

European Explorers of the New World



Reading & Notes Packet

Leif Ericsson
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Vasco Nunez de Balboa
Ferdinand Magellan



LEIF ERICSSON

Leif Ericsson (also spelled Eriksson) the Lucky (980? - 1020?) was a Viking (Norse) explorer who was possibly the first European to sail to North America. Leif sailed north from the southern tip of Greenland, then went south along the coast of Baffin Island down to Labrador, and then landed in what is now called Newfoundland (which he called Vinland). Ericsson sailed around the year 1000. Ericsson was born in Iceland and was one of the sons of the explorer Eric the Red.

Ericsson was probably preceded to Vinland by the Icelandic explorer Bjarni Herjulfsson, who spotted the coast of North America in 985 or 986 when blown off course from Iceland to Greenland (but he did not go ashore). Hearing of Herjulfsson's discovery, Ericsson sailed for North America in the year 1000 with a crew of 35. He landed in what is probably southern Baffin Island (which he called Helluland, meaning the "land of the flat stone"). He then went on to, what is now, Labrador (which he called Markland, meaning "forest land"). In 1001, they reached Vinland (perhaps the southern tip of Newfoundland), where remains of an ancient Norse settlement have been found. Ericsson and his crew returned to Greenland in the spring of 1002.

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS



Christopher Columbus (1451 - 1506) was an Italian explorer who sailed across the Atlantic Ocean in 1492, hoping to find a route to India (in order to trade for spices). He made a total of four trips to the Caribbean and South America during the years 1492-1504.

The First Trip:

Columbus sailed for King Ferdinand II and Queen Isabella of Spain. On his first trip, Columbus led an expedition with three ships: the Niña (captained by Vicente Yañez Pinzon), the Pinta (owned and captained by Martin Alonzo Pinzon), and the Santa Maria (captained by Columbus), and about 90 crewmembers. They set sail on Aug. 3, 1492 from Palos, Spain, and on October 11, 1492, spotted the Caribbean islands off southeastern North America. They landed on an island they called Guanahani, but Columbus later renamed it San Salvador. They were met by the local Taino Indians, many of whom were captured by Columbus' men and later sold into slavery. Columbus thought he had made it to Asia, and called this area the Indies, and called its inhabitants Indians.

While exploring the islands in the area and looking for gold to loot, Columbus' men traveled to the islands of Hispaniola (now divided into Haiti and the Dominican Republic), Cuba, and many other smaller islands. On the return trip, the Santa Maria was wrecked and the captain of the Pinta sailed off on his own to try to beat Columbus back. Columbus returned to Spain in the Niña, arriving on March 15, 1493.

The Second Trip:

On a second, larger expedition (Sept. 25, 1493-June 11, 1496), sailed with 17 ships and 1,200 to 1,500 men to find gold and capture Indians as slaves in the Indies. Columbus established a base in Hispaniola and sailed around Hispaniola and along the

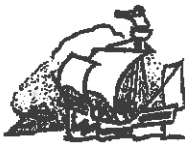
length of southern Cuba. He spotted and named the island of Dominica on November 3, 1493.

The Third Trip:

On a third expedition (May 30, 1498-October 1500), Columbus sailed farther south, to Trinidad and Venezuela (including the mouth of the Orinoco River). Columbus was the first European since the Viking Leif Ericsson to set foot on the mainland of America.

The Fourth Trip:

On his fourth and last expedition (May 9, 1502-Nov. 7, 1504), Columbus sailed to Mexico, Honduras and Panama (in Central America) and Santiago (Jamaica). Columbus is buried in eastern Hispaniola (now called the Dominican Republic).



JUAN PONCE DE LEON

Juan Ponce de Leon (1460-1521) was a Spanish explorer and soldier who was the first European to set foot in Florida. He also established the oldest European settlement in Puerto Rico and discovered the Gulf Stream (a current in the Atlantic Ocean). Ponce de Leon was searching for the legendary fountain of youth and other riches.

Born in Santervae, Spain, in 1460 (the date is uncertain); Ponce de Leon was a soldier fighting Muslims in southern Spain in the early 1490's. Ponce de Leon sailed on Christopher Columbus' second expedition to the Americas in 1493. Ponce de Leon did not return to Spain with Columbus; he stayed in Santo Domingo (now called the Dominican Republic).

He was appointed governor of the Dominican province of Higüey. He later heard of gold in the neighboring island of Borinquen (now called Puerto Rico) and brutally conquered the island, claiming it for Spain. He was then appointed governor of this island. Due to his extreme brutality to Native Americans, he was removed from office in 1511.

Ponce de Leon was then given the right to find and take the island of Bimini (in the Bahamas); he was searching for riches and the fountain of youth (a legendary spring that gave people eternal life and health). He sailed from Puerto Rico on March 3, 1513, with three ships, the Santa Maria, the Santiago, and the San Cristobal, and about 200 men. After stops at Grand Turk Island and San Salvador, they reached the east coast of Florida (St. Augustine) in April 1513. Ponce de Leon named the land "Pascua de Florida" (Feast of Flowers) because they first spotted land on April 2, 1513, Palm Sunday. He then claimed the land for Spain.

They left on April 8, heading south in the warm current now known as the Gulf Stream. This oceanic current would become very important for Spanish trips from Europe to America. On the return trip, a fight broke out between Ponce de Leon's men and Native

Americans in southern Florida. They sailed to Cuba, then headed north, again trying to find Bimini (but instead, finding Andros Island).

After returning to Puerto Rico, Ponce de Leon resumed fighting with the Native Americans (putting down their rebellions against Spanish rule). He returned to Spain and was named a Captain General by the King of Spain on September 27, 1514, and again sailed to Puerto Rico to search for the elusive Bimini.

His last expedition was another search for Bimini in 1521. His force of 200 men landed on the west coast of Florida but were met by Native American warriors, who wounded many of the men with arrows, including Ponce de Leon. Ponce de Leon later died in Havana, Cuba, from this wound (in July, 1521). He is buried in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

JOHN CABOT



John Cabot (about 1450-1499) was an Italian-born English explorer and navigator. In Italy, he is known as Giovanni Caboto (which is his original name).

Cabot was born in Italy but moved to England in 1495. At the request of King Henry VII of England, Cabot sailed to Canada in 1497, commanding the small ship called "Matthew." Cabot landed near Labrador, Newfoundland, or Cape Breton Island (the exact spot is uncertain) on June 24, 1497. One of John Cabot's three sons, the explorer Sebastian Cabot, accompanied him on this trip. Cabot claimed the land for England.

Cabot explored the Canadian coastline and named many of its islands and capes. The mission's purpose was to search for a Northwest Passage across North America to Asia (a seaway to Asia). Cabot was unsuccessful, although he thought that he had reached northeastern Asia.

Cabot undertook a second, larger expedition in 1498. On this trip, Cabot may have reached America, but that is uncertain. Cabot's expeditions were the first of Britain's claims to Canada. John Cabot died in England in 1499.



AMERIGO VESPUCCI

Amerigo Vespucci (1454-1512) was an Italian explorer who was the first person to realize that the Americas were separate from the continent of Asia. America was named for him in 1507, when the German mapmaker Martin Waldseemüller, printed the first map that used the name America for the New World.

On his first expedition (sailing for Spain, 1499-1500), Vespucci was the navigator under the command of Alonso de Ojeda. On this trip, Ojeda and Vespucci discovered the mouth of the Amazon and Orinoco Rivers in South America, thinking it was part of Asia. On his second expedition (sailing for Portugal, 1501-02) he mapped some of the eastern coast of South America, and came to realize that it not part of Asia, but a new world.

Vespucci's second voyage in 1501 was on a Portuguese ship. The voyage across the Atlantic Ocean took 64 days. Again the crew explored the coast of South America to within 400 miles of its southern tip, Tierra del Fuego.

While on this voyage, Vespucci wrote long letters to a friend describing his travels. He was the first to realize that this was a separate continent, not part of Asia. Although he did not captain the ship, his accounts of what they saw, maps of the areas they explored, and ability to write were what eventually made him famous.

On this third and final voyage, Vespucci contracted malaria and died after he returned to Spain in 1512. Vespucci did not name the continents of the "New World" after himself. That was done by a German cartographer, Martin Waldseemüller, who was drawing a new updated world map. He had read of Vespucci's travels and decided to honor him on his map. He printed and sold his map with the name America on the southern continent of the New World.



VASCO NUNEZ DE BALBOA

Vasco Nunez de Balboa (1475-1519) was a Spanish conquistador and explorer who was the first European to see the eastern part of the Pacific Ocean (in 1513), crossing the Isthmus of Panama.

In 1500, Balboa sailed with Rodrigo de Bastidas from Spain to Colombia, South America. They searched for treasures (pearls and gold) along the northern coast of South America and in the Gulf of Uraba (near San Sebastian). They were forced to abandon their leaky ship in Hispaniola. The penniless Balboa tried, unsuccessfully, to farm for a living.

In 1510, Balboa and his dog, Leoncico, stowed away on a boat going from Santo Domingo to San Sebastian. When they arrived at San Sebastian, they discovered that it had been burned to the ground. Balboa convinced the others to travel southwest with him to a spot he had seen on his earlier expedition. In 1511, Balboa founded a colony, the first European settlement in South America - the town of Santa Maria de la Antigua del Darien.

Balboa married the daughter of Careta, the local Indian chief. Soon after, in 1513, he sailed with hundreds of Spaniards and Indians across the Gulf of Uraba to the Darien Peninsula.

Balboa headed an overland expedition west through very dense rainforests. Along the way they fought many local Indians and destroyed one Indian village, killing hundreds of Indians. Balboa (accompanied by his dog) was the first European to see the eastern part of the Pacific Ocean (in September 1513, from a peak in Darién, Panama). Balboa and his men (including Francisco Pizarro) then traveled to the ocean and claimed it and all

the land that touched it for Spain. They spent about a month conquering Natives along the Pacific coast and stealing their gold.

Balboa was charged with treason against Spain (although he was innocent and had been framed by a friend, Arias de Avila). Francisco Pizarro arrested Balboa. Balboa was found guilty and was publicly beheaded in Acla in January 1519.

FERDINAND MAGELLAN



Ferdinand Magellan (1480-1521) was a Portuguese explorer who led the first expedition that sailed around the Earth (1519-1522) or circumnavigated the world. Magellan also named the Pacific Ocean (the name means that it is a calm, peaceful ocean).

Magellan was born in Northern Portugal (either in Sabrosa or in Oporto). His parents, Pedro Ruy de Magalhaes and Alda de Mezquita, were members of the nobility (they were wealthy and powerful).

Early in his career, Magellan sailed to India and to the Far East many times via Africa's Cape of Good Hope. He sailed for his native Portugal, but a dispute with the Portuguese King, Manoel II, turned him against the Portuguese. Thereafter, he sailed for Spain for King Charles I.

Magellan and his friend, the astronomer, Ruy de Falero proposed to King Charles I (of Spain) that a westward voyage around the tip of South America would take them to the Moluccas (spice-rich islands) and avoid the Portuguese (with whom they were competing fiercely). The voyage began September 8, 1519, and lasted until September 6, 1522 (almost 3 years). Magellan sailed from Seville, Spain, with five ships, the Trinidad, San Antonio, Concepcion, Victoria, and Santiago. Three years later, only one ship (the Victoria) made it back to Seville, carrying only 18 of the original 270 crew members. Magellan was killed towards the end of the voyage, on the Island of Mactan in the Philippines, during a battle with the natives. The Basque navigator Juan Sebastián de Elcano (del Cano) completed the trip.