

Columbus... the intrepid voyager!

Christopher Columbus - born Cristoforo Colombo - grew up in Genoa, Italy and had an insatiable thirst for knowledge and exploration. Even though he was very religious, he had an inkling that the world was round and decided to prove this by sailing west. This would also - he thought - help his Spanish masters to an easier route to India and Asia.



Admiral of the High Seas

15th century Europeans were not aware of the American continents and maps were not reliable. King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain - with the promise of gold, spices and silk from the Far East - eventually gave him ships and a crew. He set sail in 1492. He was also determined to spread Christianity. In return, Columbus would be given the title "Admiral of the Ocean Seas."

The ships would cover about 150 miles a day. His crews would use a compass for direction and a knotted line (with a weight attached at the end) to measure speed. A sailor counted how many knots were let off the reel in set amounts of time and this would help to give a rough estimate of the distance travelled. Columbus - with his considerable experience - relied on 'dead reckoning' instead, meaning he used his experience, guesswork and observations to determine his ships' positions.

The routes he took to and from his discovered lands are ones we still use; his use of the Atlantic Canary Current was a sign of his genius.

Although his discovery of new lands led to the nearly complete destruction of the people of those lands, and their environment, Columbus appreciated the beauty of the places he discovered. 'Before me', he said, as he surveyed the islands of the Caribbean '...is the bounty of God's handiwork'.

Christopher Columbus opened up new worlds to Europe, and it is hard to overstate the significance of these discoveries and their impact today. The exchange of flora and fauna, of human beings and their cultures has left a mark on us today. During the Age of Discovery western Europeans acquired the ability to exchange information with nearly all parts of the world.

As one of the great pioneers of the age, Columbus deserves recognition for the intellectual transformation that occurred during the Renaissance. As a result of his endeavours, the modern age was ushered in, and the world would never be the same again.