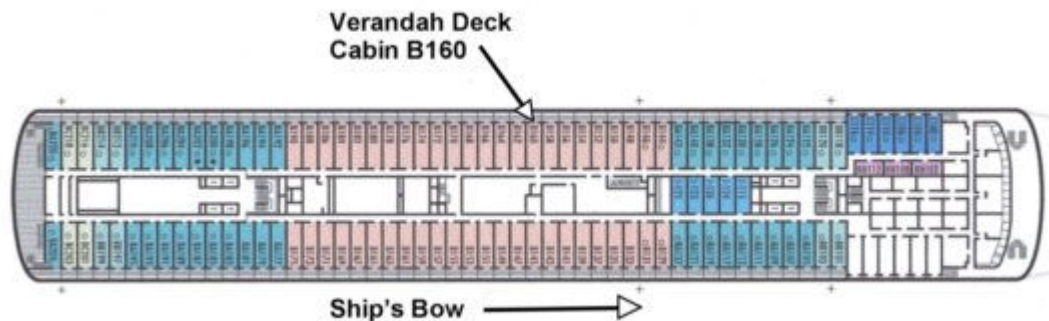


Introduction:

This is a journal of Orlin and Barbara Stansfield describing the preparation and personal experiences for the 35-Day Voyage of the Vikings on the Holland America Lines ms Maasdam in 2009.

Deciding to Go: Unlike our previous cruises the decision to sign up for the Holland America Lines 2009 Voyage of the Vikings was made in an instant. This rapid decision was triggered when we got an email notification that a nice stateroom could be had for a substantial discount relative to prior numbers we had seen. We became aware of the Voyage of the Viking itinerary back in 2007 and had signed up for the 2008 cruise. Because of a number of factors we later dropped out of that cruise but we still harbored a desire to make the journey. The bad economic times currently in play and associated lower number of cruise passengers had created an opportunity that we couldn't pass up.

Signing up for the 35 Day Voyage of the Vikings: On May sixth we visited our travel agent Wanda Moretz to book the cruise in her AAA East Tennessee office. We will be cruising on the Motor Ship (ms) Maasdam which is named for the Maas River in the Netherlands. Wanda initially signed us up a Ocean View stateroom on the Lower Promenade Deck. The Lower Promenade Deck (#5) is where it is possible to do some walking on the nice teakwood deck while at sea. However, we later succumbed to marketing ploys offered by Holland America and Wanda upgraded us to a verandah suite on the Verandah Deck (#6). Our cabin (B160) will be portside on deck 6 and a about in the middle of the ship as shown in the deck 6 plan below.



Cruise Itinerary: There was a lot to like about the 35 day Voyage of the Vikings itinerary. For one thing it included more ports than the 2008 35 day cruise. We were amazed that stops at six ports in Iceland were scheduled. We didn't know there were that many cities in Iceland. In addition there were two ports in Greenland and 5 in the British Isles among others. The fact that it began and ended in Boston was also a plus because that would make airline travel to and from our home in East Tennessee less of a hassle than some of the longer trips we have taken. Speaking of East Tennessee, we were looking forward to replacing the heat and humidity of the typical summer with the cool breezes of the north Atlantic. Here is a map showing our ports of call.



A table showing the detailed schedule for the ports of call is shown below.

2009 Voyage of the Vikings Itinerary
Holland America Lines – ms Maasdam

Day	Date	Port	Arrive	Depart
0	July 25	Boston, Massachusetts		05:00 PM
1	July 26	At Sea		
2	July 27	Iles de la Madeleine, Quebec ^{TR}	09:00 AM	06:00 PM
3	July 28	Bonne Bay, Newfoundland ^{TR}	08:00 AM	05:00 PM
4	July 29	Red Bay, Labrador, Canada ^{TR}	08:00 AM	04:00 PM
5	July 30	At Sea		
6	July 31	Nanortalik, Greenland ^{TR}	08:00 AM	05:00 PM
7	August 1	At Sea		
8	August 2	At Sea		
9	August 3	Isafjord, Iceland	08:00 AM	05:00 PM
10	August 4	Akureyri, Iceland	08:00 AM	11:00 PM
11	August 5	Husavik, Iceland ^{TR}	08:00 AM	05:00 PM
12	August 6	Seydisfjordur Iceland ^{TR}	08:00 AM	05:00 PM
13	August 7	At Sea		
14	August 8	Invergordon, Scotland	07:00 AM	06:00 PM
15	August 9	S Queensferry (Edinburgh), Scotland ^{TR}	07:00 AM	11:59 PM
16	August 10	At Sea		
17	August 11	Rotterdam, The Netherlands	07:00 AM	05:00 PM
18	August 12	At Sea		
19	August 13	Dunmore East, Waterford, Ire	08:00 AM	06:00 PM
20	August 14	Liverpool, England, UK	08:00 AM	06:00 PM
21	August 15	Greenock (Glasgow), Scotland	08:00 AM	05:00 PM
22	August 16	At Sea		
23	August 17	Torshavn, Faroe Islands, Denmark	08:00 AM	05:00 PM
24	August 18	Djupivogur, Iceland	10:00 AM	06:00 PM
25	August 19	Reykjavik, Iceland ^{ON}	02:00 PM	
26	August 20	Reykjavik, Iceland		06:00 PM
27	August 21	At Sea		
28	August 22	At Sea		
29	August 23	Qaqortoq, Greenland ^{TR}	08:00 AM	05:00 PM
30	August 24	At Sea		
31	August 25	St Anthony, Newfoundland ^{TR}	08:00 AM	03:00 PM
32	August 26	St.Johns,Canada	08:00 AM	05:00 PM
33	August 27	St Pierre, France	08:00 AM	04:00 PM
34	August 28	At Sea		
35	August 29	Boston, Massachusetts	07:00 AM	

Port Notes:

^{TR} TENDER REQUIRED

^{ON} OVERNIGHT

Viking Voyage Background: Since we are going to be embarking on cruise that retraces the Voyage of the Vikings it seemed like a good idea to get some background information about those early North Atlantic adventurers. What follows is a brief summary of what we learned from a few hours of searching the Internet and reading some printed literature.

Back in the 1940s when we were learning our grade school history lessons the dogma was that Christopher Columbus “discovered America” in 1492. We celebrated Christopher Columbus Day like all good Americans. Then in the 1950s we started to hear rumors that maybe some people from Scandinavia had come across the Atlantic and “discovered America” many years before Columbus. We brushed off those improbable rumors and went on with our lives. Over the decades since then there has been a wealth of archeological evidence that indeed there were Vikings that used their 50 to 70 foot long shallow draft boats to travel the oceans and rivers of Europe, Russia and the Middle East. They did most of this in a two hundred year period from about 800 to 1000 A.D. At the peak of this activity they established settlements in Vinland (now Newfoundland, Canada) and Greenland around the year 1000 A.D. The map below shows the extent of the Viking exploration with the year of initial contact at various locations noted in the red and yellow boxes. The territories they conquered and occupied are shown in bright green.



In most of the places contacted by Vikings there were established cultures with which they alternately engaged in commercial trading activity and warfare. Eventually the sheer numbers of opposing people in these locations overcame the Vikings who proceeded to intermarry and add their DNA to the local population. However, the Viking foray into Greenland and Newfoundland around 1000A.D. and disappearance after about a 350 year stay is an enigma that is fascinating and explains part of the attraction of the "Voyage of the Vikings" cruise itinerary as shown above.

From the standpoint of the mysterious disappearance of the Vikings three interesting spots on the cruise itinerary are St. Anthony (L'Anse aux Meadows site) in Newfoundland and the Nanortalik and Qaqortoq sites in Greenland. The other stops in Iceland, Torshavn, Ireland and Scotland also have some interesting Viking heritage but the focus of this background study was the story behind the Viking experience in Newfoundland and Greenland. We had two basic questions: (1) Why did they come? and (2) Why did they leave or perish?

There are plenty of sources for Viking lore but for this quick-and-dirty study we used the following three references:

- (1) "Collapse – How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed" by Jared Diamond (2003).
- (2) The Internet website: http://www.geocraft.com/WVFossils/ice_ages.html#anchor29241 .
- (3) The Internet website: http://www.geocraft.com/WVFossils/Reference_Docs/NYT-vikings_greenland/NYT-vikings_greenland.html ,

In the following text these sources will be designated References 1, 2, and 3 respectively.

According to Reference 1, the 800 to 900 A.D. intrusion of Vikings into Europe, Russia and Middle East, as portrayed in the Viking Territories and Voyages map above, was made possible by the fact that Vikings had developed boats that permitted long ocean voyages as well as shallow river navigation. The capability for water travel had been developed over thousands of years because of the difficulty in traveling by land in Scandinavia over the steep mountains and sea coasts that were laced with fiords penetrating deep inland. In earlier times the Viking ships were powered only by oars but contact with Mediterranean seafarers resulted in the Vikings adopting sails for their boats. The sails greatly extended the reach of the Viking voyages.

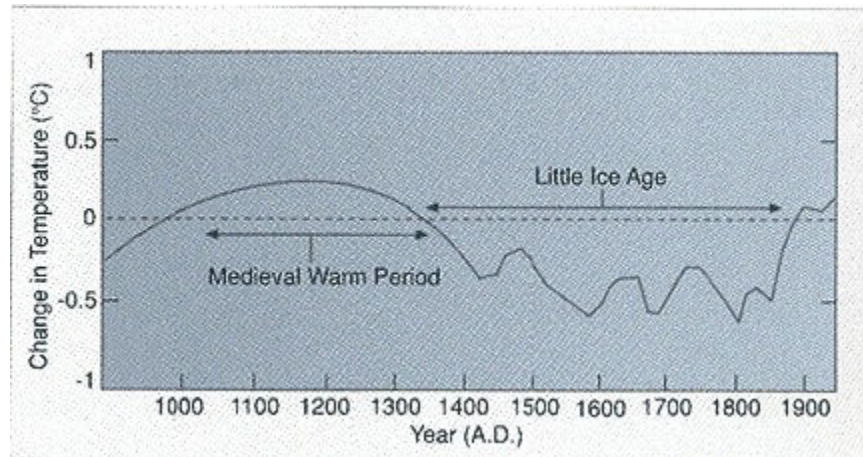
Scandinavia, being far from the influence of Greece, Rome and Middle Eastern civilizations was a backwater of Europe during the middle ages. However, Scandinavia had an abundance of furs from forest animals, seals, and beeswax prized as luxury imports in the rest of Europe. These commercial products provided the initial driving force for Viking trading ventures in distant lands. Once the Vikings had discovered rich customers the more aggressive among them turned to raiding and stealing the wealth that they saw. Chiefs and petty kings in what is now Norway and Sweden competed with each other to see who could bring home the most booty. The lucrative raiding trips led the Vikings to discover new lands for exploitation.

The onset of the Viking raiding tradition is dated in Reference 1 at about 800A.D when they attacked a wealthy monastery on an island off the northeast coast of England. The early Vikings had adopted pagan religious beliefs so when raiding Christian settlements they showed no deference to Christian churches or officials. They slaughtered people and took treasure from churches or peasants where ever they found it. This behavior explains the terror that people felt when the Vikings arrived.

A hard fact is that land suitable for farming and providing food was limited by the mountainous terrain to about 3% of the Scandinavian landscape. Even though the iron plow and other improved farming methods were imported into Scandinavia the population was outgrowing the availability of food. The resulting famine, discontent and social strife in the 800 to 1000 A.D.

time period provided pressure to cause desperate and adventuresome people to move to less populated shores.

Fortunately, the world was undergoing one of the periodic warming cycles. The following graph from Reference 2 shows how global temperatures have cycled over the last 1000 years. At the time the Vikings were pushing out from Scandinavia around 800 to 1000 A.D. the Medieval Warm Period was starting and the Southern shores of Greenland were exposed by retreating glaciers (we note that the current global temperatures during our cruise are similar to those that may have existed at the time of the Vikings arrival in Greenland).



Given these population pressures and climatic conditions the Vikings undertook an effort to transport some of their people to Greenland where they set up farming communities. They imported cows, pigs, and goats from Scandinavia for their farms in Greenland so that the lifestyle and culture of their homeland was maintained. About 250 to 200 years later The Viking population in Greenland probably peaked at 5000 people. When the Vikings arrived there were no native people but after they had been in Greenland for a couple hundred years some Inuit (Eskimo) people started to migrate down from the north.

The Vikings continued to push further west and in about 1000 A.D. they briefly established a settlement at the L'Anse aux Meadows site in Newfoundland. However, the natives there were numerous and very aggressive so the Vikings soon abandoned that colony.

It was instructive to learn from Reference 1 that the Viking settlements in Greenland existed for about 350 years. However, by about 1350 A.D. the last of the settlers had either died or returned west to countries like Iceland or the Faeroe Islands. While the Viking Greenland colony appeared to eventually fail they persevered in the face of very harsh conditions for a long time. Some perspective is provided by comparing their 350 years in Greenland with the similar time span between Pilgrims landing at Plymouth Rock in America (1620) and our current times.

According to Jared Diamond in Reference 1 there were several reasons for the ultimate failure of the Viking settlements in Greenland.

-First of all there was the gradual cooling of the climate as the Medieval Warm Period came to an end. Check out the Temperature Cycle graph above showing the decline in temperatures in

the mid 1300s. The cooling trend caused the crops to fail so that some livestock and farmers starved and the society was highly stressed.

-Secondly, the importation of iron for knives and other tools used in farming was severely restricted by the long distances from sources in Iceland or Europe. Commerce with people to the East had nearly ceased. The Greenland Vikings were forced into using whale and other animal bones to make cutting tools which were inefficient and slowed farm production. Reference 3 contains another reason for the drop-off in commerce with Europe. Europe's trade with Africa for ivory was becoming easier in the 1300s, allowing comparatively inexpensive African elephant tusks to compete with Greenland's walrus tusks, the Viking colony's main item of trade.

-Third, the Vikings had severely abused the environment by grazing cattle on the thin grass land. They also cut turf from the soil to construct houses and barns. The plant life was very slow to replace itself in the cold climate so that the rich topsoil soon blew into the fiords or ocean. The loss of topsoil further reduced the production of food. A related problem was that the Vikings harvested all the trees that existed when they arrived. The trees did not grow rapidly as in their homeland so they were soon without wood that could be used for construction of ships or houses. The lack of material for ships helps to explain the breakdown in commerce between Greenland Vikings and more stable cultures in the East.

-Fourth, in the third century of Viking existence in Greenland the Inuit (Eskimo) people moved down from the north of Greenland and began to make contact with them. The Vikings did not welcome or form alliances with these native people who had coped with the Arctic environment for thousands of years. The Vikings did not adopt the hunting and fishing technology used by the Inuit to harvest food from the ocean but clung to their imported Scandinavian lifestyle.

-Fifth, Reference 3 suggests another, rather macabre, contributor to the abandonment of the Viking settlements in Greenland. Between 1347 and 1350, the Black Death plague wiped out about one-third of Europe's population. This demographic implosion lured people from the periphery of the medieval world, researchers say, offering new economic opportunities in Europe's depopulated heartland. Faced with the climactic cooling, the Vikings in Greenland had the survival choice of "going native" and living like Eskimos, or moving to Iceland or Scandinavia, where the plague had relieved population pressures and they could maintain their European lifestyle. In view of the lack of boats and difficulty of travel this suggested cause of the Viking disappearance does not seem very significant.

Reference 3 also offers this additional intriguing comment. Greenland's last Viking probably retreated to Iceland. Today, some historians speculate that Columbus heard accounts of North America from Icelandic sailors when he sailed near Iceland in the 1480's. Dr. Fitzhugh, the Smithsonian curator of the Viking exhibit, said, "The idea is that Columbus had been in the region of Iceland before deciding to go in search of North America."

So this is our best guess as to why the Vikings came to Greenland and Newfoundland and why they left.

