

De Soto

NATIONAL
MEMORIAL



Florida

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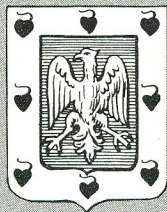
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR



Oscar L. Chapman, *Secretary*

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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De Soto National Memorial commemorates the first major exploration of the North American interior (1539-43)

THE DE SOTO Expedition, a typical instance of organized Spanish exploration, was the first European penetration into what is now southern United States. Crossing 4,000 miles of wilderness, the explorers earned for Spain a broad knowledge of the interior lands and peoples and recorded priceless information on native American life of the 1500's.

The Conquistadors

COLUMBUS had given Spain an early claim to the New World and its wealth, and her warrior nobles penetrated the new-found continents with amazing rapidity. Hardy and courageous men, loyal to King and Church, they had built some 200 permanent towns in the Americas long before Raleigh landed in Carolina.

While Cortés was still having difficulty with the Aztecs, Spanish explorers were moving out from the West Indies. In 1513, Ponce de León discovered Florida; by 1519, the Gulf coast was charted; by 1525, navigators had probed Atlantic shores from Cape Horn to Newfoundland. In 1526, Ayllón set ashore a short-lived colony at South Carolina's Pedee River. Two years later Narváez landed on Florida's west coast. His sole survivors were the resourceful Cabeza de Vaca and a trio of companions. Still the vast North American interior lay mysterious and untouched, rumored to be "the richest land of any which until then had been discovered."

Cover: *Hernando de Soto.*

Hernando de Soto

DON HERNANDO DE SOTO, Knight of Santiago, "a gentleman by all four descents," was a typical conquistador. Born in Spain about 1500, he achieved wealth and a brilliant career in Nicaragua and Peru. Charles V appointed him Governor of Cuba and Adelantado (Leader) to "conquer, pacify, and populate" the northern continent.

On April 7, 1538, trumpets sounded and cannon thundered as the flotilla left San Lúcar, Spain, with about 700 volunteers aboard. The winds were favorable, and Don Hernando's bride was at his side.

Landing in Florida

IN HAVANA, on May 18, 1539, De Soto bade farewell to his Doña Isabel and set sail for Florida. On May 30, the army landed on the west coast, apparently at Tampa Bay. A ruined scatter of pearls lay in the dust at the deserted Indian village where they camped, and the Spaniards believed themselves at the threshold of fortune. So Narváez had thought, when he chanced upon a single golden ornament!

Spanish scouts found the lost Juan Ortiz, who had come to Florida with Narváez and had been saved by a native princess from death at the stake. For 10 years Ortiz had been a slave of the Indians, and, while he had seen no riches, he



The landing in Florida. From Smith's Narratives.

had heard wonderful reports of the interior land. De Soto assigned 100 men to guard the camp and sent the ships back to Cuba for supplies. The march through 4,000 miles of unknown land began on July 15, 1539.

Into the Wilderness

DE SOTO led 600 or more disciplined veterans who averaged—and sometimes doubled—a steady 10 miles a day on the march. Counting the Indian carriers drafted as they went along, the expedition must often have numbered up to 1,000 people. A full 200 horses mounted the lancers. There were about 300 crossbowmen and harquebusiers, a dozen padres, a physician, and artisans to build boats and bridges or repair weapons and rivet the slave chains.

As they pushed northward, heat and hunger plagued them; hidden natives rained arrows upon them. De Soto followed the practice of seizing village chieftains and forcing them to supply food, carriers, and guides. Once beyond Ocale, Indians gathered to rescue their chief, but the Spaniards moved first, driving the warriors into nearby lakes.

De Soto continued onward, then from winter quarters in the hostile Apalache farmlands; he summoned the men left at the landing site, while to Havana he sent a present of 20 Indian women for Doña Isabel. Meanwhile, his scouts

discovered Pensacola Bay; others saw the bleached bones of Narváez' horses at Apalache Bay.

Search for Treasure Continues

IN the spring of 1540, they marched toward the Savannah River, where the comely chieftainess of Cofitachequi bestowed her pearl necklace upon Don Hernando. Another 200 pounds of pearls were dug from the burial mounds. But the Adelantado pushed onward. If no richer land were found, they could always return.

Some were lame and sick by the time they reached the Xuala region of western South Carolina, but here they saw "more indications of gold mines than in all the country they had traversed." Up into North Carolina, then across the Smokies into Tennessee they went. Mulberries, nuts, maize, and turkeys the natives gave willingly, as the army pressed southward toward Coosa in central Alabama, still searching for treasure.

The Tragedy of Mabila

POWERFUL Tascalusa, lord of the Mobile Indians, hid his anger when the Spaniards seized him, and agreed to furnish 400 carriers as soon as they reached the town of Mabila. But warriors—not carriers—surrounded De Soto in Mabila. The Spaniards fought free and in a fierce,

day-long battle burned the town and slaughtered 3,000 Indians. De Soto suffered crippling losses in this battle: 20 men killed, including a brother-in-law and a nephew; a number of horses killed; most of the expedition's supplies and property destroyed; "and the wounded comprised all the men of most worth and honor in the army."

De Soto had planned to meet supply ships on the coast and send the pearls of Cofitachequi to Havana. But the pearls were lost at Mabila. Some of his disillusioned men, naked under their rusty mail, planned to sail with the ships. To prevent this the Adelantado again turned his face from the coast.

A River "Larger than the Danube"

THE expedition almost ended in the spring of 1541, when the Chickasaws made a surprise dawn attack on the northern Mississippi camp. Fortunately, the Indians mistook stampeding horses for cavalry and withdrew; yet a dozen Spaniards lost their lives, and 50 horses were killed. Clothing, saddles, and weapons were burned. Shaking with cold, the men covered themselves with grass mats, while they fashioned new saddles and lances.

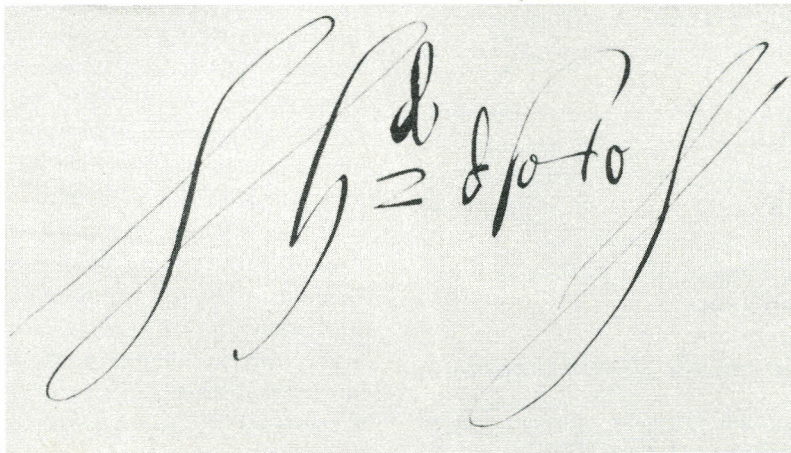
On May 8, 1541, De Soto saw "the great River," so wide that "if a man stood still on the other side, it could not be discerned whether he were a man or no." Beyond the Mississippi lay the rumored wealth of Pacaha Province, so the artisans built barges and the army crossed for the march into Arkansas to the mouth of the St. Francis. Finding no gold, they turned west, then south, to winter on the west bank of the Ouachita River, near Camden, Ark. Here, the interpreter Juan Ortiz died, and his death was a great loss.

The Death of De Soto

EVEN De Soto was discouraged. He went back to the Mississippi, planning to settle at a seaport and refit for a westward advance, but the scouts found no news of the sea. To terrorize the populous country and keep the Indians from uniting against him, the Adelantado ordered the destruction of the Anilco village. The bloody fighting was left to his lieutenants, for De Soto, called by his men "one of the best lances who have passed to the New World," was burning with fever. A few days later, on May 21, 1542, Hernando de Soto died.

Not all mourned his passing, for he was a stern man. Yet, skill and courage demanded re-

De Soto's signature.





View from Shaw's Point across the mouth of Manatee River to Tampa Bay.

spect, and his concern for his men won devotion. Secretly, they buried their knight within the village walls, telling the Indians that the "Child of the Sun" had ascended to his father. When the natives saw the loosened earth and whispered, the Spaniards dug up the body and sank it, weighted in an oaken casket, into the dark bosom of the Father of Waters.

Return to Civilization

LUIS DE MOSCOSO, DE SOTO's appointed successor, after a futile try to reach Mexico through Texas, led the tired band again to the Mississippi, where they spent the winter building seven little ships. Before the fleet sailed downstream on July 2, 1543, most of the remaining 50 horses—those faithful steeds that were such a decisive factor in battle—were slaughtered for their meat.

Running a gauntlet of arrows, the ships found the Gulf 19 days later. On September 10, some 300 Spaniards and 100 Indians reached Mexico's Pánuco River. There, haggard and worn, they found a warm welcome.

That fall, a ship took the news of De Soto's death to Doña Isabel.

Florida and the Spanish Empire

HEARTBREAK and hardship failed to destroy the golden myth of Florida. Moscoso and his

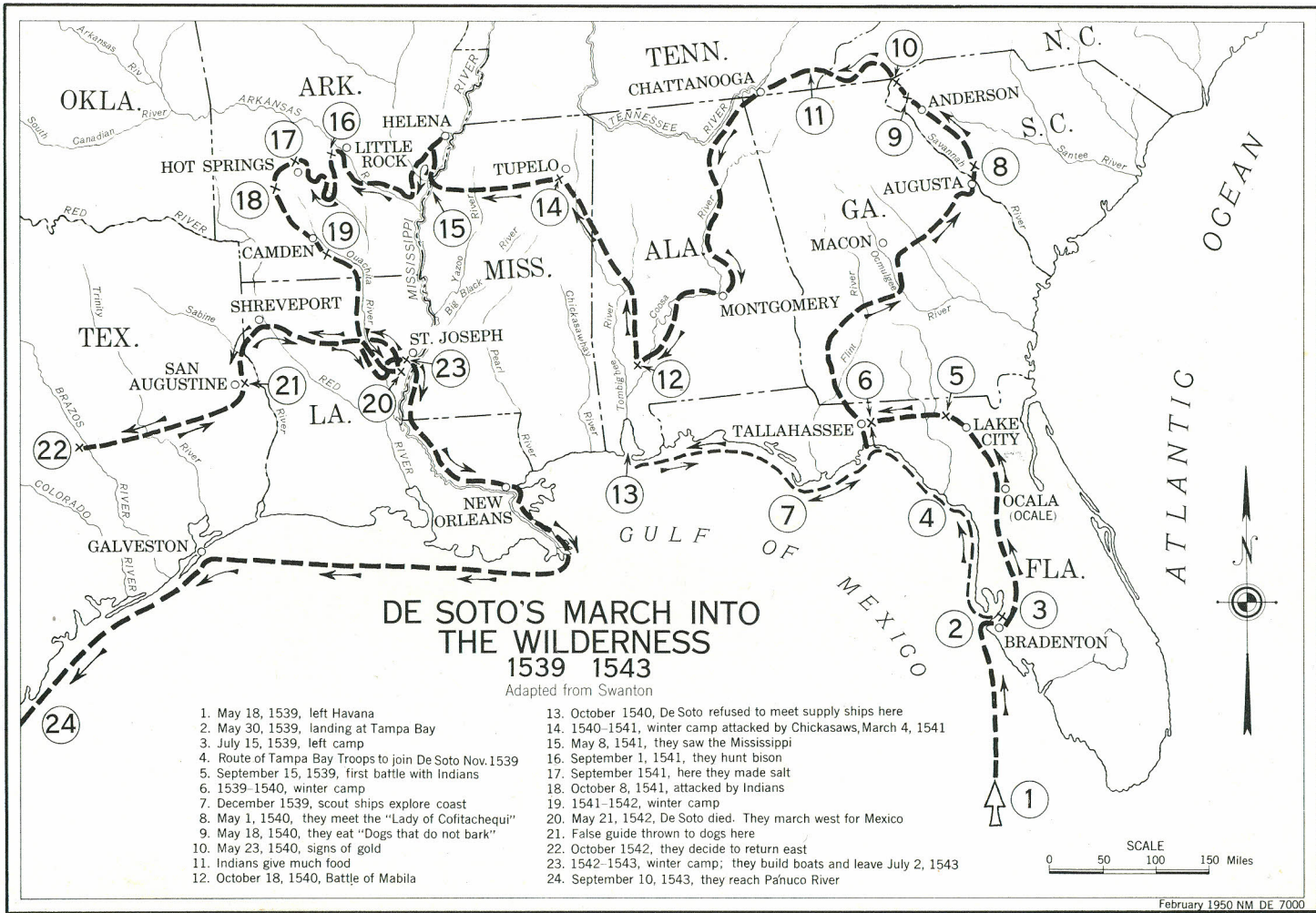
tattered comrades, safe once more, painted glowing pictures of the north country. Around the Caribbean, however, Spain had precious metals and docile natives, so North American furs and forests held little attraction. Florida was merely a dangerous coast on the treasure fleet route. After the martyrdom of Fray Luis Cancer by the Indians, and the unsuccessful colonies of Luna and Villafañe, the Crown prohibited Florida projects.

Then, in 1564, the French colony on Florida's St. John's River threatened the treasure fleets. The founding of St. Augustine was Spain's inevitable answer.

De Soto National Memorial

DE SOTO National Memorial, established August 5, 1949, by the Secretary of the Interior, embraces approximately 25 acres on the shore of Tampa Bay, 5 miles west of Bradenton, Fla. The United States De Soto Expedition Commission has concluded that De Soto's first landing was probably in this vicinity.

De Soto National Memorial is a part of the National Park System owned by the people of the United States and administered for them by the National Park Service of the Department of the Interior. Limited public facilities are under development. Correspondence should be addressed to The Superintendent, De Soto National Memorial, Bradenton, Fla.



DE SOTO'S MARCH INTO THE WILDERNESS 1539 1543

Adapted from Swanton

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. May 18, 1539, left Havana 2. May 30, 1539, landing at Tampa Bay 3. July 15, 1539, left camp 4. Route of Tampa Bay Troops to join De Soto Nov. 1539 5. September 15, 1539, first battle with Indians 6. 1539-1540, winter camp 7. December 1539, scout ships explore coast 8. May 1, 1540, they meet the "Lady of Cofitachequi" 9. May 18, 1540, they eat "Dogs that do not bark" 10. May 23, 1540, signs of gold 11. Indians give much food 12. October 18, 1540, Battle of Mabila | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13. October 1540, De Soto refused to meet supply ships here 14. 1540-1541, winter camp attacked by Chickasaws, March 4, 1541 15. May 8, 1541, they saw the Mississippi 16. September 1, 1541, they hunt bison 17. September 1541, here they made salt 18. October 8, 1541, attacked by Indians 19. 1541-1542, winter camp 20. May 21, 1542, De Soto died. They march west for Mexico 21. False guide thrown to dogs here 22. October 1542, they decide to return east 23. 1542-1543, winter camp; they build boats and leave July 2, 1543 24. September 10, 1543, they reach Pahuco River |
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