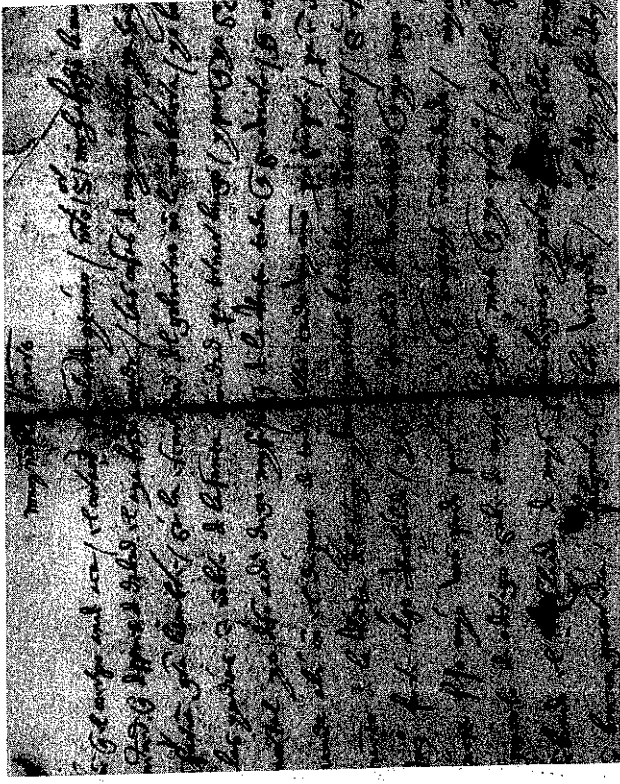


"Indians." He wrote about being placed in chains during his third voyage. He expressed excitement about seeing a new continent for the first time.

Columbus returned to Europe from his first voyage in March 1493. He was very eager to share his adventures with the queen and king who had paid for his voyage. But he had to travel many days to reach the royal court. To prepare Isabella and Ferdinand he wrote a letter telling of his amazing success. Later, he would bring his *diario* to them. Sadly, this journal, as well as a copy of it ordered by Isabella, was eventually lost. To this day, no one knows where they are.

How do we know what Columbus thought in 1492 when he began his adventure? What did he experience as he traveled across the Atlantic in search of the fabled Indies? How did he feel when he reached land at last? Fortunately, Bartolomé de Las Casas, who sailed with Columbus on his third voyage, copied much of the original *diario* before it disappeared.

By reading the journal Las Casas copied, you hear



Columbus's writings, such as letters like this one, help us understand what he saw and experienced.

what Columbus thought, felt, and experienced. Reading Columbus's *diario* you feel as though you are standing beside Columbus on the *Santa María*. You smell the salty wind in your face. You gaze across the mysterious western sea. You feel Columbus's determination to find a water route to the rich Indies. You hear the fearful crew grumble. You can

for the reward. Columbus fell to his knees and thanked God. The men climbed the rigging for a better view. They sang a hymn of thanks. Hopes ran high, for the land seemed to be less than 50 miles (80 kilometers) away.

Columbus "ordered the ships to leave their course, which was west, and for all of them to go southwest where the land had appeared." The sea was calm. They sailed on and on until night fell.

The next day they realized their mistake. Columbus wrote, "They recognized that what they had been saying was land was not land but sky." Disappointed, Columbus ordered his fleet to turn west again.

On they sailed. More birds. More seaweed. More driftwood. But no land. For three weeks, no land. Hope turned to fear. Then the steady winds carrying them west died down to soft breezes. With little wind, the ships barely moved. They just wallowed in the sea.

The men were unhappy. They had suffered.

enough. What if they ran out of food? some grumbled. What if Columbus were mad? others argued. What if they could not find their way back home? a few muttered.

Then, at sunrise on October 7, the cry "*Tierra!*" was heard from the *Niña*. The crew raised a flag and fired a cannon. Land at last!

By sunset everyone knew the "land" was only another cloud. No land in sight.

By Columbus's measuring, they should be very near the Indies. The men did not care. If land was not found in three more days, they would throw Columbus overboard. They would return home without him.

Three more days, Columbus agreed, then he would order his ships to sail east to home. Little did he know that he was less than 200 miles (322 kilometers) from land.

The winds picked up. The three ships made good speed. The sailors saw more signs of nearby land. The *Niña* picked up a green branch with a flower on it.

The *Pinta* picked up a "little stick fashioned, as it appeared, with iron." Columbus wrote, "With these signs everyone breathed more easily and cheered up."

Once again all eyes searched for land. Everyone, including Columbus, wanted the reward offered by Queen Isabella. All wanted the silk jacket Columbus promised.

At ten o'clock on the night of October 11, Columbus claimed to see land. But he was not sure. "I saw a light, although it was so faint I did not wish to affirm it was land... I saw it once or twice and it was like a small wax candle that rose and lifted up."

Thus Columbus himself claimed to be the very first to see land. And he claimed Queen Isabella's prize.

Two hours after midnight Pedro Gutierrez shouted, "*Tierra! Tierra!*" This time he was right.

In the morning they "reached an islet which was called Guanahani in the language of the Indians."

Columbus thought he had reached the Indies.

A NEW WORLD

IMAGINE THE EXCITEMENT ABOARD THE ships that night. This time there was no doubt. They had reached land.

What land, they did not know. But that day, October 12, 1492, they would find out.

At sunrise, Columbus searched for a safe place to anchor. Warm breezes carried wonderful smells to the ships. The men aboard gazed hungrily at the green of the trees. However, huge waves crashing on the reefs kept the excited sailors from landing.

At last a lookout spotted a break in the reef. Flags were raised. Colorful shields were hung from the railings. Columbus put on a scarlet jacket. His

officers dressed in their best. Sailors armed themselves with lances, swords, and crossbows. Boats were lowered.

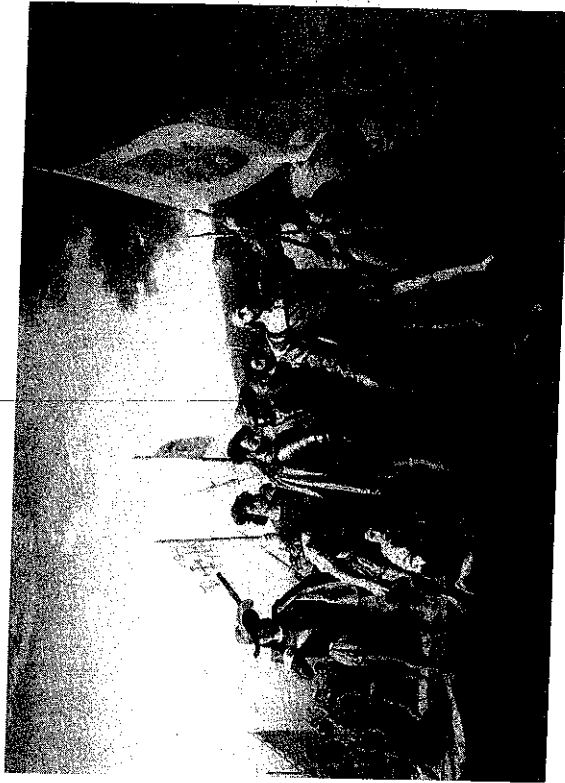
"I went ashore in an armed launch," Columbus wrote. The beach was long. The water was shallow. They rowed as close as they could. Then Columbus and the two Pinzón brothers waded ashore.

Columbus went first. He carried a royal banner. The Pinzóns held flags bearing a green cross and the initials of Isabella and Ferdinand. All three mariners had tears in their eyes.

Columbus lowered his flag. He fell to his knees and kissed the ground. The others did the same.

Columbus stood. He called to his men to witness his taking possession of the land. Even though the island was populated, he claimed it for the king and queen. He called it "San Salvador," the island of the Savior.

The natives of San Salvador watched from the safety of the forest. Imagine their thoughts as they watched these strange men come onto their island.



Columbus landed on the island of San Salvador on October 12, 1492. Natives of the island called it *Guanahani*, which means *iguana*.

"We saw naked people," Columbus wrote. "In order that they would be friendly to us... I gave them red caps, and glass beads and many other things of small value." Columbus was delighted with their response. "They took so much pleasure and became so much our friends that it was a marvel."

Columbus did not want to fight these "Indians," as he called them. He wanted to learn if they had

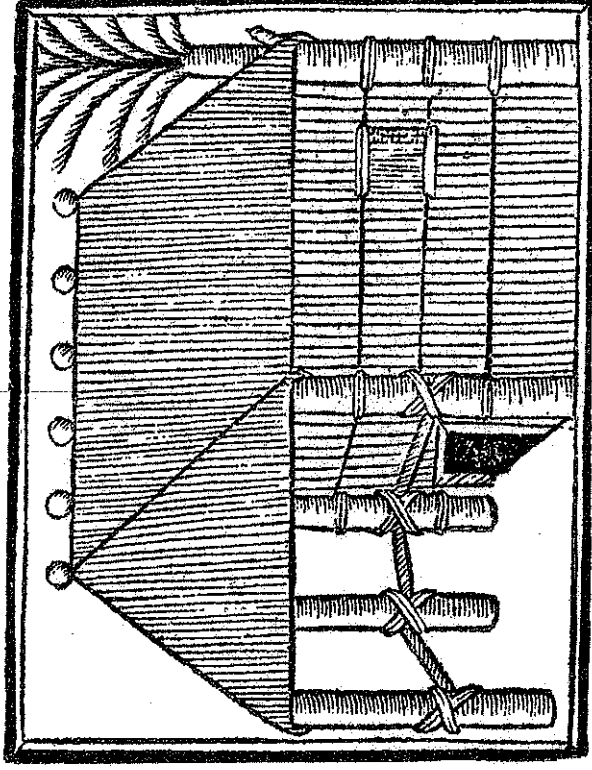
gold. He wanted them to follow the Catholic religion. "I recognized that they were people who would be better converted to our Holy Faith by love than by force."

Columbus had met the gentle Taíno people, the inhabitants of Guanahani. The Taíno people lived on these scattered Caribbean islands. They were ruled by a chief called a *cacique*. Their families lived together in houses made from thatch, woven mats, and strong poles.

The Taíno people were skilled wood-carvers. They wove wonderful hammocks of cotton. These were the first hammocks ever seen by Europeans. Columbus took hammocks back with him.

The best guess is that 600 to 1,200 Taíno people lived on San Salvador in 1492. Columbus was impressed by their gentleness. Their trust struck him as well.

"They do not carry any arms nor are they acquainted with them. I showed them swords, and they took them by the edge and through ignorance cut themselves. They have no iron." Used to stone



This drawing shows what a Taíno house may have looked like when Columbus landed.

and bone tools, the Taíno people did not understand the sharpness of steel.

The Taíno people were also very generous to Columbus and his men. "They took everything and gave of what they had very willingly." Some Taíno people swam out to the ships to trade. "They brought us parrots and cotton thread in balls and javelins and many other things. They traded them

to us for other things which we gave them, such as small glass beads and bells."

Columbus had met his first "Indians." The Taíno people had met their first Europeans.

At sunrise on October 13, more Taíno people came to the beach. "All were young and of good stature, a very handsome people," Columbus wrote. "They came to the ships in dugouts made from the trunk of one tree, like a log boat. So big that in some of them 40 to 50 came. They row with a paddle like that of a baker and go marvelously." These were the first canoes Columbus had ever seen.

These Taíno people came to trade. More cotton, parrots, and javelins. Columbus, however, wanted something else: gold. He wrote, "I was attentive and labored to find out if there was any gold." The Taíno people had some.

"I saw that some of them wore a little piece hung in a hole they have in their noses." Columbus wanted to know where they had gotten the gold.

"By signs I was able to understand that, by

rounding the island to the south, there was a king who had large vessels of it and had very much gold."

Columbus decided to wait another day before searching for this wealthy king. "I will go to seek gold and precious stones," he wrote.

Columbus explored San Salvador. He was delighted by what he found. "This island is quite big and very flat and with very green trees and much water and a very big lake in the middle and without any mountains." He paused and added, "All of it so green that it is a pleasure to look at it."

But he found no gold other than what the natives wore. Columbus knew gold was nearby. After all, these were just small islands near the Indies. Somewhere close, he believed, lay China, Japan!

He had another idea to please the queen and king: slaves. Columbus was already aware of the gentleness of the Taíno people. "They would be good and intelligent servants," he wrote in his *diario*.

Believing the Taíno people had no god, Columbus wanted to save their souls. "I believe they

would become Christians very easily, for it seemed to me that they had no religion."

He decided to take six Taíno people back to Spain. "At the time of my departure, I will take six of them from here to Your Highnesses in order that they may learn to speak [Spanish.]"

The men Columbus "took" helped him immediately. They told by signs of other islands nearby. They served as pilots to guide him. "And they named by their names more than one hundred."

Columbus would continue his search for the Indies. "I looked for the largest island."

On October 14, the ships set sail again. Columbus had first thought San Salvador was Japan. Now he knew better. No gold, no silks, no spices here.

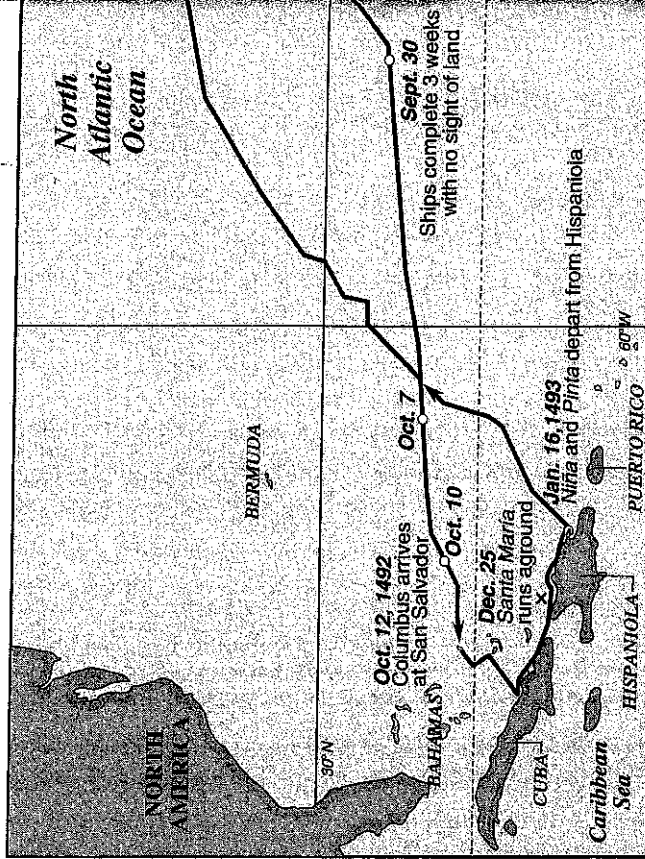
But on the other islands? He would find out.

GOLD, MORE GOLD, AND DISASTER

COLUMBUS WAS NOT THE FIRST European to reach the Americas. But he was the first to return with proof of his adventure. Yet he was lost the whole time. Even after his fourth voyage to the New World, Columbus thought he had reached the Indies. He died thinking so.

Where had he first landed? Which island in the Caribbean is San Salvador? Even today the location of Columbus's actual landfall remains a mystery. The best guesses are Samana Cay or Watling Island in the Bahamas.

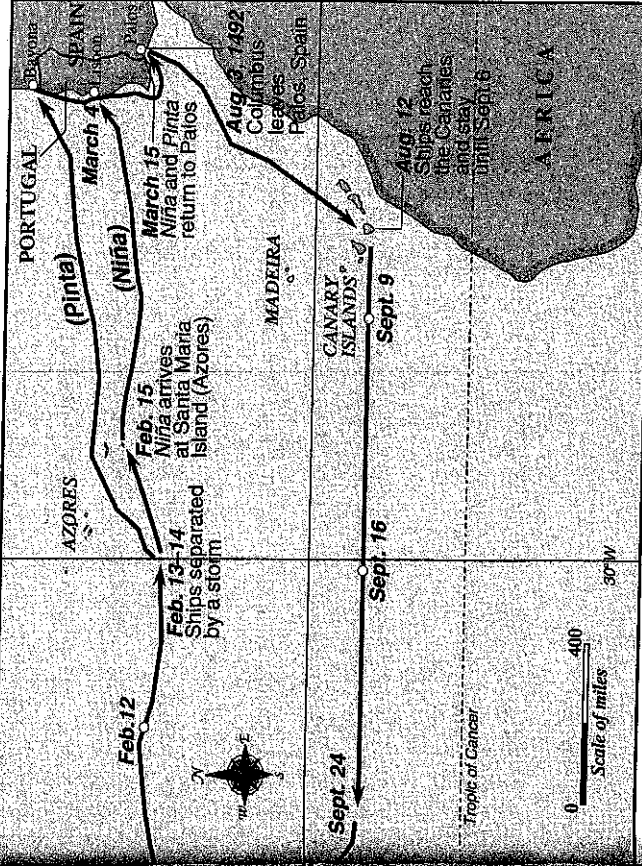
Columbus's trail becomes easier to follow once



Columbus set out on his first voyage to the New World on August 3, 1492.

he left San Salvador. He believed he was among the many islands of the Indies. If the first island wasn't Japan, maybe the next island was. He began visiting island after island.

Such sailing was dangerous. The fleet had to dodge coral reefs. They had to avoid shallow waters. They had to be wary of storms, which could wreck



He did not return to Spain until March 4, 1493.

them. Twisting and turning, the three ships made their way among the islands of the Bahamas.

But exploring each island was frustrating for Columbus. The tiny amounts of gold he saw hinted to Columbus that the wealth of the Indies must be near. If only he could find it.

The "Indians" kept signing to Columbus that