

World Explorers

History of the Ages

Grades 4-6

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EXPLORATION



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The First Explorers

Exploration is one of the oldest and most exciting human activities. Explorers have been driven by curiosity, the desire to spread religion, to discover riches, or the need to find a new home.

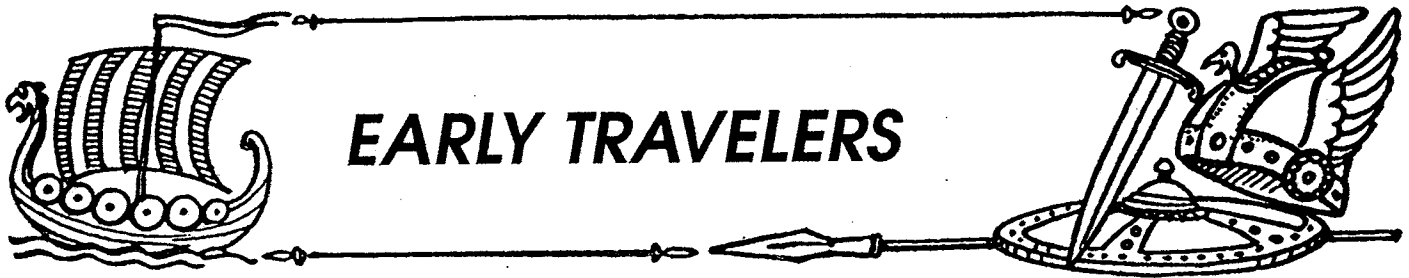
All explorers share special qualities. They are the love of adventure and the desire to discover the unknown. Many explorers faced ridicule, danger and even death to achieve their goals.

The earliest explorers were the Stone Age hunters who lived about 40 000 years ago. They traveled through strange and alien lands searching for food.

The first known explorers were really traders from such places as Babylonia and Egypt. The earliest named explorer was an Egyptian called Henu. Around 2 500 B.C. Henu and some friends crossed the desert to the Red Sea. They built boats and sailed down the Red Sea to Punt, on Africa's east coast, near what is now Somalia. Henu filled his ship with gold, ivory and myrrh and took them back to Egypt.

The *Phoenicians* were the leading sea explorers of ancient times. Phoenician explorers became the first to sail the length of the Mediterranean Sea. They established a trading and shipping post at Carthage which is present day Tunis. In time they sailed through the Straits of Gibraltar to explore the Atlantic coast of North Africa. Hanno, a Carthaginian navigator commanded a fleet of sixty ships that explored the coast of Africa and established settlements.

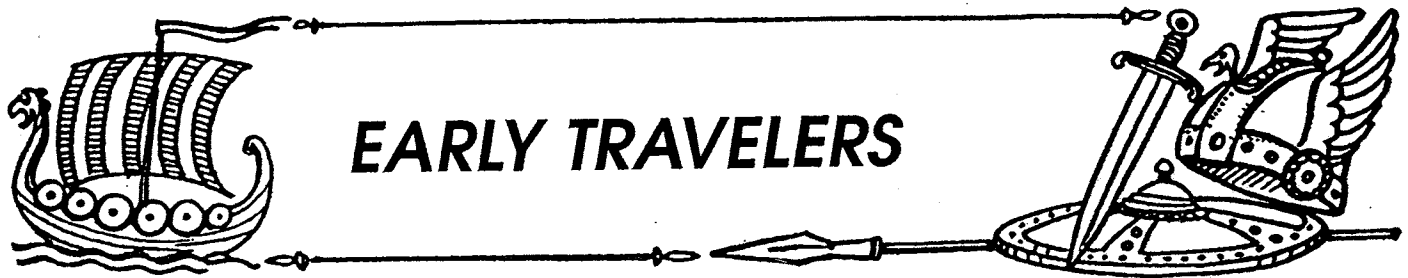
The Ancient Greeks became very knowledgeable about the world. Greek sailors explored the Mediterranean coasts of Europe and Africa, looking for places to set up colonies. Two famous Greek explorers were *Pytheas*, an astronomer and *Alexander the Great*, a king, general and conqueror.



EARLY TRAVELERS

Pytheas lived in Massalia which was then under Greek control. Today it is known as Marseilles and is found in southern France. During the fourth century B.C., *Pytheas* sailed from Massalia through the Straits of Gibraltar. He explored the coasts of what is now Portugal, Spain and France. *Pytheas* sailed past the British Isles and kept on sailing until he was stopped by ice. At the same time *Pytheas* was exploring the North Atlantic, Alexander the Great was exploring lands by way of a military campaign. He greatly expanded the world known to the Greeks.

The *Romans* were not great explorers like the Greeks. They did conquer lands that they knew little about such as Britain, France, Germany and Spain. They traded with India, China and Africa and brought back many different types of goods.



EARLY TRAVELERS

The Vikings

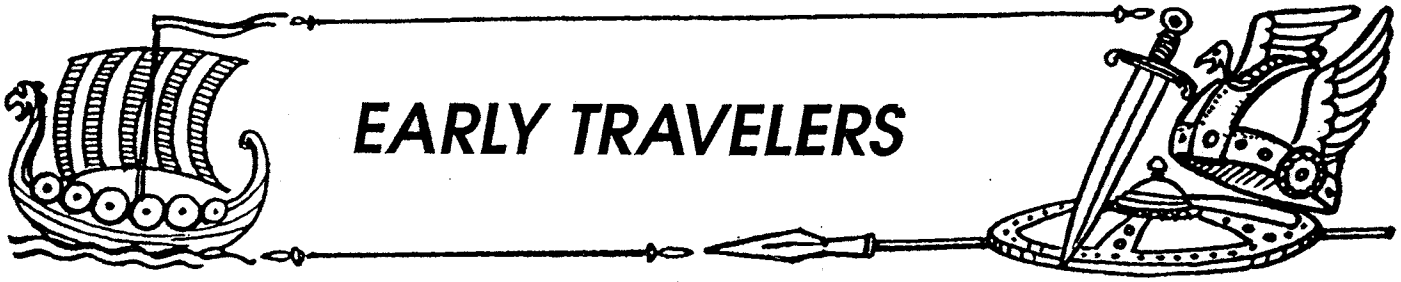
The people in Scandinavia were feeling the effects of an expanding population between A.D. 700 and 800. They began by exploring England, Iceland, Ireland and Scotland.

In about A.D. 982, "*Eric the Red*" set sail from Iceland in search of new territory. He explored the waters west of Iceland looking for a land that had been sighted by Gunnbjorn Ulfsson around A.D. 900. Eric discovered the huge island now known as Greenland and settled there.

A few years later another Viking captain called "*Bjarin Herjulfsson*" sailed for Greenland to join Eric's colony. He was blown off course by a storm to the east coast of Canada. He was the first known European to see the mainland of North America. It has been said that he sighted Sandwich Bay on the coast of Labrador and Frobisher Bay at the southern end of Baffin Island.

"*Leif Ericson*" was the son of Eric the Red. In A.D. 1000, Leif led an expedition to explore the land seen by *Herjulfsson*. According to the sagas, Ericson and his men first landed at a level stone area that he named *Helluland* (Flat Rock Land). They sailed further south to *Markland*, a heavily forested area. Leif continued to sail southward and went ashore at a place they later named *Vinland* (*Wineland*). Here they supposedly found grapes growing with which they made wine. Historians feel the fruit may have been cranberries or gooseberries but not grapes.

Ericson and his men spent the winter in Vinland. A large house was built and a shed to protect their ship. No one really knows where Vinland was for sure but historians feel it was in northern Newfoundland where Norwegian archaeologists found the ruins of an old Norse settlement.



Marco Polo

1254 - 1324?

Marco Polo was born in Venice, Italy in 1254. His father, who was a merchant, was often away from home on trading trips. Marco's mother had died when he was very young and an aunt and uncle raised him. Marco loved listening to the stories told by his father and uncle on their return from their trips along the Great Silk Road from Europe to the Orient. When he turned seventeen his father and uncle took him on a trip back to China.

The rulers of this part of the world were the Mongols, led by their famous emperor called Kublai Khan. The Polos traveled by boat from Venice to Acre, a port in Palestine. They traveled by camel great distances across the deserts and the mountains of Asia. It took three years for the Polos to reach Kublai Khan's summer palace in Shang-tu near what is now Kalgan. Kublai Kahn gave them a hearty welcome.

For twenty years Marco, his father and his uncle traveled, traded and explored throughout China. By 1292, the Polos were very wealthy and were becoming more anxious about going home. They were afraid Kublai Kahn might die before they left China and his enemies might capture them.

In 1292, their chance to leave came. Kublai Kahn needed someone to escort a young princess to Persia. She was to be a bride for the Kahn's great-nephew, the Mongol ruler of Persia. They returned by the ocean route to avoid the wars that were being fought on land.

The Polos and a fleet of fourteen junks sailed from Zaitun, a port in southern China, to Singapore. They traveled north of Sumatra and then around the southern tip of India. The fleet crossed the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Omar to Hormuz. The Polos left the wedding party there and traveled over land to the Turkish port of Trebizond on the Black Sea. From here they sailed to Constantinople and then to Venice Arriving in 1295. Their journey to China and back totalled approximately 24 100 kilometers (15 000 miles). The Polos had been gone for 24 years.



EARLY TRAVELERS

The Polos returned from China very wealthy and with many riches. They had been given ivory, jade, jewels, porcelain, silk and many treasures by Kublai Kahn. After Marco Polo, no one else traveled this way again for many years.

Marco's adventures became known by accident. He was captured by the Genoese during a naval battle and was imprisoned in Genoa. While in prison he told of his adventures to a writer named *Rusticiano of Pisa*, who was also a prisoner. Rusticiano recorded his story and called it "The Travels of Marco Polo". Although his story seemed hard to believe much of what was written has been proven to be true.