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## *James Herriots trip to Russia*

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In 1961 John Crooks, a former assistant At Skeldale House, persuaded Alf Wight (James Herriot) to go on a trip to Russia to accompany a cargo of sheep. Alf wanted some variety and felt he needed a break from country vetting at that time. The entire voyage is described in diary form over several chapters of his book, 'The Lord God made them all'.

The diary mentions places I was unfamiliar with so I mapped out the journey and found out more about the ship that he sailed in.

### *The 'Iris Clauson'*

This was the ship that Alf first set eyes on October 28<sup>th</sup> 1961. He was expecting a much larger ship but instead he saw the 300 ton 'Iris Clauson', a Danish vessel built 4 years earlier as a livestock carrier.



## The Crew

The crew comprised of the following:

Captain:	Rasmussen
Officers:	Carl Rasmussen (he shared the same surname as the Capt) Hansen, the Engineer
Crewmen:	Raun
Mess-Boy	'Peter'
Cook:	Nielson

## The Cargo

The ship was carrying 383 pedigree Romney Marsh and Lincoln sheep to be used for breeding. They were worth about £20,000 which is equivalent to nearly half a million pounds today in 2021 - a valuable cargo.

## Locations

### Klaipeda

This was the destination for the sheep. It is in Lithuania which is an independent nation now but in 1961 was still part of the Soviet Union (Russia).

### Stettin (Szczecin)

A Polish city with a major port where the 'Iris Clauson' picked up a cargo of 800 pigs and delivered them to Lubeck in Germany.

### Lubeck

German city with the second largest German Baltic port. After delivering the cargo of Pigs Alf then took the train to nearby Hamburg and flew back to London Heathrow and on home to Thirsk.

## The voyage and route.

The route is illustrated on the map that accompanies these notes. It shows the distances and locations mentioned in Alfs diaries. A particular feature of the diary are the severe storms that they sailed through in the Baltic Ocean. Alf seems to have been immune to sea-sickness as well as having immunity to air-sickness which he demonstrated when learning to fly during WW2.

The diary of his journey is in his book 'The Lord God made them all' which, together with the Istanbul trip, are the only stories that divert away from normal veterinary practice in Yorkshire. The voyage was quite an adventure and opens up a different aspect to Alfs character and his writing. He got on well with all the crew and particularly the cook, Nielson whose food sustained Alf nicely on the journey.

At the end of the journey Nielson cooked Alf a meal which he described as 'Hot Love' which he enjoyed very much. This intrigued me so I researched it and discovered it was a Danish dish popular in rural areas and comprising of simple wholesome ingredients. And it was easy too. You can check it out on [www.jamesherriot.info](http://www.jamesherriot.info) under 'Mrs Halls Cookbook' section and have a go yourself to see what Alf ate as his farewell meal onboard the 'Iris Clauson' on the way back from Russia.

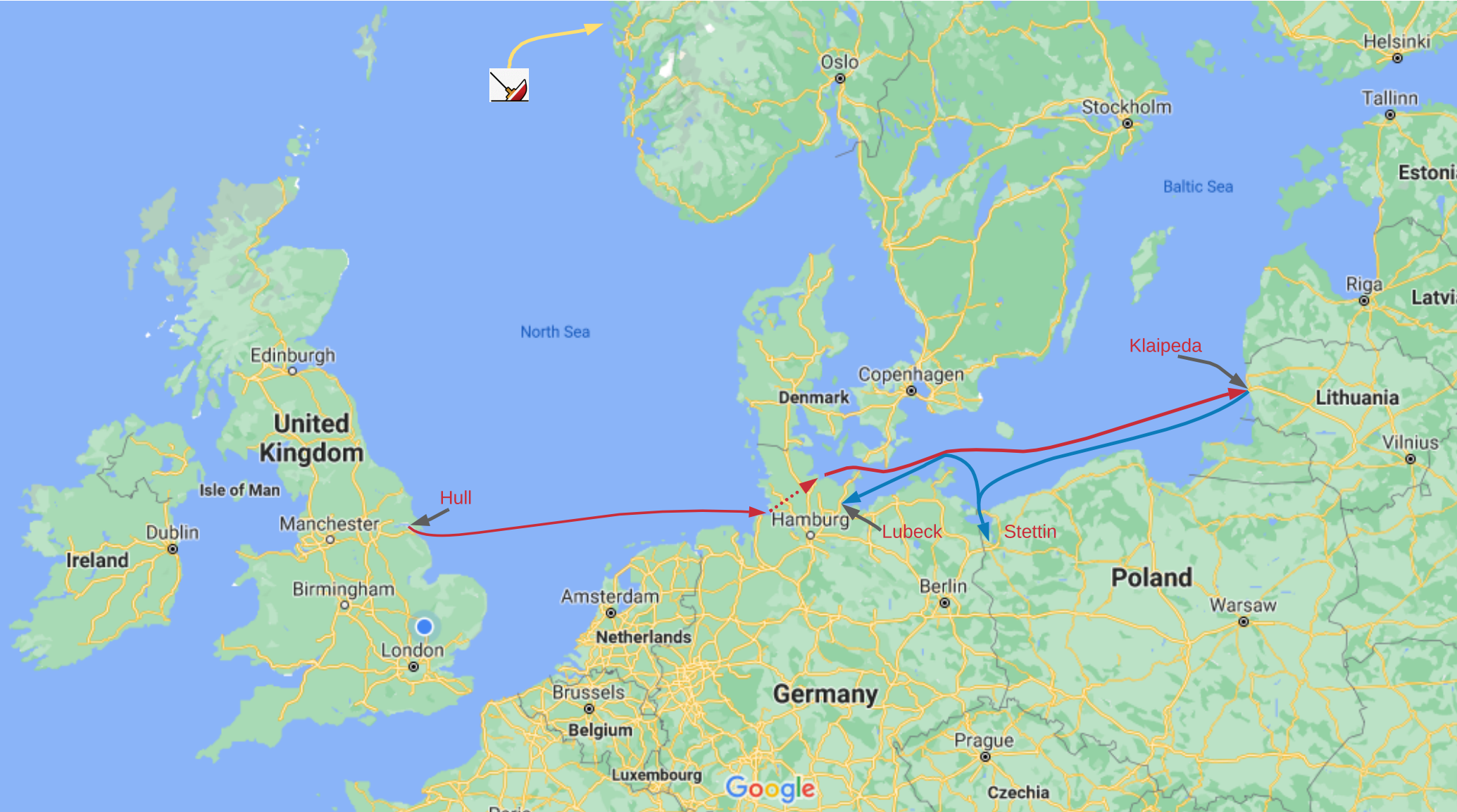
## What happened next...

For Alf, this was an enjoyable trip filled with the adventure that he yearned for. But it was not exactly exotic which is why he later embarked on another trip, this time to Istanbul with an air cargo of cattle. Little did Alf know that that the Istanbul trip would end up being a very close escape from disaster. I have created a separate set of notes on that trip, the locations and the aircraft itself.

As for the ship in this Russian adventure, the Iris Clauson, she was converted for general cargo some 13 years later in 1974 and renamed 'Brievaag'. Later on, in 1989 she was carrying a cargo of steel plates off the coast of Norway when its propeller fouled near Holmengra Lighthouse leaving her stranded and subsequently she sank. You can read more about this here:

<https://www.wrecksite.eu/wreck.aspx?168695>

Alf Wight (James Herriot) trip to Lithuania (then part of Russia) on a cattle ship Oct/Nov 1961



Red arrow → Outbound Trip

Yellow arrow → Location of the 'Iris Clauson' shipwreck in Feb 1989

Blue arrow → Return Trip (Flew back to UK from Hamburg)