

How does the climate help to explain the changing fortunes of the Vikings?

TASK: Read the story of the unit, to find out more about what we're going to study in the next six lessons. Then, answer the questions at the bottom of the page (use a separate piece of paper).

In the early medieval period, **Scandinavia** (which included the modern-day countries Sweden, Norway and Denmark) was home to the Vikings. They were **seafarers**, which meant that - from the 700s - they began travelling by boat to lots of different places. They went to Europe, North Africa, the Middle East and Greenland.



Part of the reason for the Vikings' adventurous spirit was that life in Scandinavia could be difficult. **Farming land** was not always good, and a **growing population** put even more pressure on resources. Many Vikings decided to travel overseas - sometimes to steal and **pillage**, so that they could return with valuable goods, and sometimes to make new lives there. The Vikings arrived in England in 793, raiding Lindisfarne monastery; they were in France by 790; and they had even travelled as far as Constantinople by 860.



The **climate** helps to explain why the Vikings were able to travel to so many distant places. The '**Medieval Warm Period**' (which saw global temperatures warm up slightly between 950 and 1250) allowed the Vikings to travel further by boat, because areas that had previously been too icy and dangerous were now accessible. However, the carvings on the **Rök runestone** suggest that the Vikings were worried about the return of an 'ice age' - and they were right to be, because when temperatures on Greenland cooled, it became much harder to sustain life there. In fact, by the 1400s the Vikings had



disappeared from Greenland. Researchers now think that this might partly have been due to a rise in **sea levels** (caused by cooling temperatures), which made it hard to live in the coastal areas of Greenland.



The climate also impacted on Viking **culture**. For example, the cold weather meant that 'indoor' games like the board game Hnefatafl were popular. The Vikings' diet depended on what was naturally available in the areas they lived in: meat, vegetables, berries and grains were all commonly eaten by Viking families. Viking men, women and children wore thick, fur-lined clothes that allowed them to keep warm in the harsh winters.

It is possible to find out about the Vikings' lives by using a combination of different **sources**, and information from different types of **researchers**. For example, **natural scientists** use pollen sources to chart ups and downs in temperature, whilst **archaeologists** carry out excavations to find out about the Vikings' way of life.



TASK: Answer the questions below:

- 1: What kinds of places did the Vikings travel or migrate to?
- 2: Why did some groups of Vikings want to leave Scandinavia?
- 3: How did the climate help the Vikings to migrate?
- 4: Why might Vikings have 'disappeared' from Greenland?
- 5: How did the climate impact on Viking culture?
- 6: Explain how the work of different types of researchers can help us find out more about the Vikings.

