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| http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/0/02/Henry_the_Navigator1.jpg/220px-Henry_the_Navigator1.jpg | **Prince Henry the Navigator** |
| **Born: 1394** | **Died: 1460** |
| **Portuguese Explorer** |
| **Major Accomplishment**He sponsored expeditions of discovery in the Atlantic Ocean, down the western coast of Africa.  |

Although he was called Prince Henry the Navigator by the English, Prince Henry never actually sailed on any of the voyages of discovery he sponsored. Instead, Prince Henry established a school for the study of the arts of navigation, mapmaking, and shipbuilding. This would allow sailors to better guide their ships and to come up with new ship designs.

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**Designing New Ships**

His goal was to find a route to the rich spice trade of the Indies and to explore the west coast of Africa. The ships that sailed the Mediterranean were too slow and too heavy to make these voyages. Under his direction, a new and lighter ship was developed, the caravel, which would allow sea captains to sail further and faster.

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**Exploring the West Coast of Africa**

Despite the creation of the caravel and the knowledge shared at his school for sailors, Prince Henry had a great deal of difficulty persuading his captains to sail beyond Cape Bojodor off the west coast of Africa. According to legend, beyond this point in an area known as the "Green Sea of Darkness," the sun was so close to the Earth that a person’s skin would burn black, the sea boiled, ships caught on fire, and monsters hid waiting to smash the ships and eat the sailors. It took fourteen voyages over a period of 12 years until a ship finally reached the equator.

During the two-year period from 1444 to 1446, Prince Henry intensified the exploration of Africa, sending between 30 and 40 of his ships on missions. The last voyage sponsored by Prince Henry sailed over 1,500 miles down the African coast.

Although he never sailed on the expeditions, the voyages that he paid for in the mid-1400s helped launch Portugal into the front of the race to find a sea route to the Indies.