

Sailors set off on world voyage that killed Magellan

Spain

Sarah Morris Madrid

Five hundred years ago today the Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan set out to circumnavigate the world, on a journey that became blighted by sea battles, mutiny, starvation and scurvy.

A group of 140 volunteers are hoping for an easier time when they recreate the voyage. They will set out from Seville in southern Spain today, taking it in turns to be part of the journey, which was completed by the Spaniard Juan Sebastián Elcano for Charles I of Spain after Magellan was killed.

The trip to the rich Spice Islands of Indonesia helped Europeans to prove that the Earth was round. It has been fêted by historians, geographers, astronomers and astronauts ever since.

“Our goal is to make the people who

made the history of this country better known,” Pepe Solá, chairman of the Association of the Friends of the Great Spanish Navigators and Explorers, said.

Magellan set out in search of fame and fortune and to chart a western sea route to the islands, known today as Maluku. His fleet of five ships crossed the Atlantic, reaching South America within a month. The ships hugged the coast before passing through what is now known as the Strait of Magellan to reach the Pacific.

After entering the strait in October 1520 the sailors mutinied. The crew of one ship, the *San Antonio*, forced her captain to desert, returning to Spain.

Down to two ships by the time they had crossed the Pacific and reached the Philippine island of Cebu, Magellan sought to convert its people to Christianity. He was killed in a battle between



islanders in April 1521. Only one ship, the *Victoria* captained by Elcano, made it back to Spain. Out of a crew that historians believe numbered between 235 and 270, only 18 men returned.

“Until Magellan and Elcano’s achievement there was no certainty that the world was round — the empirical test hadn’t been done — and there were very limited maps,” Eduardo Boix, a member of the organising group, told

Spanish state radio. The volunteers will set sail from Seville on the *Pros*, a 21m sloop. “We’ll cross the Strait of Magellan in January and February, the best months to do it,” Mr Solá said. “They had a rough time and now it’s about having a good time.”

Juan Manuel Eguiagaray, 73, a former cabinet minister, is one of the captains. The crew will work in one-month stints.

Only 30 per cent of the voyage’s estimated €1 million cost has been funded. The sailors are appealing for donations.

Events to mark the anniversary are planned in Spain until 2022, including a naval procession in Seville today and a ceremony at the Torre del Oro watch tower, a symbol of where explorers set off to discover the New World.

Magellan’s ill-fated journey,
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