

Chapter 1 : Russell Kaye (Author of An Illustrated Viking Voyage)

"Viking Voyage" is richly illustrated with beautiful photographs, and it helps us to understand the Viking way of life. There is a special magic within this book: a magic of seeking and reaching for dreams.

There is some matching of the details of the story in the two sagas but there are also discrepancies between the two versions of the story. For decades there was considerable uncertainty as to whether the Vinland story was based upon fact or whether it was purely fictional. There was an unsuccessful search for remnants of the Vinland settlement based upon the belief that the "vin" in Vinland referred to grapes and wine. This belief focused the search much farther south than Newfoundland because of the limit on how far north grapes could grow. The finding of the ruins of the Vinland settlement came as a result of the skillful deductions of the Norwegian scholar Helge Ingstad and his wife Anne Stine Ingstad. The Ingstads believed that the "vin" of Vinland referred to meadows rather than grapes and wine. How else could the second group hope to locate a small settlement in the thousands of miles of wilderness? Ingstad looked on the map for a feature that would be unmistakable to new visitors from Greenland. He decided that the strait that separates the island of Newfoundland from the mainland was the most unmistakable feature in that part of North America. The Ingstads journeyed to the northern peninsula of Newfoundland and searched for ruins. There the Ingstads and their expedition found ruins that were identifiable as Norse. It was a stunning triumph of historical detective work. The irony of the story is that some of the deductions were based upon faulty premises. Kirsten Seaver, who has written a definitive work on the Norse colonies in Greenland, asserts the derivation of "vin" from meadow has now been largely discredited. These artifacts are butternuts which do not grow north of the St. Lawrence River, which is the northern boundary also of wild grapes. The trees are shrubby. The river is at best a stream. The shallow "bay" is not a bay. It is unprotected and crowded with rocks. The climate is horrendous. Besides the outer coast of Baffin Island, this is the most weather-ravaged place we have seen. The one positive aspect to this site is that if Leif and his gang arrived here, it had to have been devoid of any Native Americans. The Vikings would not have had to battle any indigenous people for the right to stay here - at least not at first. From the saga literature we know of two notable episodes. Natives came to the Vinland settlement and were willing to trade animal hides for strips of red cloth. The Norse kept tearing their red cloth into smaller and smaller strips but still the natives wanted to trade. Finally the red cloth was entirely gone. Everything appeared to be cordial and the natives left. The other saga tells of the natives returning shortly on the warpath. What seems likely is that the natives, being of Asian ancestry, could not digest milk. Milk would make them sick and they would think that the Norse had poisoned them. Thus the relationship between the Norse and the native degenerated into violence because of lactose intolerance. The Norse were able to defend themselves against the overwhelmingly larger numbers of the natives, but just barely. They had the superior technology of metal but not that of firearms. The constant conflict wore down the Norse and they eventually abandoned the Vinland settlements. The sagas tell of another encounter between the natives and the Norse. One member of the second expedition was Freydis, an illegitimate daughter of Eric the Red and hence a half-sister to Lief Ericson. Once some members of the Norsemen group, including Freydis, were away from the settlement and they encountered a larger hunting party of natives. The men of the Norse party decided it would be better to avoid further confrontation with the natives. But Freydis would have no retreat. She challenged the Norsemen to attack and defeat the skraelings. When the men declined she charged the natives herself. She soon found herself surrounded. She picked up a sword and began to battle. She bared a breast and slapped it with her sword to call to the attention of the natives that she was a woman. And what is more she was pregnant. This behavior on the part of a woman was so strange that the natives retreated in perplexity. Although Freydis may have been a brave Amazon, the other saga reveals her as the personification of evil. Here is the story. But Freydis announced that Leif had loaned the houses only to her family and the other group would have build their own houses. The other group did so some distance from the settlement. When the expedition had collected ship loads of goods, such as timber, and were ready to return to Greenland, Freydis asked the other group for the use of their larger ship. The other group agreed. But Freydis was not

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content with just having the larger ship, she wanted all of the ships and their cargoes. She claimed she had been insulted by the men of the other group and demanded that the men of her group avenge her honor. Her men then killed all of the men of the other group but would not kill the women. Freydis herself then grabbed an ax and killed the five women of the other group. Freydis swore all the members of her group to secrecy about what had occurred in Vinland and the expedition returned to Greenland with cargoes of trade goods. The story leaked out and Freydis was condemned for her evil deeds. Although the Vinland settlement was unsuccessful, the Greenland colonies lasted for at least four and perhaps five hundred years. It is a mystery as to what led to the disappearance of the colonies. Both colonies were on the west side of the island of Greenland. The one in the south was known as the East Colony and the one in the north was the West Colony. The West Colony ended sometime between and AD. Visitors from the East Colony told of coming to the West Colony and finding no humans there. There were livestock roaming about. The West Colony did not die because of Inuit Thule Eskimo attack, nor did it die because of an epidemic. There were no bodies in the farmyards or farmhouses. It was as though there was an orderly evacuation. Kirsten Seaver argues that English ships made contact and the inhabitants of the Norse colonies voluntarily left with them. The English wanted to setup stations for drying codfish from the Grand Banks. It was not easy to find people to live in such a climate. The Greenlanders who were used to an even harsher climate have been the ideal workforce for the cod drying stations. However those English ships were apparently lost at sea with their Greenlander passengers before the cod drying stations could be setup. Helge Ingstad, Westward to Vinland, St.

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Chapter 4 : The Vinland Sagas

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Hodding Carter; Russell Kaye] -- In , journalist and history buff W. Hodding Carter, along with a band of amateur sailors, set out to retrace Leif Eriksson's journey to North America.

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