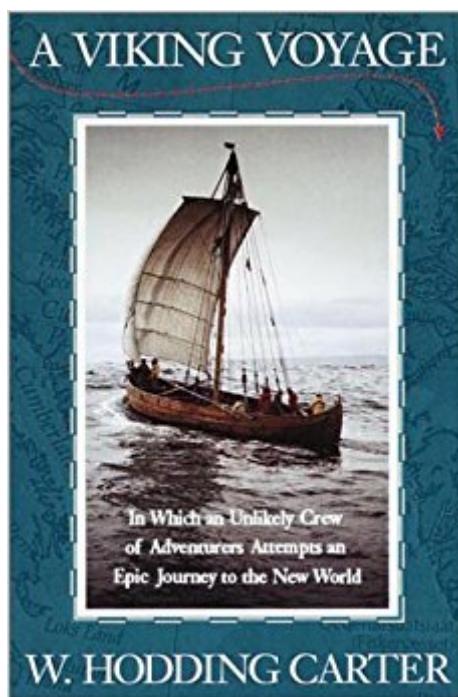


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# A Viking Voyage: In Which An Unlikely Crew Of Adventurers Attempts An Epic Journey To The New World



## Synopsis

W. Hodding Carter admits he cannot sail a Sunfish, hates to be cold, and panics when he's lost. So why did Carter devote three years of his adult life, not to mention a small fortune, to dodging polar bears and icebergs on an open-decked wooden ship resembling an over-sized canoe? He wanted to be a Viking. Obsessed since childhood with Leif Eriksson and his triumphant voyage a thousand years ago from Greenland to North America, Carter hatched the admittedly crazy idea of reenacting Erikson's voyage in a replica of the precarious square-rigged Viking cargo ship known as a knarr. Never mind that he had a wife, twin daughters, and another baby on the way. Carter was going to make it happen. This enthralling, inspiring, occasionally hair-raising, and genuinely hilarious book is the account of how he pulled it off. With funding from Lands' End and expertise gleaned from Viking enthusiasts all over the world, Carter had the knarr constructed by an eccentric boat builder on a small Maine island. He then arranged to have the Snorri, as he dubbed the craft, shipped to the southern tip of Greenland, where he and his grab-bag crew of eleven would embark in midsummer. The departure was inauspicious, to say the least: for two solid weeks, the Snorri tacked back and forth in the windy fjord by Erik the Red's ancient farm, covering a grand total of eighty miles. Although that first attempt ended in defeat in the middle of the Davis Strait, Carter, his prudent red-haired captain, and their crew were not about to surrender. The next summer, in even worse weather, the Snorri was back on course and these latter-day Vikings were ready to handle anything Mother Nature dished out atop the icy, open sea. Well, almost anything . . . By turns thrilling and slapstick, sublime and outrageous, *A Viking Voyage* is an unforgettable adventure story that will take you to the heart of the most magnificent, unspoiled territory on earth, and even deeper, to the heart of a journey like no other. A celebration of the people and places Carter visits and a treasure-trove of fascinating Viking lore, this is a mesmerizing story of friendship and teamwork--and of accomplishing a goal that once seemed impossible.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The author himself describes his story as a tale of "quixotic idiocy, passion, determination, frightening beauty, love, loss, enlightenment, failure, and redemption...." Initially, only the idiocy is apparent. On a whim, Carter decides to reenact the voyage of Viking Leif Ericson, who, in the year 1000, sailed his knarr (a Viking longboat) from Greenland to a land he called "Vinland." But why should anyone care? Because Vinland, many experts believe, was located somewhere on the northeast coast of North America, meaning that Ericson beat Columbus to the New World by nearly 500 years. To realize his dream voyage, Carter endures an almost comical assortment of trials. First, he must find someone to build, pay for, and help sail the boat. Then, he and his novice crew must sail it from Greenland to North America, struggling with the arctic cold, 1,000-year-old technology, and their own ineptitude. Carter describes their exploits with equal parts humor and terror. Fighting frostbite, he muses, Like Robert Peary, I was going to lose my toes. Unlike him, I would whine and scream until the end. And I certainly would not be able to claim I discovered the North Pole or anything at all beyond learning that Viking boats were not meant to sail windward in anything beyond a duck pond. For the landlubber, it's difficult to fathom why even the most die-hard Viking fanatics would go to such dangerous lengths to emulate their Norse heroes. Carter's account renders their passion more understandable, revealing little-known gems of Viking history and myth, and garnishing them with thrills and triumphs from his own adventures. Readers may not be inspired to rush out and build their own knarr, but they will find that Carter makes good on his introductory boast, wrenching new adventure from a world with seemingly no unexplored territory. --Andrew Nieland

Travel writing has churned up a new subset: the Ironic Adventure, in which the protagonist, unlike traditional explorers, is unskilled, untrained and traveling on a whim. In this engaging but uneven adventure, self-proclaimed "chicken" Carter repeats the successful formula of his previous book, Westward Whoa, in which he retraced the steps of Lewis and Clark. This time he goes back over the voyage Leif Eriksson made from Greenland to the New World. Accompanied by a motley crew of friends (all except two have no previous sailing experience), Carter decides to accomplish his

journey on a reproduction of a Viking "knarr" or cargo ship. Initially budgeted for \$3,000, Carter's adventure becomes a half-million-dollar production, funded by the Lands' End clothing company. The most interesting parts of the book come before the ship ever sets sail, as Carter desperately tries to meet his deadline for building the knarr, hampered by unfriendly Norse scholars and aided by expert craftsmen. After he sets sail, the ship breaks down, and Carter must rouse support for a second attempt, which ultimately succeeds. This second part is precisely written, with careful as well as humorous details of sailing life. But the "ironic" approach here trivializes Carter's effort; at times it's hard to give him the credit due for succeeding in such a wild trip because his initial impetus was nothing more than a lark, and because his writing is undercut by his continuing attitude of "I can't believe we are doing this!" 5-city author tour. (May) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Mr Carter's account of sailing the North Atlantic is both humorous and illuminating. He presents a wonderful picture of the trials and successes of the Viking sailor. A good read.

I first became acquainted with the author and his quest from the earliest published excerpts in the Land's End catalogs. Crossing the ice choked Davis Straight in an open Norse boat is no easy feat and such a story well told could be a great book. Somehow the author missed the boat in this book. The development of the individual crew members never really does more than scratch the surface. The maps and photos are interesting, yet the book does not sustain one's interest. I had earlier read and highly recommend Tim Severin's *The Brendan Voyage*. It's the true story of the crossing of the North Atlantic in a replica leather boat in the effort to recreate the ancient Irish monks journeys from Ireland to North America.

A wonderful story of a crew, of little actual seafaring experience, overcoming the odds, building a Viking knorr and sailing it from Greenland to North America. A great story of improvisation when needed and overcoming both natural and human obstacles.

To some, Americans are best exemplified as a people "blundering into success". This book is certain to reinforce that view. Carter relates the assembling of an "unlikely crew" to duplicate a "Viking" voyage from Greenland to North America. The voyage required two attempts [as you learn from the map preceding the text], and succeeded only after hilarious and desperate adventures. But it did succeed. Carter's account is intensely personal as he explains his motives to duplicate the "Viking" [apparently Carter was never taught the word "Norse"] voyages leading to the "Vinland"

landings. Long debated, "Vinland" became a real place with the revelation of a Norse settlement at L'Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland-Labrador in the 1960s. With Norse voyages to "Vinland" recorded in 1000 CE, Carter's target date of exactly one millennium later seemed appropriate. The only hitches were that Carter didn't know how to sail, didn't know anything about the Norse, their history, their boatbuilding techniques or their navigation methods. A shaky start compounded by a crew of similar qualifications. During the voyages, personality clashes make their inevitable appearance. Although discussions about the route to follow are understandable, the debate over toilet paper use seems almost a diversion. The primary issue of discussion is the rudder - it's shape, use and mounting. That question remains fundamental since the rudder determines as much as the winds which track is best. By the time you close the final page of this book, it's difficult to avoid feeling emotionally soiled. Carter reaches his thirty-sixth birthday on this voyage. The writing, however, is more in line with that of a sixteen-year old. Carter spends so much time at whingeing about missing his family, self-abasement over his inadequacies as a "leader", recounting the losses of wives and girlfriends by his mates, that reaching the Newfoundland coast seems anticlimactic. That this inept and mismatched team survived a journey that once took countless lives is hardly reassuring. If ever the gods were arbitrary in their machinations, they seemed to have proved it here. That an amateur crew survived an expedition against all odds is a mildly entertaining read, but hardly an inspirational one. [stephen a. haines - Ottawa, Canada]

As one directly involved in publicizing the second - and triumphant - voyage of the Snorri, and privileged enough to witness in person, its arrival on the shores of L'Anse aux Meadows, I found the book captivating and could not read it fast enough! Hodding Carter paints an original and incredibly entertaining picture of the voyage and managed to keep me in suspense the entire time - even though I already knew the outcome! I was riveted by Hodding's vivid descriptions of the crew's first nights at sea, and touched by his words of devotion to his wife and children. However, I am a little disappointed that the book does not contain any color pictures of the Snorri at sail or the landing at L'Anse aux Meadows (where hundreds of local Newfoundlanders gathered to greet the conquering crew). Sounds nitpicky, but to see the Snorri and crew at full sail was awe inspiring -- almost relegating Hodding and crew to second billing! Nonetheless, the book was skillfully written and thoughtfully assembled. The only question I am left with is, how in the world was Hodding Carter able to maintain such a detailed account of the journey considering the Arctic conditions?

Hodding Carter's tale of his adventures in building and sailing an "authentic" replica of a viking knarr

is a wonderful story of how all one needs for adventure is passion and friends. The very best part of this book is that it truly makes you believe that you could have done it yourself or at least that you can make your own crazy dream come true. Too often, the travel adventure stories we read are written by men with more means or skills than the average man can muster. Hodding Carter had no significant sailing skills or money yet he raised over \$500,000 and with his passion and research put together a rag-tag group of viking wannabes and assembled a team committed to building their boat and reliving as best possible a true viking voyage. Carter's writing style is quite funny and he in fact makes fun of himself at pretty much every opportunity. His dedication to making the knarr, the voyage, and even his attire as historically accurate is truly admirable and makes for a wonderful read.

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