

Brendan's Story

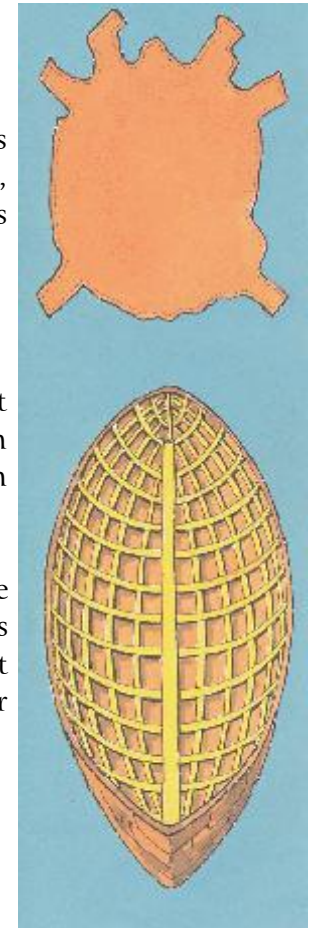
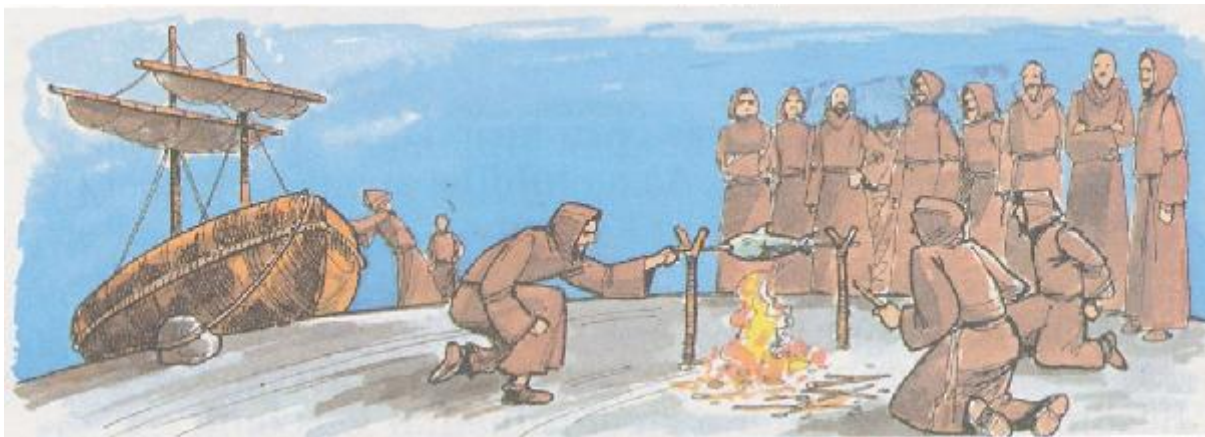
Footprints 3, CJ Fallon, 1987, no ISBN, 47-55

It is said that Brendan was born near Tralee in Co. Kerry around the year 500 AD. As a child he spent a number of years in St. Ita's convent in Killeedy, Co. Limerick. After he became a monk, he founded a number of monasteries. One was at Ardfert in Co. Kerry, close to where he was born. He also founded a monastery at Clonfert in Co. Galway. Hundreds of years later a great cathedral was built at Clonfert.

Brendan's Voyage

Brendan had often heard of a land which was called the 'Promised Land of the Saints'. This land was supposed to lie far to the west of Ireland. Brendan decided to set sail to see if he could find this land. He and a number of monks built a boat. The boat had an oak frame and was covered in oxhides. When the boat was finished they were ready to set off on the voyage. They loaded enough supplies to last for forty days. After many farewells, they set sail on their great adventure.

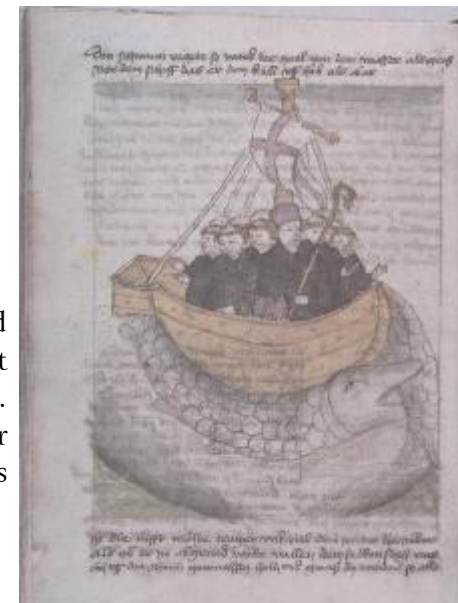
The voyage lasted a long time. In some lonely places they found groups of Irish monks. In other places friendly inhabitants gave them food for their journey. They saw strange sights. There were mountains which blew out smoke and fire. They saw white pillars floating in the sea. One strange tale tells us that the monks landed on a small island where nothing grew. They built a fire and set about their cooking. Before long however, the island began to shake and move. The monks had scarcely got to their boat when their 'island' headed off into the ocean. It was no island. Can you guess what it was?



This is part of an old manuscript written about 1400.

It tells the story of the voyage of Brendan. Study the manuscript carefully and answer these questions.

1. Do you think the person who drew this picture had been on the voyage with Brendan? Why do you say so?
2. Do you think that the creature in the picture looks like a whale?
3. Read about whales in your encyclopaedia. In what ways are whales different from fish?



The Promised Land of the Saints

The legend tells us that at long last Brendan and his friends reached the land which was known as the 'Promised Land of the Saints'. We know it today as North America. They spent forty days exploring this land, finally reaching a great river which they did not cross. They met a young man who told them that God did not wish them to travel any further. They collected samples of fruit and precious stones and made their way back to their boat. They then set sail and after another long voyage they arrived in Ireland. There they told the other monks of their adventures and in later times this story was written down.

The Brendan Tapestry

This is a picture of a tapestry which tells the story of Brendan's voyage. There are twenty-four different pictures in the tapestry. You should begin reading the tapestry at the bottom left-hand corner. See if you can find the sections which show the items listed below. When you have found a section, use the key to find its number.

People bringing stores onto the boat.

People waving farewell to the monks.

Casks, waterskins and other supplies for the journey.

Scenes from early Irish life:

A harper.

A piper.

A warrior on horseback.

A huntsman.

A chariot.

The burial of one of the travellers at sea.

Inhabitants of the land which Brendan visited.

The young man who directed Brendan home.

Brendan's boat.

	Key	6	12	18	24
A harper.		5	11	17	23
A piper.		4	10	16	22
A warrior on horseback.		3	9	15	21
A huntsman.		2	8	14	20
A chariot.		1	7	13	19



The Legend Lives On

Down through the years Brendan has been called 'Brendan the Navigator'. A navigator is a person who knows how to steer a boat at sea. Brendan is also remembered as the patron saint of the diocese of Clonfert. It is said that he spent some of his life in west Kerry and many places there have names which remind us of him.

To find out.

Find the name of a mountain in Co. Kerry called after St. Brendan.

We do not know how long after the death of Brendan the story about his voyage was written. We do not know whether all the things which were written in the story actually happened to Brendan. However we do know that in the Middle Ages, the story of Brendan's voyage was popular all over Europe. It was translated into many European languages. It is said that Christopher Columbus heard the story before he set sail on his voyages of exploration.

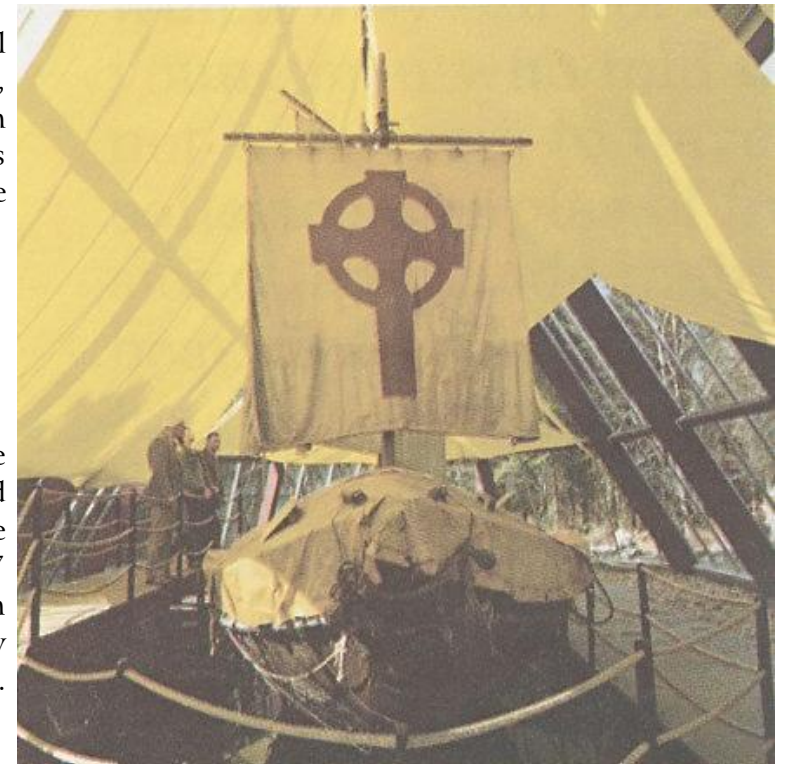
Could It Be Done?

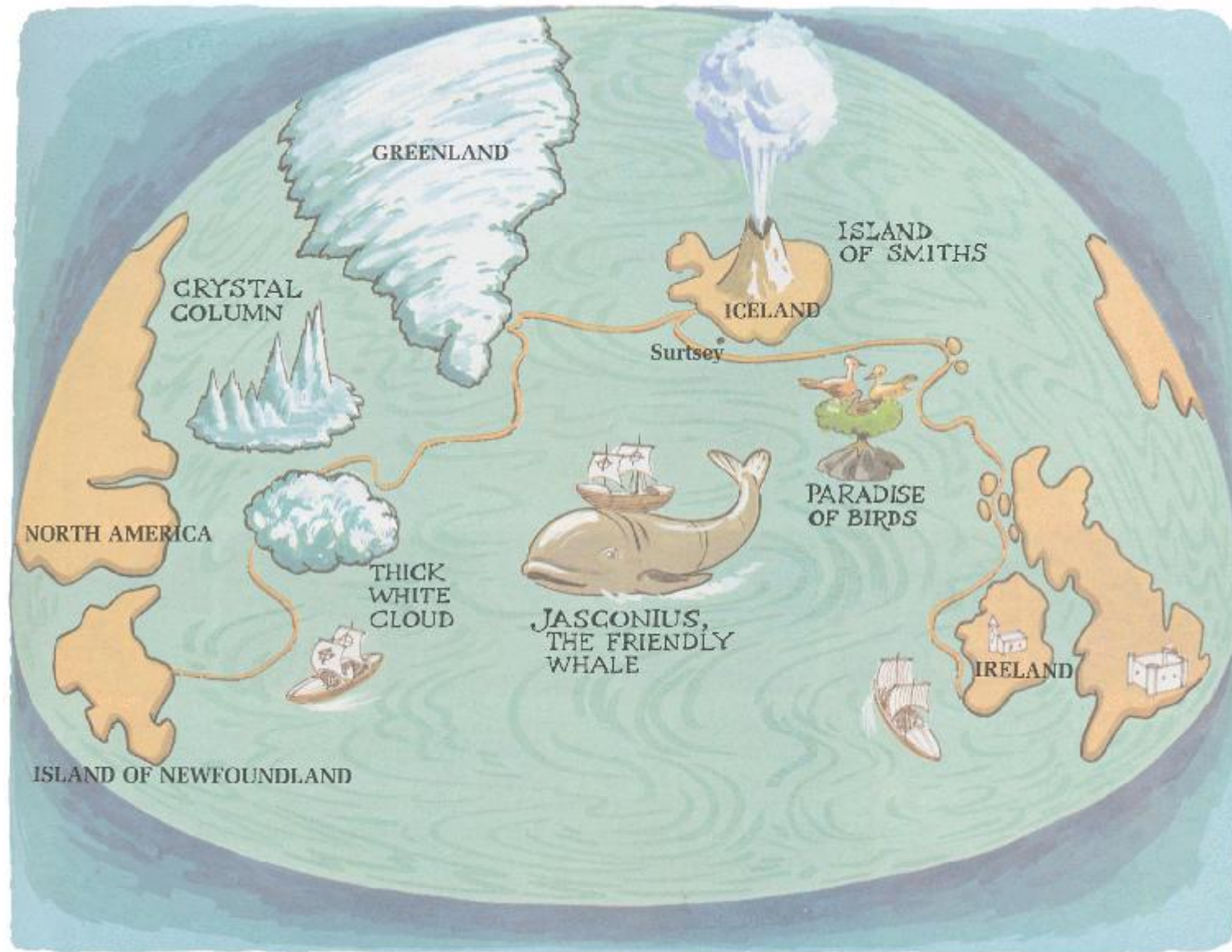
For many years people did not believe that Irish monks sailing in boats covered with animal hides could have managed to cross a great ocean. But one man believed that it was possible, using boats like the currachs still used along the west coast of Ireland. His name was Tim Severin. He studied the old manuscripts which told the story of Brendan. Finally he built his own boat which he called the Brendan. He used only those materials which were available to the early Irish monks.

This boat is now on display at Craggaunowen in Co. Clare.
Why do you think Tim Severin called his boat the *Brendan*?

Severin's Voyage

Severin and his crew set out on their dangerous and difficult journey on May 17, 1976. Some of the sights which they saw reminded them of the Brendan story. They saw an island which had been formed by a volcano. They also saw whales. Their boat travelled through icy seas. Once it was almost sunk, when the skin covers were cut by a passing iceberg. Finally on June 26, 1977 the voyage of the Brendan came to an end when Tim Severin and his crew landed in Newfoundland off the coast of Canada. He had proved what he had believed all along. Early Irish monks could have sailed in their small skin-covered boats right across the Atlantic Ocean.





This map shows the voyage of Tim Severin's boat from Ireland to Newfoundland. On it you will see some of the places mentioned in the old legend. Do you think the old story could be true?

To find out.

In recent years a number of brave sailors, like Tim Severin, have set out on long voyages. They have followed the footsteps of sailors who lived thousands of years ago. See what you can find out about these voyages.

- (a) The voyage of the Kon-tiki
- (b) Tim Severin's voyage in 1985 following the legend of Jason and the Golden Fleece

To do.

1. On the map you will see an island called Surtsey. It is close to the coast of Iceland. Read about the birth of this island in *Treasure Seekers* (Rainbow Reading Programme).
2. These six pictures tell the story of the voyage of the Brendan. In your copybook match the pictures to the descriptions.



Picture () shows the boat being built.

Picture () shows the Brendan being launched.

Picture () shows a storm at sea.

Picture () shows the Brendan leaving the coast of Iceland.

Picture () shows the Brendan approaching the coast of Newfoundland.

Picture () is of the Brendan landing on the shore of Newfoundland.

3. Listen to the music of *The Brendan Voyage* by Shaun Davey. At times, the music makes the sounds of the animals and birds seen and heard on the voyage. Can you guess which ones? At other times the music gives an idea of some of the places seen and of some of the adventures which the crew of the Brendan experienced. What do you hear described in the music?

Answer these questions.

1. In what year did Christopher Columbus land in America?
2. Name the Viking sailor who crossed the Atlantic in the tenth century.
3. Where was St. Brendan born?
4. By what name do we know the 'Promised Land of the Saints'?
5. What name did Tim Severin give to his boat? .
6. In what year did Tim Severin reach Newfoundland in his skin boat?

Class history-line.

Birth of
St Brendan

500 AD approx

St Brendan's voyage
to the 'Promised
Land of the Saints'
550 AD approx

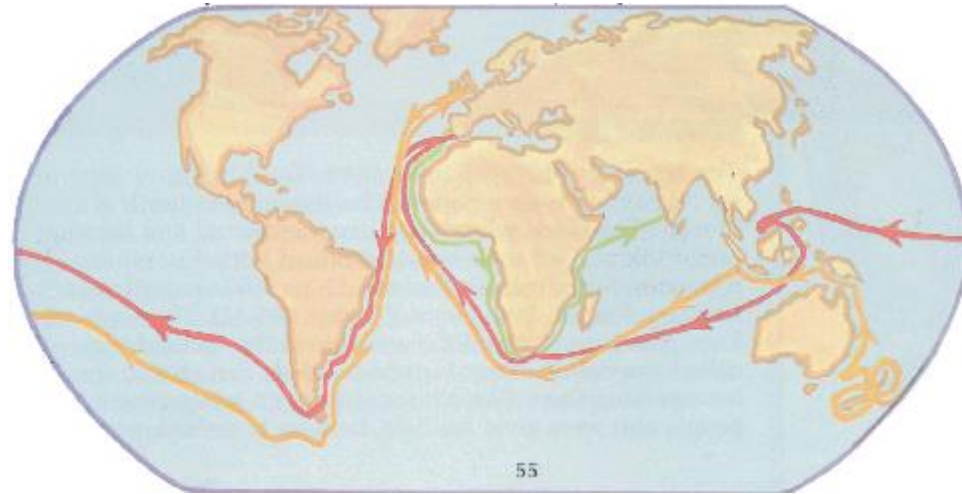
Christopher
Columbus lands in
America
1492

Tim Severin's
journey to America

1976-77

Window on the wider world.

Each of these sailors travelled on voyages which made them famous. See if you can find out more about these journeys.



----- Ferdinand Magellan

----- Captain Cook

----- Vasco da Gama