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Statue of Leif Eriksson

[How Did The Vikings Discover America?](#)

The first discovery of America

Who discovered America? When Columbus returned from the Antilles in 1493, he was not the first European to have stepped on the New World. It seems that 500 years before, a group of blond Scandinavians had done it. It happened during the Viking era, when these sailors and warriors were roaming northern Africa, eastern Europe and the Middle East. In 986, Bjarni Herjolfsson, experimenter navigator and adventurer, left Norway to reach Iceland close to the winter. He found that his father had left in a fleet led by Erik the Red to colonize a huge land situated to the west and attractively named "Greenland". So he started to Greenland, but he lost his way due to the wind and fog for many days. When they finally spotted land, it was very different from the description of Greenland: it was a land of hills and mighty forests. But after a few days the landscape turned more mountainous and glacial and departing to the east they found Greenland and Erik's colony. These people did not land in North America, but they were the first to make it out. One of Erik's son got very interested in the story related by Bjarni, especially as in the frozen Greenland wood was hard to achieve, while Bjarni was counting about a forested country. Around 1000, Leif Eriksson took Bjarni's boat and together with 35 men left in the search of the land spotted by Bjarni. Leif first met the Baffin Island (in today northeastern Canada), covered by glaciers and without pastures. Going to the south, they found a forested plain, with beaches of white sand they named Marklandia (The Forested Land), in today's Labrador. Few days later, the Vikings found an even better territory. They built houses there and wintered in that territory. One man discovered vines and the land was named Vinlandia (The Wine Land). In spring they returned to Greenland with the cellars filled with products of the area. [img=2]Till today, all these lands remain a mystery. In the '60s and '70s, in the surroundings of the L'Anse Aux Meadows village (Newfoundland), archaeologists found the ruins of some houses with distinguishable northern features, like an iron founding oven and other objects dated from the year 1000. In the '90s a Danish researcher found in southern Newfoundland a well-polished stone piece coming from a Viking craft. Leif counted to the Norwegian king his journey. In 1070, the German historian Adam of Bremen traveled to Denmark to collect information about northern countries, and the Danish king Sweyn counted him about Vinlandia and its excellent wine. [img=3]Through the chronicle of Bremen, many erudite people found about the western lands. The Iceland chronicles from the centuries XII-XIV mention other journeys made from Greenland to Markland and Vinlandia. It is possible that Columbus knew about all this, and some say he visited Iceland before his journeys to the Americas. The puzzle that remains is why didn't the Vikings remain definitively in America. Maybe they tried to, but were unsuccessful, due to the difficult conditions and "skraelings" (Native Americans), whose forces were superior. The houses at L'Anse Aux Meadows harbored no more than 500 people, and this number was enough for an uninhabited zone, not for one where they had to face Indians. How could they face an Iroquois unit, when French and British troops, armed with fire guns, had problems with them 700-800 years later? On the other side, the Greenland colony faced huge problems: the climate got colder (the Medieval "Little Ice Age"), the colons could no longer make agriculture and sustain themselves and they completely vanished: the last sign of them is a wedding from 1408.