



**STORIES
FROM
THE SEA**

SHIPWRECK OBJECTS



GREENWICH (VALENTIA)

MARINER'S ASTROLABE

Date made

about 1588

Object ref.

NAV0022; [F5272-001]

Credit

National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London

Description

A mariner's astrolabe is an instrument used by sailors in the 1500s to help calculate a ship's latitude, using the height of the Pole Star or the Sun.

This astrolabe was found in 1845 under a rock on Valentia Island, close to the point off southern Ireland where three ships of the Spanish Armada were wrecked in 1588. It was found in remains of a leather bag and had probably been hidden there by survivors.

The face is engraved with circles and lines but there are no numbers on the scale, suggesting that the instrument was never completed: it may have been one of a number of pieces of unfinished equipment hurried aboard a Spanish ship in 1588.

Questions

1. Do you think astrolabes were accurate?
2. What might happen to make this instrument useless (clue: think about the weather)?
3. How do sailors navigate (find their way) today?



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