs today are the same as they were for the Swallows. If you are backwoods camping, you have found your level, secluded ground, and set up your tent. You may want to add some amenities, especially if you are staying at the same site for a week or more.

Of course you have brought your sleeping bag with you, and a knapsack with basic foods.

It's a good idea to bring a saw and hatchet too, as well as a small spade, and a 50-foot line of strong rope. A spade or trenching shovel that folds up to carry on your back may be found at an Army and Navy store or a camping store.

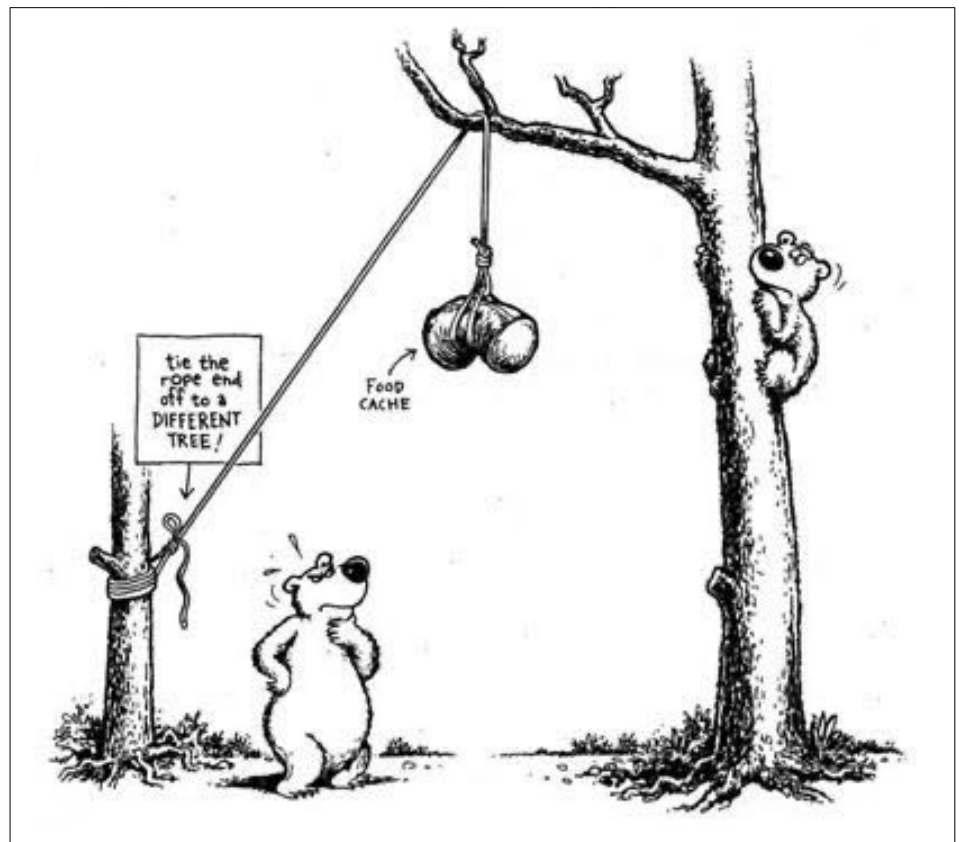
If you are camping in North America's forests, one of the first things you need to do is:

Bear-Proofing Your Food

According to the Be Bear Aware campaign of Missoula, Montana, there are

roughly 650,000 bears in North America, with black bears ranging across the continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and from Canada to Mexico, while brown bears live chiefly in the Northwest, and polar bears in the Alaskan and Canadian Arctic.

tle with a handle that you could pass the rope through, or an iron pot-lid with a handle. Or you could have brought a horse-shoe with you, for this purpose. Choose a tree with a branch extending horizontally, about 25 feet from the ground.



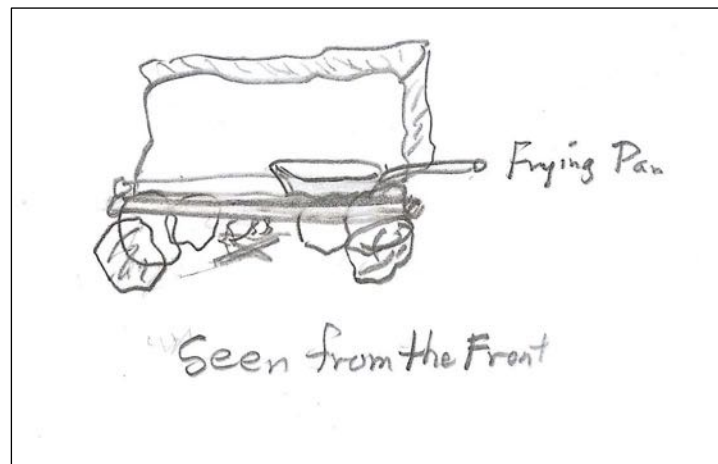
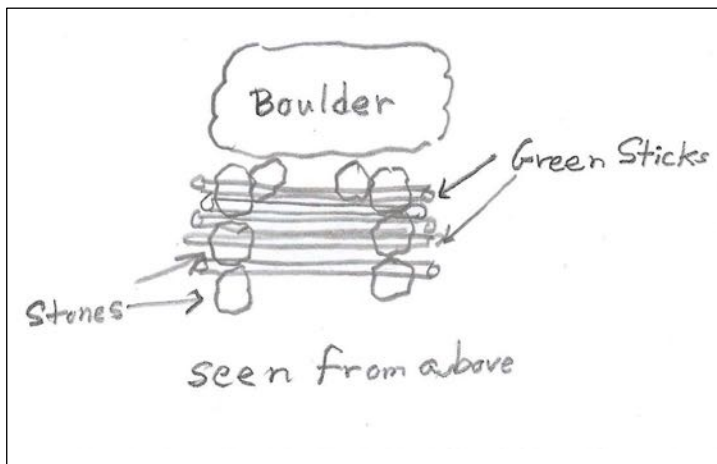
From *The Backpacker's Field Manual* (Rick Curtis, Three Rivers Press, N.Y., 2005)

Bears can smell food from a mile away, and will descend on a campsite if food is available. To prevent losing your food supplies to a hungry bear, hang your food-bag from a high tree limb. Here is how:

Tie something heavy to one end of the 50-foot line you brought with you. Your weight could be a full water bot-

tle with the coil of rope held loosely in your left hand, swing the end with the weight back and forth with your right arm to get momentum, then let it fly to go over the branch and let out rope for it to fall to the ground on the other side.

You may have to twirl the rope a few times to bring the weighted end down.



Camp Kitchen

Untie the weight, and tie your bag of food securely to the rope's end. Now hoist the food bag up to 15 or 20 feet high, so a standing bear can't reach it from the ground. It should be at least 5 feet below the branch above, so a climbing bear cannot reach it either. Tie the other end of the rope to a nearby tree so that you can easily reach it when you want to lower the bag to get your food.

A Cooking Fireplace

Once your food is safe, you can think about making a cooking fireplace.

First you must clear the ground of dry leaves, grass, or twigs so that only bare earth will be near your fire, lest it spread and burn down acres of forest. Once you have cleared a space, you can make a log grill to set your pots on, or you can set up something more elaborate, like the Amazons used, with a spit across two posts to hang their kettle on.

The simplest fireplace could use a foundation of stones to make two side pieces, across which may be laid a grill of green wood that you can cut from nearby living trees. The line of stones should be built perhaps 8 to 12 inches high, to make room for the fire be-

neath. The stone lines should be placed one or two feet apart. The back of the fireplace can be enclosed by a boulder which, placed at one end of the two lines of stone, can reflect the heat back on your cooking pots.

Lay the kindling for the fire between the stone sides, starting with dry grass, leaves or tree bark, followed by small sticks and then larger sticks. Now take straight green branches cut from near-by trees, with twigs and leaves removed, across the lines of stones which make up the sides of your fireplace. These sticks make up the grill and should be straight and firm enough to hold your pots and pans.

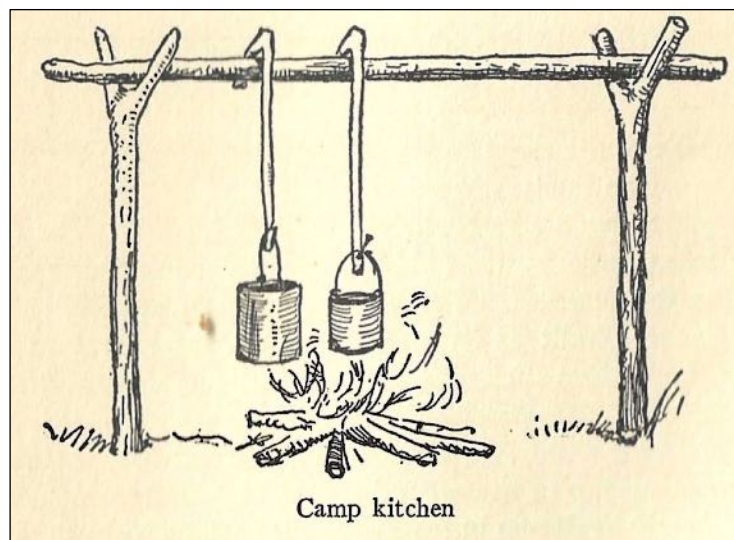
As you use the grill over your week or more of camp cooking, you may have to replace some sticks as they dry out from the fire and burn. Even better is to place a metal grill across the

side rocks if you have brought one with you.

Posts and Spit

If you plan to be at the same campsite for a couple of weeks, this more elaborate cooking fireplace will seem worthwhile. The uprights must be well-pounded into the ground and supported with packed earth around them, lest they tilt and fall into the fire with your meal.

This is a good set-up for cooking stews, and boiling potatoes. Combining the upright posts holding the horizontal spit with the on-the-ground



Camp Kitchen sketch from Ernest Thompson Seton's *Book of Woodcraft* (Doubleday Page & Co, 1915, p.273)

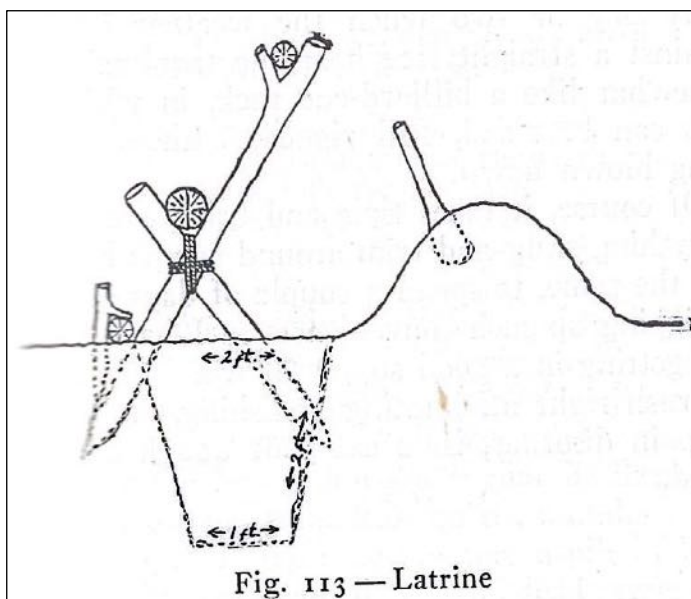


Fig. 113 — Latrine

Diagram taken from Horace Kephart, *Camping and Woodcraft* (MacMillan Co., New York, 1922, vol. 1 p. 223.)

cooking fire will allow you to boil on the spit, and fry or sear with a frying-pan over the ground fire.

The Latrine

A camp latrine can serve as an outdoor toilet, substituting for indoor plumbing.

Find a secluded place behind bushes or trees, a little bit away from the tents. With your short spade, dig a hole at least two feet deep, one foot wide at the bottom and two feet wide at the top. The hole should be about two feet long. Built like a sawhorse, two short logs and two longer ones are tied or nailed crossways, to support the seat. The seat is a sturdy pole about two feet long and about 4 or 5 inches in diameter. The bark is removed and the pole surface should be smooth. The longer support logs are extended upward to make a backrest with a strong pole set across the two long supports. The bottom ends of both pairs of supports are embedded in the earth, and secured by a short stake. The earth dug from the hole is piled

nearby and a broad piece of wood used to scrape the earth into the hole, after use.

A Rustic Seat

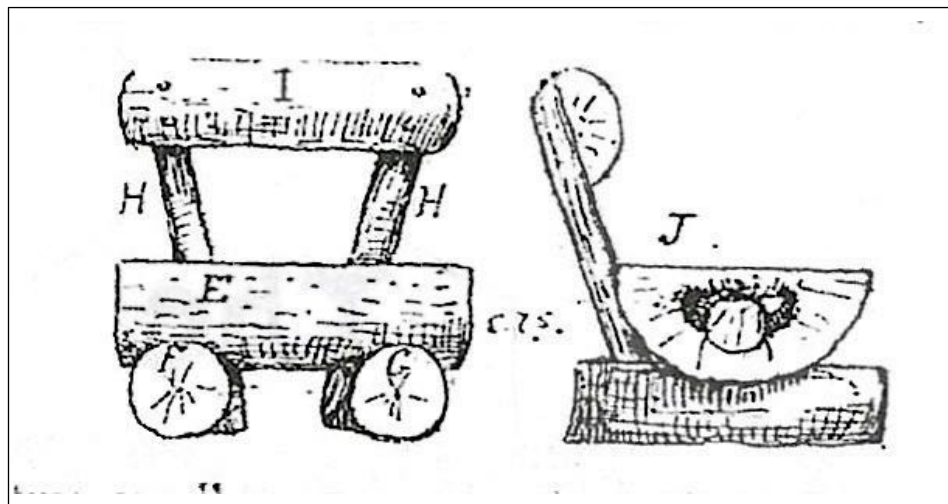
Sitting around the campfire it can be pleasant to have a seat to relax on, and also to lift you off the ground, which is often damp, especially when the dew falls in the evening.

Here is a rustic seat which can be made from forest wood, using a saw and hatchet, and a few nails.

Cut two branches, each 3 inches thick and 20 inches long (H and H) and nail them to both the supporting logs and seat, to be uprights to support the back of the seat. A rounded half-log (I) can be used for the back, nailed on to the two uprights, H and H.

Many improvements can be made at a camp in the backwoods, providing convenience while you are away from modern civilization. A few nails into nearby trees can hold towels and washcloths, and a line strung between trees can conveniently dry bathing suits. A washstand to hold a basin of water can consist of rocks with flat surfaces placed on top of one another, to raise the basin to an easy height.

In *Swallowdale*, the Swallows made a dam to block up the stream so they



Rustic Seat: Diagram & directions after Ernest Thompson Seton (*The Totem Board*, October, 1920.)

Use a log of pine or other soft wood, about 12 inches thick and 16 inches long—to rest on for the seat. (E in the diagram.) Split it in the middle with your hatchet. Cut two small logs, F and G., each about 6 inches thick and 15 inches long. Notch the big log, E, so that it sits solid on the supporting logs and can be nailed to them.

would have a pool deep enough to bathe in. And John built a pillar of stones for Titty's parrot, with a cross pole embedded in the pillar for the bird to perch on.

What other camp furnishings have readers made? I would be happy to hear about them.

Reflections on an Older Technology

By Alistair Bryden (Calgary, Alberta)

It's almost 100 years since the Walkers, Blacketts, and D's set out on their adventures, and the equipment they used reflected an earlier technology. In fact, since much of Ransome's writing reflected his own youth, some of the equipment he describes may date from before WWI.

They had tents made of Egyptian cotton, warm wool sweaters, maybe duffle coats in winter, oiled (waxed) cotton jackets or coats (oilies), boats made of wood, tin boxes to keep books (and chronometers) dry. They likely had hemp or sisal ropes, jute sacks filled with straw to sleep on, leather boots, strap-on iron skates and sleds with iron runners. There were no lifejackets. They ate simple foods cooked on a campfire or a Primus stove. Much of their equipment would be made locally.

Forty or fifty years ago when I started in the outdoors, much of my equipment reflected those earlier times. I had a cotton tent made by Blacks of Greenock, wool sweaters and boiled wool hats, tin plates and mugs (that always burned your lips). Aluminum and nylon were creeping in but were far from ubiquitous. I had a "primus" paraffin (kerosene) stove. I borrowed

my dad's silk-covered down sleeping bag. Lifejackets were stuffed with kapok. The first kayak (canoe) I paddled was made of canvas stretched over a wooden frame. Almost all the equipment was made in the UK.

Today when I set out on a camping trip, I pull together my nylon and Gore-Tex jackets, plastic plates and spoons, waterproof plastic dry bags, lightweight propane stove, aluminum or titanium pots, sometimes some freeze dried food. I'll take a fibreglass or plastic canoe or a Hypalon raft. My hiking boots are composite nylon, my skis are fibreglass, my synthetic tent has aluminum flexible poles and perhaps titanium stakes. Personal flotation devices are made with closed cell foam. Much of this equipment is built or made in Asia.

So let's compare the technologies.

Effectiveness and Durability

This has to be a win for the newer technologies. There is little doubt that most of the newer items do their jobs better than the older comparative items. A plastic mug won't burn your lips, a nylon tent is more waterproof than a cotton tent though it may be noisier in a storm. A fibreglass canoe is tougher and more durable than a wooden or wood and canvas canoe. A nice warm nylon sleeping bag beats rugs every time. Having said that, many older items are pretty indestructible, a tin enamel coffee pot



The Swallows' tents were hung on a rope between two trees and kept open by piling stones in pockets along the sides!

lasts forever (I still use one) and many older tools such as axes are as good as they ever were.

Weight and Bulk

Again a win for the newer equipment. There is simply no comparison between say a Gore-Tex jacket and a waxed cotton jacket, or a heavy wooden dinghy vs a light fibreglass equivalent. Straw-stuffed sleeping pads were ridiculously bulky relative to a modern self-inflatable sleeping mat. But again, there are exceptions, tin plates and coffee pots are not much heavier than their modern equivalents and a silk/down sleeping bag worked very well. You could camp well with the older equipment.

Repairability in the field

Now the comparison gets interesting. When plastic or aluminum items break, they are difficult or impossible



Typical 1970s tent.

to repair in the field. With wooden or leather or cloth items on the other hand, it's often possible to do a field repair. When the Swallow was wrecked in Horseshoe Cove, a field repair with a scrap of canvas and some tacks worked well and a jury rig with the stub of the old mast got them across the lake where local boat-builders were able to do a professional repair. John was able to smooth the new mast with a spoke shave, and treat it with linseed oil beside the lake. Farmer Dixon was able to build a sled and put iron runners on the sled in his shed. The children sewed their own mittens out of rabbit skin.

One of the great sea stories that illustrates this point very well is *The Brendan Voyage*, by Tim Severin, in which he and his team built a leather boat to a 1000-year-old design and sailed it from Ireland to Newfoundland. He made painstaking efforts to recreate the ancient methods and techniques, and he found that they worked perfectly. His problems tended to occur when he took a shortcut with modern materials, which tended to break and were not repairable when they did.

One of the great stories of Canadian



A modern, self-supporting tent

exploration is *The Dangerous River*, where R. M. Patterson writes about long expeditions in very remote wilderness, often alone. His “outfit” equipped him to build and repair almost everything he needed to live for months in the wilderness.

I've done repairs in the wilderness and they often involve reverting to more natural materials. I've repaired a canoe with a replacement thwart cut down in the forest and shaped with an axe, I've repaired clothes with very amateur stitches. I've used cord and wire to do repairs on all sorts of item.

In my emergency supplies at home on

the west coast (in case of power cuts or earthquakes) in addition to usual flashlights, I still keep a box of candles, kerosene lanterns and Coleman gas lanterns, because they work well and last indefinitely. No batteries to run out or corrode.

Overall a win for older technologies.

Aesthetic Appeal and Comfort

Well, modern gear can look great but who doesn't like the look of a wooden boat or enjoy wearing a fine Barbour waxed jacket. Nowadays, you need to pay extra for traditional materials made by a craftsman; look at what it costs to buy a fine wooden sweater. This category is probably a tie.

* * *

Overall, the result is probably a win for new technologies and I'll keep on using mine. But if I was planning a longer trip with little opportunity for resupply, I'd look hard at each item of gear and figure out what I could do if something went wrong. Our parents' and grandparents' generation had highly efficient and effective equipment that served them as well and sometimes better than ours.



Traditional Primus stove



Modern stove

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

The Wager, A Tale of Shipwreck, Mutiny and Murder

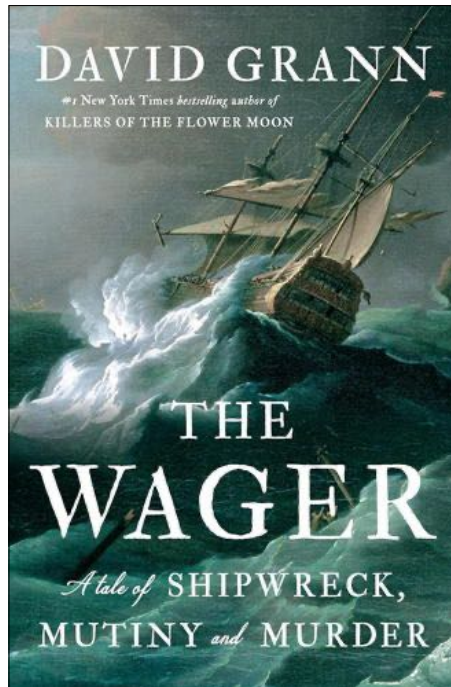
by David Grann

Reviewed by Ian Sacré (Royston, British Columbia)

For a recent birthday present I was given the above-named book by my number one daughter, who knows of my interest in true, historical nautical and well-researched works of literature. *The Wager* certainly falls very firmly into this category.

The book tells the true tale of the little-known chain of events leading to the wreck of HMS *Wager* and beyond, and the desperate trials and tribulations of her captain, officers and crew during the years 1738 to 1745. David Grann, the author, undertook a phenomenal amount of research in writing the book and sought the assistance of many leading historians familiar with the period. He perused hundreds of pages of old log books, personal accounts and archival records of the tragedy.

In 1839, in need of more ships, the Royal Navy purchased the *Wager*, a merchantman, from the East India Company for a little less than four thousand pounds, and set about converting her into a man-of-war. The ship had been built in about 1734 and was thus fairly new. The Admiralty fitted her out with 28 cannons and categorized her as a sixth rater. Warships in those days were classified by the number of guns they could carry. HMS *Victory* for instance, carried 100 guns and was a first rater. Interestingly, the rating system also determined the number and size of the “boats” they were assigned. Boats – the smaller craft carried on a ship – were a vital



and essential part of a warship's equipment. The *Wager* is also said to have been a cranky ship, and 400 tons of ballast was placed aboard to help correct her poor stability.

At the time Great Britain was at war with Spain, and the Admiralty as-



“HMS Wager in extremis” (Wikipedia)

signed the *Wager* to Commodore George Anson's squadron of five ships plus a small accompanying supply vessel. The squadron was tasked with the job of sailing to the Pacific, around Cape Horn, to the Chilean and Peruvian Coasts where they were to harass and attack Spanish ships and landholdings all along the western coast of South America, and as far west as the Philippines.

As the ships of the squadron prepared for their departure they were beset with numerous problems. Sickness, equipment shortages and most important of all, a lack of seamen. The net result of the delays was that the fleet missed the all-important weather window for rounding the Horn!

David Grann's research into the problems that beset the ships of the Royal Navy during those years is very thorough. He describes how sickness amongst ship's companies was rampant. Outbreaks of typhus were a constant threat, and of course the dreaded scurvy frequently claimed the lives of dozens, if not hundreds of men, once the ship's fresh provisions were exhausted, as was frequently the case on all long voyages. The author described the symptoms admirably. Life at sea was indeed hard and cheap! The use of lime juice, with its vitamin C, to combat scurvy was still unknown.

In 1759 Samuel Johnson wrote: “No man will be a sailor who has contrivance enough to get himself into jail; for being in a ship is being in jail

with the chance of being drowned.....A man in a jail has more room, better food, and commonly better company.” Such was the case in those days. HMS *Centurion*, Commodore Anson’s flagship, was 144 feet long with a beam of 40 feet, and had a complement of roughly 500 men. The *Wager* was 123 feet long and had a complement of roughly 250 men. The normal complement of the two ships was 400 for the *Centurion* and 125 for the *Wager*, but additional men had been added to make up for anticipated losses due to sickness and military action.

David Grann’s research – personal accounts of the ship’s officers and other official records – reveals the navigational difficulties encountered as the squadron neared and doubled the Horn, difficulties that were common in voyages of the period. It is probable that the navigators did have use of what we call today a sextant (actually a quadrant in those days), which was invented nearly ten years before, in 1731, by John Hadley. But while this instrument would have allowed them to accurately determine their latitude, the accurate calculation



John Handley’s octant, a precursor to the sextant

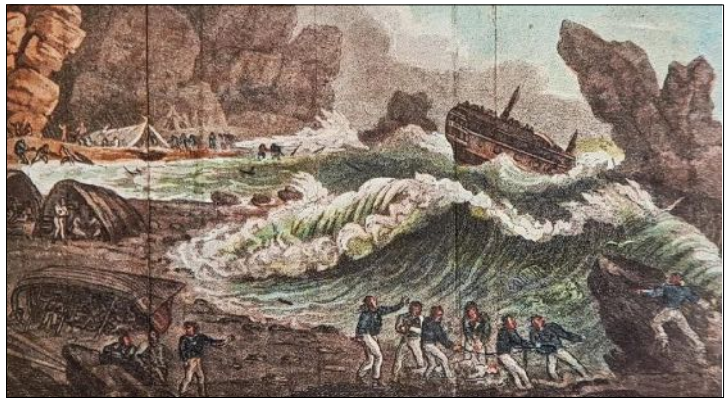
of longitude was not possible on the *Wager*.

It was not until 1770 that John Harrison invented the marine chronometer, which made for a very accurate time keeper.

Chronometers are set to show the exact time at Greenwich (GMT), which is the prime meridian and a reference point for all the celestial heavenly bodies used in marine and later air navigation. The exact time these bodies cross the prime or zero meridian is known, and this data is made available to navigators in a nautical almanac. They will then use the chronometer, set to the time at Greenwich, and the sextant to measure the vertical altitude or angle of a body above the horizon; with a thorough knowledge of spherical trigonometry the ship’s longitude can be calculated.

The most important thing about a mechanical marine chronometer, both then and now, is for the instrument to have a constant daily rate of gain or loss. So if you knew that your chronometer gained say 2 seconds per day, you could apply a cumulative daily correction to the time shown in order to determine GMT exactly.

A chronometer which gains one day but perhaps loses the next is not much use. Before the days of readily available time signals, chronometers were always treated with kid gloves. They were wound every day at the same time by the same officer. They were kept in a glass topped enclosure be-



The *Wager*’s castaways camp on the island

side the chart table. (God help the officer if he ever, ever forgot to wind it!)

But in the 1740’s, longitude would have been determined by dead reckoning, which involved simply keeping track of the course and speed of the vessel, while making allowances for current set and wind drift. A nerve-racking process and a rough and ready method to say the least, particularly when one adds in unknown compass errors.

Shortly after rounding Cape Horn, HMS *Wager* ran aground on a desolate island in Patagonia, later to be called Wager Island. This may well have happened because calculation of the ship’s longitude was in error, and they



A marine chronometer, essential to determine longitude

were further east than they thought.

David Grann takes us along after the grounding and breakup of the *Wager*, providing details of the deterioration and breakdown of naval discipline and giving excellent descriptions of the characters and actions of the various participants.

The captain slowly lost control of the situation, and his crew divided into several factions, led by three or four rebellious but natural leaders. His gunnery officer, the strongest, was one of them.

Food supplies were virtually non-existent, and nothing but crustaceans and seaweed could be found along the shore, while only wild celery could be harvested from the almost barren land.

Material, wreckage and stores, along

with several of the *Wager*'s boats, were salvaged from the slowly disintegrating wreck, and a sort of village was built from the material on the shore. One small group of men left the main body altogether and set up a camp some distance away. The gunnery officer also set up his own rough quarters on the island, where he presided and held sway.

The captain, driven by his strong sense of duty, wished to use the salvaged boats to fulfill his mission to harass the Spanish and, hopefully, meet up with the rest of Anson's squadron further north. This view was not shared by the majority of the castaways, however, and open rebellion ensued. The largest boat was commandeered by the gunner. The captain and his few remaining loyal men were abandoned, while the large

launch commanded by the gunner left to sail through the Straits of Magellan to Brazil. The survivors were later repatriated to Britain.

Meanwhile the captain and his very few loyal companions, helped by some wandering native Patagonian families, found their way north. There they were captured by the Spanish, but later released.

Eventually the survivors of the captain's group also returned to Britain, where the whole affair was investigated by the Admiralty, several long years after Anson's squadron left England. No charges were ever laid.

The *Wager* is superbly written and David Grann's research into the events is incredibly extensive. The book is altogether a super read.

Ransome on Blue Water Sailing

Collected and Introduced by Christina Hardymont (Amazon Publications, 1999)

Reviewed by Simon Horn (Montreal, Quebec)

Ransome on Blue Water Sailing collects Ransome's various writings about voyaging under sail.

Hardymont starts with an Introduction that situates these writings in Ransome's life at the time they were written. A part I found interesting was the correspondence between publisher Rupert Hart-Davis and Ransome over his introductions for the Mariners Library. Ransome would not accept any payment for these, and a grateful Hart-Davis sent him a copy of the complete 12-volume Oxford English Dictionary, or OED.

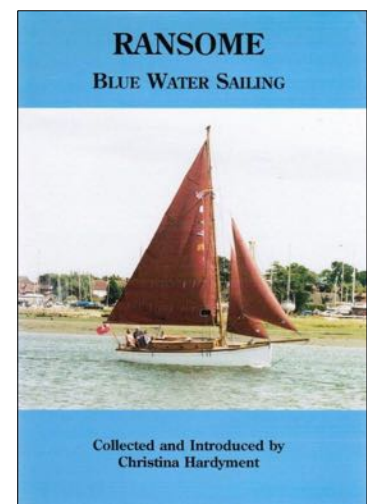
A long letter shows that Ransome was more or less overwhelmed by the gift, beginning with "Are you sure your

fellow Directors have not passed a vote of censure on you for gross extravagance? What chance has the firm got of ultimate success if it begins by hurling Great Oxford English Dictionaries quite unnecessarily at people who never expected anything of the kind?"

He goes on to say that "IT" has arrived and that they will have to move house in order to make room for it.

He concludes with:

"IT has the most extraordinary effect upon me. Looking at IT full face, or even feeling IT's blue buckram presence arming my back, I have the oddest illusion that after all I must be some sort of a writer. I daren't risk the



loss of that illusion by trying to write. And, anyhow, I have now a full-time job. I am an Owner of a GREAT OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY. That's enough of a job for anybody. I

have and shall have no time for anything else. Yours ever,
Arthur Ransome OGOED”

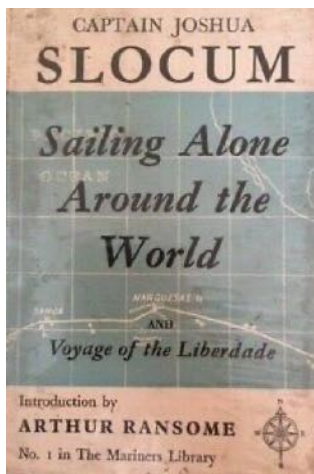
“Saturday to Saturday”

Ransome’s own writings begin with “Saturday to Saturday”, his account of a week-long cruise in *Nancy Blackett* from Pin Mill to Portsmouth in 1937. As Hardyment puts it, “... it seemed a good idea to start the book with his own account of such a voyage. It also sets the scene nicely for his opinions on other men’s writings about sailing by giving an idea of how he thought the thing ought to be done.” (p.1)

Mariners Library Introductions

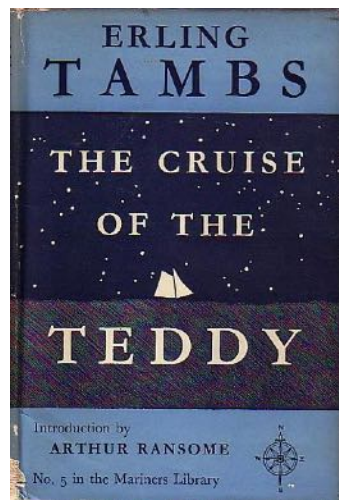
Next follow reprints of seven introductions Ransome wrote for volumes in the Mariners Library between 1948 and 1954, including the first, Joshua Slocum’s *Sailing Alone Around the World*.

In Hardyment’s Introduction, Hart-Davis recounts how Ransome’s response to the prospect of republishing Slocum’s book was: “ ‘Slocum, said Arthur, ‘wrote the best sailing book in the world, and if you republish it I’ll write you an introduction for nothing.’ ” (p. 2)



Ransome went on to provide seven more introductions, each of which tells us as much about what Ransome thought important as it does about the book being introduced.

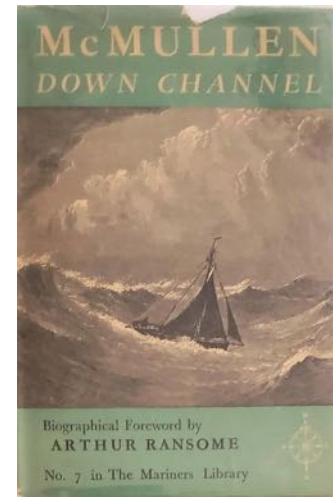
About *The Cruise of the Teddy* (Mariners Library #5) he says “...Mr Tambs's book about the Teddy and her crew is something altogether unlike all other books of the kind. Mr Tambs offers something new. And one of its chief merits is that it does not take a sailor to enjoy it.”



He then goes to say, “I suppose Captain Joshua Slocum's immortal work comes nearest to it in its combination of seafaring with direct human interest... He thereby lifted his book out of the class of mere records of travel to which a reader returns for the sake of the man who is alive in them.” (p. 23)

His introduction to McMullen’s *Down Channel* (Mariners Library #7), on the other hand, stresses seamanship. McMullen was clearly a conservative, even a reactionary, and this is a characteristic that comes out in several of the books Ransome introduced; the point is McMullen was a sailor. That is what

mattered to Ransome, and clearly what he thought should matter to other sailors or would-be sailors.



Reviews of Sailing Books

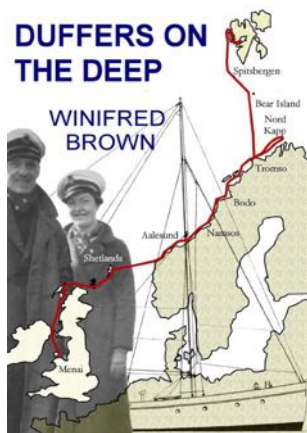
Following the Mariners Library introductions, *Ransome on Blue Water Sailing* presents reviews of 38 nautical books, including several more Mariners Library volumes, that Ransome wrote for the *Manchester Guardian*, *The Observer* and *The Sunday Times* between 1926 and 1955.

The Mariners Library books are all classics, for that is why they were chosen. The sailing books that Ransome reviewed and that appear in this book were not necessarily so. Though one assumes they were all worth reviewing, at least as far as the editors were concerned.

What is the point of a review? The idea is to give the reader an idea of whether or not it is worth their while to seek out the book in question. Ransome’s enthusiasm for sailing of any kind is the glue that unites all the reviews reprinted here but, as Hardyment points out in her introduction, his particular enthusiasms for either coastal sailing or effective writing can be seen

through these reviews.

In his 1940 review of six books, entitled “Seafarers All: Voyages in Small Boats”, Ransome contrasts Richard Maury’s *The Saga of Cimba* with Winifred Brown’s *Duffers on the Deep*: “Mr Maury is an extremely self-conscious and eloquent writer, with the odd result that his book is nothing like so vivid as the tomboyish *Duffers on the Deep*, in which Miss Winifred Brown (who does not care a hoot for literature) describes the voyage of *Perula*, a converted fishing boat, from Liverpool Bay to Spitzbergen.” (p. 103)



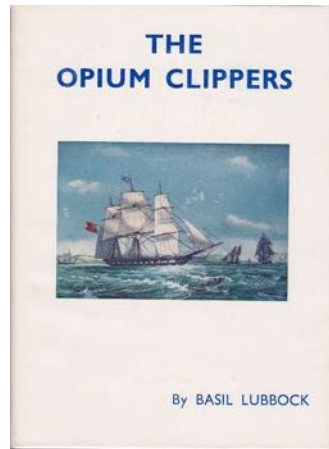
The reviews cover a wide range of nautical subjects, from historical books (Columbus or Magellan) to sailor, writer and renowned boat designer Uffa Fox (five reviews!) to ocean racing to Thor Heyerdahl’s Kon-Tiki expedition. The range is very broad.

As a reader, the point of a review is to give me an idea as to whether or not I would like the book, and there are many in this compilation that sound interesting. (Uffa Fox not so much.)

So far, my possibles include the 1934 “Flowers on the Dunghill”, a review of Basil Lubbock’s *The Opium Clippers*

that contrasts the amazing seamanship of the opium smugglers with the dirty nature of their trade:

“...Mr Lubbock has managed to bring together enough material to make to make a memorable picture of the old China Coast, the opium wars, the founding of Hong-Kong, early days in Shanghai, the opening of the



Yangtze River, a background against which the wonderful little vessels and their skippers come to life once more as, vying with each other to make record passages, they hurry to and fro on their unlawful occasions.” (p. 68)

Another interesting one is “The Sailor’s Daughter” (1938), a review of Mariners Library #2, Elizabeth Linklater’s *A Child Under Sail*, which gives the story of Linklater’s days on the square riggers her father captained, starting at age four!

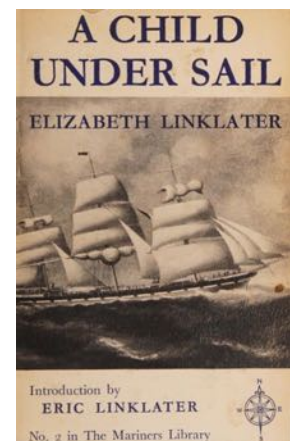
“Her book is alive with the details that take hold of a child’s mind... precarious goings ashore in native boats in foreign ports, groping returns in dark or fog to the sailing ship at anchor, being allowed to take an observation with her father’s sextant... the raffles for model ships in bottles, made by the sailors, when everybody aboard

(Unlike many Amazon books, *Blue Water Sailing* is still available on the TARS Stall, for only £5 plus postage. To get to the Stall you will have to first log in as a member:

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

then choose TARS Stall from the Society Information menu.)

put in a plug of tobacco, and she put in her plug with the rest, and somehow always won...” (p. 87)



I suggest that you try to get a copy of Ransome on *Blue Water Sailing* before the TARS Stall runs out. I don’t think you will regret it.

(PS: Note that I immediately went out and found a used, mildly battered copy of *A Child Under Sail* and I do not regret the purchase. Now, where can I find *The Opium Clippers*?)

(PPS: *Duffers on the Deep* is actually still available in a new edition, see Amazon, while I have found *The Opium Clippers* on the [Internet Archive](#).)

Beckfoot Kitchen — Eating with the Swallows and Amazons

Dinner with the Great Aunt

“Only no tapioca. Or sago. Never.” (Nancy, *The Picts and the Martyrs*)

by Molly McGinnis (Manteca, California)

In Cook’s time, both tapioca and sago were staples of the British kitchen. Uncooked, they were both rather grayish, much more alike than we would see now (right-hand photo), and might be called by either name. Despite this, tapioca and sago come

Those same “chewy glutinous lumps” have made a big comeback as pearl drink, milk drink, or bubble tea. Whatever you call it, North Americans drank almost half a billion dollars’ worth in 2022, about a sixth of the world’s bubble tea. Wouldn’t you

and cornstarch blancmange too. Cook’s good meat pie (SD) – too salt, “Back to the kitchen!” – her best black cake – too rich, “Back to the kitchen!” (PM). I’m sure many more of Cook’s tastiest efforts were rejected.



from different parts of two quite unrelated plants. Cassava root is a main food source in many African and Asian countries, and Caribbean and Asian markets. In California, many chain supermarkets sell cassava root as “Yuca” (often misspelled Yucca).

Food writer Diana Kennedy would have been learning “the basics of English cookery” in her “rather swanky” London girls’ school at about the same time the Amazons were demanding “no tapioca...ever”, and says of the tapioca they cooked, “my pet aversion... with its huge, chewy, glutinous lumps...” This must have been a standard recipe for tapioca and the kind the Amazons couldn’t stand even when Cook made it – boiled custard with big fisheye tapioca pearls floating around in it.

love to have seen the GA’s face when confronted with a big glass of purplish taro drink? Its flavor and color come from a cube of cooked taro root.



“We hate it”



“Oh yum!”

Dinner with the Great Aunt couldn’t have been much fun, especially for poor Cook. The GA was rude and bossy and her ideal meals seem to resemble the infamously bad cooking of a British boarding school. Sago and tapioca puddings in plenty, I’m sure,

What about that ginger wine, though? My belief is that the Aunt justified her taste for a tippie by calling it “medicinal,” something to help her digest those gray tasteless meals. Nancy, launching *Scarab* with a few drops of the aunt’s wine, says “Beastly stuff.” She’d probably have said that of any wine, but how would she know it was “beastly stuff” if she’d never sampled it, and how did she get any to sample?



Cook On Her Own

Mrs. Braithwaite, as we see her, is the best kind of “good plain cook”, expert at all kinds of pastry dishes, savory and

sweet, skilled with meat, and knows to take seasonal vegetables as they offer themselves. “There’s that bit of roast mutton, cold. There’s the brawn, and I was thinking of a treacle pudding...” (SD)

I can almost taste her brawn, just like I used to make: simmered meats and suave gelatinous bits, well seasoned and chilled in a loaf, then sliced rather thickly. A suet pastry rolled out, spread with black treacle, rolled up and boiled. Mrs. Beeton’s cookbook says sniffily, “It is, of course, only suitable for a nursery, or very plain family dinner.” Treacle pudding would have

been served with a sauce, like that on this jam roly-poly, another favorite.



Jam roly-poly

Cook really gets going when she’s called on to send food to the crews. “Lots of brown bread and butter... a fat beef roll... lettuces and radishes, apple dumplings, a “hunk big enough

for twelve indoor people” of her “blackest and juiciest and stickiest fruit cake,” all in one basket (SD).

Ginger biscuits, bunloaf, apple pies... The packing case in *Winter Holiday* must have been filled by Mrs. Braithwaite: two cold chickens, a Christmas pudding, meat paste, biscuits, Swiss buns, tea, milk... I’m sure she looked the other way when Nancy swiped that cake. And the cold tongue that “had hardly been touched” that Nancy “found” and brought with the plum pudding for the consolatory dinner with Uncle Jim (SA).

The Great Beef Roll Experiment

Cook’s beef roll comes into the books more than any other meat dish not made by the crews (SD, PM, WH), and it’s always greeted with such enthusiasm that I couldn’t resist trying to make one. The ingredients in my old British cookbooks are quite simple: minced lean beef, and fatty cured pork, salt, pepper, and other seasonings according to taste. Cook’s beef rolls were always sent with the other parts of a sit-down meal, but a beef roll can be eaten cold or hot.

The piece of beef cook minced would have been firm, dry, and flavorful compared to modern supermarket meat. I used home-ground beef, from a piece with every bit of fat trimmed out, but the leanest ground beef you can buy should work if you don’t want to grind or process your own mixture.

“Bacon” might be smoked or just cured in Cook’s time, but would have been firm and dry also. The bacon adds flavor and its fat keeps the roll of pure meat from being dry. You could use thick-sliced bacon, ends and pieces, slab bacon, or pancetta (Italian bacon, cured but not smoked) for the fat and flavor element.

Proportions don’t need to be exact. Mrs. Beeton’s charts give 2 cups to the pound for chopped beef and other meats, so a measuring cup should work about as well as a scale.

My Beef Roll Trials

If you’re grinding your own meats, sprinkle the seasonings over the meat before grinding. Chop finely or grind

1 lb very lean beef (2 slightly rounded cups)

1/3 lb (2/3 cup) to 1/2 lb (1 cup) fat bacon

Salt (1 tsp or more), pepper (1 tsp or more)

1/4 medium onion, minced

I followed Eliza Acton’s 1845 recommendations and added a good grating of nutmeg, with onion as a substitute for shallots; I’d have added julienned lemon peel as in Acton if I’d had a lemon (Cook surely would have had lots of peel after making all that lemonade). Parsley is often mentioned too, and thyme.



You’ll need to knead the ground mixture well so it will hold together; kneading in a bag is the least messy and most sanitary. If you use a mincing machine, grind the seasoned meats right into a bag rub-

ber-banded on. You could use the flat beater of a stand mixer also.

Hand-chopping doesn't take as long as you might think, if you're handy with a cleaver. It took me only two minutes with my Chinese cleaver to chop roughly cut up bacon slices into fine mince, and I've often hand-chopped beef.

My cleaver is like this. It was \$8 US in a Chinese grocery. Online, you'll pay \$30 US or more.



I haven't tried a food processor, but cutting the meats into smallish pieces and processing, very briefly, small amounts at a time might work. You want mince, not paste.

Baking

Use the middle rack and preheat the oven to 400 or 450°F. Line the pan with oiled non-stick aluminum foil to make cleanup easier. Also, you can wrap the baked roll in the foil to chill it.

Put the roll in the oven and turn the heat down to 350 or 375° immediately. A half hour would be about right to get the center of the roll to 150- 160°F; you don't want the meat rare. Pour the juice into a small pan and make gravy or just dip bread into it while it's hot (cook's perks). Serve hot or chilled.

I cooked my small roll about 45 minutes, because I wanted to try three things: wrapping half the roll in bread dough, making a pinwheel roll with a bit of the meat, and leaving half the roll bare. The bread dough experiment with was

not a great success – the meat shrank so much it fell out when I picked a slice up – but the dough did soak up a lot of juice and was quite tasty by itself. The same happened with the part of the roll that was wrapped in dough but it was juicier and the dough was tasty.



Next time I'm going to try wrapping the whole roll in a thin layer of richer raised dough, or maybe a buttery pie crust. Eliza Acton says wrap the roll in baking parchment and coat the whole thing with 'flour paste' (to be discarded after cooking). After comparing the wrapped half with the oven-roasted half I could see her point – a nice moist roll with no hard outside.

Traditional Lakeland cooking?

I feel that Lakeland cooking and foods in the time of the S&A series would have been much as described in Eliza Acton's 1845 *Modern Cookery* and Mrs. Beeton's various books. They're interesting reading, available in many formats at Project Gutenberg: <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/>

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...

The TARS Canada coordinator is Ian Sacré, gallivanterthree@shaw.ca

The editor is Simon Horn, sjhorn@gmail.com

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