



## ***Saga Readings***

### ***III/ Leif Eriksson Discovers Vinland (ca. A.D. 1000)***

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There was now much talk about voyages of discovery. Leif, son of Erik the Red of Brattahlid, went to see Bjarni Herjolfsson, bought his ship from him, and found her a crew, so that they were thirty-five all told. Leif invited Erik his father to lead this expedition too, but Erik begged off rather, reckoning he was now getting on in years, and was less able to stand the rigours of hard times at sea than he used to be. Leif argued that of all their family he would still command the best luck, so Erik gave way to him, and once they were ready for their voyage came riding from home. When he had only a short way to cover to the ship, the horse he was riding on stumbled, Erik fell off and damaged his foot. "It is not my destiny," said Erik then, "to discover more lands than this we are now living in. Nor may we continue further this time all together." Erik returned home to Brattahlid, but Leif rode on to the ship and his comrades with him, thirty-five of them all told. There was a German on the expedition named Tyrker.

They now prepared their ship and sailed out to sea once they were ready, and they lighted on that land first which Bjarni and his people had lighted on last. They sailed to land there, cast anchor, and put off a boat, then went ashore, and could see no grass there. The background was all great glaciers, and right up to the glaciers from the sea as it were a single slab of rock. The land impressed them as barren and useless. "At last," said Leif, "it has not happened to us as to Bjarni over this land, that we failed to get ourselves ashore. I shall now give the land a name, and call it Helluland, Flatstone Land." After which they returned to the ship

After that they sailed out to sea and lighted on another land. This time too they sailed to land, cast anchor, then put off a boat and went ashore. The country was flat and covered with forest, with extensive white sands wherever they went, and shelving gently to the sea. "This land," said Leif, "shall be given a name in accordance with its nature, and be called Markland, Wood Land." After which they got back down to the ship as fast as they could.

From there they now sailed out to sea with a northeast wind and were at sea two days before catching sight of land. They sailed to land, reaching an island which lay north of it, where they went ashore and looked about them in fine weather, and found that there was dew on the grass, whereupon it happened to them that they set their hands to the dew, then carried it to their mouths and thought that they had never known anything so sweet at that was. After this they returned to their ship and sailed into a sound which lay between the island and the cape projecting north from the land itself. They made headway west around the cape. There were big shallows there at low water; their ship went aground, and it was a long way to look to get sight of the sea from the ship. But they were so curious to get ashore they had no mind to wait for the tide to rise under their ship, but went hurrying off to land where a river flowed out of a lake. Then, as soon as the tide rose under their ship, they took their boat, rowed back to her, and brought her up into the river, and so to it the lake, where they cast anchor, carried their skin sleeping-



bags off board, and built themselves booths. Later they decided to winter there and built big houses.

There was no lack of salmon there in river or lake, and salmon bigger than they had ever seen before. The nature of the land was so choice, it seemed to them that none of the cattle would require fodder for the winter. No frost came during the winter, and the grass was hardly withered. Day and night were of a more equal length there than in Greenland or Iceland. On the shortest day of winter the sun was visible in the middle of the afternoon as well as at breakfast time.

Once they had finished their house-building Leif made an announcement to his comrades. "I intend to have our company divided now in two, and get the land explored. Half our band shall remain here at the hall, and the other half reconnoiter the countryside – yet go no further than they can get back home in the evening, and not get separated." So for a while that is what they did, Leif going off with them or remaining in camp by turns. Leif was big and strong, of striking appearance, shrewd, and in every respect a temperate, fair-dealing man.

One evening it turned out that a man of their company was missing. This was Tyrker the German. Leif was greatly put out by this, for Tyrker had lived a long while with him and his father, and had shown great affection for Leif as a child. Leif gave his shipmates the rough edge of his tongue, then turned out to go an look for him, taking a dozen men with him. But when they had got only a short way from the hall there was Tyrker coming to meet them. His welcome was a joyous one. Leif could see at once that his foster father was in fine fettle. He was a man of bulging forehead, rolling eyes, and an insignificant little face, short and not so much to look at, but handy in all sorts of crafts.

"Why are you so late, foster-father," Leif asked him, "and parted this way from your companions?"

By way of a start Tyrkir held forth a long while in German, rolling his eyes all ways, and pulling faces. They had no notion what he was talking about. Then after a while he spoke in Norse. "I went no great way further than you, yet I have a real novelty to report. I have found vines and grapes."

"Is that the truth, foster-father?" Leif asked.

"Of course it's the truth," he replied. "I was born where wine and grapes are no rarity."

They slept overnight, then in the morning Leif made this announcement to his crew. "We now have two jobs to get on with, and on alternate days must gather grapes or cut vines and fell timber, so as to provide a cargo of such things for my ship." They acted upon these orders advice, and report has it that their towboat was filled with grapes. A full ship's cargo was cut, and in the spring they made ready and sailed away. Leif gave the land a name in accordance with the good things they found in it, calling it Vinland, Wineland; after which they sailed out to sea and had a good wind till they sighted Greenland and its mountains under their glaciers.



SOURCE: *The Greenlanders' Saga*  
(Jones, 1986: 191-194)

