



Courtesy Draken Harald Hårfagre: Peder Jacobsson

The world's largest Viking ship, *Draken Harald Hårfagre*, under sail in the North Atlantic.

DRAKEN HARALD HÅRFAGRE

Sigurd Aase's Historic Quest

BY MICHAEL AYE

IN LATE SEPTEMBER, Greg Clark, one of my readers and a close personal friend, journeyed from small-town, Albany, Georgia, to New York City. The Big Apple's attraction was not big city lights or Broadway, but the world's largest modern-day Viking longship, the Norwegian clinker-built *Draken Harald Hårfagre*.

Greg visited *Draken* at North Cove Marina at Brookfield on the Hudson River in New York where she was moored from September 17 to 26.

Relating his experience, Greg was thrilled to see the ship up close. He said that for a group of men and women to sail the ocean in an open boat definitely took nerve. Of course,

history tells us that the Vikings were noted for their bravery.

The longship is named after Harald Fairhair, who was the first King of Norway. According to traditions recorded by historians in Norway and Iceland in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, he reigned from 872 AD to 930 AD.

Draken is 114 feet long and 27 feet on the beam, displaces seventy tons, and carries a 3,200-square-foot sail of pure silk.

"This was a complex project to sail a ship like this one-thousand years ago, and it is a complex project today," said Sigurd Aase, *Draken's*



Draken's Dragon Head

Photo by Greg Clark



Courtesy Draken Harald Hårfagre: Peder Jacobsson

Above: *Draken Harald Hårfagre* on Lake Ontario, with the *Pride of Baltimore II* off her port bow. **Below:** Sigurd Aase.



Courtesy Draken Harald Hårfagre: Peder Jacobsson

owner and curator. “We are still harvesting our forefathers’ capability to imagine and explore the world.”

The vessel, which is wintering at Mystic Seaport in Connecticut, is not a replica of a known ship, according to Aase. She is an original. The project to build a Viking ship was fueled by his interest in history.

Aase is originally from Haugesund, Norway, which is known as the homeland of Viking kings. He not only wanted to build an authentic Viking longship, but to recreate the journey of his ancestors and sail the ship from Norway to Vinland, the Viking name for North America. Historians believe that Vikings landed in

North America and Newfoundland one thousand years ago.

Aase launched his quest last May when *Draken* set sail from Haugesund, bound for North America. Braving North Atlantic storms and facing near disaster when the mast toppled, *Draken* and her crew was forced to put in to port in the Shetland Islands.

Leaving the Shetlands, the captain then set a course to Liverpool, England. From there, the ship proceeded to Scotland to acquire and fit a new mast before continuing across the North Atlantic.

The journey continued through the summer, with port calls at the Faroe Islands, Iceland, Greenland, and Newfoundland. Reaching the Saint Lawrence Seaway, *Draken* sailed into the Great Lakes, where she made port calls along the Sweetwater Seas. She returned to the Atlantic via the Erie Canal and Hudson River and arrived in New York in September.

THE VIKINGS

The Vikings spread from their native Scandinavia into Europe and across the world between the late eighth and the late eleventh centuries. Despite their



Visitors tour *Draken Harald Hårfagre* at North Cove Marina at Brookfield on the Hudson River in New York

Photo by Greg Clark.

earned reputation for their cold-blooded raids, often against religious entities, Vikings were also traders, farmers and developed peaceful colonies, leaving their mark on the regions in which they settled.

John Hale, an archeologist and director of the Liberal Studies Program at the University of Louisville, has written a paper, “Genius and Terror on the High Seas,” and lectures on the Vikings.

During the Viking reign, they created fear across Europe. Nothing was sacred, and they feared no one. According to Hale, they attacked armies as well as civilians. They murdered, raped, pillaged, stole, destroyed, and defiled religious centers and churches. Those who resisted were killed. The ones who didn’t resist were often killed anyway. Prisoners were occasionally taken.

Another paper pronounced that the barbaric savages usually associated with Vikings are a “distorted picture of reality.” At the dawn of the Viking Age, Christianity had spread throughout Europe. Yet the Vikings were Pagans. When monasteries were looted by the Vikings, it was the monks who wrote about their raids, looking upon the Vikings as retribution from God.

Viking women were not only mothers, but were considered the Lady of the House. They were responsible for the wealth of the farm and household. They were also active as poets, priestesses, merchants, and at

times were themselves warriors. Compared to the women elsewhere in Europe, they were very independent and considered to be free.

The Vikings were fierce warriors, but as one author described them they were also accomplished navigators, artisans, traders, and storytellers. Overall, their greatest triumphs were the ships they built.

LONGSHIPS

The Viking longships were excellent sea going vessels, which has been proven in our present day by *Draken’s* voyage. The seaworthiness of these vessels, along with the Norsemen’s ability with navigation and seamanship, made it possible for them to conquer, not only the sea but Europe as well.

Both history and legend allude to the fact that it was the seafaring element of the Norsemen that played a monumental role in their lives. It is said that over 150 of their words are used to describe waves. Vikings longships were so revered that they were used to bury their kings.

A longship could carry a crew of 100 or more men. Under sail, it’s estimated that the longships could make 10 knots. Crossing the sea from Norway to England, took only a few days. After raiding England, the Viking cargo ship was large and sturdy enough to transport



Courtesy Draken Harald Hårfagre: Peder Jacobsson

Draken Harald Hårfagre at Mystic Seaport in Connecticut, where she is spending the winter.

livestock. It is believed that it was the Vikings who carried horses to Iceland.

BUILDING DRAKEN

As mentioned earlier, the *Draken* is not a replica Viking ship. She is a reconstruction of what was called a “Viking great ship.” History, drawings, and information gathered from the Norse sagas, along with archeological findings and the tradition of Norse shipbuilding, all went into the construction of the world’s largest Viking sailing ship.

Other sources on which *Draken’s* construction was based, include data taken from the best example of a preserved Viking ship ever found, the *Gokstad*. This ancient ship was instrumental in the ornamentations, such as the dragon head and tail and other woodcarvings. Sitting on each side of the navigation table are two wooden ravens – Huginn and Muninn. They are the Norse god Odin’s travel companions. Every day they would fly over the world gathering information for their master.

Construction of the *Draken* began in March 2010, by a band of experienced traditional boat builders, historians, craftsmen, and artists. The measurements of *Draken* are as follows:

- Length from stem to stern – 115 feet
- Width – 26 feet
- Hull – oak and oak planks
- Mast – 79 feet tall, made of Douglas fir
- Sail – 260 square meters of silk
- Rig – hemp
- Flag – Norwegian
- Homeport – Haugesund, Norway
- Top speed – 14 knots

Draken Harald Hårfagre is covered at Mystic Seaport for the winter until her next adventure begins. There are no plans yet set for 2017, but stay tuned for updates. No doubt the fierce dragon head will keep evil spirits away, while she rests.

Michael Aye is the author of the Fighting Anthonys series, the War of 1812 series, and the new Pyrate Trilogy.

For additional information on
Draken Harald Hårfagre,
visit her website at
www.drakensexpeditionamerica.com.