



**ca. 1000, as recounted in *Grœnlendinga Saga (Greenlander's Saga)*  
in the medieval Norse manuscript *Flateyjarbók (Flat-Island Book)*, ca. 1387**

From about A.D. 980 to 1400, the Norse maintained two settlements on the southern coast of Greenland. From there they explored the mainland of North America, naming the regions "Halluland" (probably Baffin Island), "Markland" (probably northern Labrador) and "Vinland" ("Wineland," probably Newfoundland and southern Labrador). About 1005 Thorvald Erikson sailed from Greenland to explore the region his brother had named "Vinland." There he and his men encountered the native inhabitants, probably the Beothuk people.

The seasonal camp that the Norse maintained for about three years at L'Anse aux Meadows on the northern tip of Newfoundland is archaeologically confirmed to be the first European settlement on the mainland of North America (discovered to date).

Now Thorvald, with the advice of his brother Leif, prepared to make this voyage with thirty men. They put their ship in order, and sailed out to sea; and there is no account of their voyage before their arrival at Leif's-booths in Wineland. They laid up their ship there, and remained there quietly during the winter, supplying themselves with food by fishing. In the spring, however, Thorvald said that they should put their ship in order, and that a few men should take the after-boat, and proceed along the western coast, and explore [the region] thereabout during the summer. They found it a fair, well-wooded country; it was but a short distance from the woods to the sea, and [there were] white sands, as well as great numbers of islands and shallows. They found neither dwelling of man nor lair of beast; but in one of the westerly islands, they found a wooden building for the shelter of grain. They found no other trace of human handiwork, and they turned back, and arrived at Leif's-booths in the autumn.

The following summer Thorvald set out toward the east with the ship, and along the northern coast. They were met by a high wind off a certain promontory, and were driven ashore there, and damaged the keel of their ship, and were compelled to remain there for a long time and repair the injury to their vessel. Then said Thorvald to his companions: "I propose that we raise the keel upon this cape, and call it Keelness," and so they did. Then they sailed away, to the eastward off the land, and into the mouth of the adjoining firth, and to a headland, which projected into the sea there, and which was entirely covered with woods. They found an anchorage for their ship, and put out the gangway to the land, and Thorvald and all of his

Excerpted, and images & paragraphing added, by the National Humanities Center, 2006: [www.nhc.rtp.nc.us/pds/pds.htm](http://www.nhc.rtp.nc.us/pds/pds.htm). In J. E. Olson & E. G. Bourne, eds., *The Northmen, Columbus and Cabot, 985-1503: The Voyages of the Northmen; The Voyages of Columbus and of John Cabot*. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906); online in American Journeys: Eyewitness Accounts of Early American Exploration and Settlement (Wisconsin Historical Society) at [www.americanjourneys.org/aj-057/index.asp](http://www.americanjourneys.org/aj-057/index.asp). Photo above: L'Anse aux Meadows, Epaves Bay, northern Newfoundland, with sod house reconstructions in background; courtesy of P. Harholdt, National Museum of Natural History [Smithsonian Institution]. Complete image credits at [www.nhc.rtp.nc.us/pds/amerbegin/imagecredits.htm](http://www.nhc.rtp.nc.us/pds/amerbegin/imagecredits.htm).

companions went ashore. “It is a fair region here,” said he, and here I should like to make my home.” They then returned to the ship, and discovered on the sands, in beyond the headland, three mounds; they went up to these, and saw that they were three skin-canoes, with three men under each. They thereupon divided their party, and succeeded in seizing all of the men but one, who escaped with his canoe. They killed the eight men, and then ascended the headland again, and looked about them, and discovered within the firth certain hillocks, which they concluded must be habitations. They were then so overpowered with sleep that they could not keep awake, and all fell into a [heavy] slumber, from which they were awakened by the sound of a cry uttered above them; and the words of the cry were these: “Awake, Thorvald, thou and all thy company, if thou wouldst save thy life; and board thy ship with all thy men, and sail with all speed from the land!” A countless number of skin-canoes then advanced toward them from the inner part of the firth, whereupon Thorvald exclaimed: “We must put out the war-boards, on both sides of the ship, and defend ourselves to the best of our ability, but offer little attack.” This they did, and the Skrellings [“ugly wretches”]\*, after they had shot at them for a time, fled precipitately, each as best he could.

Thorvald then inquired of his men, whether any of them had been wounded, and they informed him that no one of them had received a wound. “I have been wounded in my arm-pit,” says he; “an arrow flew in between the gunwale and the shield, below my arm. Here is the shaft, and it will bring me to my end! I counsel you now to retrace your way with the utmost speed. But me ye shall convey to that headland which seemed to me to offer so pleasant a dwelling-place; thus it may be fulfilled, that the truth sprang to

my lips, when I expressed the wish to abide there for a time. Ye shall bury me there, and place a cross at my head, and another at my feet, and call it Crossness forever after.” At that time Christianity had obtained in Greenland; Eric the Red, died, however, before [the introduction of] Christianity.

Thorvald died, and when they had carried out his injunctions, they took their departure, and rejoined their companions, and they told each other of the experiences which had befallen them. They remained there during the winter, and gathered grapes and wood with which to freight the ship. In the following spring they returned to Greenland, and arrived with their ship in Ericsfirth, where they were able to recount great tidings to Leif.

Later the Norse traded with the native peoples of “Vinland” during their regular expeditions from Greenland to the North American mainland. How far south the Norse sailed and explored along the coast is undetermined. See the website Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga, from the National Museum of Natural History [Smithsonian Institution] at [www.mnh.si.edu/vikings/start.html](http://www.mnh.si.edu/vikings/start.html).



\* Alan Taylor, *American Colonies: The Settling of North America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), paper ed., 2002, p. 33.