SIGNALS FROM T*A*R*S*U*S

September, 2005

This is the fall 2005 issue of Signals from TARSUS and accompanies Signals and The Outlaw. As your new Signals editor, please excuse any imperfections or inaccuracies in this addition. Special thanks to Dave Thewlis for holding my hand (electronically) through the first time editing this esteemed publication and for the great help of David Bates who actually mails it out along with the International publications. I welcome your comments and ideas for upcoming issues of the newsletter. Deadline for winter issue contributions will be November 1. If you are interested in contributing an article, story or other content, please contact me for updated format information. At the end of this issue, you'll find my article, "Learning the Ropes," which includes my contact information. Have a wonderful fall and keep in touch!
--Debra Alderman

TARSUS Tidbits:

Welcome
A warm welcome to members who have joined since our last newsletter:
Patrick & Tommy Hogan, California, (juniors)
Maggy Brandt and Bert Lyons, Carrie and Lily, of Kentucky, (family)

Ransome maps available
Mike Field, of Wooden Boat Fittings in Australia, has made his wonderful maps of The Lake, Wild Cat Island, and Secret Water available as prints, which are now directly available from the U.S. Coordinator. We have a supply of all three maps in two sizes: A4 (8 &frac;14; x 12) and A3 (12 x 16&frac;12;). The A4 size are $5.70 each and the A3 size $8.80 each; p&p is additional. You can see these maps on the AR web site at http://www.arthur-ransome.org/ar/armaps.html. If you are interested, please order them from the U.S. Coordinator (Dave Thewlis) as you would a TARS Stall order and don't send money until we know what the entire cost is including shipping. Dave's email: dave@arthur-ransome.org

Coots and Swallows in American system DVD format
Dave Thewlis has alerted us that Janson Media, who have offered North American NTSC format videos of *Coot Club* and *The Big Six* (the BBC films) for a number of years, have just informed us that they are now offering them on DVD as well. These are in North American format and so will play in regular North American DVD players. Here are the links to go to for more info: Coot Club http://www.janson.com/videos/children/cootclub.html
The Big Six http://www.janson.com/videos/children/bixsix.html Price is $24.95 with no discount.

Correction to spring 05 issue
Molly McGinnis has alerted us of a mistake due to her own "overenthusiastic pruning" of her Buzzard article in the last issue of Signals. She wants her readers to know that the sentence that read: "...their preferred prey animals are pest species, especially rabbits, rodents, snakes and lizards" should have read: "Their main prey is pest species, especially rabbits and rodents, and, like their American cousins the Redtailed Hawks, buzzards also take a few snakes and lizards, themselves useful predators on rodent and insect pests."

Future File
The 2nd Annual Pacific NW TARS gathering will likely happen in late August, 2006 at Washington State's beautiful Penrose Point State Park, on the Key Peninsula in Puget Sound. Details will be forthcoming in the winter edition of Signals. For more info, contact: Elizabeth Jolley, Erjolley@aol.com

Exploring in Elbereth: Lake of the Hills─Beyond the Great Bridge

By Claire Barnett, Owner and Captain of Elbereth

Rain was predicted for the afternoon, but no one told the local clouds that, since there was already a light drizzle when I woke up at 6 AM. It was finally a cool morning – hot weather and Native Business had kept me from the water for weeks. My TARSUS article deadline was looming and I felt like the Swallows the morning they packed up to leave Secret Water, thinking their map would remain incomplete.

But Elbereth is a cabin boat – why *not* go out in a light rain? I had unfinished business on the Lake of the Hills before the buoys disappeared at the end of August, leaving me once again without a safe means of crossing treacherous waters. So off I went, and now I am back to tell you about it, warm and snug while I drink hot-spiced tea and eat crumpets with strawberry spread. (I would gladly share with you if you were here).

I launched Elbereth at Sunset Bay like the last time, after crossing the lake on the car ferry. I did my pre-launch checks, hoisted the TARS burgee and got underway without incident, proceeding at no wake speed out to the main lake and channel. The rain was no problem with Elbereth's "visor" over her windshield, and her manual windshield wipers.

I crossed far behind the car ferry to avoid its cables and headed for the railroad bridge. It was scary looking close up. It is quite rusty and the safe paths between the crumbling piers are narrow. I had the feeling of passing through an iron gate, into the unknown!

I followed the path of buoys along the shore that I had cautiously crept along last year, and finally came to the long string of them that showed the path across the lake.

The buoys have vertical black and white stripes, and mark the center of the channel. They are about 3 feet tall and hard to spot far away on a misty and hazy day. In addition to usually not being able to see more than one ahead of whichever one I was steering towards, their positions disagreed with my map! Surely the new line of buoys on my side of the little islands were there on purpose, but the map showed them on the other side of the islands, and a stump field where the new course went. And there was a line of buoys headed around the inside of the island too, just to complicate matters.

Trust your eyes, I decided, and not an out-of-date map. The water remained about the same depth, varying between nine and twelve feet deep, along the new marked channel. I was treated to wonderful views on all sides. Astern, the bridge was getting smaller but still looking like a fortification dividing the lake in half. Away in the north were the big hills where I live…

…and ahead, I could see The Narrows where the river entered the lake. I knew I would have to be careful of the current and the sandbars. I soon entered between the two hills, and was in the river. Ahead, I could not see a channel, only brush and grass covered islands.

The buoys seemed even further apart. I soon developed a way to sight on the buoys, between the upright bars on the right side of the bow pulpit. (See the above picture). If I centered the buoy on the anchor holder instead, I got off course. It was easy enough to find the right location after standing in Elbereth's center aisle and steering with my right hand, then sitting down and seeing what lined up.

The river was shallower than the lake, sometimes reading less than 3 feet deep on Elbereth's fathometer! The water is very dark from bogs upstream, and the bottom cannot be seen even when only a couple of feet deep. I started passing very close to the buoys, remembering that they would be downstream in the current and to not pass close upstream of them, or I might have fouled their anchor chains and wrecked my propellers.

The fathometer will read as shallow as two feet and then it says "Zero". Whenever I got into water about 3 feet deep, I shut off one engine and raised it out of the water. That way, if I sheared a propeller pin or broke a propeller, I could still get home with the other engine. My goal was to go up river to the interstate Highway 90/94 bridges, and then see if I could go any further.

The river channel was challenging, at one point going from one side of the channel to the other, with a sandy island to port and a submerged rock somewhere to starboard! I found my way slowly upstream, sometimes in deeper water, and sometimes taking turns with each engine.

Throughout my journey, I had seen only a couple of native fishermen out in the light rain, and later, one reckless Hullabaloo in a speedboat. But here in the shallows of the river, I encountered someone else who had sense enough to get in out of the rain - a homemade looking houseboat on pontoons!

Finally my goal was in sight. I was within sight of the I90/94 bridge. The buoys were very confusing and hard to find, but I made my way underneath, and marveled at the sight of the support piers lining up under the bridge.

I continued up the river, hoping to follow the channel for another mile. Beyond the end of the buoys lay the mouth of the river that flows past my home, and I hoped to reach it. Unfortunately, the water got more and more shallow.

Just after passing the last buoy I could see, I ran aground! The fathometer had been reading zero, meaning the water was less than two feet deep. I had one engine up, but the one running choked off without sheering the propeller pin. When I raised it, there was sand on the blades! It was time to turn back. I used the current and slight nudges from one engine barely in the water to turn Elbereth and make my way cautiously downstream. Soon, I had a lovely view of the narrows, beyond which the river opened up into the lake.

I was disappointed that I could go no further, but I had come nearly 5 miles into unknown territory and had seen many marvels. I want to come back and anchor below the cliffs or behind a sandy island and spend the night on board. I want to return in the late spring when the buoys are freshly placed and more accurate in the river portion of the trip, and maybe get to the mouth of my river.

I made it back easily to Sunset Bay, running fast along the buoy lines. Then it was back on the ferry to return to my home in the hills, with questions to be answered on board the ferry about my "cute boat". It was a good trip!

Swallow's Ship's Log

By Helen Jolley
Captain of the Swallow, and 15 yr. old member of the Jolley family of Oregon

Author's note: You may remember reading in the TARSUS Newsletter about the Krauthamer/Alderman family, who went on a sailing trip in their boat Semaphore. At the end of the article, they mentioned that they wanted to go sailing with other TARS, too. So Mom emailed them, and we planned a sailing/camping trip at Penrose State Park in Lower Puget Sound. Mom, Dad, Grandma Jane, and I would meet Debra, Moti, and Akiva at Penrose on Friday. They motored in on their boat from Seattle. We had an excellent time. Although we did not have as much wind as we had hoped for, we still had fun. We had corroborees, wrote semaphore messages, learned about constellations, and sailed (of course). As Captain of the Explorers, and their boat, Swallow, I kept the Ship's Log. I have named the Krauthamer-Aldermans "the Eels" because they greeted us with a Totem Pole. I suppose that means that my family and I are the Explorers. Anyway, here it is:

Friday, Aug. 12, 2005:
The Explorers arrived at Penrose State Park after a long drive. We found a totem decorated with seashells and seaweed in our campsite with a semaphore message attached: "Nice Campsite! Look for our S and A burgee at the dock. D (Debra), M (Moti), and A (Akiva)." We found them moored at the dock, as they said. There was their little TARS burgee. We, the Explorers, had eaten on the road, but the Eels had not. We helped carry cooking supplies to the picnic area, and then left to set up our camp. We had two tents, one for Grandma Jane, and one for Will and me. The APs slept in the car, with the back seats folded down flat.

When everything was set up, we made our own totem for the Eels with a semaphore message that said: "Thanks for a timber-shivering welcome! Race for admiralty, Sunday at dawn. S and A forever." We decided to wait until Sunday for

sailing, because the Eels are Jewish and don't work on Saturdays. I didn't want to sail for the first time in a year all by myself. We brought totems to the picnic area, near the dock.

There was a very large fire pit where we had our corroboree. I attempted to light the fire without newspaper, but after five tries, I decided not to waste any more matches. I snuck some newspaper under the kindling and away it went. It was an excellent fire once it got going. We had brought tea and treats from our English import store, Lady Di's. We had tea biscuits, barley sugar hard candies, and some candies that weren't mentioned in AR's books. We don't have wine gums or Rhubarb and Custard candies in the U.S., so it was a special treat. We all sat around the fire sharing stories of our own adventures as Swallows and Amazons.

Mom and Grandma Jane did a bit of birding before it got too dark. They represented the Coots. I put a bird feather in the Totem for the Eels, to stand for our birding. Then, as it got colder, we told stories about the trip to England that the Explorers took last summer. As it got darker, we began to see stars. We all looked for the Perseid meteor shower. We spent the last half hour looking at meteors and constellations. Akiva had just been to an astronomy camp, and knew all about the stars. We saw Cassiopeia, the Big Dipper, the Little Dipper, the Summer Triangle, the North Star, and many more. Then Akiva and Moti brought out their telescope, but we had to go to bed for an early start the next morning.

Saturday, Aug. 13, 2005:
The Explorers woke up around 7:30 am. Breakfast was buttered eggs and toast and marmalade and tea (made on the camp stove, unfortunately. None of Susan's cooking over the campfire). As soon as we finished eating, we headed off to pick up Will from summer camp nearby. Then we met up with some other friends, who came to pick up Will's friend, PJ. We all went to the Renaissance Fair.

When we returned in the afternoon, everyone was so tired that they all took a nap, except me. I was so hot and dusty that I went swimming. Before supper, Akiva, Debra, and Moti, visited our campsite. We still had more stories to tell from our trip to England. We talked for quite some time. Akiva and Will went exploring. Finally, it was time to make supper. The Eels left, and we sat down to a nice supper of pasta, garlic bread, and slices of cucumber.

We all met up again that evening for a second corroboree. This time, Debra had gathered lots of dry leaves and sticks. I managed to start the fire with two matches and no newspaper. But the first match broke before it would light; so some would say that I did it with one match, just like the Swallows and the Amazons. We looked at the stars again, and Debra, Moti, and Akiva told us about their sailing trip last year in Semaphore. They brought cookies and we brought marshmallows, chocolate, and graham crackers to make S'Mores. Before we went to bed, Debra taught us some sea shanties. We did not have the TARS Shanty book, but Debra knew some, like Leave Her Johnny. I taught everyone Spanish Ladies. We all sang and whistled for wind as we went to bed.

Crew of the Swallow: Captain Helen (center)
with ship's boy Matt and able seaman Jane

Sunday, Aug. 14, 2005:
The Explorers woke up at 8:50. We had a lovely breakfast of blueberry pancakes. Mom hurt her back, so Jane and I cooked them. It was very good. After breakfast, we washed up. Then I put the sticker letters on our boat, and named her Swallow. We prepared sandwiches to take for lunch when we were sailing. We talked to the Eels, and decided on the best place to launch *Swallow*. It was one bay away.

The Eels motored over and towed us out of the bay, into the wind. I am sorry to say that while launching *Swallow*, we did not meet up to the standards of the Swallows and the Amazons. The current kept pushing us toward shallow water. We could not get the sails up before we were pushed back to shore. Finally, the Eels came along and towed us further out into the bay. Of course, there was very little wind out there. Just our luck. We sailed as much as we could, and ate our lunch.

Then we dropped Mom off on land to drive the car and trailer back to camp, and *Semaphore* towed *Swallow* around the point and into the bay. Inspired by Captain Flint who always showed up with ices at the right moment, Mom beat us back to the park with a couple gallons of ice cream. After tying up *Swallow*, we feasted at a picnic table in the shade near the dock.

Then the wind began to pick up. *Swallow* was just waiting to go. Everyone else wanted to rest in the shade, so I took her out for our first solo voyage. This time, putting up the sails was much easier, as she was tied to the dock. The wind was good, and sometimes there were bubbles in her wake. It was great being out there by myself. When I got back on shore, I went swimming again, and jumped off the dock a few times. Later that afternoon, the Eels had to leave. I sang Spanish Ladies to them as they sailed away.

We promised to keep in touch, and to contact them the next time we're up near Puget Sound. Before supper, I set up an awning over *Swallow* with a tarp and some bungee cords. I left my sleeping bag and mattress pad in her, and went up to the campsite to eat. We had beans, rice, and cheese for supper. Then we had a campfire in our campsite. We roasted marshmallows again, and drank tea.

When it got late, I took the lantern down to *Swallow*, crawled under the awning, and went to sleep. It took some time getting comfortable. As Tom said, there's always one spot that's not comfortable. I woke up twice at night with my hand numb from lying on it. Then I woke up as the sun rose, and watched it a bit. I went back to sleep and woke one last time around 7:15. I climbed out of Swallow, and sat with on the dock with my feet in the boat, and wrote in the ship's log. I imagined that if there was not a campsite to go back to, I would take out a little camp stove and boil water for tea, just like Susan did every morning. Maybe I would go for a swim in the chilly water. If only there was a little island waiting to be discovered.

Captain Helen's cozy night under the awning

Monday, Aug. 15, 2005:
Will came down to get me for breakfast. We had cereal, and then Mom began to cook bacon, but the stove ran out of fuel. We made a campfire with the last bit of wood, and over it I cooked bacon and eggs. They turned out all right, and again, I felt like Susan. After breakfast, Will and I went down to the dock to clean *Swallow*. We made her shipshape for her next voyage. Back at the campsite, Mom and Dad had packed the car. We had to wait for the tide to come in to get *Swallow* back to the boat launch. I took Mom, Will and Jane sailing. Then we went to a little bay to eat lunch. When we got back, the tide was high enough, but there was not much wind. We would have to paddle across the bay to the launch. Then a friendly native offered to tow us across with his little motor dinghy. We gladly accepted his offer. It did not take long to get *Swallow* all set on her trailer, and packed with luggage, with her mast tied down. We drove away. Goodbye Puget Sound. Goodbye camping and sailing….but not for long! Swallows and Amazons forever!

A Ransome State of Mind

By Kate Crosby of Virginia

St Mawes, Cornwall

Unusually, it's blowing out of the East, which makes a bright crisp sunny morning and whitecaps in Carrick Roads when the ferry leaves the shelter of the Castle and heads across to Falmouth. In another world here's where Daddy taught John and Susan to sail. Titty and Roger were too young. Jim Brading and Uncle Bob came here too, in Goblin, and Nancy Blackett will follow in her own wake in the summer. This day in February it's too cold for anything but the customs boat heading out towards the Lizard. Dick would be interested in the ferry's resident bird, a tiny turnstone who travels back and forth on the afterdeck. The Captain feeds him cake crumbs. 'He's got a wife up the creek somewhere.'

We dock at the Prince of Wales Pier and I turn left to walk up to the Customs House and the Falmouth Bookshop. Nothing AR here, but a nice copy of *The Rebecca Notebook* with dust jacket, £12. Daphne Du Maurier is almost a local writer; Fowey is a few miles up the coast. Frenchmans Creek up the Helford River. What an amazing difference between Rebecca's 'huge cloudy symbols of a high romance' and the childhood world of AR, and yet many of us would list both in our top ten authors.

Back down Arwenack Street trawling the Charity Shop bookshelves. Age Concern - last bookshelf, very bottom right, in the shadow, next to the paperbacks. Better pull it out and check, just in case. Good heavens, *Secret Water*.

"How much is this one?"
"All the hardbacks are 20p."
"Well if you insist."

On to Oxfam. Rare Book Shelf, *Peter Duck*.

"Seven pounds, it's a rare one, you see."
"Indeed, but I think I'll leave it for the next AR visitor."

Up the hill towards the Royal Cornwall Yacht Club. The Bookshop in the Old Brewery Yard, *Winter Holiday*, a very late edition, ex lib. What has Cape done to the green of the boards? And the format is smaller too. No d.j. No thanks.

"Do you have any more like this?'
"No, they're gone as soon as they get here."

But I do fall for *Chill Company – Ghost Stories from Cornwall*, Mary Williams, nice d.j., £5.00.

Time to catch the ferry. Dip into the treasures as we push across the brilliant bay, turn the corner into St. Mawes and see exactly the view AR drew as the tailpiece for *Missee Lee*, if without junk or monkey today. And The Watch House, now a café, where AR came to recuperate in 1933 and write the beginning of *Coot Club.*

It occurs to me that in one morning I have touched almost the whole spectrum of AR's series. The Lakes books with *Swallows & Amazons* and *Winter Holiday*; *Secret Water* and *Coot Club* from East Anglia; *Peter Duck* and *Missee Lee* for the 'imaginary' stories. Past, present, books, places, a morning like this with AR restores my spirit.

Amazing Anguillas

By Molly McGinnis

Author's note: When I first started thinking about natural history in Ransome's life and books, I gave the working title, "Totem Animals" to my thoughts about title animals and animals that drive the stories. In this issue we have a real totem, the carved eel in Secret Water*. The living fish appears only momentarily there, but eels are an important part of the plot of* The Big Six.

"You see the eel is the totem of the Children of the Eel. That's the name of the tribe. But it's an awful secret." *Secret Water*

Anguilla Anguilla (Europe)
Anguilla rostra (America)

European and American eels look just alike, and the handsome silver eel of the Secret Water totem could be either species. Don carved and painted his eel well: you can see the pectoral fin standing stiffly out near the face, and the long wraparound fin that runs down the back, around the tail and halfway up the ventral side. The unhappy eel is flattening the fin down onto her back (an eel this big is sure to be a female), and who can blame her? It shows as a lighter, segmented line in the picture. The Anguillas are the freshwater eels, and until the early 20th century their lives were as big a secret to biologists as those of the Children of the Eel were to the Missionaries.

Suffering Lampreys!

To many Americans, especially those of us who live in the west where there are no freshwater eels, an "eel" is a Lamprey. But Lampreys are Agnathans (Greek, no jaw), the lowest fish on the evolutionary scale, and eels are Osteichthyes (Greek, bone + fish), the most advanced. Lampreys don't have skeletons --just a rod of cartilage to support

the body, and, as you might guess from the name, they don't have jaws. If you were to catch a lamprey, you would know it by the row of seven round stomata, openings over the gills, on the side. Adults are parasitic on other fish, and if you turned your lamprey over you would see a round mouth that attaches the lamprey to its victim, and rasp-like teeth that grate away the host's flesh. When the canals connecting the Great Lakes to the Atlantic ocean were built, Sea Lampreys infested the lakes and nearly destroyed their commercial fisheries, until larvicides (poisons specific to lamprey larvae), were developed. Lampreys were an important food for some American Indian tribes, and are considered a delicacy in Europe: the few caught commercially are exported.

Great Congers!

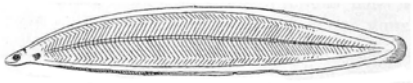
Congers and morays are in the family Anguillidae, like our Totem eel, but they are sea eels, living all their lives in salt water. Conger eels were fished commercially and prized for their rich gelatinous meat until well into the twentieth century.

Wriggling Elvers!

Harry the eeler says eels are born in the mud and live in the mud, and scoffs when Tom Dudgeon tries to tell what he's learned in school: that the eels in Harry's live box were born far away in the Sargasso sea and that those which escape nets and spears will return there to spawn.

Tom is right, but this was new knowledge when *The Big Six* was written. It had been less than thirty years since the eel life history began to be worked out. In 1908, Italian biologists proved that a quite un-eel-like fishlet called *Leptocephalus brevirostrus* ("thinhead shortsnout") was the larva, the first stage after hatching, of the eel. Leptocephali collected off the coast of Sicily were the key that finally unlocked the mystery of the eel, for its hatching grounds were found not by tracking adult eels out to sea but by following the paths of the larvae backward. In 1911, only three years after *L. brevirostris* was identified as a larval eel, one was netted off the Faeroes, and Johannes Schmidt, a biologist on the expedition that netted it, saw how important it was that a leptocephalus had been found hundreds of miles from the shores of Europe. For the next several years Schmidt followed the larvae backward along their paths, always looking for the next smaller form. The hunt was disrupted by World War I and by shipwreck and fire, but finally, in 1926 --around the time when Tom Dudgeon was born-- Schmidt netted the smallest larvae of all, three millimeters (about two tenths of an inch) long, no bigger than fingernail parings, scarcely larger than eel eggs.

Schmidt caught these tiniest of leptocephali in the curious sea within a sea called the Sargasso, a two million acre lens of water off the coast of Bermuda, contained and raised by slowly moving currents rather than by solid land. The slowly swirling boundary currents raise the Sargasso as much as nine meters above the surrounding waters, and within the lens the water is several degrees warmer and several parts per thousand saltier than the water of the Atlantic Ocean just outside and below it. The Sargasso is a clear, oligotrophic sea (Greek: *oligo*, few, *troph*-, nutrients), with hardly any large aquatic life-forms to eat the eels' eggs or the tiny, passively floating leptocephali, though there is plenty of microscopic life for them to feed on.



The hatchlings are leaf shaped, flat and transparent, with a few sharp teeth and a big dark eye, and in two years, by the time they reach European shores, they will have grown to about 7.5 centimeters long (almost three inches). Now they begin a metamorphosis as dramatic, in its way, as that of caterpillar to butterfly. They shorten. They lose up to 90% of their weight. Their sharp teeth disappear. From a flat fish-shaped creature they become something like a swimming string. They are still transparent, so transparent that you can see their hearts beating, and are now called glass eels. As the glass eels come to fresher water near the river mouths they darken to become more recognisably eel-like elvers.

The elvers transform again, into yellow eels with bronze or yellow-brown backs and creamy buff bellies --a countershading that helps make them invisible in murky summer water or in mud. The females move up the estuaries to rivers, streams, lakes, and ponds, while most males hang about the river mouths, carried in and out by the tides. Inland, eels slither across pastures and roads to get to water and even climb streamside trees, dropping into the water from the branches.

Eels are opportunistic feeders, like most very successful species, and will eat any kind of animal they can catch, as long as it's fresh. Eels are not generally fast enough to catch game fish and biologists don't see eels as any kind of threat to salmon or trout fisheries, though gamekeepers may. Even large eels feed mostly on invertebrates, with whatever small fish they can catch. One fish that eels can catch is other eels, and yellow eels have been caught with 50 and more elvers in their stomachs, harvested from the great masses of elvers moving upstream.

There will be one last inward and outward metamorphosis in fresh water. After the yellow eels feed and grow for 10 to 20 years or more, ribbonlike ruffly gonads (egg or sperm-producing organs) begin to develop, the body fluids become less salty, and the digestive system atrophies: the eels will never eat again. They change color one last time, to the handsome

silver and black of Ransome's drawings, and the body becomes firmer as the muscles are packed with fat. They are now silver eels, and migrate toward the sea, to disappear into its waters forever. Over all the recorded centuries, only a dozen or so eels have been caught at sea, and even today none have been tracked to the Sargasso. In 1898, an adult eel was collected from the stomach of a sperm whale, which tells us no more than that the eel was well out in the Mid-Atlantic and many meters below the surface, because that is where sperm whales feed. That specimen remains the only eel to be collected from the open sea. A handful of adults have been caught off the shores of Britain, metamorphosed yet again, and in ways that suggest they are deep-sea swimmers. The eye has become very large, the fan-shaped pectoral fins are now pointed like those of other fast-swimming ocean fish, and the color is a uniform bronze.

Bobbling Babbers!

"The old man talked of eels... 'We'll have a look at them old eels,' he said... The boat stopped, and the old man reached down with a pole that had a hook on the end of it." *The Big Six*

Surely no fish have ever been harvested in so many places, in so many ways and at so many sizes as eels. Eels were caught in estuaries and rivers, in streams and lakes and farm ponds, in brackish water and fresh. Though eels aren't mentioned in the books set in the Lake Country, there were enough eels there to support a small commercial fishery. Elsewhere, mudbanks where yellow eels lounged through hot summer days or lay buried in winter torpor were so thick with eels that they were harvested just by spearing at random into the mud. They were trapped in baited cages of withy or netting, or gathered by weirs (fish fences across a stream) and hand-netted. Silvers migrating downstream were caught in setts like Old Harry's: drift nets set in a "V" to guide the eels into tubular, hooped fyke nets. Many-hooked lines like Don's night lines **(**trot-lines, to Americans) caught eels by dozens, and "babs" of fine yarn wound into a ball, with no hooks at all, caught them by the teeth. Commercial fishermen found eels in their nets and on their long-lines and swore, and cut them loose, hooks and all; sport fishermen caught eels by accident and swore, and cut them loose; and fishermen looking for dinner caught them and delighted, for eel is one of the richest and tastiest of all fish.

Farewell and Adieu, Anguilla Anguilla

In time of the Swallows and Amazons there were still so many eels that no amount of harvesting made a dent in their numbers. Seemingly unending streams of eels returned from the ocean to be caught: tiny glass eels migrating upstream in spring, yellow eels going nowhere in particular at any time, and finally, mature silver eels on their way to the sea in the fall. There should have been enough eels for everyone, for forever.

Then the world changed. Dams were built, more than 15,000 of them across the rivers of the Eastern United States where young eels once swam upstream to feeding grounds and mature eels migrated downstream to the sea. The turbines of 1100 hydroelectric dams chop up eels just as efficiently as they chop up migrating salmon. By law, any of several agencies have the power to require bypasses around dams so that eels and other fish can get by, but hardly any bypasses have been built. Very few young eels swim and slither upstream past the dams, and very few adults slither or swim down. Commander Walker marooned the S&A's on Secret Water because he was called away to deal with the beginnings of the Second World War. Paradoxically, the war brought a new prosperity to a rebuilt Japan and eventually to China, countries where eels are a special delicacy. More people could buy eels than there were eels to buy. Japan and China have their own freshwater species, and the Japanese learned to farm them, but there still weren't enough eels. Because eel eggs won't hatch in artificial environments, the only way to farm eels is to catch elvers and glass eels and feed them to size, and there weren't enough in Asia. Japanese eel farms began buying elvers from Europe, and started a feeding frenzy among fishermen. Prices for glass eels and elvers skyrocketed. Modern nets could catch almost every tiny glass eel and elver, and did, leaving hardly any to mature upstream. When live elvers and eels began to be shipped around the world, eel parasites and diseases travelled with them and are now affecting both Western and Far Eastern populations. Eel numbers were dwindling before the elver boom, but with almost no elvers escaping dams, nets, and disease to mature, there are almost no young eels to replace the adults when they finally migrate to sea. European eel fisheries have collapsed and *Anguilla anguilla* is on the verge of extinction. ICES, the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, has now (June 2005) recommended that *all* eel fishing in Europe be halted. Some biologists fear that European Eel populations have already declined beyond recovery, but if not, the moratorium could save the species.

Meanwhile, the United States and Canada continue to dam rivers and to harvest eels and elvers for eel farms, for bait, and for European tables, so that fewer and fewer American Eels reach the Sargasso to spawn. It has taken many years to fish out existing adult populations, because eels are so long-lived and so slow to mature, but it's now clear that almost all of the silver eels migrating downstream are the last remnants of aging populations, with hardly any young eels getting past the dams to replace them. If blocking of streams and unregulated harvesting aren't corrected, and soon, our eel too could become extinct. Action has been slow in coming, but finally, in late 2005, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service is preparing to petition the Environmental Protection Agency to list the American eel as a threatened species, and Canada is also taking steps to protect eels. If *Anguilla rostrata* is granted threatened status and if we can act quickly enough, if we can put dam bypasses in place so that eels can get to their upstream feeding grounds and migrate back down, if we can

curtail harvests so that enough adult eels to maintain the species reach the Sargasso Sea and spawn, our eel populations may recover and we may not have to say that final farewell after all.

KARABADANGBARAKA!!
AKARABGNADABARAK!!

(The conclusion of)

Three Bridge Fiasco

By Jim Wessel Walker
Continued from April 05 issue of Signals

Our tide tables told us to expect low tide at the Golden Gate at about nine, soon after our start. We therefore planned to sail first to the Blackhaller Buoy just inside the Golden Gate Bridge, taking advantage of the ebb on our way to the bridge and the flood on our way back. Either the tide tables were wrong or we misread them. As we began our carefully timed and planned approach from the east toward the start line we ran into a strong current from the west that had not been there during our practice. Furthermore, the wind had weakened. Our approach to the start was painfully slow and we crossed the line more than five minutes late. Conditions got worse as we struggled towards the Golden Gate. On shore landmarks were close enough to make our slow progress painfully obvious. It looked as though we could spend the whole day on the shortest leg of the race. So we decided to leave the Golden Gate until later, sailing eastward with the current back into the bay to go first to Red Rock, just south of the Richmond Bridge.

I still do not know why we encountered a strong flood current when we should have been riding the last of the ebb. A mid-continent sailor, I am not used to grappling with currents, particularly erratic tidal currents. Our neighbor in the Richmond marina told us on Saturday night that she had not managed even to reach the start line and so had had to drop out of the race. Her start time was later than ours, when the current was even stronger and the wind weaker.

Bob & San Francisco at Dawn

A direct line from the Golden Gate to Red Rock is blocked by Angel Island lying just off the end of the Tiburon Peninsula. Should we take the short route through narrow Raccoon Strait between the island and the mainland, where hills might block the wind, or should we stay in the open water of the longer route to the south of the island? We chose the longer route. This was a mistake. The wind died as we rounded the eastern tip of Angel Island and began our run north to Red Rock. We spent the rest of the day drifting slowly northward, listening to the radio messages of boats withdrawing from the race. Far off to the north a cloud of sails emerged from Raccoon Strait and moved slowly towards Red Rock. They had been carried through the channel by the incoming tide. Far off to the south was another cloud of sails first on one side of Treasure Island and then on the other. These were the boats that had chosen to visit the Oakland Bay Bridge first. Later in the afternoon we could see these two clouds come together off the far eastern shore of San Francisco Bay and then draw apart again as the Red Rock fleet headed south to Treasure Island and the Treasure Island fleet headed north towards Red Rock. So we could watch the race unfold even if we were not participating very effectively ourselves.

We gave up with just enough time to get back to the Richmond marina under power before dark. Only 34 boats finished the race and most of them squeaked in just minutes before the seven o'clock closing time. I think the finishers had all chosen Raccoon Straight as the route to Red Rock and they were all fast, light boats carrying lots of sail.

It was all downhill, or upstream, from here. We had used the engine very little on Saturday so started our return trip on Sunday morning without stopping for gas. But we had not realized, on our downstream voyage, how much of a boost we were getting from the current. It had rained a lot in California during the weeks before our voyage; the river currents were particularly powerful. Now we found our upstream progress very slow, even with the engine running. We had another warm, sunny day with little wind, probably the pattern for Northern California in January. The sailing might have been better if it had been raining. Well, we ran out of gas in the middle of San Pablo Bay. We flagged down a sailboat chugging briskly upstream and were given all the spare gas on board. It wasn't enough. We ran out again as we were

approaching Carquinez Strait. There were no boats around and our prospects looked grim. Bob called the Coast Guard. They took all our details but they are not allowed to rescue us from discomfort and inconvenience, only from danger. We thought about calling a towing service, but were saved by a motorboat that came roaring across the lake. The two friendly men on board had taken an afternoon jaunt down to San Francisco and back, a voyage that had taken us several days. They gave us a jerry can full of gas and recommended the nearest marina, at Vallejo "just a few minutes" up the Napa River. The day was getting late and we were once again worried about the key to the bathroom so we thankfully took their advice. After half an hour on the Napa River we realized that they had meant a few of their minutes not a few of ours. We got into the marina in time, just, so had a comfortable night.

We set out before dawn on Monday because with a long way to go back to Owl Harbor. The current was strong, the wind light, and our progress slow. We put in to the marina in Benicia to fill the tank and found a wall of fog up ahead of us when we returned to the main channel. For a while we motored along in clear air with this ominous cloud just off to starboard, but before long it closed in over us and we were motoring by compass up the Sacramento River with nothing visible beyond a boat length. By good luck or skillful helmsmanship we picked up the buoy marking the channel under the Martinez Bridge. We could hear the traffic on the bridge, and then we could see the roadway over our heads. The fog was only a few tens of feet deep. Finally we could make out the bridge piers beside us and see how the current swirled around them.

We realized that Prelude did not carry enough gas to take us to the next marina, at Pittsburg on the far end of Suisun Bay. We gave up and turned back to Benicia, arranged a berth for Prelude for the rest of the week and called a friend in Sacramento for a rescue. We enjoyed a few hours exploring Benicia while waiting for our ride. It was the State Capitol in 1853 and 1854. The capitol building is now a museum, unfortunately closed on Mondays. I flew home to winter on Tuesday. Bob bought several jerry cans, filled them with gas, and brought Prelude back to Owl Harbor in one very long voyage the following weekend.

We have a lot to learn. I need more skill in reading the wind and the current. Would we have done better on the other side of the river? Should we have been closer to shore or further away? How variable are the tides in San Francisco Bay and how can we figure out what to expect on any particular day? Clearly we need to watch our speed through the water. Bob's handheld GPS receiver gave us most encouraging reports about our speed over the ground during our voyage down river. We never thought to worry about how much of our speed was a gift of the current. Next time I want to know speed through the water as well as speed over the ground. The speed gauges in the catalogues are expensive and require a hole through the hull, but I found in a book about old navigation instruments a method that is easy, inexpensive, and accurate enough for our purposes. It is called the Dutchman's log. Count off the seconds it takes for the boat to pass some marker floating freely in the water, a chip of wood, a splotch of foam, or a broken tendril of weed. Speed through the water in knots is 0.6 times the length of the boat in feet divided by the number of seconds. Why 0.6 you say? Well, divide the length of the boat by the seconds to pass something floating in the water to get the speed in feet per second. Divide by the number of feet in a nautical mile, about six thousand, to get the speed in nautical miles per second. Multiply by the number of seconds in an hour to get the speed in knots. I plan to try this in the Wildcat as soon as the ice melts.

Jim Wessel Walker, a retired Professor of Environmental Studies, is the father of Ten-Gong Contributing Editor, Mary Wessel Walker. He sails the Wildcat on lakes great and small in and around Michigan.

Learning the Ropes

By Debra Alderman, Seattle, WA

I wanted to introduce myself as your new newsletter editor and offer my thoughts on why I've taken on this volunteer opportunity.

As a teenager I was very lucky to have been a part of a small group of friends in a co-ed Explorer Scout troop with which I shared many adventures exploring the waters of Puget Sound and the coast of British Columbia. Our vessel, which had been donated by a wealthy yachter looking for a tax write-off, was the 65' historic Dutch bøtter-yacht *Groote Bear*, which was a pleasure-craft version of a traditional canal boat with lee-boards instead of a keel (similar to ones the crew of the *Swallow* saw in the Dutch harbor in WDMTGTS). With fairly minimal help of few friendly adults, we took on all the responsibilities of earning money to pay for our trips; planning our voyages; navigating, sailing and maintaining that wonderful old wooden boat. We did *a lot* of scraping, sanding and varnishing. We girls did all that mate stuff which kept our crew fed and taken care of. A few of the more mechanical boys learned to maintain that old diesel engine. One of our teenage members actually got sick of having to get a licensed volunteer adult skipper each time we wanted to take the boat out and studied for and received skipper's certification! When we weren't messing around with the *Groote Bear*, we sailed small boats on Lake Washington, canoed on the Skykomish River, or backpacked in the Cascades.

Helen Jolley, Debra & Akiva at PNW TARS corroboree 8/05

I have such great memories of those times, and that's probably a lot of the reason the Swallows and Amazons are among my favorite books. My son, 12 year old Akiva, and I have been avid AR fans since we discovered the series about five years ago. During this gorgeous Pacific Northwest summer, and especially during a recent, very special gathering of Pacific Northwest TARS families, I've reflected on some of the reasons these books have taken hold of our imaginations the way they have, and why I feel my time is well spent helping others to discover them, too.

While I still love to go on adventures myself, I tend to fall back into my traditional role of "Mate." In order to get everyone out on an adventure, someone's got to be practical like Susan and make sure that the right gear gets packed and stowed, that the provisions are turned into edible grub on a regular basis, and that everyone stays dry, healthy and safe. But I'm not totally practical. I have a bit of Titty in me, too. Like her, I'm a reader, a dreamer, and writer. So in taking on my role as newsletter editor I hope to bring those two sides of me together and help our members not only use their imaginations, but to actually get out there and have adventures!

So I encourage you to go out, have as many adventures as you can, meet up with other TARS members and send me stories of your experiences to share in Signals. Other welcome contributions might include camping/boating tips, recipes, and ideas; puzzles, quizzes, coded messages; or information about events in your area that would be of interest to other TARS members. Thanks for your support as I take on this new role. Let me know if you have any suggestions.

Karabadangbaraka!
--Debra

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