



Christopher Columbus

Wednesday 10 October

He steered WSW [west by southwest]; they made 10 miles an hour and at times 12 and others 7, and during the day and night 59 leagues; he told the men no more than 44 leagues. Here the men could stand it no longer; they complained of the long journey; but the Admiral encouraged them as best he could, holding out good hope of the rewards they could gain. And he added that there was no point in complaining, because he had set out for the Indies and that he intended to persist until he found them, with the help of Our Lord.

Thursday 11 October

He sailed WSW. They had rough sea, rougher than any they had had throughout the voyage. They spotted some petrels ([birds] and a green reed near the flagship. The crew of the caravel Pinta spotted a cane and a twig and they fished out another piece of stick, carved with iron by the looks of it, and a piece of cane and other vegetation that grows on land, and a small plank. The crew of the caravel Nina also saw signs of land and a branch covered in barnacles. At these signs they breathed again and all took heart....

The first man to see this land was a sailor by the name of Rodrigo de Triana, although the Admiral had seen a light at ten in the evening on the poop deck, but it was so indistinct that he would not swear that it was land. But he called Pero Gutierrez, His Majesty's chamberlain, told him that it seemed to be a light and asked him to look, which he did, and he did see it. He also called Rodrigo Sanchez de Segovia, whom the King and Queen had sent as comptroller, and he saw nothing as he was not in a position from which he could see it. After the Admiral had spoken, the light was spotted a couple of times, and it was like a small wax candle being raised and lowered, which stuck very few people as being a sign of land, but the Admiral was certain that he was near land.

...So when they had said the Salve, [prayer] which all sailors are accustomed to say or chant in their own way, and they were all gathered together, the Admiral urged them to keep a good lookout from the forecandle and watch for land, saying that he would give the first man to tell him that he could see land a silk doublet, quite apart from the other rewards which the King and Queen had promised, such as the annual payment of ten thousand maravedis to the first man to see land.

Friday 12 October

Two hours after midnight land appeared at a distance of about two leagues. They shortened all sails, kept the mainsail without the bonnets and lay to, waiting for Friday to dawn, the day on which they finally reached a small island of the Lucayos which was called in the language of the Indians Guanahani.

Then they saw native people and the Admiral went ashore in the armed boat with Martin Alonso Pinzon and Vicente Yanez, his brother, who was the captain of the Nina. The Admiral brought out the royal standard, and the captains unfurled two banners of the green cross, which the Admiral flew as his standard on all the ships, with a F and a Y, and a crown over each letter.....

When they landed they saw trees, very green, many streams and a large variety of fruits. The Admiral called the two captains and the others who landed, and Rodrigo de Escobedo, secretary of the expedition, and Rodrigo Sanchez de Segovia, and made them bear witness and testimony that he, in their presence, took possession, as in fact he did take possession, of the said island in the names of the King and Queen, His Sovereigns, making the requisite declarations, as is more fully recorded in the statutory instruments which were set down in writing. Then, many islanders gathered round.

What follows are the Admiral's own words from the journal of his first voyage and discovery of these Indies. In order to win their good will, he says, because I could see that they were a people who could more easily be won over and converted to our hold faith by kindness than by force, I gave some of them red hats and glass beads that they put round their necks, and many other things of little value, with which they were very pleased and became so friendly that it was a wonder to see.

Afterwards they swam out to the ships' boats where we were and brought parrots and balls of cotton thread and spears and many other things, and they bartered with us for other things which we gave them, like glass beads and hawks' belts. In fact they took and gave everything they had with good will, but it seemed to me that they were a people who were very poor in everything.

I only saw one girl, and she was very young. All those I did see were young men, none of them more than thirty years old. They were well built, with handsome bodies and fine features. Their hair is thick, almost like a horse's tail, but short; they wear it down over their eyebrows except for a few strands behind which they wear long and never cut. They do not carry arms and do not know of them because I showed them some swords and they grasped them by the blade and cut themselves out of ignorance. They have no iron: their spears are just shafts without a metal tip, and some have a fish tooth at the end, and some have other things. They are all fairly tall, good looking and well proportioned. I saw some who had signs of wounds on their bodies and in sign language I asked them what they were, and they indicated that other people came from other islands nearby and tried to capture them, and they defended themselves. I believed then and still believe that they come here from the mainland to take them as slaves.

They ought to make good slaves for they are of quick intelligence since I notice that they are quick to repeat what is said to them, and I believe that they could very easily become Christians, for it seemed to me that they had no religion of their own. God willing, when I come to leave I will bring six of them to Your Highnesses so that they may learn to speak?