John Davis Encyclopedia Article

John Davis

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Contents

John Davis Encyclopedia Article.....1

Contents.....2

John Davis.....3

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1550?-1605

British navigator and Arctic explorer who made three voyages in search of a Northwest Passage from Europe to the Indies (1585, 1586, and 1587), visiting Greenland and Baffin Island. As pilot and navigator for Thomas Cavendish's second privateering circumnavigation expedition in 1591, Davis became separated from the fleet near the Straits of Magellan and he journeyed back to England, discovering the Falkland Islands on his return voyage (1592). Davis authored two books on navigation, *The Seaman's Secrets* (1594) and *The World's Hydrographical Description* (1595); and he invented the Davis quadrant, a double quadrant that was the principle instrument of navigation until the early 1700s. Beginning in 1598, he served as pilot on three voyages to the East Indies, including the first successful expedition of the East India Company. Davis was killed by Japanese pirates off the Malaysian coast on his third voyage. His *Traverse Book* from his final voyage became the model for ships' log books.