

Crossing the Seas

Ships are one of the oldest and most important forms of transportation. Giant tankers carry oil and other liquids. Refrigerator ships carry fresh fruits, meats, and vegetables. People traveled across the ocean on ships before airplanes became widely used. Now people take vacations on cruise ships.

Throughout history, nations became rich and powerful by taking control of the seas. When they lost that control, they also often lost their power.

Probably the earliest “ship” was a log that someone used to cross a lake or river. Later people tied logs together to create rafts and discovered how to use trees to make canoes. In places where wood was scarce, people made boats out of animal skins. They sewed the skins into a bag, filled the bag with air, and used the bag as a float.

By about 3000 B.C., the Egyptians had discovered how to use sails to move boats. They also learned how to make boats out of planks of wood. For the next 5,000 years, shipbuilders focused on building bigger and bigger ships with better sails.

A big change in shipbuilding came in the 1800s. People began to use steam instead of wind power to move ships. These ships were fueled by coal. Later people began using heavy oil instead of coal. Today people even use nuclear power to move large ships.

1. What was probably the earliest ship?
2. According to the article, why was controlling the seas important long ago?