

**Maritime Rescue Institute**  
**Coastal Notes - 5 December 2006**

Stonehaven lies approximately 57° N of the Equator. If you were to take a journey around the globe keeping to the same latitude, you might be a bit surprised at some of the places you pass through.

Setting out on an easterly course from Stonehaven you will cross north Denmark and the southern part of Sweden before arriving in the Latvian capital and major Baltic port, Riga. The weather there will likely be much the same as you left behind, but there is on average only one hour of sunshine per day between November and February. The Historic Centre of Riga has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the city is particularly notable for its extensive Art Nouveau (Jugendstil) architecture, comparable in significance only with Vienna, Saint Petersburg and Barcelona.

Continue east across the Russian states and Moscow will be well to the south. Unlike Stonehaven, Moscow gets very little rain: summers are dry, but the winter snows usually start in October and last until the spring. The next phase of the trip crosses the middle of the Siberian plains, coming back to a maritime environment at the Sea of Okhotsk. In winter, navigation on the Sea of Okhotsk becomes difficult, or even impossible. Large amounts of fresh water flows in from the River Amur, lowering the salinity and raising the freezing point of the sea. As a consequence, huge ice flows form.

The northern tip of the island of Sakhalin lies just south of Stonehaven's latitude, but the weather is vastly different. The average annual temperature is only 0.5° C, falling to a bone chilling -45°C in winter. Even in summer, thick cloud cover blanks out the sun. Farmers have a hard time as there are only about 100 growing days in the year. In spite of its inhospitable climate, Sakhalin hosts the largest integrated oil and gas project in the world.

To the east of the Sea of Okhotsk lies the Kamchatka peninsula, perhaps best known here for the fabulous fishing in its many rivers. The seas around the peninsula abound with marine life, including sperm whales, walruses, seals, and the greatest diversity of salmon species. Biologists reckon that at least one-sixth of the world's Pacific salmon originate in the Kamchatka region. The geography is dominated by volcanoes – there are around 160, 29 of which are still active. The climate ranges from temperate to sub arctic, but there are only about 400,000 inhabitants.

Fans of the television series 'The Deadliest Catch' might be surprised that those men working in the fearsome conditions of the Bering Sea are at our latitude. 57°N makes landfall at the Aleutian Islands in Alaska, where harbours are often ice-bound for stretches of the winter and weather conditions are harsh and extreme. The average annual rainfall is about 80 in (2,030 mm), and Unalaska, with about 250 rainy days per year, is said to be one of the rainiest places within the United States. From there, the journey continues overland through the Northern Territories of Canada, crossing the middle of Hudson's Bay and north Labrador, before skirting the southern tip of Greenland.

After that, there is only the wild north Atlantic; the first landfall would be Rockall, not that you'd want to land there. The rock is about 25 metres wide at its base and rises sheer to a height of approximately 22 metres. It's regularly washed over by large storm waves, particularly in winter. Continue east to arrive back in Scotland at Barra. From there it's a short hop over the Highlands back to Stonehaven.

Given the harsh conditions found elsewhere at 57°N, Stonehaven doesn't seem such a bad place after all.

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