



SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

High-tech Ship Marks 400 Anniversary of the Mayflower

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A high-tech ship is marking the 400th anniversary of the sailing of the Mayflower -- the ship that carried a group of European settlers to North America.

The famous trip prepared the way for England's colonization of what Europeans in 1620 called the New World.

The anniversary was marked this week in Plymouth, England -- the starting point for the historic Mayflower crossing of the Atlantic Ocean.

Local officials gathered with sea travelers and scientists for the launch of the new ship. It is called the Mayflower **Autonomous** Ship. It is an ocean research ship that is fully autonomous and powered by **artificial intelligence** (AI).

The sun-powered ship is set to sail across the Atlantic without a captain or crew on it.

The 15-meter ship is a joint project of ocean research group ProMare and IBM, the American computing company. It will take the same **route** as the 1620 Mayflower, from Plymouth, England, to Plymouth, in the American state of Massachusetts.

ProMare and IBM hope the autonomous Mayflower will be the first in a new generation of crewless, ocean traveling machines. They say such ships could be used to explore parts of oceans that are too difficult or dangerous for people to reach.

Andy Stanford-Clark is chief technology officer for IBM in Britain and Ireland. He told The Associated Press the ship's launch marked "a very exciting stage of the **journey** towards autonomous shipping." He added that AI-powered ships like the new Mayflower could be used in the future to transport goods, carry out research and serve as water taxis.

The ship will first complete six months of sea trials and short trips before beginning its Atlantic crossing early next year. The ship is equipped with instruments designed to measure the health of ocean waters. It will examine the effects of climate change, gather information on microplastic pollution and study ocean populations of whales and dolphins.

Along the way, the ship's AI system will have to make complex decisions, reacting to severe weather conditions and movements of other ships.

Brett Phaneuf is co-director of the Mayflower Autonomous Ship project. He told the AP he sees strong similarities between the two Mayflower trips even though they were four centuries apart.

"Neither of us are sure we were going to make it," Phaneuf said.

"But our risk is much smaller than their risk," he said, "if we don't make it, no one will be injured, no one will die."

I'm Bryan Lynn.

The Associated Press reported on this story. Bryan Lynn adapted the report wrote for VOA Learning English, with additional information from IBM. George Grow was the editor.

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Words in This Story

autonomous – *adj.* independent and having the power to operate automatically without human involvement

artificial intelligence – *n.* the power of a machine to copy intelligent human behavior

route – *n.* the roads or path a person follows to get from one place to another

journey – *n.* an act of traveling from one place to another

