

Video transcript

What was life like for Viking sailors?

For centuries the secret of Viking success was their ships. To sail in them was to be a Viking.

They were built from shaped, wooden planks held together with iron rivets and wooden frames. Any gaps were sealed with animal hair to make them waterproof.

Rowing one of these on a day like today is actually quite pleasant, if you can get into the rhythm. It's not such a bad way to spend a morning. Oh, hold on, hold on! It's all gone terrible.

These ships meant they could sail all round Scandinavia, and then on to Ireland, England and Scotland, transporting people, animals, weapons and tools.

It's been estimated that in the case of the bigger vessels with crews of 70 men, to keep them going for a sailing season lasting four months would require the surplus from 460 farms. Alternatively, you could just get your food from raiding and pillaging.

If there was no wind, the Viking boats could be powered by oars. But they really came into their own as sailing ships, then they were able to travel much, much further.

But not all Viking boats and ships were meant for sailing across the open ocean. Some Vikings used their vessels to sail up the mighty rivers in Russia and beyond. This would take them to the mysterious lands in the East, where they could find riches beyond their wildest dreams.

Morning, Vikings. Where can I be? Up here? But travelling along the rivers presented a whole new challenge.

If they reached a point where the river was blocked, by ice or rapids, the boats could be taken out of the water and rolled on logs beyond the obstacles. Sometimes, they would even transport their vessels between different rivers. That's why these boats are smaller than the ocean-going ships. They weren't so heavy, and they could be moved metre by metre overland from one place to another.

Imagine how long it'd take to get anywhere. You leave home in Sweden, across the Baltic in ships, and then get everything onto boats like this. Every now and again, you've got to take the boat out of the water and move it overland.

These guys must have been away for years at a time. It's time-consuming and it is laborious, but there are enough men here to move a boat this size, so the system does work, as history shows.