



CAPE HORN AND ANTARCTIC WATERS: Including Chile, the Beagle Channel, Falkland Islands and the Antarctic Peninsula – Paul Heiney. Published in hard covers by Imray, Laurie, Norie & Wilson [www.imray.com] at £60. 210 A4-size pages in full colour throughout. ISBN 978-1-8462-3836-9

I am not sure that anyone could, or even should, attempt to produce a comprehensive cruising guide to these remote and challenging cruising grounds. In compiling this latest RCC Pilotage Foundation title, Paul Heiney makes it very clear that it provides only an overview of what lies in store for the more adventurous.

The notes on preparation have been culled from many experienced sailors who have gained these insights first-hand and over many years, and I would urge anyone considering venturing this far south to read and re-read Section 1. *Preparing for the Extremes* – in which the author highlights some of the many personal skill-sets, equipment, techniques and the high levels of boat preparation required – well before departure.

There is much to be gained even by experienced sailors, and I successfully used the advice on tandem anchoring techniques (reprinted in this guide) gleaned from the RCCPF's Chile guide by Andy O'Grady* before my own adventures in Chile, South Georgia and Antarctica. There is a good sub-section on the fascinating wildlife to be found in the area, but I would recommend that anyone visiting these waters add specific books on the wildlife to be seen beneath and above the waves.

Section 2 provides advice and information on how to get there, in itself a challenging proposition, but the book outlines the various route options, distances, weather, currents and possible anchorages, plus what can be expected from the locals if you stop along the way! Whilst some things never change others are a moving feast. Harbours get developed, formalities are changed (sometimes for the better) and it is always a good idea to obtain the latest information – eg. the marina in Piriapolis has been extended to accommodate up to 100 boats and there is now an immigration office directly behind the marina.

Section 3 covers Chile from Valdivia to the Beagle Channel and Magellan Strait, and provides a good overview of what is to be found in these amazing cruising grounds. Once again there is plenty of background information on formalities, charts, weather and the key harbours where fuel and provisions are available, plus details of just a handful of the many anchorages that can be explored along the way, all supported by detailed chartlets and stunning photographs to whet the appetite.

* *CHILE: Arica Desert to Tierra del Fuego*, third edition revised by Andrew O'Grady. Reviewed in *Flying Fish* 2015/2.

The same format covers the subsequent sections on the Beagle Channel and Cape Horn, the Falkland Islands including South Georgia, and the Antarctic Peninsula, each with information specific to the area. Here things get even more adventurous and the book provides links to other, more detailed cruising guides for each area, lists charts required, etc. Permits for South Georgia and the Antarctic Peninsula are getting more difficult to obtain and the rules and regulations are getting ever more stringent, but the links provided will help you find a route through these bureaucratic minefields.

As with all RCCPF guides, the quality is excellent and there are lots of top-class photographs. It achieves its aim of providing adventurous yachtsmen and women with a sufficient understanding of what can be expected when venturing south into these vast, exciting and challenging cruising grounds.

SB



KNOX-JOHNSTON ON SEAMANSHIP AND SEAFARING – Sir Robin Knox-Johnston. Published in hard covers by Fernhurst Books [<https://fernhurstbooks.com>] at £14.99. 220 150mm x 231mm pages but no photographs or other illustrations. ISBN 978-1-9121-7714-1

Sir Robin Knox-Johnston is a legend, an inspiration, even a hero. As the first person to sail singlehanded non-stop around the world by the three great capes of Good Hope, Leeuwin and the Horn he led the way in bringing sailing to the notice of the world. He has competed in some of the greatest ocean racing events, including the Whitbread, Jules Verne, Route du Rhum and, at the age of 68, the Velux 5 Oceans.

Starting out in the Merchant Navy, and with over 250,000 miles sailed aboard a wide variety of yachts, Robin has experience and knowledge that is hard to match. *Knox-Johnston on Seamanship and Seafaring* was brought out in June 2018 to coincide with the 50th anniversary of his departure from Falmouth on the Golden Globe Race, the event which shot him into the record books and saw the start of an illustrious career. It has an admiring foreword by Alex Thomson, after which Robin pens an introduction that considers the changes in boats, navigation and communications which have taken place over the past 50 years. It then comprises two main sections:

- **Part 1: Seamanship** – in which 26 short pieces cover ‘Skills’ such as using waypoints, obeying COLREGS, throwing a heaving line, and the art of anchoring; followed by another 13 pieces addressing ‘Gear’, including safety harnesses, leadline and sextant.
- **Part 2: Seafaring** – with a sub-section of 13 pieces on ‘Boats’ that includes *Cutty Sark*, the Metre Classes, Dunkirk Little Ships, MOD70 and of course, *Suhaili*; another covering ‘Races’ including the Velux 5 Oceans, Vendée Globe and the Round the Island Race; and a final sub-section of 10 pieces about ‘Places’ that have significant meaning for Sir Robin, such as the Southern Ocean, Durban, Bombay and Greenland.

I started this book with a high level of interest and enthusiasm – indeed, who wouldn’t? When Robin did a book signing in June 2018 in Falmouth the queue snaked down the

street, with all copies of the book being sold before all would-be purchasers could be satisfied. Sadly, however, it failed to meet my expectations. Apart from the Foreword and Introduction there is no new writing here – it is a collection of Robin’s writings that appeared in *Yachting World* magazine. This in itself is no bad thing, but according to the dust cover ‘you can benefit from Robin’s wealth of experience as he shares his thoughts ... in this new book’.

Much of the disappointment, and indeed frustration, could have been avoided if each piece had carried the date on which it was first published. This would have avoided the confusion that results when reading a piece which includes such phrases as ‘this summer’, ‘last year’, ‘at present’ etc. It would also have avoided such apparent *faux pas* as the statement ‘With modern anchors like the CQR ...’ when writing about the Art of Anchoring. Had we been told when the piece was written we would understand the reference to ‘modern’. OCC members might also take issue with his definition of a circumnavigation. It appears that, to Robin, you have only completed a ‘proper circumnavigation’ if you have sailed south of the three great capes as ‘A voyage that takes the sailor through the Suez or Panama Canal does not count’.

Having said all that, while the experienced sailor is unlikely to find many nuggets in Part 1, Part 2 has some interesting stories about Boats and Races. For me the Places sub-section did not spark except for an amusing story about visiting Lerwick.

So, as an anthology of Robin’s writing and to see how he has addressed sailing matters over a period of 50 years, the book has a place on the shelf. His love of the traditional ways comes through strongly, but his enthusiasm for the new is muted despite keeping pace with changes in technology and design.

CPH



YANMARA, SHIP’S CAT – Suzanne Hills. Published in soft covers by AM Publishing New Zealand, and available from Amazon at £7.78 / US \$10.60. 216 127mm x 203mm pages with a route plan, boat details and black-and-white photos. ISBN 978-0-9951-0768-7

Dog lovers beware! Although not in the first person, *Yanmara, Ship’s Cat* is written from Yanmara’s point of view and dogs are, without exception, baddies. No need to read further, in fact... For cat lovers however, or those with an impartial view of the animal kingdom, this is a delightful book, and though written with pre-teen girls in mind this (pensionable) reviewer enjoyed it thoroughly.

Many members will recall Yanmara from *5000 Miles in ‘The Variables’*, Suzanne’s account of *Whanake’s* South Pacific crossing which appeared in *Flying Fish* 2016/1. Yanmara was a kitten when they left Valdivia but Ship’s Cat by the time they reached New Zealand, a transition which forms the background of the book.

Deep literature it ain’t, but not only does Suzanne write extremely well, she also shows a deep understanding and empathy with cats and what motivates them – mainly fish, in Yanmara’s case! Of course there’s a strong element of anthropomorphism, not just towards Yanmara herself but also many of the other species she meets and – unlikely though it might sound – befriends.

For me pride of place must go to Karin and Rossi the Swiss Army Knife crabs, but we also meet Nina the sea eagle, Ken the dancing albatross, a pair of depressed and nameless jellyfish, Matt and Laurie the dolphins, Slater the suckerfish, Jeff and Octavia the octopuses, and Martha the humpback whale and her five-tonne son Little Arthur. Only Le Rat is not made welcome.

In addition to being a fine (and inexpensive) Christmas stocking-filler containing much gentle humour, *Yanmara*, *Ship's Cat* would make a great animated cartoon, or (with less detail) an appealing illustrated book for younger children. Suzanne tells me that Yanmara has a growing fan club and may soon have a presence on YouTube. She definitely should – like most cats she's a natural star! Highly recommended.

AOMH



ASTRONAUTS OF CAPE HORN – Nicholas Gray. Published in hard covers by The Conrad Press [www.theconradpress.com] at £16.99. 240 158mm x 240mm pages, plus 15 pages of good-quality mono photographs and a chartlet. ISBN 978-1-9115-4638-2

Astronauts of Cape Horn owes its unusual title to the fact that by the time of the sixth and last moon landing in 1972, twelve men had stood on that alien surface but only eleven had doubled Cape Horn singlehanded. Some of the latter are well-known, at least to fellow sailors, but others are now almost forgotten. Nicholas Gray, himself a very experienced singlehanded sailor, has done much to rectify this between the covers of this fascinating book.

The first recorded rounding of Cape Horn – as against passage through the Magellan Strait – was in 1615, and it was almost another 200 years before land was discovered to the south. Prior to the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914 it became the graveyard of countless fully-crewed ships and men. As (almost) every cruiser knows, the first man to circumnavigate singlehanded was Joshua Slocum, who left Boston in 1895 aboard the *Spray*, but like most smaller vessels of the time he passed through the Magellan Strait. He was followed by Harry Pigeon, Alain Gerbault, Edward Miles and Louis Bernicot in the 1920s and '30s.

A prodigious amount of reading and research – allied to at least one stroke of sheer luck – went into the writing of this book. This (fairly well-read) reviewer had never heard of Alfon Hansen, who left Norway in 1932 aboard his 36ft Colin Archer-designed gaff cutter *Mary Jane*. Amazingly, received wisdom at the time was that the best season in which to double the Horn was June or July, the depths of the southern winter. Accordingly, Hansen left Buenos Aires in June 1934. He later called in at a town more than 1000 miles up the Chilean coast, but after leaving to continue north was never seen again. Meeting Hansen in Buenos Aires early in 1934 may well have inspired Argentinean Vito Dumas, who in 1942 left his homeland aboard his 31ft *Legh II* to head eastabout, finally doubling the Horn in June 1943 as related in his *Alone Through the Roaring Forties*.

Next to set off was Frenchman Marcel Bardiaux in his home-built *Les 4 Vents*, variously reported as either 25ft or 30ft (LWL, LOD or LOA?), who left France in October 1950

and reached Cape Horn in May 1952, only to hit a (small) iceberg which forced him to return to Ushuaia for repairs – via the Beagle Channel as he had already passed Cape Horn. He finally entered the Pacific via the Magellan Strait – almost certainly the first non-naval vessel to pass through all three passages in a single season.

Fourth to head for the Horn alone was Australian Bill Nance, who left the UK aged 23 in December 1961 aboard *Cardinal Vertue* (a sistership of Humphrey Barton's *Vertue XXXV*). Unlike Dumas and Bardiaux he never wrote about his voyage, and Nicholas Gray only learned the details due to the stroke of luck referred to previously – a chance contact with Pam Wall, OCC Port Officer for Fort Lauderdale, Florida whose late husband Andy had doubled the Horn with Nance's brother Bob (see *Flying Fish* 2014/2) and who had kept in contact with Bill. Like Dumas, Nance headed eastabout via the Cape of Good Hope and the southern Indian Ocean, the last 2000 miles to Australia under jury rig. After two years in New Zealand, on 1st December 1964 he set off across the Southern Ocean towards Cape Horn, which he rounded on 7th January. *Astronauts of Cape Horn* is worth buying for this chapter alone.

The chain continued, with Edward Allcard doubling the Horn in 1966 after a chance meeting with Bill Nance in Buenos Aires. His 36ft yawl *Sea Wanderer* was 55 years old by then but appears to have coped admirably, a voyage recounted in *Solo Around Cape Horn*, published shortly before Allcard's death last year and reviewed in *Flying Fish* 2017/1.

Compared to their predecessors, the encounters of Sir Francis Chichester, Sir Alec Rose and Sir Robin Knox-Johnston with Cape Horn in 1967, 1968 and 1969 are well-documented on film as well as in print. Very different characters sailing very different boats, all three wrote about their circumnavigations, in *Gipsy Moth Circles the World*, *My Lively Lady* and *A World of My Own*, all of which make interesting reading. All three yachts are still sailing.

Frenchman Bernard Moitessier, like Sir Robin a competitor in the 1968 Golden Globe Race, passed south of the Horn in his 38ft *Joshua* in February 1969, but remained in the Southern Ocean past the Cape of Good Hope and eventually made landfall in Tahiti. Also in the Golden Globe Race was Nigel Tetley sailing the Piver-designed trimaran *Victress*, the first multihull to double the Horn. After surviving the Southern Ocean and passing Cape Horn safely a month after Moitessier, and with more than 20,000 miles already under her keels, she began to break up within 1500 miles of home and had to be abandoned – a sad and needless outcome which Nicholas Gray describes with great sympathy.

The final man to double the Horn prior to the sixth and last moon landing on 7th December 1972 was Sir Chay Blyth aboard the 57ft *British Steel*. Unlike his five world-girdling predecessors he opted to head westwards into the prevailing winds. Leaving the UK in October 1970 he rounded the Horn on Christmas Eve, beat into the Roaring Forties for a further five months to round the Cape of Good Hope in May 1971, and finally made landfall in the Solent to a hero's welcome on 12th August after 292 days at sea.

Since then there have been many solo circumnavigations in ever-decreasing times, but nearly all with the underlying knowledge that, should the worst happen, the authorities can be alerted and help summoned. Up to the 1970s, all who crossed oceans in small boats were as isolated as if they had been walking on the moon – in many ways more so.

Normally a book review should offer more than just a synopsis of its contents, but *Astronauts of Cape Horn* is not a normal book – with its comprehensive bibliography it opens a window onto a world of enterprise and endurance unknown to most modern cruisers. Its focus is relatively narrow and I hope that Nicholas Gray will follow up some of the stories – or others – in greater detail in future books. Meanwhile I can recommend *Astronauts of Cape Horn* without hesitation. A traditionally-bound hard-back complete with dust cover, it would make an excellent Christmas present – but only after buying a copy for yourself first.

AOMH

PS: The contribution made by OCC member Roger Robinson should not be overlooked. In addition to drawing the chartlet of Cape Horn (though he tells me the publishers have printed an earlier, unfinished version) his archives provided several of the photographs.



VANISHING SAIL: THE STORY OF A CARIBBEAN TRADITION (film) – written and directed by Alexis Andrews, produced by Alexis Andrews and Justin Sihera, Indian Creek Films 2015. Available on DVD from www.store.vanishingsail.com at £19.15 / US \$24.95.

We loved this film. It tells the story of Alwyn Enoe, one of the few remaining traditional boat builders in the West Indies, as he builds his last boat in Windward, Carriacou. Alexis had become enchanted with Carriacou sloops and bought one in Antigua in the 1990s, subsequently sailing her back to Carriacou where she had been built. He became friends with Alwyn, from whom he commissioned a boat which they named *Genesis*.

In 2012, Alwyn had not received any commissions for new boats for several years, and his sons had found other employment to support themselves, away from the boat-building craft. In his late 60s, Alwyn decided it was time to retire. Before he did so, however, he wanted to build one last boat for his family and asked Alexis to document the tradition before it was lost for ever. “If this thing gone from here, everything gone you know ...”, Alwyn explains. The result is this beautifully-filmed story which follows Alwyn and his sons over a three-year period as they build *Exodus*, a traditional Carriacou gaff-rigged sloop.

They haul trees from the forest to make her frames, and fashion a mast out of a utility pole. As the boat nears completion, Alwyn is seized with the idea of finishing her in time to compete in the Antigua Classic Yacht Regatta, five weeks away. They complete her just under the wire and launch her in an enthusiastic, traditional ceremony. Alwyn and his sons then set off on the 48 hour sail to Antigua to join the regatta.

Woven throughout the film are stories and commentaries by some wonderful island personalities including boat builders, neighbours and seamen of all stripes. Don Street even makes an appearance. The film explores the vibrant history of boat building and trading (and smuggling) under sail in the eastern Caribbean, and reaches back to the Scottish settler origins of the art. Besides being an engrossing story of an ancient,

vanishing skill and one man's poignant effort to preserve it, we are given intimate and genuine exposure to this small island community. For now, Alwyn's legacy continues as his sons do their best to carry on their father's work and Carriacou's tradition.

Vanishing Sail is the winner of numerous awards including the Directorial Discovery and Audience Choice awards at the 2015 Rhode Island International Film Festival, the 2016 Grand Jury Prize at the Barcelona International Film Festival, and most recently, the 2017 Donald Gosling Maritime Media Award for Best Television or Film.

One last thing. The film is gorgeous. Shot primarily in Carriacou, the Grenadines and Antigua, it had us ready to jump on the next plane from wintry Maine. It also inspires one to take part in, or at least attend (plus camera!), the Antigua Classic Yacht Regatta. Whether your interests lie in cruising, racing, boat building, or boat design, *Vanishing Sail* will not disappoint.

JAG

This review originally appeared in the 2018 issue of *Voyages*, the annual magazine of the Cruising Club of America.



FIRST AID AT SEA – Dr Douglas Justins and Dr Colin Berry (7th edition). Published in spiral-bound format between hard covers by Adlard Coles Nautical [www.adlardcoles.com] at £12.99. 30 250mm x 170 mm pages in full colour on card. ISBN 978-1-4729-5341-4

This latest edition of *First Aid at Sea* remains 'a little cracker', to use the words of a previous reviewer (5th edition, *Flying Fish* 2009/1). It contains all the essential information for immediate first aid, as well as for non-life threatening situations where readers may still seek reassurance or guidance.

It remains the same practical, water-resistant, spiral-bound design, colour-coded sections which make finding the correct page much quicker and more straightforward than thumbing through an index. As in previous editions the language is clear with no medical jargon to confuse the reader. The previous reviewer questioned the need for a page to be devoted to distress signals. I have to say I agree with his wife, who suggested that inexperienced (or indeed experienced) crew may benefit from a step-by-step guide to seeking help when faced with an emergency situation.

Many sailors quite rightly worry about the potential for serious injury aboard a yacht, such as head injuries, hypothermia and drowning. While these serious situations are covered extremely well in the book, I particularly liked the pages covering sudden illness. In this section it describes the point at which to call for urgent medical assistance or evacuation. While prompting the crew to seek medical advice at the appropriate point may serve to reassure them that they are giving the correct care to the casualty, early advice regarding intervention and evacuation may prove to be life-saving.

First Aid at Sea is light despite its robustness, and will be easy to stow on board even the smallest yacht. It offers excellent value for money and is a worthy addition to any boat's safety equipment.

CB

THE NARROW DOG TRILOGY (NARROW DOG TO CARCASSONNE, NARROW DOG TO INDIAN RIVER, and NARROW DOG TO WIGAN PIER) – Terry Darlington. Published in soft covers by Bantam Books [www.randomhousebooks.com/imprints] at £6.99, £9.99 and £8.99 respectively. 426, 432 and 354 130mm x 198mm pages, with a few sketch plans and line drawings but no photographs. ISBNs 978-0-5538-1669-3, 978-0-5538-1816-1 and 978-0-8575-0063-2.

Terry Darlington is a ‘Marmite’ writer – you either like his clipped, sometimes terse style or you don’t. The same is true of his frequent quotations and allusions, while the fact that all three books tell of travels aboard a narrow-boat* called *Phyllis May* could be seen as a turn-off by some OCC members. However anyone who has ever had anything to do with boats will recognise a fellow spirit when, on page 309 of *Narrow Dog to Wigan Pier*, Terry Darlington writes: ‘Pretending a problem isn’t there, however monstrous, even when it is staring you in the face, is one of the most common and effective strategies in life. ... But the strategy never works on a boat. Ignore a rattle and a piece of your boat will tear itself off... Get something on the prop and it will stall you in a cross-current as the trip boat is coming for you’.

Narrow Dog to Carcassonne, first published in 2005, tells how Terry, his wife Monica, and Jim the (very reluctant) whippet, left their base at Stone in the English Midlands to make a circuit of the country’s canals and rivers via London and Bristol ... after which they sat back and thought ‘where next?’ and decided on Carcassonne in the south of France for no better reason, apparently, than that they liked the name (one gets the feeling that Terry makes a lot of decisions for reasons like this). They’re experienced narrow-boaters and not crazy, so arrange back-up to make the Channel Crossing – possibly the only narrow-boat to have done this, as the standard method is to ship by ferry – after which they visit Belgium and Paris, have an exciting time on the River Rhône, and eventually make it to Carcassonne – or as close as a canal-boat can to this ancient town.

This all could become a somewhat boring account of canals, locks and glimpsed towns were it not for Terry’s eye for detail and oddball humour (quite frequently at himself). It also transpires that he speaks fluent French, which may not always be obvious to those discussing him and the *Phyllis May* in his presence.

No such opportunities in *Narrow Dog to Indian River*, published in 2009. *Narrow Dog to Carcassonne* having been a somewhat unexpected success to author and publisher alike, he and Monica (Jim is not consulted) are encouraged to spread their wings and take *Phyllis May* to the US. Even they realise the Atlantic might be a bit much for her, so have her shipped to the Chesapeake and follow the Intracoastal Waterway south through Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia and across Florida. One can foresee Terry having quite a party with those southern ladies, and he does. Just occasionally the writing seems a little laboured and one imagines him scratching his head and

* Designed to travel England’s ‘narrow’ canals as well as the wider ones, and originally to carry commercial cargoes, a typical narrow-boat is around 70ft (21.1m) LOA with a beam of just under 7ft (2.1m). Virtually flat underneath, they do not manoeuvre easily – and I speak from experience.

wondering how to fill the next chapter, but never for very long. Few narrow-boats can ever have enjoyed a dolphin escort.

Narrow Dog to Wigan Pier, from 2013, is sometimes a little darker in tone. Ostensibly it describes first a trip up England's western canals from Stoke to Tewitfield – as far north as a narrow-boat can get, basically – and then a circuit around the centre of the country. But it is in a new boat, *Phyllis May II*, after her predecessor is lost in a yard fire, and the writing is interspersed with large chunks of autobiography and smaller chunks of philosophy. Both are interesting, not least because of Terry's considerable intelligence and distinctly off-the-wall view of the world. He tells us that he doesn't plan to write another book, and though I'm sure he could, and it would probably sell well, I think he's wise to stop while he's ahead.

There are no photographs or other illustrations, though each book has a page or two of sketch maps at the beginning. Doubtless other narrow-boaters will follow the Darlington's routes on detailed waterways maps (and glean a great deal of useful information in the process), but those of us with nearly 2m draught have no reason to take life so seriously. For more detailed maps and photos visit their website at www.narrowdog.com – where you are also encouraged to buy Terry's books, of course.

A few pages at the end of each book are devoted to listing the quotations and allusions mentioned in the first paragraph of this review. I regretted not knowing this until I reached the end of *Narrow Dog to Carcassonne*, though felt cheered at having recognised quite a few. Now I tend to check the unfamiliar as I go along. Terry Darlington has a degree in English from Oxford University, and as his syllabus is unlikely to have extended from William Langland to Allen Ginsberg one can only conclude that he also enjoys reading.

In summary? Well I really enjoyed all three books, and so did the people I lent them to. I can't promise that you will, but unless you have no sense of humour at all there has to be a very good chance...

AOMH



RACUNDRA'S THIRD CRUISE – Arthur Ransome. Edited and compiled by Brian Hammett. First published by Fernhurst Books [<https://fernhurstbooks.com>] in 2002, this edition in soft covers published 2018. 128 235mm x 150mm pages illustrated with original photographs. ISBN 978-1-9121-7711-0.

Arthur Ransome has a lot to answer for. Many a ten year old, including this reviewer, went on to a life of nautical pursuits after reading *Swallows and Amazons* and its 11 sequels about the adventures of the fictional Walker family and their friends, the Blackett sisters.

It wasn't until much later that I came across *Racundra's First Cruise* – Ransome's account of his introduction to *Racundra* and her inaugural cruise from Riga, where he had her built, to Helsinki, in August and September of 1922. It was much later still that I discovered what an interesting character was Arthur Ransome. A man whose political views were of the left, who reputedly was the only British journalist permitted to remain in Moscow through the Bolshevik Revolution and its aftermath. Here was a

man who had Lenin as a chess opponent, and who fell in love with and subsequently married Trotsky's personal secretary, Evginia Shelepina. Indeed, once Ransome had obtained a divorce from his first wife, he was married to his beloved Evginia by the British Consul in Riga. *Racundra's* third cruise in 1924 was their honeymoon.

Despite its title, *Racundra's Third Cruise* is much more than a 21st century version of a book by Ransome that he never had published. The first 80 pages is an account of the cruise itself, on inland waters from Riga up the Aa River (now called by its Latvian name the Lieupe). Editor Brian Hammett has combined Ransome's words with those contained in his diary and entries extracted from *Racundra's* log. The result is a fascinating insight into river cruising through a countryside suffering from the aftermath of a long and bitter civil war. Hammett calls the remaining 45 pages a 'prelude', containing lots of interesting background information about *Racundra's* earlier cruises, about Arthur and Evginia, and about the boat herself, as well as more general insights into Baltic cruising life and times in the early 1920s.

Even at the age of ten I can remember being irked by the unreality and monotony of interactions between siblings aboard the *Swallow* and the *Amazon*, and other boats in later books. In my admittedly limited experience, no family I knew was that peaceable and civilised in the various stressful situations that occurred during their adventures. This, however, was more than compensated for by the skill with which Ransome's prose imparts the spiritual as well as physical pleasure of cruising in small boats in interesting places.

His description of real cruising experiences aboard *Racundra* did not suffer from this pacific limitation. Here is an extract from his diary of an incident recognisable to many in the cruising fraternity as 'cabin fever':

"The Cook says there is no point in living in *Racundra*, that only children are glad to live in a ship, that there is nothing to see, nothing to write about, and that she's sick of wind and rain and living in a small cabin; that I grow worse with age, and that proper authors live at home and write books out of their heads."

A charming idiosyncrasy that carried over to his later childrens' books was to use nicknames for things and people. *Racundra's* somewhat temperamental hot-bulb, kerosene-powered Swedish engine became 'the little donkey', Evginia the 'Cook', the old, experienced, nautical person who helped Ransome fit out *Racundra*, and who crewed on the first two cruises, 'The Ancient Mariner'. On the second cruise a fourth crew member was a grass snake over three feet long called 'Oureberes', a mis-spelling of *ouroboros* – a mythical dragon that is depicted as swallowing its own tail and hence has no beginning or end. According to the The Ancient Mariner's daughter, on cold nights Oureberes would sleep coiled around Evginia's breasts.

Clearly, the Cook was an interesting character in her own right. She stood 6ft 3in tall, was secretary to the man who formed the Red Army that prevailed in the Russian civil war, was suspected by MI5 of smuggling diamonds out of Russia to finance the *Comintern* in Paris, but jumped ship near the end of the third cruise because two mischievous boys in a dugout canoe emerged from the river marshes to toss a mouse down the forward hatch. As Ransome puts it: '... the cruise is almost over. The Cook has gone and I am left a hero to face a raging lion in a mouse's skin'.