

Unscheduled Private Jets

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ABSTRACT

In this assignment we classify and visualize private jet flight patterns, for making it possible we have been provided with a dataset that contains all required information about all flights registered in a week of september 2016.

First of all we have to identify which flights are private jets from our dataset, then having created our own dataset of only private jets, we can look for usual airports and routes. After that we will compare locations of airports that are closed to prison to identify which ones are actually rendition flights.

1. INTRODUCTION

First we started with a provided dataset from September 2015, consisted of 200 GB of compressed ADS-B messages. We decoded the messages to be able to work with them and we extracted a sample to make the first steps of the filters and the code created for filtering the information that we wanted to extract from the dataset.

Another dataset of 600 GB was provided, this time information was from september of 2016.

2. RELATED WORK

In 2010 Matei Zaharia, Mosharaf Chowdhury, Michael J. Franklin, Scott Shenker, Ion Stoica from University of California, Berkeley proposed a new model for cluster computing called Spark. This system was supposed to replace the standard in 2010 which was MapReduce. The authors claim that a system with a wider range of possible programming styles than MapReduce allows is necessary. The two main types are: iterative jobs and interactive analytics.

The entry point of Spark applications is so called driver program. This application controls all of the operations on the data which then are issued to the cluster. The data itself is represented as RDDs, resilient distributed datasets. Its a lazy and read-only representation of a dataset. Thanks to it the user doesnt have to worry about parallelization and resilience.

A RDD can be created from several sources, most notably: a file from a shared file system (e.g. HDFS), by parallelizing a Scala collection, by transforming an existing RDD, by changing the persistence of an existing RDD. There is a collection of parallel operations supported by Spark. It includes reduce, collect (which sends the RDD back to the driver program) and foreach which allows invoking a function to get side effects.

The operations mentioned in the previous paragraph clearly belong to the functional paradigm. However, Spark allows also more imperative way of writing applications. This is done by using shared variables: broadcast variables and accumulators. The former can be used to distribute a big read-only piece of data to the workers. This is an optimization which prevents sending this structure every time an operation relying on it is performed. The latter can be used as a counter of any type.

Implementing RDDs was the central part of the implementation. RDDs are implemented as a list of objects capturing the actions which are supposed to be invoked on the dataset. Each RDD implements an interface which consists of 3 methods: getPartitions(), getIterator(partition) and getPreferredLocations(partition). getPartitions() returns list of partition IDs which contain the data. getIterator() returns an iterator used to iterating over a partition. getPreferredLocation() is used to achieve data locality.

3. TECHNOLOGIES

The main technology used in this assignment is Apache Spark 1.6.1 with Scala 2.10. Besides that we used Python 2.7. Spark was used to first filter and then analyze the dataset. Python was used to convert the output data from Spark to the format suitable for our visualisation.

We chose those technologies, because of several reasons. Apache Spark is becoming increasingly popular and is the de facto standard for big data. It is very modern and, provides very easy and intuitive interface. Besides that none of us had any practical experience with neither Spark nor Scala. Python is very easy to use when it comes to scripting.

4. MANAGING DATASET

4.1 Data Format

The original dataset consists of several Apache Avro files. According to the schema equipped with those files they contain the following fields: sensorType, sensorLatitude, sensorLongitude, sensorAltitude, timeAtServer, timeAtSensor, timestamp, rawMessage, sensorSerialNumber, RSSIPacket,

RSSIPreamble, SNR, confidence. Only sensorType, timeAtSensor, rawMessage, sensorSerialNumber are bound to be in every message.

4.2 Preliminary data filtering

The original dataset contains a lot of unnecessary data with each of the messages, i.e. only rawMessage and timeAtSensor are of importance to us. Filtering out the other fields lets us make the data smaller by as much as 75

4.3 ADS-B Messages

The field rawMessage contains the message received by the sensor. Those messages are 112 bits long. Bits 1 to 5 are called 'downlink format', 6 to 8 'Message Subtype', 9 to 32 'ICAO Aircraft Address', 33 to 88 'Data Frame' and 89 to 112 'Parity Check'.

In this assignment of particular importance are messages which downlink format is set to 17 (decimal) and the first 5 bits of 'data frame' (which are called 'Type Code') are set to some value between 1 and 4, between 9 and 18 or between 20 and 22.

'Type Code' set to values between 1 and 4 means that this is an identification message which contains the callsign. Values between 9 and 18 or between 20 and 22 indicate that this is a position message. Only those two types of messages are of interest to us from the context of this assignment.

For handling those messages we use a Java library provided by The OpenSky Network¹. It has a decoder which can decode single messages. We use it to check the type and, if its an identification message, get the callsign. The library has also a position decoder which can be fed with position messages and return a position for each of them (if possible).

4.4 Finding suitable planes

The major filtering part of the messages is based on callsigns. As our main goal is to find unscheduled private jets, its probably the best to first filter out all of the planes which dont belong to any airlines. We do it by finding all of the identification messages from planes with either a callsign which doesnt belong to a known airline or no callsign at all. From those messages we take all of the distinct ICAO24s and filter the position messages based on that.

4.5 Decoding position messages

Decoding position messages is not trivial in general. Each of those messages is either even or odd. To be able to decode a position we have to have a pair of even and odd messages which were sent near each other. To achieve this we have to sort the messages by the time when they were received. After that we use a position decoder from The OpenSky Networks library and feed it with those messages.

Real life data is not perfect and even after sorting the messages by time rather often there are situations where there are multiple odd or even messages in a row. Fortunately, the position decoder handles incorrect situations like this one very well.

5. VISUALISATION

¹<https://github.com/openskynetwork/java-adsb>

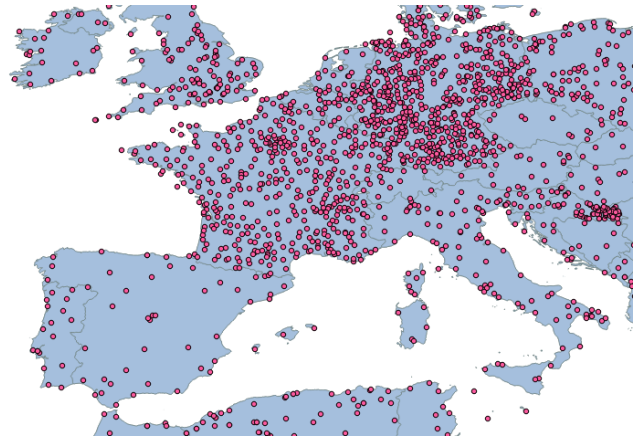


Figure 1: Map visualisation in QGIS with layer of airports applied.

5.1 Map representation

For visualizing the extracted information we obtained maps from different sources. First we started using the maps from Natural Earth, provided in ESRI Shapefile format. An ESRI shapefile consists of a main file, an index file, and a dBASE table. The main file is a direct access, variable-record-length file in which each record describes a shape with a list of its vertices. In the index file, each record contains the offset of the corresponding main file record from the beginning of the main file. The dBASE table contains feature attributes with one record per feature. The one-to-one relationship between geometry and attributes is based on record number. Attribute records in the dBASE file must be in the same order as records in the main file. Also we found another Shapefile which contains most of the locations of the principal airports in the World. We created a composition using shapefiles as layers in QGIS². With this program we were able to visualize in a world map all airport locations using a real scale.

All the information about countries and airports included in the shapefiles were very interesting for our project, the possibility of accessing it anytime only accessing the map. The only problem was that all the routes information could not be inserted after the creation of the final map, leaving no option for interaction with the user after exporting the map.

5.2 Route representation

One of the biggest problems we have when we are done with extracting the routes from the dataset is the fact that they are substantially more complex than we actually need. An obvious way to cope with this is to use an algorithm capable of reducing the number of points while maintaining a the curve shape with reasonable accuracy.

There are multiple approaches to solving this problem. One of them would be to remove from the line either randomly a certain percentage of the points or every nth point. This is a very efficient method in terms of computing time,

²QGIS is a user friendly Open Source Geographic Information System (GIS) licensed under the GNU General Public License

but very inefficient in terms of accuracy and therefore should not be used for such irregular shapes as a plane route.

If the line is long enough its possible to remove all points besides every n th point. Assuming that the density is high enough this can yield acceptable results and it is very efficient. However, using this method will not take into account the shape of the line and straight parts will be overrepresented.

Another approach is known as the RamerDouglasPeucker algorithm. It was developed by U. Ramer [2], David Douglas and Thomas Peucker [1].

This algorithm focuses on removing points which have the least meaning in terms of the general shape. Before the algorithm starts, an arbitrary parameter - lets call it d - has to be known. This parameter describes the accuracy of the output line. The higher it is, the less accurate the output is.

A simplified version of this algorithm is as follows. The first and the last point of the line are included in the output line. Lets call them a and b , respectively. Then it is checked whether there are any points within the distance d from the line going through a and b . Those points are removed. After that the furthest point from the line is taken into account - lets call it c . From now on two lines are considered: $a-c$ and $c-b$. Those lines are then processed the in the same way. If no such point c exists, then the algorithm terminates.

The expected complexity of this algorithm is:

$$O(n \log n)$$

However, in the worst case scenario it goes up to:

$$O(n^2)$$

6. SECOND VISUALISATION

After achieving the first static visualisation we decided to make another one interactive, simple and intuitive, because of the aim was to represent flight routes we do not need so much information about countries and airports for printing routes. The best option that we found was to create a webpage, using Javascript and Json.

This time the world map was obtained from Amcharts³. They provide not only the map but diferent options for representing points in the map (airports in our case) and animating little planes through the lines created between points.

For our project airports will be provided by the origins and destinations of routes extracted from the dataset, because for this case we cannot use airports of the World as points in the map, it could lead to confussion because routes are made of coordinates and not all start or finish at the same position of an airport. Routes will be provided in the same way but instead of using shapefiles we will convert them to json files.

For this visualisation, we made

7. CONCLUSIONS

The most important part of this project was to identify and visualize flights which could be considered as unscheduled. We did that mainly by looking for planes which didnt emit any callsign or their callsign didnt belong to a known airline. Then those messages were grouped by ICAO24

³<https://www.amcharts.com/javascript-maps/>

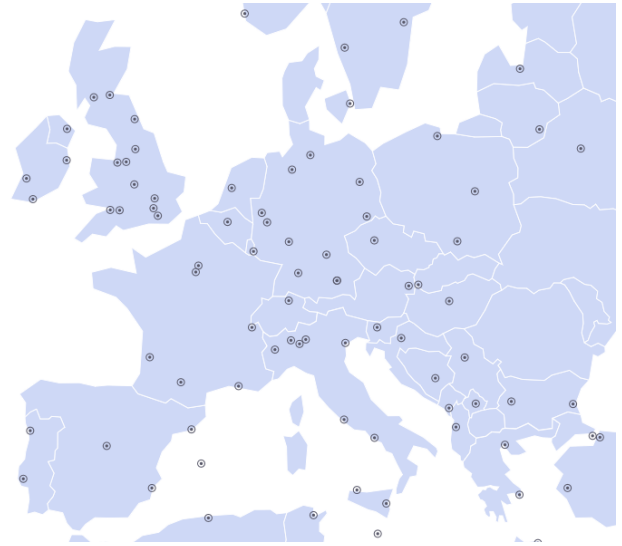


Figure 2: Second visualisation using js with a few airports added.

and by date. Routes obtained this way were reduced using the RamerDouglasPeucker algorithm. The planes were also annotated with information about the manufacturer and model. This approach gives us a reasonably good picture of the main routes and most popular airports. This is clearly visible on visualizations.

However, there are a lot of questions which we werent able to answer due to lack of time. We weren't able to extract unusual airports and find a reasonable heuristic for identifying rendition flights. We also didnt analyze the altitudes, so we werent able to easily extract single flights within a day. Another problem was that we werent able to use the new dataset, because we were getting strange results. Due to lack of time we didnt address those problems.

8. REFERENCES

- [1] D. Douglas and T. Peucker. Algorithms for the reduction of the number of points required to represent a digitized line or its caricature. *The Canadian Cartographer*, 10(2):112–122, December 1973.
- [2] U. Ramer. An iterative procedure for the polygonal approximation of plane curves. *Computer Vision, Graphics, and Image Processing*, 1(224):256, 1972.

8.1 References