



trusting history

The tales of Ivarr the Boneless come from a foggy time in history called the Dark Ages. What we know about the Dark Ages comes from writings of the time, including Icelandic sagas, the Annals of Ulster, Asser's History of King Alfred and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Dates that are mentioned vary wildly, so it's difficult to get to the whole truth.

Ivarr the Boneless

Ivarr was the first son of the famous Viking warrior Ragnar Lodbrok and Princess Aslaug Sigurdsdottir. Ivarr was probably born disabled and couldn't walk. Many people think this is where his nickname '*Ivarr the Boneless*' came from. Ivarr was an extraordinary warrior and the most feared Viking of his day. Ivarr invaded and occupied England. His family continued to rule Dublin for the next two centuries.

the birth of Ivarr the Boneless

Ivarr was born around 794 AD. He may have been born with a condition called *Osteogenesis Imperfecta* (also known as brittle bone disease). Ragnar's Saga says that when Ivarr was born...

“Only cartilage was where bone should have been, but otherwise he grew tall and handsome and in wisdom he was the best of their children.”

Ivarr's disability may have meant that he couldn't walk because his bones were so fragile they would break. Normally if children were born with disabilities in Viking times they were killed. But Ivarr was a Viking prince and Ragnar's eldest son, so he was allowed to live.

growing up Berserk

Ivarr grew up to be very clever and found ways to become a great Viking leader despite his disabilities. He solved the problem of not being able to walk by being carried into battle on the back of his shield. He was a fearless type of warrior called a '*Berserker*'. Berserkers completely lost control in battle as if they were in a trance. Nowadays, when we talk about people going into a frenzy, especially if they're angry, we might say they're '*going berserk*'. The Berserker fighting style is where this phrase comes from.

invading England

Ivarr the Boneless and his brothers, Halfdan and Ubbe, crossed the North Sea to England in 865 AD and led an army of Danes to invade the east coast of England. The Anglo-Saxons called them '*The Great Heathen Army*'.

Continued on next page...





Ivarr the Boneless

how Ivarr outsmarted the King of Northumbria

Ivarr and his brother Halfdan went to war against King Aella of Northumbria. The brothers wanted to take revenge on the King for murdering their father, Ragnar (he threw Ragnar into a pit of snakes). After a bloody battle, the Northumbrians defeated the Viking brothers, but Ivarr offered King Aella a deal that seemed too good to be true.

Ivarr told the king that he would promise never to go to war against him again if King Aella would give Ivarr as much land as he could cover with one ox's hide. The King agreed, thinking Ivarr was an idiot. How much land could you cover with one animal skin? So the King agreed to the deal... but Ivarr was a smart fellow. Ivarr ordered the ox's hide to be cut into incredibly fine strands. He used the strands like an extra-long piece of string and went around the edge of an area of land big enough to build a massive fortress right in the middle of Northumbria. King Aella had no choice but to agree.

Ivarr was also a very generous Viking; he made lots of new friends by sharing his wealth with the local people of Northumbria. A little while later, Ivarr, with his new-found popularity, went to war once again with King Aella, breaking his promise. This time the Viking army won, and Ivarr had King Aella killed.

invading East Anglia

In 868 AD, the Vikings decided to spend the winter in Mercia (now, most of the Midlands). But the Mercian and Wessex armies joined forces against the Vikings. Ivarr realised they were badly outnumbered so decided to sign a peace agreement – the Treaty of Nottingham.

“Ingwar [Ivarr] then, seeing that the whole force of England was there gathered, and that his host was the weaker, and was there shut in, betook himself to smooth words – cunning fox that he was – and won peace and troth (truth) from the English...”

Once the treaty was signed, the English thought the danger was over. But Ivarr had just taken a little break. A year later he re-crossed Mercia with his army and his brother Ubbe and they conquered the kingdom of East Anglia.

finding friends in Ireland

Ivarr left England for Dublin, while his brothers stayed behind to command his army as they fought Ethelred, King of England. The fighting was fierce with huge losses on both sides. At the battle of Basing, King Ethelred died from his wounds and Alfred (later known as 'Alfred the Great') took the throne. In 870 AD, Ivarr's brothers made peace with England.

Meanwhile, Ivarr the Boneless decided to invade Scotland with his co-ruler of Ireland, Olaf the White. Together they attacked Dumbarton Rock for four months and won. They returned to Dublin, their ships loaded with booty and slaves. Ivarr died in Ireland in 873 AD.

