**THE VIKING THAT BEAT COLUMBUS**

**The Lengendary Viking Raiders**

VOCABULARY

SAVAGE: fierce and violent

RAMSOM: a sum of money or other payment demanded

PLUNDERED: steal goods from

SEAFARER: sailor

RELIANCE: depended on

BANISHED: kicked out

The Vikings left their homeland to invade the coasts of northern Europe beginning in the 8th century.

The raiders used savage tactics. They would attack their victim, take as much treasure as possible and then demand a ransom to make sure that they would not return again.

By the 10th century these raids had become a seasonal event. Over time, the raiders settled in, rather than plundered some of the territories they visited such as Iceland, Ireland (where they founded the city of Dublin), and central Russia (its name derived from the term Rothsmenn, meaning seafarer and shortened to "Rus").

The Viking's used on the sea as their way of attack and made seaworthy ships and navigational methods with which they could travel vast distances over open water. These advantages [](javascript:;)allowed them to travel the cold, dangerous ocean to the west and reach the shore of America almost five hundred years before Columbus.

Eric the Red was the first to venture into the distant waters. He sailed west from Iceland to an island he dubbed "Greenland".

His son, Leif Ericsson, continued exploring and sailed from Greenland to the islands off the coast of northern Canada and finally to the shores of Newfoundland.

**Reaching North America**

Nearly 500 years before Christopher Columbus, a band of European sailors left their homeland behind in search of a new world. The Viking ships sliced through the icy waters of the Atlantic Ocean as winds blew the boat’s huge single sail. After traveling unfamiliar waters, the Vikings aboard the wooden ship found a new land, dropped anchor and went ashore. 500 years before Columbus “discovered” America, those Viking feet may have been the first European ones to ever have touched North American soil.

Exploration was a family business for the expedition’s leader, Leif Eriksson.

His father, Erik the Red, founded the first European settlement of Greenland after being kicked out of Iceland for killing a neighbor. (Erik the Red’s father, himself, had been banished from Norway for committing manslaughter.)

Stories called sagas tell of Eriksson’s journeys in the New World. These stories were spread by word of mouth before becoming recorded much later.

After crossing the Atlantic, the Vikings encountered a land in present-day Canada.

The Vikings spent an entire winter there and benefitted from the milder weather compared to their homeland. They explored the surrounding region filled with meadows, rivers loaded with salmon, and wild grapes so suitable for wine that Eriksson called the region Vinland (Wineland).

After spending the winter in Vinland, Eriksson and his crew sailed home to Greenland with badly needed wood and large portions of grapes.

**A Look at the Evidence**

Archaeologists dug up evidence that supports the sagas’ stories of the expeditions to America. In 1960, Norwegian explorers searched the coasts of Canada for signs of a possible settlement, and found it on the northernmost tip of Newfoundland.

While Columbus is honored with a federal holiday, the man considered to be the leader of the first European expedition to North America has not been totally forgotten on the calendar. In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson signed a bill that declared October 9 to be Leif Eriksson Day in honor of the Viking explorer, his crew and the country’s Viking-American heritage. The closeness of the days honoring Eriksson and Columbus is coincidence. October 9 was chosen because it is the anniversary of the 1825 arrival in New York of the first ship which carried Norwegian immigrants to the United States.

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1. What methods (tactics) did the Viking use to cause fear around Europe?
2. What are some places that were named by the Vikings?
3. Why were Viking ships so effective in crossing the ocean?
4. How were Erik the Red and Leif Eriksson related?
5. How did people learn about Viking history (what is a saga?)
6. Why do YOU think these stories might not be reliable?
7. What evidence was found to prove that the Viking were here?
8. Where is Leif Eriksson Day celebrated and how was the date chosen?