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A Theory of the Vikings on Cape Breton In the late 10th century, a Viking settlement was established in Greenland. Very soon afterward, a merchant named Bjarni Herjolfsson set off to supply that colony. He was blown off course and sighted new lands. Some time later, Leif Eiriksson with one of Bjarni's ships deliberately set off in search of those lands. As the sagas report it, "By God's will, after a long voyage from the island of Greenland to the south, towards the most distant remaining parts of the Western Ocean Sea, sailing southward amid the ice, the companions Bjarni and Leif Eiriksson discovered a new land, extremely fertile, and even having vines, the which island they named Vinland...." This is all reported in what are known as the Vinland Sagas • but the sagas are not sufficiently detailed to locate by the texts alone precisely where this new land was. Different people have argued it was places as far apart as Hudson's Bay and New England, and several places in between. H.L. Livingston of Marble Mountain is apparently the first person to declare that Cape Breton Island was Vinland. He feels he has gone as far as he can guided by the sagas alone. We present this discussion with Mr. Livingston to help keep his theory alive until proper archeological research can supply the artifacts proving the location of Vinland. H.L. Livingston, Marble Mountain: All signs point to its being Cape Breton Island. There are so many clues combined. F.J. Pohl has been writing for years, trying to prove that Vinland was in Massachusetts • and it could have been. That's the tantalizing part of this whole thing. Any one of us could be right or wrong. We can only take the evidence and see how well the sagas fit the district. It may seem strange that no one has ever thought of Cape Breton before as Vinland. But it has never been proposed because to compare two persons, two things, or two conditions, you must be familiar with both. And the people so far who have been interested in the Vikings and wrote about them didn't know anything about Cape Breton. But I went to school and in the spring and summer I fished. Lobsters first. Then we set out a fish-trap to get the mackerel run. Then we went swordfishing. All the way from Scataria around to Flint Island. That's the way I got my knowledge of the Cape Breton coast. Weather conditions and so on. And that knowledge is essential to an understanding of the location of Vinland. (Tell us, very simply, what happened in 985?? as told in the sagas.) The first voyage was accidental. Bjarni was blown off course going from Iceland to Greenland. When he arrived from Norway at his home in Iceland, he found that his father and mother and whole family had gone with Eric the Red to Greenland. So getting the consent of his crew • he had to do that because they were going to stay in Greenland • and without unloading his ship, he set sail for the Greenland settlement. And for three days they had good weather. And then they ran into a north-easterly • north wind • and overcast skies • so he didn't know which way he was going • and the saga merely says that happened for many days. We don't know how many. He just ran before the wind. This is an important point with the sagas. I don't believe their ships could beat to windward or that they ever thought it possible to beat to windward • but they went cross-wind very fast. They were faster than anyone thinks. And if a storm came and



they Cape Breton's Magazine/22 didn't know what direction they were traveling, all they could do was just leave a man at the steerboard and let the thing run before the wind. That's why they were so constantly getting hundreds of miles off course. So after the gale blew itself out and he got latitude • they couldn't get longitude • he sailed for one day until he came in sight of a low-lying land that was heavily wooded. He left that land to port • so it must have been on the west side • and sailed for two days till he came to a second land and he got becalmed there and his crew wanted to go ashore • also low-lying land heavily wooded • and I think that was probably the peninsula at Cape George on the west coast of Newfoundland. Now what direction they went depended exactly on the way the wind was blowing • and it's impossible for anyone that's not familiar with boats to understand the sagas. For instance, this Danish writer, Krogh, says that Helluland • (that's Bjarni's third land?) • is southeast