



Signals from TARSUS & North Pole News

May(-June) 2025

The Transformation of Ransome, p. 5



Susan Makes Exploring Possible, p. 9



Going Bananas!, p. 3



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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 have no doubt noticed, this issue of *Signals from TARSUS/North Pole News* is late, a month late. The reason is simple, I have spent a lot of the last month or so lying on my back, recovering from a hip replacement operation following a bad, though stupid, bicycle accident. Thanks to exercise and reg-

ular physio appointments, recovery is going well and after a couple of weeks of extreme fatigue, my strength is returning.

So here, at last, is the May(-June) issue of the newsletter.

More important than my annoying situation is unhappy news about a long-time TARS member, Maida Barton Follini of Halifax. Maida had been a regular and much appreciated contributor since I started editing the newsletter, and I was surprised not to receive anything for the January issue. When I looked into things, I regret that I discovered Maida had died last November at age 94. She will be missed. You can find my appreciation of her interesting life at the end of *Ship's Papers*.

In this issue

As always, thanks to the contributors.

In *Dipping Our Hands*, **Martin Beech** looks at the fortuitous event that propelled Arthur Ransome into journalism in "The 1914 Boat Race and the Transformation of Ransome".

Andrew Fisher then continues his travels through the 12 with a consideration of "Susan – The Mate Who Makes Exploring Possible".

Ian Sacré follows in *The Professor's Laboratory* with an addendum to his January article about repairing your ship when stranded in the middle of nowhere. "Make Do and Mend, Part 2" tells us more about the difficult task faced by Captain Cook and his crew when they had to careen and repair HMS *Endeavour* in Australia in 1870.

In *The Ship's Library* I take a look at another Amazon Publication, 2004's *The Best of Childhood*, which uses diary entries, letters and commentary to consider the process by which Ransome produced each of the Swallows and Amazons stories.

Finally, in *Beckfoor Kitchen* Molly McGinnis presents "Going Bananas", a look at how that fruit appears in virtually all the books.

As you can see, this issue is a bit short. The newsletter continues to rely on submissions from a very small number of members, and I am afraid that sooner or later their imaginations may dry up.

Please, think about ways you can help out. Shorter articles, questions and comments, not to mention pictures, are always welcome.

The New TARS Payment System and How to Renew your Membership

As you all should know by now, the TARS website (<https://arthur-ransome.org>) has been renewed and with it a new on-line yearly subscription system has been put in place.

This was explained in the May-August 2025 issue of *Signals*, on page 6.

Also, in early May the TARS webmaster, Ben Hambleton, sent an email to all TARS members who had paid their membership fees for this year **by some other method** than the new online payment system, explaining how to update their information online for future renewals.

Anyone who is still confused by this transition, especially if you have not renewed for 2025, or did not receive Ben's email, should contact your country coordinator to ask for help:

US Coordinator Marc Purtil: purtil@alum.mit.edu

Canada Coordinator Ian Sacré: gallivanterthree@shaw.ca

Start thinking about it now. I will send out my usual reminder for the September issue on August 1.

I hope everyone has a good summer.

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



Greetings from your new US Coordinator

By Mark Purtil, TARSUS Coordinator
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purtil@alum.mit.edu

I got the job by showing up as an American at the 2024 AGM and being willing and able to do the job.

So far duties have been (as promised) rather light, as most business can be done directly with the UK.

Should you wish to contact me, the best way is to write to the official US email address, usa@arthur-ransome.org.

You can also call me at the number given in latest issue of *Signals* from the UK, but due to the volume of spam calls (that we all deal with), you'll have to leave a message. Either

way I'll try to get back to you as soon as I can.

Many of will have received a couple of emails from me already on some Zoom opportunities from the UK. Unfortunately, it's not yet possible for me to send email from the official US address, so watch for email from purtil@alum.mit.edu until that changes.

If you didn't get email from me, let me know and I'll add you to my list

(which came from the society treasurer). Likewise if you'd prefer not to emails from me on things like that, let me know and I'll remove you from the list.

I would also welcome any thoughts on what we might do as TARSUS or with our neighbors to the north.

I feel I should say something other than administrative things, so I will finish with this advice: if you go to a TARS event, don't forget your boots! I forgot to bring mine so, while I did have a lovely time, I did miss a couple of events where boots were needed.

All the best,
Mark



Greetings from the North

By Ian Sacré, TARS Canada Coordinator
3965 Marine Drive, Royston, BC V0R 2V0
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Greetings Fellow TARS Members,

Another winter has past and, according to all accounts, in a typically Canadian manner the winter

weather across the country varied from extreme to benign with a mix of blizzards, torrential rain and full gale and storm force winds. Hopefully such tumultuous days are behind us for a while.

I have had little news from TARS HQ during the past few months, though Krysia Clack has kindly kept us up to date on the progress being made on re-designing and updating the TARS website, <https://arthur-ransome.org>. On this subject I

strongly encourage all members to read the website update found on page 6 of the May-August 2025 edition of *Signals* just received. The update goes into significant detail concerning subscription renewal procedures etc. Webmaster Ben Hambleton's email address is also given should you need to contact him.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who take the time to contribute to the *North Pole News* and a very special thanks to Simon

Horn, our editor, who tirelessly labours to put it altogether for us. This is a huge task which takes Simon numerous hours to do. I can't think how he manages it all!

Wishing everyone calm seas and fair winds.

Ian Sacré
Canadian TARS Coordinator

Maida Barton Follini, 1930-2024

An appreciation by Simon Horn (Montreal, Quebec)

Maida Follini was a long-time TARS member. A resident of Halifax, Nova Scotia, she died early last November at age 94. You can [read a fascinating obituary online](#).

I knew Maida because she was a regular contributor to *Signals from TARSUS/North Pole News*. She sent me an article for the June 2016 issue, soon after I became editor. Her “Before the Spray” talked of Joshua Slocum’s life before he began his famous round-the-world voyage.

That was the first, but from then until her September 2024 article, “The Schooner Bluenose”, and her review of “Captains Courageous”, she wrote a total of 14 articles.

An obituary described Maida Follini as a “retired psychologist, educator, writer, and life-long Quaker”. She had a remarkable and varied life, living in the United States until moving to Nova Scotia in 1980 to take up a position at the Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority’s School for the Deaf.

She was very much at home in the outdoors, and her family would often meet at their camp on Ram Island, Maine. Her article “Adventures and Misadventures in the High Sierra” (January 2023) described a memory from her early ’20s:

“I thought that, like the Swallows and Amazons who climbed “Kanchenjunga” in the Lake District, I would head for the mountains, in this case the High Sierras of California. So on August 2, 1958, I set off with a sweater in my knapsack along with a week’s food, a canteen of water, and a blanket strapped to the

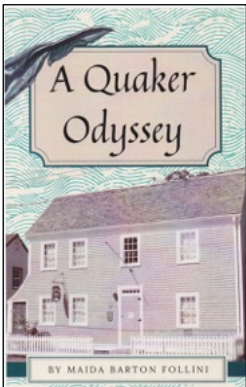


knapsack. Also a topographic map of the park and the surrounding mountains. I thought I was well-prepared!”

Her article, “Setting Up Camp”, in the January 2024 issue, described traditional methods of setting up a campsite in the wood, and showed that she had not forgotten what she had learned in a life outdoors.

Maida was very much a writer, and not just for TARS. Her letters to the editor often appeared in the Halifax *Chronicle-Herald*, and she wrote for the *Canadian Quaker History Journal*. Her article, [“A Quaker Odyssey”](#) appeared in its issue 71, in 2006, and described how Quakers from Nan-

tucket migrated to Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, and then on to Milford Haven in Wales. (A slightly edited version was published by the [Dartmouth Heritage Museum](#) in 2007, and is still available.)



I never got the opportunity to meet Maida Follini in person. I had hoped to see her during a recent trip to Halifax, and she wrote “If I still had my boat, I would take you for a sail but I sold it a couple of years ago.” Unfortunately our schedules did not match and I never got to see her.

An interesting person, and an interesting life. I wish I’d had the opportunity to know her better.

Maida’s articles

Before the Spray	Captain Flint’s Trunk	June 2016
Skimming Over the Ice	Dipping Our Hands	January 2018
Sailing Around the Horn to the Goldfields	Dipping our Hands	September 2018
Pirates, Explorers, Indians, and other Roles	Dipping Our Hands	May 2020
The Amazons and Other Pirates	Captain Flint’s Trunk	January 2022
Animal Characters: Participants, Rescued...	Dipping Our Hands	May 2022
Whales Up Close	Kanchenjunga’s Cairn	September 2022
Adventures and Misadventures in the High Sierra	Kanchenjunga’s Cairn	January 2023
Snakes Rehabilitated	Pieces of Eight	January 2023
Birds in the Ransome Books	The Professor’s Lab	May 2023
Mountain Walking, East and West	Kanchenjunga’s Cairn	September 2023
Setting Up Camp	Kanchenjunga’s Cairn	January 2024
The Schooner Bluenose	Captain Flint’s Trunk	September 2024
Kipling’s “Captains Courageous”	The Ship’s Library	September 2024

Dipping our Hands — Personal relationships with the books

The 1914 Boat Race and the Transformation of Ransome

by Martin Beech (Courtenay, B.C.)

This year the 1914 Oxford and Cambridge University Boat Race will celebrate its 111th anniversary. In Tolkienian terms, it will be “eleventy-one” years old - the same age as Bilbo Baggins at the beginning of *The Lord of the Rings*. And, just as Bilbo’s life was to undergo a dramatic transition upon turning 111, so too, 111 years ago, in 1914, did the life and outlook of Arthur Ransome dramatically pivot directions. Indeed, in the wake of the 1914 Boat Race (which the Cambridge boat crew won) the world, that August, was about to descend into carnage. The long-standing tradition of the University Boat Race (first held in 1829) had seen 71 continuous annual outings by 1914, but with events that were soon to unfold, the race, for the first time since 1856, was to be put on hiatus. When the Boat Race resumed in 1920, five of the 16 crew members in 1914 had died on the battlefields of Europe. The halcyon days of the Edwardian era had come to an abrupt and tragic end, and the world was forever changed.

For Ransome, 1914 began in England. Indeed, he had only recently returned, in October of 1913, from his first foray into Russia collecting folktales. During that fall and winter, however, he worked upon a critical study of the writings of Robert Louis Stevenson (eventually published in 2011), completed a rhyming verse version of *Aladdin and His Wonderful Lamp* (published in December 1919 and available on the Internet Archive), and produced a short, odd, but philosophically fascinating, story, *The Blue Treacle* (eventually published in 1993) for his then



4-year-old daughter, Tabitha. In early March, 1914, however, Ransome was on holiday in France, when, as he writes in his autobiography [1. p.163]:

“I was back in Paris again when an urgent message from Cecil Chesterton and [Hilaire] Belloc told me they had a seat in the Press Boat for the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race next day and asked if I could get back in time to use it. An hour later I was on the train and duly saw the Boat Race, was soaked through, and made my first experiment in reporting”.

The *Daily Telegraph* newspaper for Monday, March 30, 1914 gives us our first account of the race, and it informs us that, in spite of the Dark Blues (Oxford) giving a stern chase, the Light Blues (Cambridge) easily won by 4 ½ lengths. The time to cover the 4.2-mile (6.8-km) course was 20 minutes and 23 seconds. The

reporter, “An Old Blue”, describes the day: “the weather was in every way ideal. ... The Sun shone gloriously all the morning, and the light breeze from the south, which had but the faintest touch of east in it, brought no chill with it”. The crowds spread out along the Thames embankment were, we are told, large and enthusiastic. And, in the evening, the crews dined at The Grand Hotel, and (mercifully) “the speeches were short and to the point, so the crews were able to get away to amuse themselves at an earlier hour than normal”.

A second article in the *Telegraph* for March 30 further informs us of the collapse of a temporary viewing platform near the Hammersmith Bridge. The collapse resulted in a dozen people being taken to hospital, with dozens more being thrown on to the shore or into the Thames. The article indicates that, “the accident was probably the worst that has occurred in the history of the contest And

the air was filled with the shrieks of women and children and the shouts of men”.

Ransome’s account of the Boat Race appeared in the April 2, 1914 issue of *The New Witness* [2]. Edited by Cecil Chesterton, this weekly newspaper had evolved from the short-lived *The Eye Witness*, started by Hilaire Belloc in 1911, and was published from 1912 to 1923. In 1925 it became the *G.K.’s Weekly*, and was famously edited by G. K. Chesterton.

For all this, Ransome’s two-page account is far more introspective than the copy found within *The Daily Telegraph*. Indeed, it begins in reflective mood, indicating that:

“I was in Paris taking tea with a Russian lady when a blue telegram was brought to me”. His unnamed companion [not Evgenia Shelepina – that relationship was still several years away], failed to see the point of such a contest, and could not comprehend why it would be such a national spectacle. Ransome explains, however, that, “I began to think of the race as a religious festival, a yearly contest between Olympians fraught, whichever University of Gods should win, with happy presage for the ensuing year”.

Having dashed to England, Ransome, arrived just in time to cover the event, and prepared himself by borrowing a pair of binoculars, “from an old sportsman”. The story proper begins with Ransome explaining his unsuccessful battle with the crowds at Putney Bridge and his frantic search for the Press Boat. Eventually, however, he informs his readers, “I hired a waterman and we crossed the stream to look for the

launch”. The sought-after craft was then soon located, but Ransome found himself, “disappointed”, commenting that, “the Press-boat was a beast of a boat with a big yellow funnel, blunt bows, wide beam, and an obvious incapacity for speed”.

Once aboard his transport, however, Ransome reflected upon his surroundings, and the preparations for the start of the race. Through his borrowed field-glasses Ransome describes what he saw as the first crew emerged from their boat-house, “mounted police forcing the crowd back”, as, “eight whitish ants carrying a straw moved down the slips to the waterside. ... presently [the] straw moved outwards into the river, and became a boat”. The Cambridge crew, Ransome writes, moved with, “perfect unanimity and ease”; Oxford in contrast, “had no grace to spoil and would lose nothing if it came to a struggle through heavy water”.

As the race proceeded, Ransome’s attention focused as much upon what was happening in the Press Boat, as to events taking place on the river. He comments that even though “a quarter of a million people were roaring on the banks”, it was seemingly quiet on the river; he questioned, “I wondered if, for those actually rowing, the race is lost or won in a void of silence and, perhaps, of dark”. The race over, the Press Boat returned to Putney Bridge and Ransome made his way to Fleet Street, where newspaper posters were already announcing the outcome of the race. Seeing these posters, Ransome was left, as he concluded in his article, to reflect, “on the futile marvels of our modern civilization”.

The unexpected telegram, and opportunity to cover the 1914 Boat

Race, was the unlooked for start of Ransome’s career as a newspaper reporter. While he had written numerous reviews and articles for many magazines and periodicals before 1914, the Boat Race “experiment” was a new adventure in writing about an actual news event with a distinct, time-sensitive deadline. For all this, Ransome really wrote about his own experience of the Boat Race, rather than about the crews and the actual race. Indeed, he completely missed seeing and reporting upon the events surrounding the collapse of the temporary viewing platform.

While Ransome probably did not realize it at the time, a literal wind-change in the direction of his life had commenced with the running of 1914 Boat Race. It was ultimately Serendipity and Fortuna, however, that turned the Boat Race squall into a distinct life-impacting sea-change. Indeed, early in that eventful year, Ransome had secured a commission from Douglas Goldring (editor of the *Tramp* – a magazine that Ransome had previously contributed to) to write a descriptive history and guide to Saint Petersburg (re-named Petrograd in September 1914, and later as Leningrad in January 1924). It was this commission that ultimately put Ransome in the right place at the right time to become a reporter on international politics.

Arriving in St. Petersburg on May 13, 1914, Ransome quickly assembled the material for his guide and history, and by July he had retreated to Finland to begin the writing and organization of his manuscript. History tells us that world events were to overtake both Ransome and Russia, and that the guide was never published – indeed, Ransome eventually burned the completed manuscript.

Following a brief return to England in September, Ransome was soon on his way back to Russia, arriving in Petrograd on December 30, 1914. His plan was to continue collecting and working upon his translations for *Old Peter's Russian Tales*. In February 1915, however, something entirely unexpected happened. Ransome, full of enthusiasm, decided to write a romance novel. This idea ultimately became *The Elixir of Life*. Published in September 1915, *The Elixir* was a dramatic departure from Ransome's previous critical writings. It is a fast-paced, gothic romance, having a macabre plot, philosophical musings and, of course, a happy ending involving fishing.

While Ransome wrote, more than once, about his dream of quietly settling down somewhere, and writing many romances, *The Elixir* was to be a one-off. Indeed, in terms of making a living, and paying his way, the most significant event for Ransome in 1915 was an offer from *The Daily News* newspaper office to become their official reporter and correspondent in Russia. Founded by Charles Dickens in 1846, *The Daily News* had been brought-out by chocolate manufacturer George Cadbury in 1901, and Cadbury used the paper to campaign the British parliament in support of the introduction of old age pensions, workers' rights, and women's suffrage, and to denounce the continuation of wars between nations. Ransome's first article for *The Daily News*, covering some fierce fighting, Russian captures and German counter-attacks, appeared on November 13, 1915, and this signaled his transformation from a writer of critical reviews, philosophical essays, stories, and romance novels, to that of a reporter on matters relating to war and politics.

Ransome completed the text for *Old Peter's Russian Tales* in June of 1916, and it saw print that same November. This long-admired book is perhaps the best-loved, as well as best-known, of Ransome's works outside of the Swallows and Amazons series. That Ransome was aware of the transformative times within which he lived is evident from a letter to his mother written on March 6, 1916. He worries about, "keeping alive after the war", commenting, "I am content to turn to journalism simply, and do no more decent writing at all. However, we'll see". One senses that the "we'll see" comment was really a boiler-plate caveat added as an afterthought – deep down, Ransome had no real intention of abandoning his "decent writing".

In October 1916, Ransome was once again in England, this time imploring the British Foreign Office, indeed, anyone who would actually listen to him, that he believed Russia was on the verge of revolution. And as he prophesized, in late 1917 the foundations of the Soviet Union were brought about through the Bolshevik revolution and the onset of civil war.

Ransome returned to Petrograd in late December 1916, and for the next several years (with occasional short visits to England) reported on the political machinations surrounding the emergence of the new Soviet Union. Importantly for Ransome, as 1917 came to a close, he met and began to romance Leon Trotsky's secretary, Evgenia Shelepina. This was yet another inflection-point in Ransome's life, and he recalled in his autobiography, "that Christmas of 1917 was the beginning of a wholly new life, though I did not suspect it at the time".

Ransome continued to report on the revolution, and the ravages of WWI through 1918 and 1919, acting, in small part, as an informant (under codename S76) for MI5, part of the British Secret Service [3].

In November of 1919, Ransome started writing for the *Manchester Guardian* newspaper, beginning an association that was to last for the next decade. This, however, was also the beginning of the drawn-out ending of his career as a reporter. While Ransome continued to cover political events (in Russia, Egypt and China) for many more years after 1919, he also began to take-on other writing projects at the *Guardian*, working on copy pertaining to literary criticism, book reviews, and a popular column on fishing. The latter writings, eventual resulted in the publication of Ransome's fishing classic, *Rod and Line*, in 1929.

The 72nd Oxford - Cambridge University Boat Race took place on March 27, 1920. Once again it was won by the Cambridge crew – this time by 4 lengths and in a time of 21 minutes and 11 seconds. The return of the Boat Race was a renewal, or the attempt at a renewal, of past normality, but for Ransome, new adventures had begun to unfold. Indeed, in the spring of 1920 Ransome, then living in Estonia, brought *Slug*, an old and rather dilapidated open boat. This was to be both a transformative and life-affirming, moment. After the purchase of *Slug*, for the remainder of his life Ransome was rarely without access to a sailing craft of one sort or another. Soon finding *Slug* living-up to its name, being both slow and open to the elements, Ransome next purchased *Kittimake*, and in late 1921 began laying plans for the commissioning of *Racundra*. This latter boat, of course, was the key

player in Ransome's masterful sailing book *Racundra's First Cruise* (published in 1923).

Towards the close of 1922, Ivy Walker finally agreed to a divorce, and Ransome was free to marry Evgenia. A move back to England, this time for good, was made in 1925, Ransome, in terms of his career and outlook, was at this time a completely transformed person, no longer a bohemian youth, writing on philosophy and literary criticism, but a respected political commentator and reporter. In spite of this success, however, Ransome also began to fight back against the system that supported him, looking to break away from the world of politics and reporting, and to rekindle his dreams of becoming a writer of stories. Here is the "we'll see" caveat in his letter of March 6, 1916, coming into play. It was from the long-established and long-latent desire to "produce more decent writing", that *Swallows and Amazons* eventually arose in 1929.

The Boat Race of 1914 clearly stuck in Ransome's memory. He specifically mentions it in his autobiography (begun 35 years after the event, in 1949), and he used it to develop a storyline in *Missee Lee*, published in 1941. Indeed, with sad resonance, *Missee Lee* was written during the second Boat Race hiatus, from 1940 to 1945, due to the outbreak of the Second World War. The storyline of interest is found within chapter 26, and concerns a confession by Captain Flint. Here we learn that he had only once been before a police court, and that it was on, "boat-race night. High spirits. A fancy for policemen's helmets" [4. p.212].

That Captain Flint himself had rowed (possibly for Oxford) is evi-

dent in *The Picts and The Martyrs* (published in 1943), when, after the break-in and burglary at Beckfoot, Nancy, in chapter 21. comments that the Great Aunt and the police were mostly flummoxed by what had not been taken, "the cups Uncle Jim got rowing were all there, and a medal or two".

Miss Lee, a one-time Cambridge student, appeared to fully understand the high-jinks associated with the Boat Race, and commented, "I know. Cambridge won and evellybody [sic] happy". Unfortunately, Captain Flint replies, "not that year, ma'am. We were the happy ones that year" [4. p.212]. In this case, given that Oxford University had won the race, it is apparently not the 1914 outing that Ransome was specifically channeling. This being said, Oxford had been on a five-year winning streak from 1909 to 1913, and they won again in 1923.

Ransome was not, as such, 'a university man', he had abandoned his undergraduate studies at the Yorkshire College of Science (now the Univer-

sity of Leeds), in 1902, after just two terms. Rather than follow a career as an industrial chemist, he left Leeds in favor of making a living as a writer, and a publishers-help. Captain Flint parallels this part of Ransome's life with his claim that, "I chucked Oxford before Oxford made up its mind to chuck me" [4. p.213].

There is some biographical resonance here with Ransome's time at Rugby School (1897 – 1901), where the offer by his tutor William Rouse to coach him for the Oxford University entrance examinations was actually turned down by his mother. This discussion, it should be said, was largely because of the financial burden it would have imposed upon the family should Ransome have been successful in securing a university placement [1, p.60].

Ransome later commented in his autobiography that he left Yorkshire College partly in order to not, "disgrace my father's name in Leeds". Indeed, Cyril Ransome had been Professor of Modern History and English Language at Yorkshire College



from 1878 to 1896. In his autobiography, Ransome describes the traumatic events surrounding his early attempts at learning to row – his father being the most critical of teachers [1. p.28].

Cyril had, in fact, gone up to Oxford (to study mathematics), and, had rowed for Merton College, but not as member to a Boat Race crew. All this being said, Captain Flint, and one assumes Arthur (and possibly Cyril Ransome), would have agreed with Miss Lee's observation that, "at Oxford the scholarship is poor, but the marmalade is velly [sic] good" [4. p.213].

Starting in 1914, with his coverage of the Oxford-Cambridge Boat Race, Ransome found himself, albeit reluctantly, on the path to becoming a fledgling reporter and newspaper correspondent. At the same time, his continued desire to collect and translate Russian folktales found him in the right place, at the right time, to

channel his writing towards political commentary.

By 1921, when the annual Boat Race resumed, Ransome had effectively transformed himself in to a full-time journalist, and commentator on Russian political machinations. For all this, Ransome was ever the romanticist, and he hankered for a return to writing for pleasure. Indeed, throughout the 1920s an inner debate must have raged in Ransome's mind: should he stay-on as a journalist at the *Manchester Guardian*, with its stable pay and advancing prospects, or, should he strike-out as a free and independent writer, and accept the privations to life and limb that such a move might well bring about. Eventually, in 1929, matters came to a head, and as explained in chapter 42 of his autobiography, Ransome records that, "1929 was for me the year of crisis, a hinge year as it were, joining and dividing two quite different lives" [1. p. 330].

Ransome, once again, pivoted directions in his life and outlook, and presumably with both relief and a considerable amount of trepidation, finally severed ties with that profession into which he had inadvertently stumbled, some 15 years earlier, as a result of the 1914 Boat Race and a telegram from Cecil Chesterton.

Notes and references

[1] R. Hart-Davies (ed.). *The Autobiography of Arthur Ransome*. Jonathan Cape, London, 1976.

[2] I am greatly indebted to the staff at The British Library, London, for finding and forwarding to me a copy of Ransome's *New Witness* article.

[3] Chambers, R. *The Last Englishman: The Double Life of Arthur Ransome*. Faber & Faber, London, 2009.

[4] Ransome, A. *Missee Lee*. Jonathan Cape, London, 1941.

Susan – The Mate Who Makes Exploring Possible

by Andrew Fisher (Evanston, Illinois)

Susan is really the only one of the young explorers that the adult "natives" totally trust. In *Swallows and Amazons*, she is the one who makes sure that the able seaman and the boy (Titty and Roger) always get to bed on time.

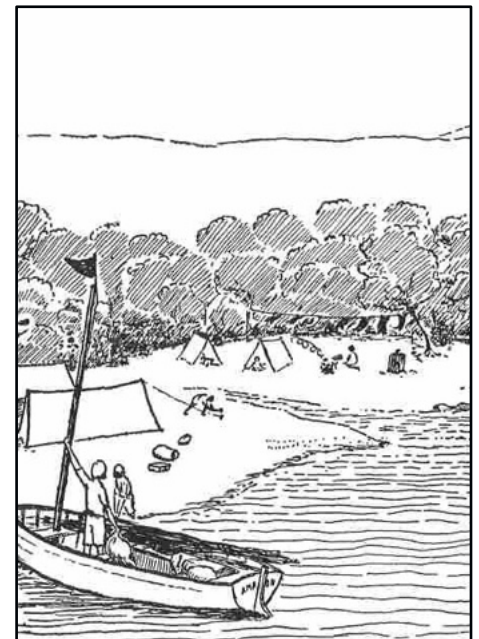
In *Swallowdale*, after the shipwreck, Susan hangs up the wet clothes on a line, then really straightens up the initial camp in Horseshoe Cove before Mother arrives to inspect it. Captain Flint says several times that there couldn't be a better Mate.

While climbing Kanchenjunga, at the halfway camp Susan turns all the

sleeping bags inside out to properly dry. It is Susan who keeps on hurrying the stretcher party for fear of not arriving before Mother does.

In *Peter Duck*, Susan, along with Peggy, keeps track of their use of the drinking water ballast ("Sums"), thus making it possible to bypass Madeira and the Canary Islands and go straight on to Crab Island, thus outwitting the pirate *Viper*.

In *Winter Holiday*, after Mrs. Jackson finds Titty and Roger missing, she says to herself "with Miss. Susan they will come to no harm". When they are all at the North Pole, Susan





says “I’m sure mother wouldn’t mind. The main thing is that we’re all here.” as they all drift off to sleep.

In *Pigeon Post*, in “Mrs Blackett Makes Conditions”, Nancy is trying to convince their mother that they should be allowed to camp up on High Topps. It is Susan who makes the difference, saying “Slater Bob said High Topps” is where the gold is “and he told us just what to look for...”

And later “She [her mother] would say all right if Roger went to bed at the proper time”, and then “It’s much safer than the island, no night sailing or anything like that, nothing could possibly go wrong”.

Much later in the story, after Roger, Dick, Dorothea and Titty get trapped underground in the Old Level because the wood shoring collapses behind them, Susan is very mad and forbids any more exploring of old tunnels. Later still, after the fell fire roars past the Gulch, Susan is most relieved to see the four younger explorers fighting the fire.

In *We Didn’t Mean to Go to Sea*, Susan is most horrified as they first drift then sail out to sea beyond the Cork lightship, even though it’s clearly the only safe thing to do. When they try sailing back, it is Susan’s sea sickness (and the wind) which stops them. After John successfully reefs but temporarily vanishes from the fore-deck, it is Susan’s horror which cures her of sea sickness.

In *Flushing*, it is Susan who tells the pilot the entire truth so they can get a telegram back to Mother and Jim Brading ASAP. Of course it’s Daddy who tells Susan to stop worrying after he sends the telegrams, because worrying does no good. And finally, as the *Goblin* approaches Harwich, Susan remembers that Daddy loves scrambled eggs and makes him some.

In *Secret Water*, in “Eager Prisoner”, Bridget is captured by the Eels so she can be a human sacrifice after all. Susan, of course, is very worried that Bridget will be scared out of her life, and when they arrive at the Eels camp Nancy mentions that Bridget is



probably “gagged and bound”. But after Susan calls for Bridget, she comes out of the large tent, neither bound nor gagged, saying, “Hullo, Susan. They’ve agreed. They say I’m quite old enough and I’m going to be a human sacrifice after all.”

In “Rescue and After”, Titty, Roger and Bridget are all safely back on the island, but then John and Susan arrive, very mad.

John says “Susan and I raced home, and there’d have been just time for me to go and settle that North West Passage if only you’d waited in the camp instead of putting Susan in a stew and making us waste hours in looking for you. And now we can never do it. It’s too late now, and the map’s a failure without it.”

Susan is always worried if people can’t be found.

(Of course, on the last morning Titty and Roger complete the North West Passage, just in time.)

The Professor's Laboratory — Ideas, instructions & fixes

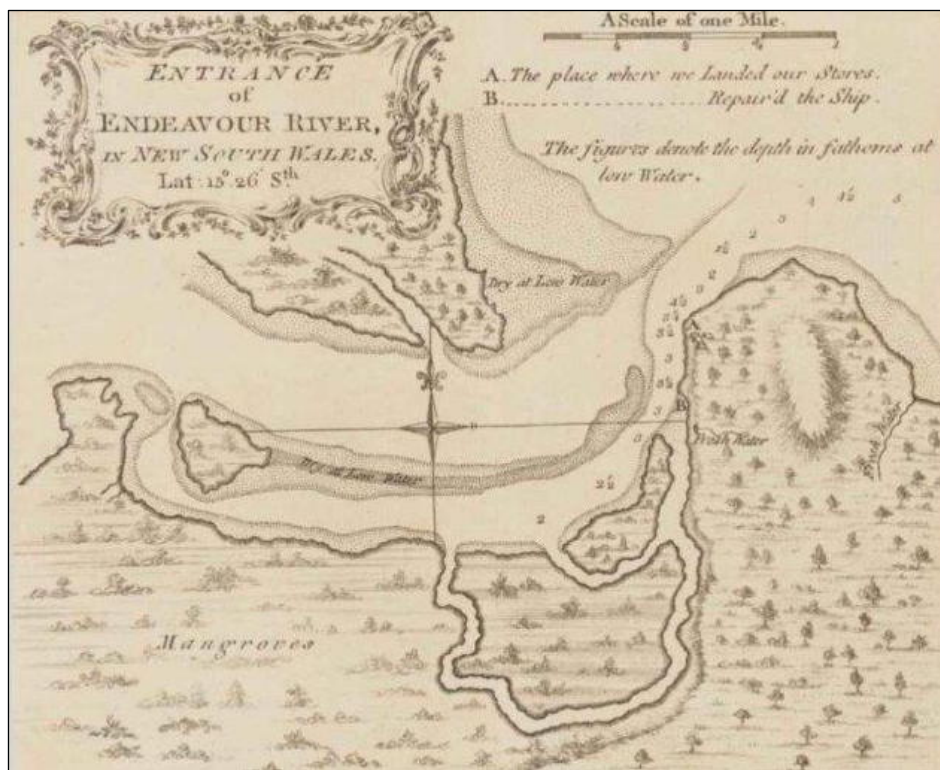
Make Do and Mend, Part 2

by Ian Sacré (Royston, British Columbia)

In the January issue of *Signals from TARSUS/North Pole News* I wrote a short article describing how important it had proven for sailors to be able to “make do and mend” in order to extricate themselves and their vessels from imminent structural disaster or danger and to effect ongoing maintenance repairs. Subsequent research revealed some interesting points that need clarification.

In touching on the repairs made to Captain Cook's ship HMS *Endeavour* I mentioned that the ship was careened in what became known as the Endeavour River in New South Wales, Australia. Indeed in 1770 when the incident occurred the whole geographic area through which the river flows was called New South Wales. But since then the Australian continent has gone through numerous territorial evolutions insofar as the boundaries of the states are concerned; now the river lies in what is called the State of Queensland.

I recently discovered a chart of the Endeavour River estuary which was made by Captain Cook at the time and which to me demonstrates his prudence and devotion to hydrography. The chart shows the depths in fathoms (6 feet) according to soundings of the river channel from deep water to the point where he finally careened the *Endeavour*. Bear in mind that no European discoverers had ever been to the area, and as a prudent mariner he would first have sent his boats to determine if there was sufficient depth of water to sail or be towed into the river, and also to locate a suitable spot to careen his ship.



The *Endeavour* carried five boats all of them stowed on deck. A yawl, a pinnace, a longboat and two skiffs. When one considers that the *Endeavour* was only 105 feet overall, had a beam of 29 feet 3 inches, and had a loaded draft of 14 feet, it is amazing she was able to carry so many boats and was able to launch them! But boats were an essential equipage of such Royal Navy ships, which had to be frequently towed when manoeuvring in and around harbours or anchorages.

The boats were used also for coastal survey work, carrying water casks ashore for filling, the carriage of personnel and replenishment stores, and so on.

The boats seem to have been stowed between the fore and main masts and ‘nested’ one on top of the other. They would have been lifted and launched with tackles rigged to the masts and yards above them.



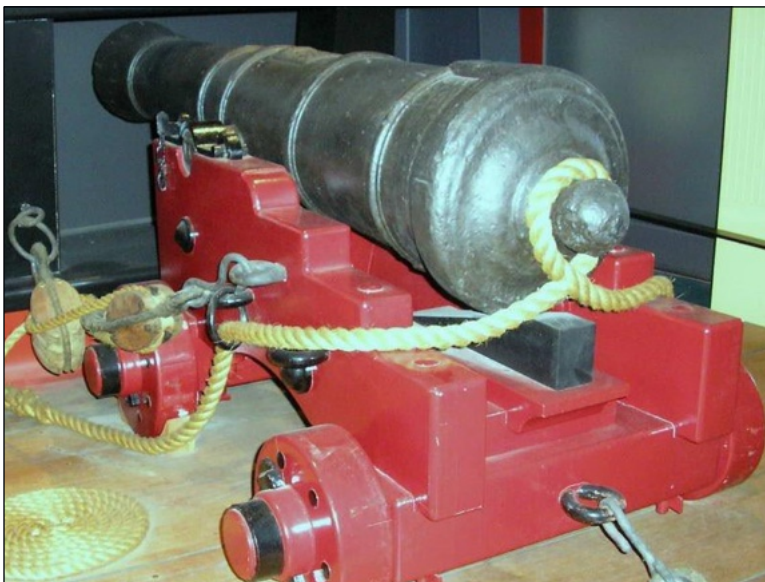
The Endeavour River estuary has a tidal range of 8.5 to 9.5 feet, depending on neap or spring tides, and the chart shows a shallow patch of 1-1/2 fathoms (9.0 feet) at low tide just

outside the river entrance. So timing for entering the river would have been important. The old chart also shows the location at the river entrance where Capt. Cook unloaded his remaining cannons (four) and stores before towing the vessel further into the river, where the vessel could be laid alongside a soft bank (also shown) for careening and repair. An examination of the old chart also shows a small creek flowing into the river just south of the careening spot. This would have proven to be a most useful source of fresh water.



250 lbs. each. Cook had jettisoned six of his cannons overboard to lighten the ship when she struck the Great Barrier Reef. He also dumped much of his fresh water. (A cannon was recently found on the reef where the *Endeavour* struck.)

of numerous salt water crocodiles! These creatures are always on the lookout for their next meal and so the crew would have had to be on the lookout for these predators. Another danger on the land would have been snakes. Queensland is home to about 120 varieties of these reptiles, most of which are venomous and some deadly so. With most of the crew hailing from the British Isles, where



The *Endeavour* normally carried ten 4-pounder cannons and twelve swivel cannons. Each cannon weighed about 2000 lbs., with their carriages, and the swivel guns about

After the *Endeavour* was careened and the vessel was safe from foundering, the crew had other more land-based dangers to contend with. The *Endeavour* River was and is the home

the only dangerous snake is the seldom-seen adder, living ashore for seven weeks amongst such unwanted creatures would have been rather nerve-racking.



When *Swallow* was salvaged and lying ashore on the beach, our survivors might have come across the odd shy adder on the fells above the camp, but the only adder referred to in the story was the one kept in the tin by the charcoal burners. As for crocodiles, there just weren't any, and Roger would have been most disappointed!

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

The Best of Childhood

Compiled by Amazon Publications, 2004

Reviewed by Simon Horn (Montreal, Quebec)

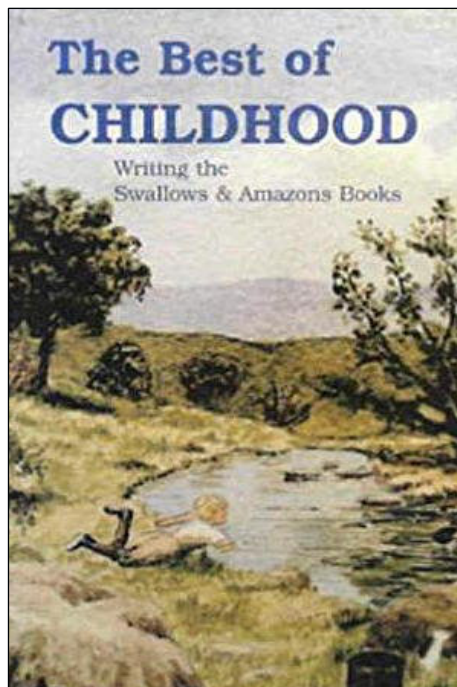
In 2004 the Amazon Publications book was *The Best of Childhood*, with the subhead, "Writing the Swallows and Amazons Stories". The name comes from Ransome's 1934 remark:

Writing is one profession in which one can have one's cake and eat it, and it seems to me that in writing children's books, I have the best of childhood over again and the best of being old as well, which is a very great deal more than I deserve. (from the title page)

The book brings together letters, diary entries, notebooks, bits of the *Autobiography* and commentary to present the sometimes difficult process by which Arthur Ransome produced "The Twelve". It uses these sources to trace the 20-year period during which Ransome wrote the books, after taking the life-changing decision to stop making a living writing for the *Manchester Guardian* and to become the storyteller that one might argue he always was.

If you can get a hold of a copy it is well worth reading. It shows the ways in which Ransome took parts of his own background and experience and wove them into the stories we love. It also shows the difficulties that he and Evgenia had to overcome.

Swallows and Amazons was not an instant bestseller, nor was *Swallowdale*, and for a couple of years it was far from clear that the whole gamble would work out. It was *Peter Duck* that seems to have started the break-



through. In a November 30, 1932, letter to his mother, Edith Ransome, he says:

I cannot resist giving you the good news at once. I have just had a TELEGRAM from the publishers to say that *Peter Duck* is already being REPRINTED !!!!!!!

And he's only been out a month!

We shall pull through after all. (p.77)

As more books were published, originally at the rate of one per year, the earlier books also began to see greater sales, and Ransome's reputation as a writer for children grew. As an anonymous review in the *Times Literary Supplement* put it much later, in 1950: "...Mr Arthur Ransome,

who has achieved the rare distinction of becoming a classic in his own lifetime." (p.326)

But the process wasn't easy. To begin with, Ransome often said that he always had trouble with plots, despite having a picture in his head of a perfect setting:

I wish I had a good plot for my next book. It is to be placed on the Broads, with all those rivers, and hiding places in the dykes and the little stretches of open water. Really a lovely setting, with herons and bitterns, and fish, very wild except just in the holiday months. But, as usual, though I have five youthful characters and one old lady, I haven't a glimmering of a plot. (p.126)

What's more, Ransome was always certain that the book he was working on, or had just finished, was terrible.

In July 1933, when Ransome was working on *Winter Holiday*, Edith Ransome wrote to a friend:

Arthur and Genia were very good, but are both on tenterhooks over the book - Arthur is so depressed about it and says it ought to have three more months' work on it to come up to his standard of what it should be - I have read it, and feel sure that any child who liked *Swallows* and *Swallowdale* will like this... (p.100)

In September 1934, finishing *Coot*

Club was the problem. Ransome was unsatisfied with the book and wanted to postpone publication to the following year. G. Wrenn Howard, Ransome's contact at publisher Jonathan Cape disagreed:

“When I last saw you I think I said that in my view you were over particular and Mrs Ransome hypercritical. I did not believe then, and I don't now that the book is unpublishable even as it stands. What you read me was damn good stuff.” (p. 148-9)

Ransome was convinced, and *Coot Club* came out in November 1934.

It was while writing *Pigeon Post* that Ransome first had the idea for *We Didn't Mean to Go to Sea*. Unfortunately his enthusiasm for this new idea at first led him to be even more convinced that PP was no good. He did, of course, eventually get it finished.

But when the time came to finish WDMTGTS, it was the same story all over again. As usual Ransome was convinced it was not good enough, but again Wrenn Howard disagreed:

“I think in many ways it is the best of the lot, and I shall never believe another word you say about your own books. It won't be any use your telling us that your next manuscript is hopeless; we just shan't take any notice.” (p.205)

Ransome's anxiety over the quality of his books never went away, but it seems to have receded as time went on. There was, however, another factor that played an important part in the process of writing the Swallows and Amazons books, and that was

role of Evgenia Ransome.

I think that Evgenia has been given a bad rap for being overly critical and disparaging about Arthur's writing. She clearly pulled no punches, and Ransome was often depressed or worried about her reactions. When she was reading a draft he felt he had to get out of the house:

“While I was away Genia read

the beastly book [*Pigeon Post*]. That was the idea. I got a version of it finished so that it could be read through, and then cleared out, because I could not have borne being in the house during the grim process.” (p.168)

But Evgenia too had a hard time of it: “Genia says she can't stand my depending on her for the criticism of my books.” (p 145)

Did Ransome make a good living from his books?

Early sales were quite low and the first print run for S&A was limited to 2000 copies, although Lipincott in the U.S. soon decided to publish it. It was far from clear in these early days that the Ransomes' gamble would pay off. On March 4, 1932, he told his mother:

Saw Cape's yesterday. They have sold 1656 copies of Swallows. They seem quite pleased. I'm not. Until I can get into the 3000 there is small chance of earning a living out of books. Once you get among the people who sell 3000 regularly things are all right . . . I don't think I shall be among the lucky ones. (p.53)

Swallowdale and *Peter Duck* also saw only 2000 copies printed to begin with, but as I mentioned, PD was soon reprinted. As almost every year a new book came out, sales of the earlier volumes also picked up. When WDMTGTS was published in 1937, over 11,000 copies were printed before release.

So gradually Ransome did earn a living from his books, and not a

bad living at that. Annual sales of the series reached 50,000 in 1945, far greater than the 3000 he had earlier thought essential. On day when *Great Northern?* was published, on August 25, 1947, Cape had already printed 44,500 copies.

Although Ransome and Cape occasionally argued over the level of royalties he was paid, I took the figures given at various places in *The Best of Childhood* and tried to figure out Ransome's income in 1945.

With 50,000 copies sold at 7/6 each, total revenue would have been £18,750. With Ransome's royalties at 17%, this would have meant a total of £3188 — the equivalent of £175,836 today. The total might well have been higher, since at some point Cape dropped the level of royalties from 20%, and I haven't even thought about royalties from other countries.

Whatever the actual total, it is clear that at very least Ransome made a sufficient income to keep on producing the books that we all love. It is just a pity that he was unable to complete *Coots in the North*.

And that was the point. He did depend on Evgenia's criticisms, and while they may have been depressing at the time, they also enabled Ransome to rewrite and polish and improve the books.

The well-known one exception to this was Evgenia's reaction to *The Picts and the Martyrs*: she was totally against publishing it ("...the book as a whole is dead." - p.290) and never changed her mind. At first Ransome agreed with her, but Cape wanted it, and a few months later he allowed it to be published (fortunately for those of us who like it).

The whole episode remained as source of tension, though, and he could never mention the book at home. In December 1942 he wrote to his mother:

PLEASE do not mention my wretched book in your letters. Genia was completely miserable because in the end I decided to publish it and every mention of it reopens the wound. So please don't mention the wretched thing again.

Where can I get a copy?

Unfortunately *The Best of Childhood* is no longer available from the TARS Stall; looking back at old issues of *Signals*, it does not seem to have been available new for a long time. I got my copy thanks to the generosity of member Gordon McGilton.

The book may be available second-hand: I found one copy on Abebooks, but with some difficulty (only by using the advanced search and including Amazon Publications as the publisher). It was not cheap!

The Best of Childhood makes fascinating reading, and there is much in it that I have not even touched on. For example, Ransome did his own illustrations, and was almost as uncertain about them as he was about the books in general. Like the books, however, his publishers and his readers liked them.

As well, Ransome's writing was often affected by his regular ill health. Even as he finished S&A, he was di-

agnosed with a duodenal ulcer, and similar ills would appear throughout his life.

After reading *The Best of Childhood* I am left with some questions.

Personally I wish that we had some of Ransome's early drafts (before Evgenia's criticisms, perhaps) that we could compare with the final published books. For writers that would be a fascinating thing to look at. Of course that would be a specialist study and even if drafts are available in archives somewhere, *The Best of Childhood* could not have provided them.

Reading the book it also became clear that the Ransomes' gamble paid off. He was able to make a living writing children's books. If you are interested take a look at "Did Ransome make a good living from his books?"

There are many more aspects that could be discussed, and if you could find a copy of *The Best of Childhood* it would be well worth reading. That might probably be very difficult, but well worthwhile; see "Where can I get a copy?"

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 Ransome-related 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/

Beckfoot Kitchen — Eating with the Swallows and Amazons

Going Bananas!

by Molly McGinnis (Manteca, California)

Q: Where did the “really huge bunch of bananas” the “best of all natives” brought to the Swallows’ camp come from?

A: A banana boat! These fast refrigerated steamships carried bananas – and passengers – from the Caribbean to England and Europe.

The Swallows’ “banana tree” was a hand – an entire stalk of bananas. They would have been picked green; all bananas are picked green for shipping. The crews’ stores include bananas in almost all the books, and Gibber the monkey is quite fond of them.

The adventurers in *Peter Duck* found a “heavy drooping cluster of ripe fruit” on a wild banana tree, though the bananas would have been full of seeds. The bananas must have tasted good, because Peggy says “It was a pity... that nobody had thought of bringing aboard a really large stock of bananas,” when they are escaping from the pirate ship.

What’s In A Name?



Scientifically, only fruits with one skin enclosing seeds and flesh are berries, and berries don’t split open to release seeds, as peas and beans do. Grapes are berries. Gooseberries, tomatoes and pumpkins are berries too.



We all know what a banana looks like, but what about the wild banana? One skin... many seeds embedded in its flesh... it must be a berry.



Where are the seeds? Bananas were selected for seedlessness over many centuries, and all that’s left of the seeds are tiny markings.



And the blackberry? Where are its seeds? Is it a berry? Well, not scientifically. Each little blackberry blob has a



seed inside. They’re called drupelets, and a blackberry is an “aggregate fruit”, a collection of many fruits. Drupelets and drupes have one seed with a rather hard, definite outside. Plums, olives and almonds are all drupes.

Oranges...

There are oranges in every book after the first two. Seaside Titty and Nancy “only sucked an orange for dinner” in *Peter Duck*, so there must have been a good supply aboard. In *Winter Holiday*, there are oranges from the beginning, in the lunch Mrs. Dixon packs, to the North Pole feast at the end. And in *Coot Club* Mrs. Barrable buys oranges (and bananas) for the *Teasel* – too bad the boy who was supposed to be keeping watch for the Hullabaloo didn’t treat himself to an orange rather than all those “dud bananas!” And what about all the lemons Cook must have used for Pirate Grog? They’ll come along later in this story.

Mrs. Blackett’s list of the “tremendous lot of stores” in *Pigeon Post* includes oranges, which the crews take for lunches and eat in camp. In *We Didn’t Mean To Go To Sea*, Goblin is coming back to port and Susan is making tea for Jim. Roger (who else) surveys the food and says there are “still” eleven oranges, so Jim must have had a good supply.

There’s a whole crate of oranges for the about-to-be-ma-



United Fruit Company Ad, 1916

rooned crews in *Secret Water*. The dinner the Swallows' mother puts together for their first night includes a note that says "fill up with bananas" and later Susan makes banana and blackberry mash, so they must have had a lot of bananas too. In *The Big Six*, the Death and Glorys' feast ends with oranges, though oranges are not mentioned among the stores her crew buy with their pike-catching reward.

There are oranges in the *Wild Cat* in *Missee Lee*, and orange trees in *Missee Lee's Tiger Island stronghold*, though nothing is ever said about eating their oranges. Dorothea's stores list in *The Picts & The Martyrs* includes "six bananas, twelve oranges..." and later Timothy brings the miners a bag of oranges. Roger sucks an orange and falls asleep in *Great Northern?*, so there must have been oranges on the *Sea Bear*.

The oranges would probably have been from Spain or Portugal. Spain gave us juicy Valencia oranges, sold in every supermarket today. Blood oranges, which are very juicy, and "bitter" oranges, used for marmalade, were shipped to England also. Portugal was a big exporter of citrus and was famous for Lisbon lemons (very like the lemons we see in supermarkets today).

...and lemons

In *Swallows and Amazons*, "grog" is ginger beer, but by *Swallowdale*, it's clear that Cook's grog is lemonade. "Sorry we've got no grog," said Nancy. "Cook's had no time to make any..." and when they climb Kanchenjunga "there was the bedroom jug full of pirate grog, which some people might have thought was lemonade." Cook makes a lot of lemonade



through the books – I hope she had a nice tall juicer that a big jug could go under, so she could just halve lemons and pull the lever until there was enough lemon juice for a puncheon of lemonade.

Cook was carrying on a long tradition with her fresh lemonade.

A French street vendor is selling



How To Suck Lemons, by a Grandmother

"Everybody else was promising to tidy things up that very morning, and meanwhile sucking the oranges of which [Uncle Jim] seemed to have a large supply." — *Winter Holiday*

No one ever peels an orange and eats it out of hand in the S&A books. No one ever eats a quartered orange piece by piece. Oranges are sucked, and that's that.



There are a few hints – in *Great Northern!* Roger, on sentinel duty watching for hostile Gaels, falls asleep after his lunch and Ian finds "the empty lemonade bottle, the sucked orange, the scout-knife that had been used to cut a hole in it..." so we know one thing about the technique. Titty finds "the remains of three sucked oranges oranges carefully pushed away to be tidy in among the roots of the heather" in *Pigeon Post*, but that doesn't tell us a lot about what the "remains" were like. Were the oranges collapsed, as if they'd been squeezed to get more juice out? Maybe. We can deduce that oranges in the books were one of the kinds with a lot of liquid inside, like Valencias, and that's about all we'll ever know.

However... when I was a child, one of our great treats was to roll a lemon on the table or between our hands to release the juice, poke a hole (our mother probably made the hole for us, with the tip of a knife, as Roger had done only a few years before) and use a candy stick for a straw to suck the juice out. The flavor of the candy stick mixed with the lemon flavor. The juice was quite concentrated, more like candy than a juice drink.

I'm guessing the crews' oranges were rolled to make them juicier just as we rolled our lemons, but eating oranges this way must be a thing of the distant past. I searched the Internet and came up with nothing. Peeled oranges, quartered oranges, sliced oranges, oranges any way you can imagine, but never the way the crews of the S&A books had their oranges!

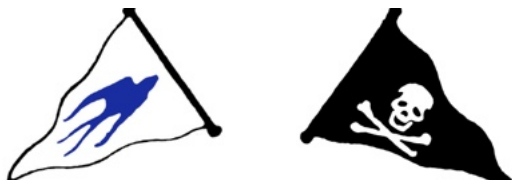
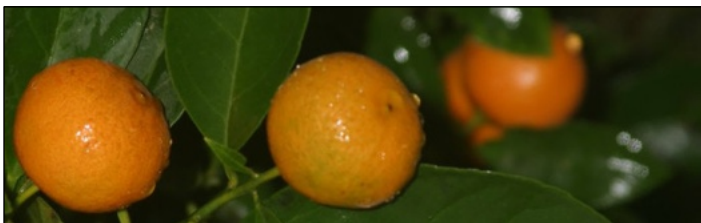
lemonade from her backpack in this 1820 picture (left). Too bad no one thought of making a backpack of a big bottle instead of carrying an open jug of lemonade on

the Kanchenjunga climb. But lemon drinks are much older than that. The Egyptians made a lemon juice and sugar drink called “qatarmizat” in the 12th century, but lemons originated in China and lemon drinks were probably popular there long before then. Even the name is centuries old – in 1660 Samuel Pepys writes in his diary about drinking “lemonade”, though I’m not sure how anyone ever figured that out!

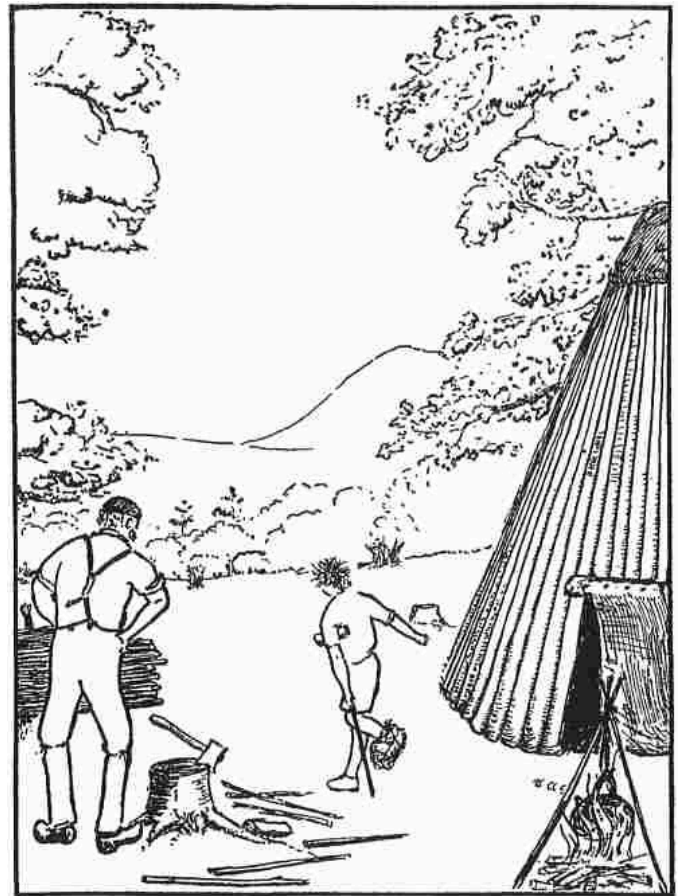
And what about real grog?

Real grog? British Navy grog was one part rum to four parts water, without a drop of lemon juice! The rum helped purify the water and the dilution was not just to keep a sailor sober – a crewman couldn’t hoard his grog rations because the mixture was so weak it would spoil. The navy actually didn’t want the grog to taste very good, but if a crewman wanted to make his ration taste better, he was allowed to add lemon juice – from his own lemon.

Are lemons (and oranges) berries? No, because the partitions divide the fruit. Citrus fruits are a special type of berry called a hesperidium. Think of peeling a navel orange and eating it section by section. If there are seeds, they will be inside the sections – and each section is actually, to a botanist, a fruit. This Wikipedia article is full of information and photos: [Oranges](#).



Ah, If I Were Eight Again



THE MEDICINE MAN AND HIS PATIENT

Alas, your editor is a bit older than Roger was when he sprained his ankle. So far I can only dream about the the way Roger hopped about after his injury.

All the best to all of you,
Simon

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