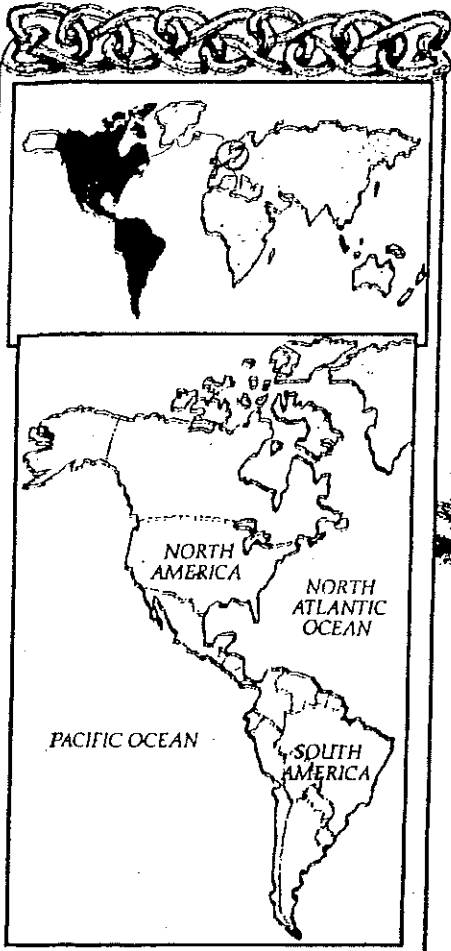


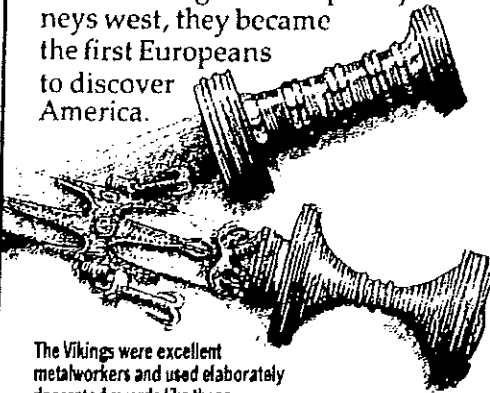
Name \_\_\_\_\_ (Use pop-up thoughts)

# The Vikings reach America

AMERICAS



The Vikings were seafarers and warriors who had lived in Norway, Sweden and Denmark since ancient times. They began sailing west in the 9th century, searching for new territory. By about 860 some of them had reached Iceland and settled there. During their frequent journeys west, they became the first Europeans to discover America.



The Vikings were excellent metalworkers and used elaborately decorated swords like these.

Eric the Red wanted other Vikings to follow him there. He called the new country Greenland – not a very appropriate name for such unforgiving territory. By 986 he had convinced a group of colonists to settle there.

After a gruelling journey the expedition arrived in Greenland. It was summer, and conditions were favourable enough to establish farms. Settlements soon grew up, and the colonists were able to begin trading with Scandinavia.

## Bjarni Herjolfsson

Soon another Norwegian, called Bjarni Herjolfsson, set out for Greenland, but went astray in fog and gales. He realized he had lost his way when land finally loomed out of the fog at him. It was not the harsh territory he had been told to expect when he reached Greenland. Instead it proved to be hilly and wooded.

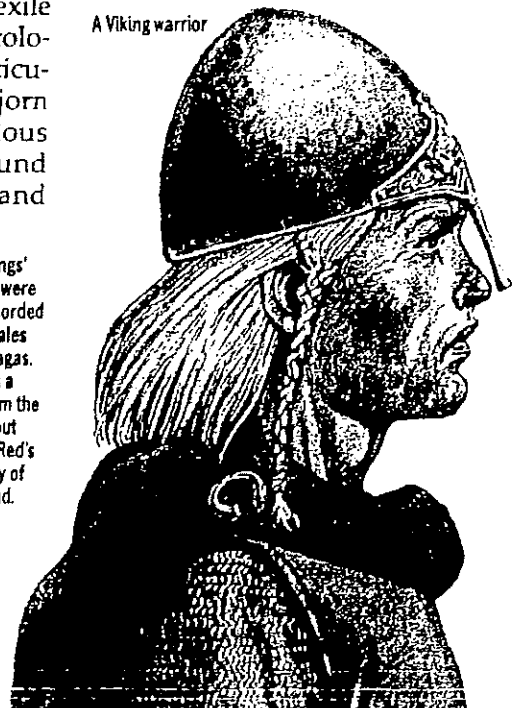
In fact, the storms had blown Herjolfsson's ship far to the southwest of Greenland. We now know that the shoreline he saw was the northeastern coast of America. Instead of landing there, however, he turned back. When he finally reached Greenland, he reported his findings to the Viking colonists there.

Around 900, a ship commanded by a man called Gunnbjorn was sailing to Iceland from Norway. His ship was blown off course, and he saw a new land which he described to the settlers when he finally got to Iceland. His story inspired other Vikings to go in search of the new country.

## Eric the Red

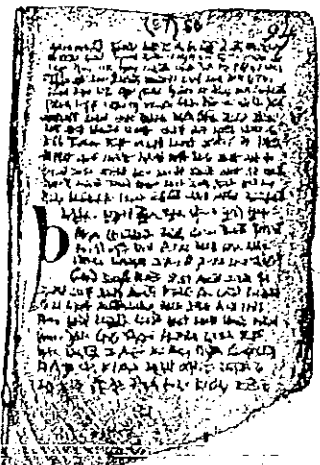
Eric the Red was a Norwegian who was banished from his country for three years for murder. He decided to use his period of exile to search for new lands to colonize, and set his sights in particular on the place that Gunnbjorn had spotted. After a hazardous voyage he arrived there but found that it had a hostile climate and landscape.

A Viking warrior



The Vikings' exploits were later recorded in long tales called sagas.

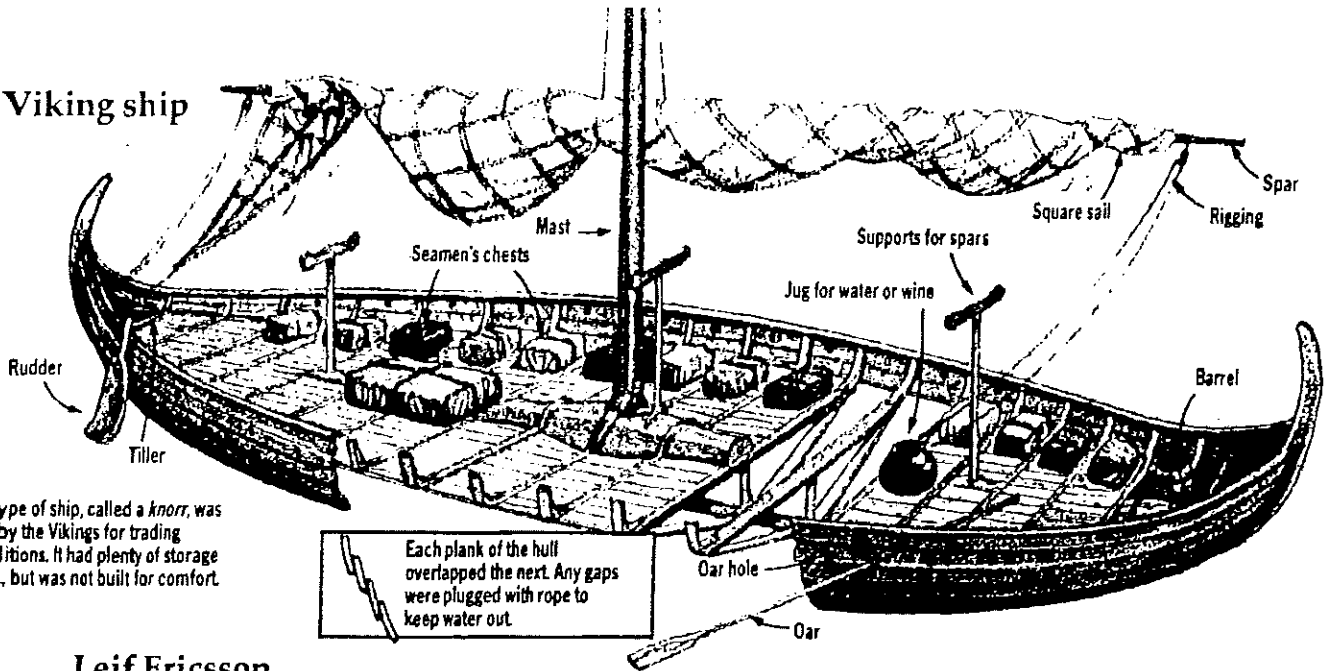
This is a page from the saga about Eric the Red's discovery of Greenland.



## Key dates in American exploration

- c.860 Vikings settle in Iceland.
- c.986 Viking colony established in Greenland under Eric the Red.
- c.1000 Leif Ericsson lands on the east coast of North America.
- 1002 Thorwald, brother of Leif, establishes colony on the east coast.
- 1492 Christopher Columbus leaves Spain for the East. He reaches and explores the Indies.
- 1519 Hernando Cortés sails from Cuba to Mexico.
- 1521 Siege of Tenochtitlán. Collapse of Aztec empire.
- 1534 Jacques Cartier leaves France for North America.
- 1535 Cartier founds Montreal.
- 1576 Martin Frobisher leaves England on the first of three voyages to find the Northwest Passage.
- 1585-87 John Davis makes three voyages to find the Northwest Passage.
- 1608 Samuel de Champlain founds Quebec.
- 1609-10 Henry Hudson makes two journeys in search of the Northwest Passage.
- 1678-82 Robert de La Salle travels across North America.
- 1799 Alexander von Humboldt and Aimé Bonpland leave Europe for South America.
- 1804 Meriwether Lewis and William Clark lead expedition across the United States of America.
- 1831 Charles Darwin leaves for South America on the Beagle.
- 1925 Percy Fawcett sets off across Brazil.

## A Viking ship

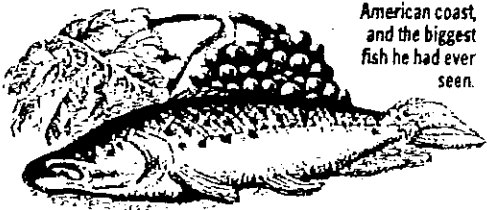


This type of ship, called a *knorr*, was used by the Vikings for trading expeditions. It had plenty of storage space, but was not built for comfort.

## Leif Ericsson

The first European actually to set foot on American soil was Eric the Red's son, Leif Ericsson. Around the year 1000 he and his men left Greenland and sailed southwest. They landed at three places on the eastern coast of America. Leif gave these names: Markland ("forest land"; now the region of Labrador); Heluland ("slab-land", after the rocky landscape; now Baffin Island); and Vinland ("vine-land"; experts are unsure, but Vinland was probably where either New England or Newfoundland is now).

According to the saga of his voyage, Ericsson found wild grapes on the American coast, and the biggest fish he had ever seen.



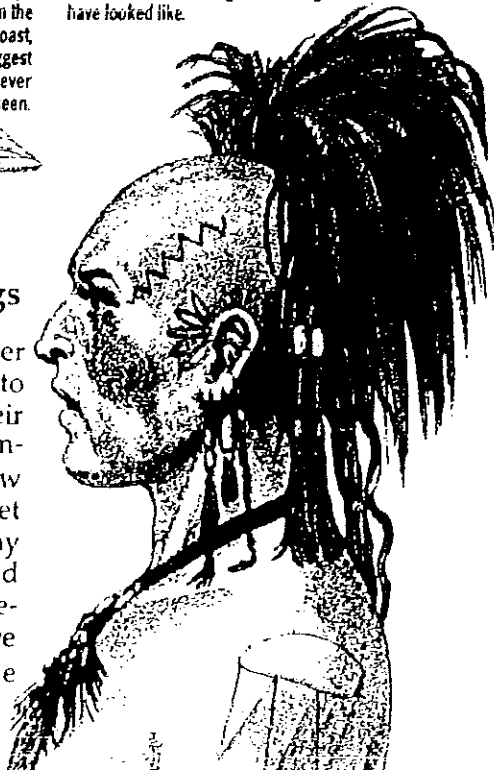
## Defeated by the Skraelings

Ericsson's men spent the winter in Vinland, then returned to Greenland with the news of their discovery. Although Leif himself never returned to the new lands, his brother Thorwald set out in 1002 to set up a colony there. He and his men found Vinland, but they were not prepared for the hostility of the native American Indians (known by the

Vikings as Skraelings). Thorwald was killed in a fight, and his companions returned to Greenland discouraged.

Eric the Red's descendants made two more attempts to colonize Vinland. The first expedition included his daughter-in-law Gudrid and her second husband. They settled there and started a family, and succeeded in trading successfully with the Skraelings. But later relations between settlers and natives deteriorated. The Vikings had to give up their home and return to Greenland. They finally settled in Iceland.

This is what a Skraeling warrior might have looked like.



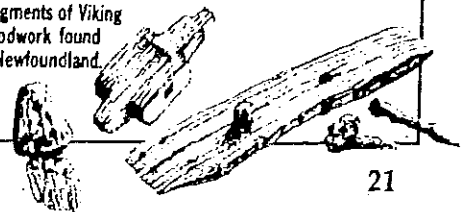
A second expedition was led by Eric the Red's daughter Freydis, but she too failed to establish good relations with the Indians. She also caused chaos among her own people, and murdered several of her fellow colonists.



## The evidence

The theory that the Vikings had reached America was quite common for many years, but until the mid-1960s there was no reliable evidence. Doubts also arose when a map of the northeast coast, said to date from Viking times, turned out to be a fake. But in 1968 the remains of a Viking settlement were discovered in Newfoundland, proving that the Vikings had managed to reach America.

Fragments of Viking  
woodwork found  
at Newfoundland.



## Reading for a Purpose

Look for these important words:

### Key Words

- Vikings
- navigators
- sagas

### People

- Bjarni Herjulfsson
- Eric the Red
- Leif Ericson

### Places

- Iceland
- Greenland
- Scandinavia
- Vinland
- Newfoundland

Look for answers to these questions:

1. Who were the Vikings?
2. Who was Leif Ericson?
3. Where was Vinland?
4. How do we know about Leif Ericson?



## Leif Ericson Sails to Vinland

One summer about a thousand years ago a young man named **Bjarni Herjulfsson** (BYAHR·nee HER·yahlf·uhn) was sailing from **Iceland** to **Greenland**. He was captain of a cargo boat. A terrible Arctic storm arose and blew the boat off course.

When the storm was over, Bjarni could see a low, flat land covered with trees. This was the Atlantic coast of North America. His sailors wanted to stop and explore, but Bjarni had been told that Greenland had glaciers. This land did not have glaciers, so it could not be Greenland. He decided to sail north until he found Greenland.

Greenland had been discovered and settled some years before by **Eric the Red**. Bjarni's story was told during the long winter evenings by settlers in Greenland. Among those who heard Bjarni's story were Eric the Red and his son, **Leif Ericson**. They decided they would try to find the land Bjarni had seen. On the day they were to

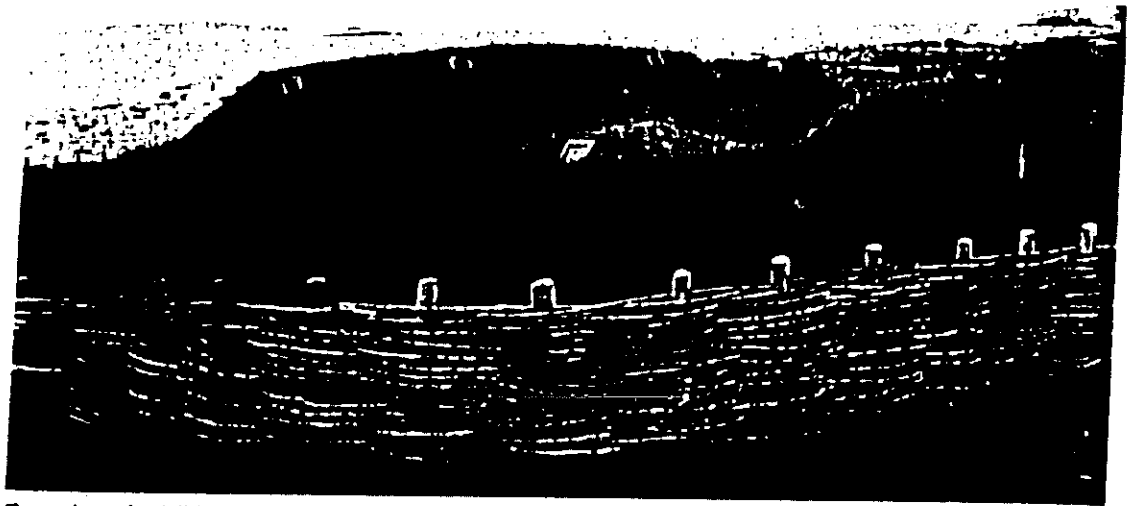
leave, Eric the Red hurt his leg. Leif alone was left to command the voyage.

### The Vikings

For the men who set out on that voyage of discovery, travel was a way of life. They were members of a group of people sometimes called **Vikings** and sometimes called **Norsemen**. The Vikings first lived in the region of what is now known as **Scandinavia**. Scandinavia includes the countries of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark.

Several hundred years before the time of Leif Ericson, many Vikings left their homeland in boats searching for adventure, riches, and new lands to settle. Some settled in Iceland.

The Vikings were good **navigators**. That means they knew how to find their way on the seas. They were also excellent boatbuilders. They had learned to build a type of **cargo** boat that was good for ocean travel.



Remains of a Viking settlement have been found at L'Anse Aux Meadows in Newfoundland. There these Viking dwellings have been rebuilt.

It was in such a boat that Leif Ericson and his crew of about 30 men set out to find the land Bjarni had described. Leif hoped to return to Greenland with his boat full of lumber. Few trees grew in Greenland, and the Viking settlers needed wood. They needed wood to build their boats. They needed wooden beams to support the sod roofs of their houses.

### Arrival at Vinland

Leif Ericson and his crew found the land Bjarni described. Leif called it **Vinland**. The land had fine grassland and berry vines. The Icelandic word *vin* can mean either "grassland" or "wine." Leif spent the winter in Vinland before returning to Greenland with a cargo of wood.

The stories about the deeds of the Vikings are called sagas. We now

know the sagas about Leif Ericson are based on truth. Archaeologists have discovered the remains of a Viking settlement in **Newfoundland, Canada**. This is the earliest European settlement in North America that is known to us. We know Vikings lived there about 1,000 years ago.

The Viking discovery of North America was forgotten. Dim memories of Vinland remained only in the sagas. Almost 500 years passed before Europeans again came to North America.



### Reading Check

1. How did Leif Ericson know about another land?
2. What did Leif Ericson hope to find?
3. Why do we now believe the sagas?

**Think Beyond** Why do you think the Vikings did not settle permanently in North America?