

# The Age of Exploration and Discovery

## The First Americans



The first people came into North America by foot, crossing a land bridge from Asia. They settled in all parts of North America and eventually spread into Central America and South America as well. These Native Americans developed societies that were successful and survived for thousands of years. During this time, they may occasionally have had contact with people from other lands, but they were basically living in isolation, unaffected by what was going on in the rest of the world.

The first proven sea voyage to North America was made by Leif Ericsson, a Viking explorer from Norway. In the year 1000, Ericsson sailed to an island off the coast of Canada. Here, the Vikings established a settlement that lasted almost 500 years before dying out. During this time, Indians continued to live in North America, but were still unaware of the rest of the world, especially a part of the world called Europe.

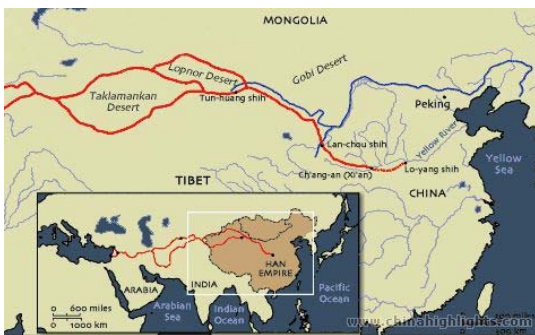
## The Age of Exploration

It is now the year 1300, the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In Europe, a chain of events is starting which will eventually affect the Indians living in North America.

For nearly 500 years following Leif Ericsson's voyages, no other explorers are known to have come to the Americas. Very few people in Europe even knew about Ericsson's voyage to North America. There was little communication between distant places, so people had very little knowledge about the rest of the world.

During this time, most Europeans (people who lived in Europe) were not interested in dangerous sea voyages to faraway lands. Except for a man named Marco Polo...

Marco Polo was an explorer from Italy. Around the year 1300, Marco Polo traveled east across Europe and Asia, all the way to a part of the world known as the Far East, which are now called India and China.



Marco Polo brought back silk, spices, and other exotic goods that had never been seen in Europe before. He became a rich man by selling these goods to Europeans who were eager to buy them. Stories of Marco Polo's adventures spread and caused other

adventurers and traders to travel overland to the Far East in hopes of gaining great wealth for themselves.

These overland routes to the Far East were long and hard to travel. The routes were also dangerous because the land between Europe and the Far East was controlled by Arabs, people who did not want Europeans to cross their land. About 100 years after Marco Polo's first journey, fighting made these routes too dangerous to travel. Europe had to find a new way to the Far East. The only possible hope was by water, to find a sea route.

## **The Age of Discovery Begins**

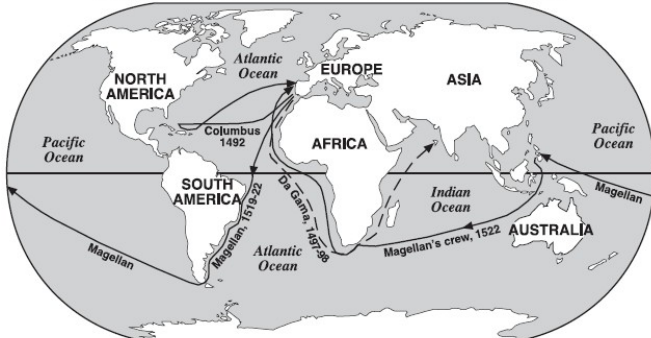
The search for a sea route to Asia began an exciting time in Europe. It was the year 1400, the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It was a time of learning, growth, and exploration, called the Age of Discovery.

Nowadays, we just have to look at a map to find any particular place on the planet. In 1400, most of the world was a big mystery to the people in Europe. Ship captains had only a very vague idea of what the land was like

beyond their horizons. Most discoveries had been made by adventurous individuals exploring on their own.

In 1400, though, kings and queens began to sponsor explorers, providing them with ships and supplies. They sent explorers out to find new trading routes, or wanted them to sail off into the unknown to claim distant lands and bring back treasure.

Voyages of Early European Explorers (1492–1522)



Source: James Killoran et al., *The Key to Understanding Global History*, Jarrett Publishing (adapted)

It wasn't long before the kings and queens of Europe - Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, and England - were beginning to compete with each other to be the first to find new lands and undiscovered riches. Sea captains, soldiers, and other men

hungry for adventure wanted to be part of these voyages of exploration. A new age - the Age of Discovery - was underway.

Whatever the reason for their exploration, explorers always had a destination in mind and a plan for getting there. Unfortunately, many explorers got lost due to storms, accidents, lack of knowledge of the earth, and poor navigational equipment. Some explorers never found what they were looking for, because the lands they were seeking did not even exist. Other explorers got lucky, because they found lands that were previously undiscovered.

With all this exploration going on, it was only a matter of time before land and life in North America were discovered again. For Europeans, discovery of North America was one more opportunity to gain wealth and power. For the Indians who were living in North America, the arrival of the European explorers was the beginning of the end.