

2026-09-04 The travel adventures of borzoi. Picture from Gatchina

When Borzois were imported from Russia to Europe and America in the late 19th century, the long distances involved in the journeys also caused problems. The dogs sometimes became ill, and some died during the long sea voyage (for example, Likhotka, imported to America by Mr. Hanks in 1892).

In December 1897, the German magazine *Hundesport und Jagd* published the case of a Borzoi named Wolja, purchased in Gatchina by Mr. Böhm, during the journey from St. Petersburg to Germany.

From „*Hundesport und Jagd*” 1897- 45

Mr. Director Böhm of the Palmengarten in Frankfurt an Main, the well-known and highly esteemed breeder of Borzois in Germany, has imported two outstanding Borzoi bitches from the Imperial Kennels at Gatchina, one of which is being offered at a very reasonable price. The buyer may choose between the two excellent specimens, as both are completely equal in quality.”

From „*Hundesport und Jagd*” 1897-52

„*The Travel Adventure of a Borzoi*”

A letter from St. Petersburg tells us of a strange adventure that befell a Borzoi who had travelled from St. Petersburg via Stettin to Frankfurt. Mr. Director Böhm of the Palmengarten was kind enough to let us have the letter for publication.

It is a wonder that this animal is still alive. But our readers shall judge for themselves:

“I am extraordinarily pleased that you have found the animal in good condition. I can only repeat to you once again that it was a rare and valuable specimen of his breed and is not accustomed to living confined, we would like to let him live together with other dogs. The name is not “Boja,” but “Wolja” (i.e. in Russian: Freedom).

That the animal does honour to his name, I am permitted to relate to you in two cases.

When “Wolja” was still confined in my apartment and I was waiting for his shipment, he disappeared one day. He had broken through two window frames in my apartment, smashed two panes of glass, and was gone; only on the following day was he brought back to me with the help of the police. On the journey to Stettin, however, he behaved very well.

About six hours from the German coast, the captain took pity on the howling dog, who was being held in a cage, and since there was also a small ship's dog on board, “Wolja” was released and the dogs were allowed to play peacefully on deck. But with one male dog “Wolja” disappeared, and all searching aboard the ship was of no avail. He had been seen three-quarters of an hour earlier. The writer of this account had kept a particularly close watch on the dog, and was therefore greatly worried and anxious about the dear animal.

When all searching proved fruitless, it became clear that “Wolja” had jumped overboard, and the captain ordered the steamer to turn, “Course for Petersburg,” and the sailors to climb the masts with binoculars. After an hour's return journey, a white spot was seen in the distance among the waves. The ship was steered towards it, and our “Wolja” was happily paddling in the sea. The boat was lowered and the fugitive was brought aboard.

The dog had spent two hours swimming in the sea. The captain remarked that, judging by his vigorous condition, he could have swum for 20 hours, for the swimming muscles in this animal were very well developed.

Two hours later, as a result of this adventure, the steamer arrived in Stettin, and the captain now swears high and low that he will never again take a dog aboard, charging the entire loss of time to the ship's account—which we heard with great amusement.

Hoping that the urge for freedom in “Wolja” will not lead to such an extent that he will break out in his new home, where he will certainly not lack companionship, I wish him every success and happiness.”

Mr. Böhm, the director of the Frankfurt Zoo, was one of the first Borzoi breeders already in the 1880s in Germany. In the spring of 1897, he bought two female from Russia – Golubka and Wolja. It is known that Golubka gave birth to six puppies on June 30, 1897. One of them, Udaf, went to Sweden, and another puppy went to England. I do not know what happened to Wolja. In December 1898 issue of the magazine reports that Dr. Böhm was selling his dogs, including Golubka and Wolja.

Photo of Gatchina Borzois published in 1896.



Barzois (wellhaarige russische Windhunde) im Zwinger Sr. M. d. Kaisers von Rußland in C
Nach einer photographischen Originalaufnahme für „Wild und Hund“. (Text Seite

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