

# SIR FRANCIS DRAKE



**S**ir Francis Drake was born in England in 1540. He was the oldest of 12 children.

When he was a young boy, his family lived in the hull of an old ship. His father became a preacher to the sailors. Ships and sailors became the center of young Francis's life. In the 1550s, Drake went to sea as an apprentice on a small freighter. He did so well that the captain of the ship left it to Drake in his will. This began Drake's life as a seaman. By the 1570s, Drake had gathered his own crew and begun voyages to the New World.

He had also begun his career as a *privateer*. A privateer is really a pirate, but one who sails for one country against another. Under orders from Queen Elizabeth I of England, he attacked Spanish settlements and destroyed Spanish ships. In 1572, he crossed the Isthmus of Panama and saw the Pacific Ocean for the first time.

Queen Elizabeth secretly financed Drake's voyage in 1577. His plan was to sail through the Straits of Magellan at the southern tip of South America and then explore the Pacific Ocean. He started with five ships but only one, *Golden Hind*, continued around the strait. As he went North up the coast, he attacked Spanish settlements in Chile and Peru and captured treasure from the Spanish ships that were headed for Panama.

Drake then sailed farther north along the California coast claiming it for the Queen. Historians believe he was looking for the Northwest Passage from the Pacific Ocean side. There are accounts that he encountered groups of natives there. According to these accounts, Drake was friendly to them and had no desire to convert them to Christianity. There was some trading but very little.

Drake was concerned that the Spanish would seek revenge. He decided not to return to England the way he had come. This began his most well-known voyage. Drake decided to circumnavigate the world by following Magellan's route. He reached England in September 1580 nearly three years after he set out. Queen Elizabeth knighted him because of all the treasure he brought back.

In 1585, war broke out between England and Spain. For the next eight years Drake sailed to the West Indies and even to Spain destroying settlements and vessels. He was so feared he earned the name *El Dragón* (The Dragon) from the Spaniards.

Drake died of a fever they called "bloody flux" in 1596 aboard one of his ships. He was buried at sea in a lead coffin.