1.2: Explorers and Oceanographers

Henry the Navigator lived from 1394 to 1460. Prince Henry of Portugal was interested in sailing and commerce, and studied navigation and mapmaking. He established a naval observatory for the teaching of navigation, astronomy, and cartography around 1450. From 1419 to his death, Prince Henry made many expeditions south along the west coast of Africa to secure trade routes and establish colonies.

Prince Henry of Portugal organized and financed many voyages that went south from Portugal and eventually rounded the African continent. His purposes were to create maps of the West African coast line, establish trade routes, and spread Christianity. He encouraged voyages of expeditions and the scientific study of navigation. Furthermore, he ran an observatory and school of navigation. Prince Henry played a vital role in the development of more accurate maps and the engineering of a new ship that was more ideal for exploring rough seas.

Christopher Columbus

Christopher Columbus lived from 1451 to 1506. He made four voyages across the Atlantic Ocean in an effort to find a new route to the East Indies by traveling west rather than east. Having inaccurate estimates of Earth’s magnitude, he underestimated the distances necessary for the voyage and believed he had found islands off the coast of Asia when, in reality he had reached the “New World.”

Christopher Columbus believed sailing west would be a faster way to get to India and to all the spices and riches it held. When his idea was rejected by Portugal, Columbus went to Spain where the King and Queen agreed to sponsor him. Columbus was granted three ships (the Niña, Pinta, and Santa Maria) and funds to finance his voyage across the ocean. After two months of
sailing, Columbus and his crew arrived in the present day Bahamas. Due to his excellent navigation records, he was able to sail back to Spain with proof, in the form of gold and other materials, of his success. However, the rest of Columbus’ voyages were unsuccessful. Although he died bitter and believing he had found Asia, Columbus’ discovery opened up a whole new world for his successors to explore.

**Ferdinand Magellan**

Ferdinand Magellan lived from 1480 to 1521. He left Spain in September 1519 with 270 men and five vessels in search of a westward passage to the Spice Islands. The expedition eventually lost two ships even before finally discovering and passing through the Strait of Magellan and rounding the tip of South America in November 1520. Magellan crossed the Pacific Ocean and arrived in the Philippines in March 1521, where he was killed in a battle with the natives on April 27, 1521. Magellan’s skill as a navigator makes his voyage probably the most outstanding single contribution to the early charting of the oceans.

Ferdinand Magellan had the idea to sail west across the ocean to get to Asia. Contrary to his expectations, Magellan sailed past modern day Argentina and found a route to the Pacific Ocean. He was the first person to sail across the Pacific Ocean. It took him six long months to arrive in Asia though he had been looking for a shorter route. Eventually, Magellan and his crew sailed into charted waters in East Asia. Unfortunately, Magellan was killed in battle in the Philippines. His crew continued without him and reached Spain a total of three years after they had first set out on their voyage. Though Magellan died during the voyage, his belief that the Earth is round was proven true. This important discovery altered the way people thought about the world and had a significant impact on future voyages.