

Sailing to Sweden and back in 2014



The route: outwards in yellow, return in red. (Mapping using Google earth.)

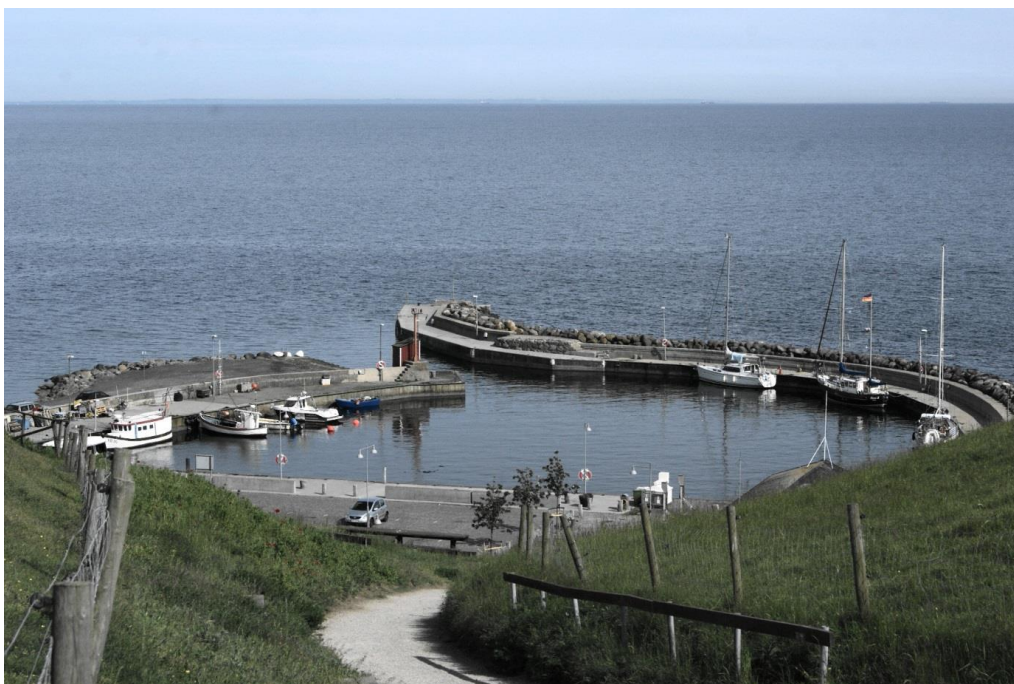
We planned to leave on 1 May, but as that date approached the forecasts looked a lot better if we left earlier, so we hurriedly loaded everything into *Alshira* and motored across to the Netherlands in a flat calm. Boats arriving the next day had a horrible crossing – we had made the right decision! We hid from stormy weather in the canals of the Netherlands, emerging into the German Frisian Islands when the sun came out again. Then a quick dash took us to and through the Kiel Canal, and into the Danish islands. After motoring so much in the canals, we were now intent on sailing, and we used very little diesel in the 1100 nautical miles we covered in the Baltic

The Danish islands are lovely, with small harbours, gentle rolling rural landscapes, and lots of interesting (but tide-free) channels between them. Danish (and Swedish) weather forecasts are excellent, so when some strong winds were forecast we stopped for a few days in Vordingborg to get a water leak in engine sorted.

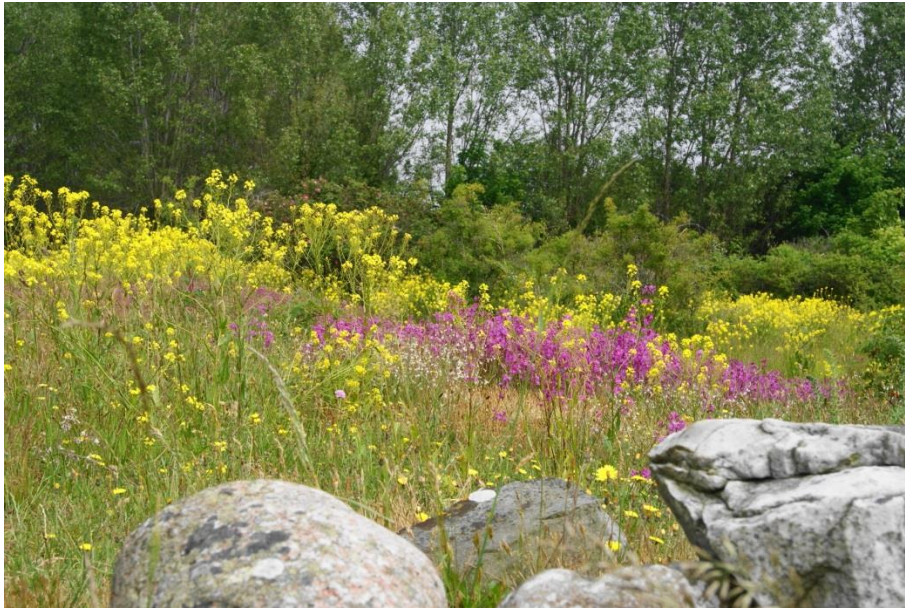
The next long passage was to cross the main shipping channel into the Baltic, across to the south coast of Sweden. It was a fast sail in a rising wind, arriving just before the wind rose to an uncomfortable level. We called in at Ystad (of Wallender fame) where we met the first British boats we had seen so far – one from Brightlingsea – before heading up the east coast of Sweden. This is a relatively poor and quite sparsely populated area with wonderful wild flowers, little fishing villages, and small harbours.



Klintholm, our jumping off point from Denmark to Sweden, has 100 metre high chalk cliffs – very unusual in Denmark.



Alshira in the tiny harbour of Kåseberge on the south coast of Sweden. On the cliff top are the Ales Steiner, standing stones laid out like a Viking ship, on a religious site dating back a few thousand years. While we were there, two yachts called in simply to stock up with fish from the excellent smoke house by the harbour.



Early June on the south east coast of Sweden. Nearby the rocks have carvings of horses, axes and ships, 3500 years old.

Alison had to fly back to see her daughter, visiting from New Zealand, so Gordon celebrated Mid-Summer's Day alone in Karlshamn. Alison's sister came back with her to sail with us for a few days. This is an area with an archipelago of hundreds of tiny rocky, wooded islands and even smaller bare rocks. Most of the smaller islands are uninhabited, but there are some holiday homes, and just about everyone has a boat. Generally, the wind dropped overnight when we were anchored in a sheltered bay, but at about 11am a nice sea breeze started, giving us a gentle sail to the next anchorage. There were some worrying channels which wound between barely visible and invisible submerged rocks, but the charts and buoys are good, and we missed all the hazards! We visited Karlskrona, the base of the Swedish Navy, which has an excellent maritime museum, dropped Alison's sister off so that she could return home, and set off north again. Now we were between the long narrow offshore island of Öland and the mainland. We zigzagged between them, to visit some of the interesting sites on Öland, such as Borgholm with its enormous castle overlooking the narrow channel, and Kalmar on the mainland, where there is probably the most perfect castle we have ever seen.



Kalmar Castle on the mainland half way up Ölandsund.

By the time we got to the northern end of Öland, the Swedish holidays had started in earnest, and suddenly the harbours filled up. . We visited the lighthouse on the northern tip of Öland, called Lange Erik (Long Eric) and had our most northerly anchorage in a bay on the mainland near a rather desirable house. Extraordinarily, two months later we met the owners of the house at the Southampton Boat Show! It was time for us to turn homewards, and reluctantly we headed south. We had another few days of poor weather which we sat out on Öland, exploring its south end by bike, and then we revisited some of the anchorages we had enjoyed on the way north, some of which we explored using the inflatable canoe that we carry.



Lange Erik marks the north end of Öland.



Revisiting one of our favourite anchorages near Karlshamn we found a schooner anchored there. The owner was using her for accommodation while he built a house on one of the small islands, where he intends living all year round. Over drinks by the foundations of his house, he introduced us to his ex-wife, his current lady partner (a former sea 'man') and his son (on vacation from his medical studies at Uppsala University). He will collect rainwater in a tank under the house, and has a steel workboat to get through the ice in the winter...

The weather cleared for some lovely sailing down to the south coast of Sweden, and across to Denmark, back again to the spectacular chalky cliffs of Klintholm. We crossed Denmark quickly and went into the long German fiord – the Schlei - to Schleswig, which we had wanted to visit for some time - it has a superb cathedral as well as an excellent Viking museum.



Navigating the last mile to Schleswig and its superb yacht harbour is easy – aim at the Dom. We came back through the Kiel canal at about the time that the remnants of Hurricane Bertha were battering Britain, so we sheltered in Cuxhaven while Germany was battered in its turn. Lots of other boats were doing the same, several Dutch crews gave up and took the train home! We emerged into the German Bight as the sea calmed, but then had a further 3 days on one of the Frisian islands to avoid another storm. Thereafter, the weather allowed us to make a few hops along the coast and across the North Sea to Lowestoft, and home.



*Alshira in the Elbe estuary,
photographed by Fraser B. who
had also been stuck in Cuxhaven
by the weather.*

*We were away for 4½ months
and sailed 2217 nautical miles.*

Alison and Gordon.