

THE SEA DOGS



Under Queen Elizabeth I, England became the world's greatest sea power. Elizabeth achieved this with the help of a group of bold merchant seamen. These were her "sea dogs," daring swashbucklers who roamed the seas in search of high adventure.

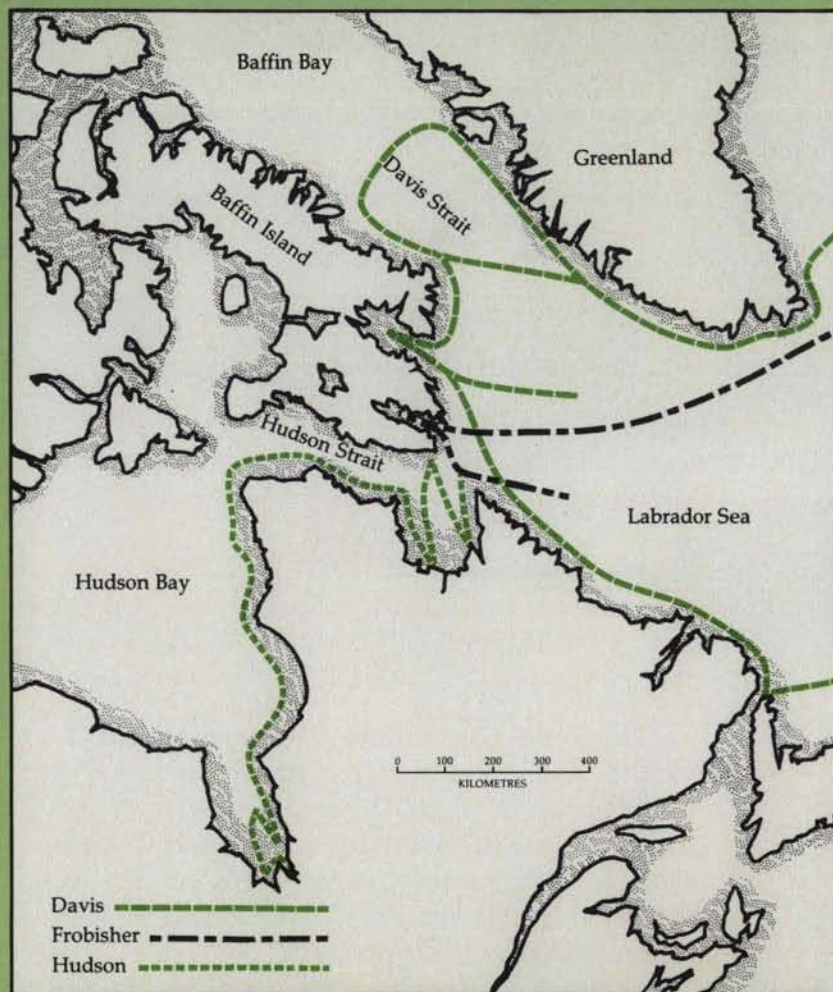
Elizabeth loved her sea dogs and honoured them richly with knighthoods and favours. She looked the other way when they committed piracy and plundered the ships of Spain and France. After all, much of the booty from these ships found its way into the royal treasurehouse.

Elizabeth was delighted when some of her sea dogs began to search for the Northwest Passage. Like other European rulers, she longed to find a sea route to the riches of the Orient. Perhaps this route lay across the Arctic wilds of the New World.

Sir Humphrey Gilbert and *Sir Martin Frobisher* were among the first to believe in the Northwest Passage. Frobisher sailed as far as the southeast coast of Baffin Island. *John Davis* reached farther north, almost to present-day Lancaster Sound. *Henry Hudson* entered Hudson Bay before his men turned against him.

The sea dogs did not find the Northwest Passage to the Orient. However, they did learn a great deal about the northern lands of the New World. Europeans began to look more closely at the new land itself.

The New World was not the Orient, but it was rich in fish, furs, and precious metals. Many of its Native Peoples were friendly and eager for trade. Perhaps this New World was not just a



THE SEA DOGS' SEARCH FOR THE NORTHWEST PASSAGE

barrier to the Orient. Perhaps it was worth claiming and exploring in its own right.

SIR HUMPHREY GILBERT c. 1537–1583



The Unlucky Explorer

Humphrey Gilbert was one of the first people to believe in a Northwest Passage through the New World. He was a brave and adventurous man, but not very practical. His first New World voyage was cut short because of leaky ships, poor supplies, and lawless crews. Queen Elizabeth called him “a man noted of not good hap by sea.”

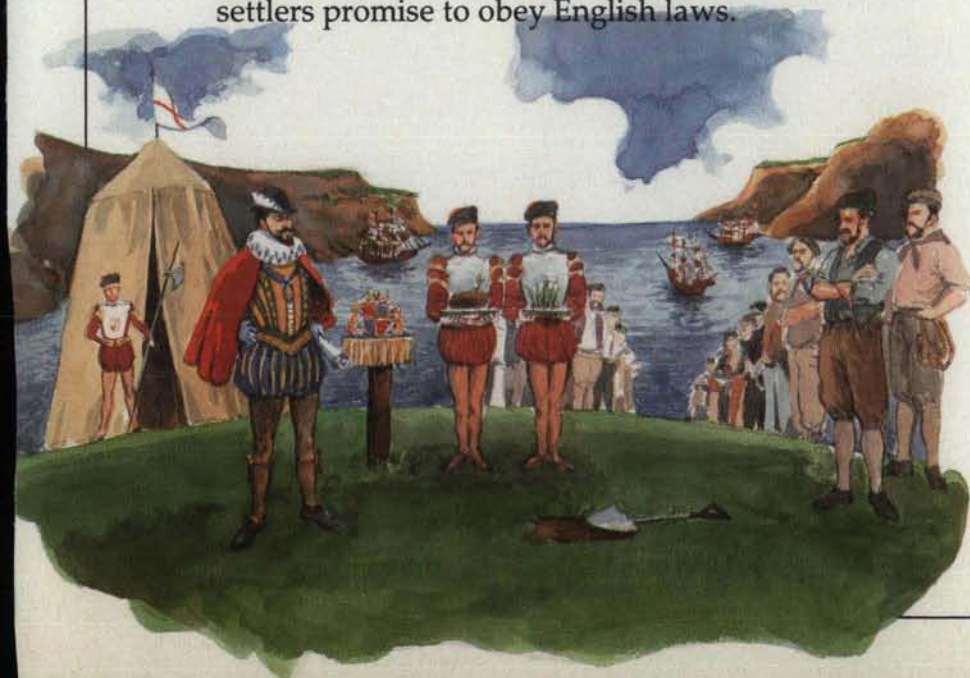
1 Undaunted, Gilbert set sail again in 1583. He reached Newfoundland, but two of his five ships turned back. Gilbert claimed Newfoundland and other nearby lands for England. He made the settlers promise to obey English laws.



2 Gilbert sailed down the coast to search for a site for a colony. Then, near Sable Island, one of his ships ran aground. Most of the ship's men were killed, and morale fell very low. Gilbert decided to head for home.



3 On his way to England, Gilbert ran into rough storms and heavy seas. He was last seen on deck, hailing his only other ship. “Courage!” he cried. “We are as near to heaven by sea as by land!” Soon after, he and his men vanished beneath the waves.



SIR MARTIN FROBISHER c. 1539–1594

Pirate and Goldseeker



Martin Frobisher was a true “sea dog,” a swashbuckling daredevil of the high seas. He first sailed when he was only 14, and he commanded his own ship by the age of 21. He was fired at by French cannons and held hostage by African tribesmen. He was also arrested three times for piracy.

Frobisher was soon known all over England for his great courage and daring. He began to look for new adventures that would bring him fame and fortune. He decided to search for the Northwest Passage across the Arctic wilds of the New World.

In June 1576, Frobisher set out with three small ships to find the Passage. From the start, the winds were against him. Near Greenland, a great storm blew up. One ship was lost, and the other turned back to London with the news that Frobisher had drowned.

Frobisher was still very much alive. He continued westward in his ship, the *Gabriell*, searching for a sign of land.

At the end of July, Frobisher sighted land at last. On August 11, he sailed into a deep inlet in present-day Baffin Island. He mistook this inlet for a channel leading through the Arctic. He called it Frobisher Strait—today it is known as Frobisher Bay.

Frobisher sailed about 250 kilometres into the bay. Then, in late August, some Inuit came to his ships to trade. The Inuit offered to lead him to a “great western sea.” He hoped this would be the Pacific Ocean.



"Frobisher's Men in a Skirmish With Eskimos at Bloody Point" by John White. Some Native people viewed the Europeans as a welcome source of trade. Others, like these Inuit, saw them as powerful invaders.

Frobisher sent five men to follow the Inuit in a small boat. The men disappeared and never returned. The Inuit claimed to know nothing of their fate.

Frobisher waited and searched, but at last he was forced to give up. Summer was quickly fading, and he decided to leave for home. Before setting sail, he captured one of the Inuit. He also took a piece of black rock he had found on the shore.

Back in England, Frobisher was welcomed as a hero. The captive Inuk caused a great sensation. He put on a show for Queen Elizabeth and hunted royal swans on the palace pond. Sadly, the Inuk fell ill and died soon after.

Frobisher's black rock also caused a stir. When it was analysed, it was found to contain iron pyrites, or "fool's gold." However, one assayer claimed the rock contained real gold dust.

Word spread quickly, and soon merchants were anxious to invest in another voyage. Gold-seekers vied eagerly for a place on Frobisher's ships. This was Canada's first gold rush.

In May 1577, Frobisher set sail with 3 ships and 120 goldseekers. They reached the islands of Frobisher Bay and began to dig for ore. In a few months, they returned to England with 200 tonnes of shiny black rock.

The next year, Frobisher set sail again. Once more, he and his men brought home 200 tonnes of ore. This time, however, mining experts showed that the ore was fool's gold—completely worthless.

Frobisher still had a dazzling career ahead of him. In the West Indies, he raided Spanish ships with Sir Francis Drake. He helped lead the British fleet against the Spanish Armada. He was knighted by Queen Elizabeth, and fatally wounded in battle. He died a hero, just as he had lived.



"Eskimo Man with Paddle" by John White. This is the earliest known Inuit portrait. It was painted by an artist aboard Frobisher's ship.

Pathfinder of the North

John Davis was still a boy when he first went to sea. He learned quickly, and soon grew into a fine seaman and navigator. Davis was a strong, good-natured man, with a natural flair for command.

Like many others, Davis believed in a Northwest Passage through the Arctic waters of the New World. In 1585, he set sail on his first voyage to find that Passage.

1 Davis landed on the coast of Greenland and met a group of Inuit. He ordered his musicians to play a tune and began “leaping and dancing” to the music. The Inuit were delighted and approached the English as friends.



2 Davis sailed to Baffin Island and entered present-day Cumberland Sound. He thought this might be the Passage he was seeking, but heavy winds forced him back.



3 On Davis's second voyage, he pushed farther north up the strait that bears his name. He kept careful notes on Inuit life and on the plants, animals, and climate. Once again he was forced back by ice and bad weather.

4 In 1587, Davis set sail on his last journey to the Arctic. Ice conditions in Davis Strait were very good that year. Davis sailed halfway up the Greenland coast—much farther north than any European had been.



5 On his way back south, Davis found the “furious overfall” of water that would be known as Hudson Strait. He correctly guessed that “the northern parts of America are all islands.” He was sure that someday a Northwest Passage would be found.



6 Davis was a writer and inventor, as well as a great seaman. His book, *The Seaman's Secrets*, became a standard handbook for mariners. The quadrant he invented was used by navigators for well over 100 years. His record of his third voyage is still the model for ships' logs today.



7 Davis never returned to the Arctic, but he made many other exciting voyages. He explored South America, the South Pacific, and the coast of Southeast Asia. He was killed by Japanese pirates in the China Sea.

The Tragic Explorer

In 1610, Henry Hudson set out to search for a Northwest Passage through Arctic waters. He took with him a crew of 22, including his son John. Here is the story of the tragic journey, as the ship's butler, Abacuk Prickett, might have told it.

"Captain Hudson was a brave man, but a poor judge of men. We were only at sea a few weeks when the first quarrels broke out. The first mate, old Juet, picked a fight with Greene, the captain's favourite.

"In June, we sailed into the treacherous waters of an ice-clogged strait (Hudson Strait). Pack ice crashed around us and storms drove us without mercy. For over six weeks we crawled through those cruel, foaming waters. Our men grew sick with fear and clamoured to turn back.

"With great courage and seamanship, our captain guided us safely through. We emerged onto a great sea that we thought must be the Pacific. Then, after a month of good sailing, the open water came to an end. We were in a vast land-locked bay, and winter was almost upon us.

"That winter was one long nightmare. We ate anything to keep alive, even frogs and moss. We shivered in the cold, and many of us fell ill from scurvy. Juet and Greene began to speak against the captain, blaming him for all our hardships.

"Spring came at last, and the ice began to melt. We set sail in June, though some of us were too sick to stand. The captain divided up the last of the supplies and said they would have to last for weeks. There was only a bit of mouldy bread



and rotten cheese for each of us.

"By this time, some of the men were already near mutiny. Greene stirred them up by spreading lies about the captain. He said the captain was hiding food away for himself and his son. He said the captain did not intend ever to sail for home.

"On the night of June 23, Greene came to my cabin and told me his plans for mutiny. I said I wanted no part of it, but I promised not to interfere. At daybreak, the mutiny began.

"Greene and the others showed no mercy. They forced Captain Hudson and his son into a small boat. Then they threw seven others into the boat after them. Some of these were loyal to the captain, and others were sick with scurvy.

"We cut the captain's boat to flounder on the bay. We left them without food, water or weapons. Then we hoisted sail and fled from the sight of our crime.

"Only misfortune awaited us. Greene and others were killed on Digges Island when they tried to steal food from the Inuit. Juet starved to death on the cruel journey back to England. Only a few of us survived to tell the story of poor Captain Hudson and his landlocked bay."

Whatever the fate of Hudson, his name has lived on. He is remembered as the discoverer of Hudson Bay, the world's largest inland sea.



"The Last Voyage of Hudson." This tragic scene shows Hudson's son John as a weak, helpless boy. In fact, John Hudson was an experienced young seaman of 19.

PETER EASTON fl. 1610–1620

The Pirate of Harbour Grace

Under Queen Elizabeth I, many bold privateers plundered the ships of England's enemies. Then James I became king of England and made privateering illegal. Many privateers became pirates instead, raiding ships for their own fortune and glory.

Peter Easton was the greatest of these outlaw pirates. At the height of his career, he commanded 40 ships and controlled vast stretches of the open sea. He was a brilliant seaman, and sailors everywhere spoke his name with awe.

Easton built a fort and made his headquarters at Harbour Grace in Newfoundland. He raided the English fishing ships and robbed them of their supplies. He also forced many fishermen to become pirates on his ships.

Easton was never captured, though many countries tried. He decided to return to England, so he asked King James for a royal pardon. Easton was granted the pardon but it never reached him. After a while, he gave up hope of returning to his native land.

In 1613, Easton sailed into Villefranche (now Nice, France), the free port of the pirates. There he retired with over £2 000 000 in gold. He built himself a palace and married a wealthy, beautiful woman. He even got himself a title—the Marquis of Savoy.

