

Are you ready to explore the ancient cultures of America's Southeast?

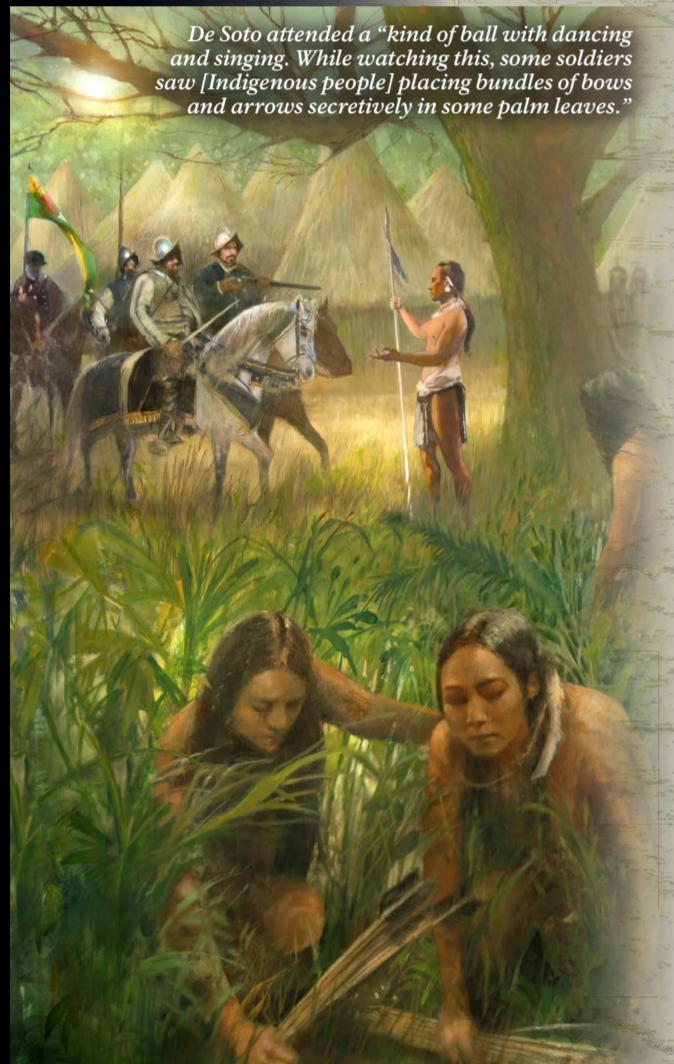
De Soto National Memorial shares stories of many cultures connected to a historic expedition. Spain's monarchs once claimed, by divine right, they owned all lands they occupied. In 1539 the king sent renowned conquistador Hernando de Soto to colonize the Southeast. De Soto was to subdue the Indigenous people and convert them to the king's religion.

De Soto had previously overtaken Indigenous peoples in Peru and Central America, including the large Incan Empire. He enslaved men as porters and guides, gave women to his soldiers, and punished those suspected of treachery.

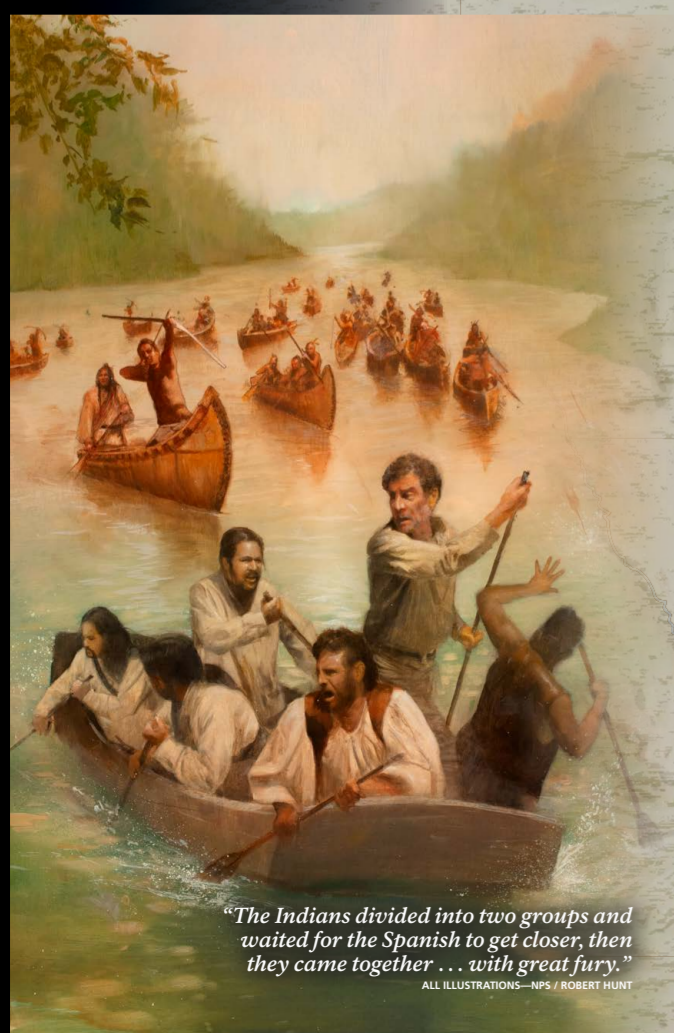
In the 1540s de Soto encountered many Indigenous groups of the Southeast who resisted and ultimately ousted his expedition, yet irreversible harm was done to these cultures. Learn more about the expedition's course and effects.



"They captured a hundred" and took them "along in chains with collars about their necks and they were used for carrying the baggage."



De Soto attended a "kind of ball with dancing and singing. While watching this, some soldiers saw [Indigenous people] placing bundles of bows and arrows secretly in some palm leaves."



"The Indians divided into two groups and waited for the Spanish to get closer, then they came together ... with great fury."

1539—The Expedition Sets Sail

On May 18 de Soto's nine ships leave Havana with about 700 people, 200 horses, and 400 pigs. Within two weeks they land at what is now Tampa Bay.

1 De Soto takes the village of Uzita. Nearby his men retrieve Spaniard Juan Ortiz, the lone survivor of a 1528 mission who was enslaved for years by the Uzita cacique (male chief) until rescued by a Native American woman. Familiar with Indigenous languages and cultures, Ortiz becomes de Soto's main interpreter and guide.

The expedition moves quickly through forests and grasslands, then deep rivers, swamps, and palm thickets slow it down. The area's Indigenous people continually shoot arrows at the expedition.

2 Upon learning of the expedition's approach, Anhayca's residents leave their town. De Soto camps here for the winter with ample food. Many of the expedition's enslaved people die from the cold.

Spring 1540—Following Rumors of Wealth

To find gold and silver, de Soto heads northeast. His expedition passes through the land of the Toa but does not head to the principal village of Ocmulgee.

3 The cacica (female chief) at Cofitachequi seeks peace, greeting de Soto with pearls and goods. When she says Chiaha may have mines, he forces her to take him there across the high mountains.

4 At Chiaha Cofitachequi's cacica escapes while de Soto rests and his scouts search for mines. When they return without gold or silver, he heads south.

5 The Coosa cacique leads the expedition south through his lands. He warns de Soto about his neighboring cacique, the fearsome Tuscaloosa.

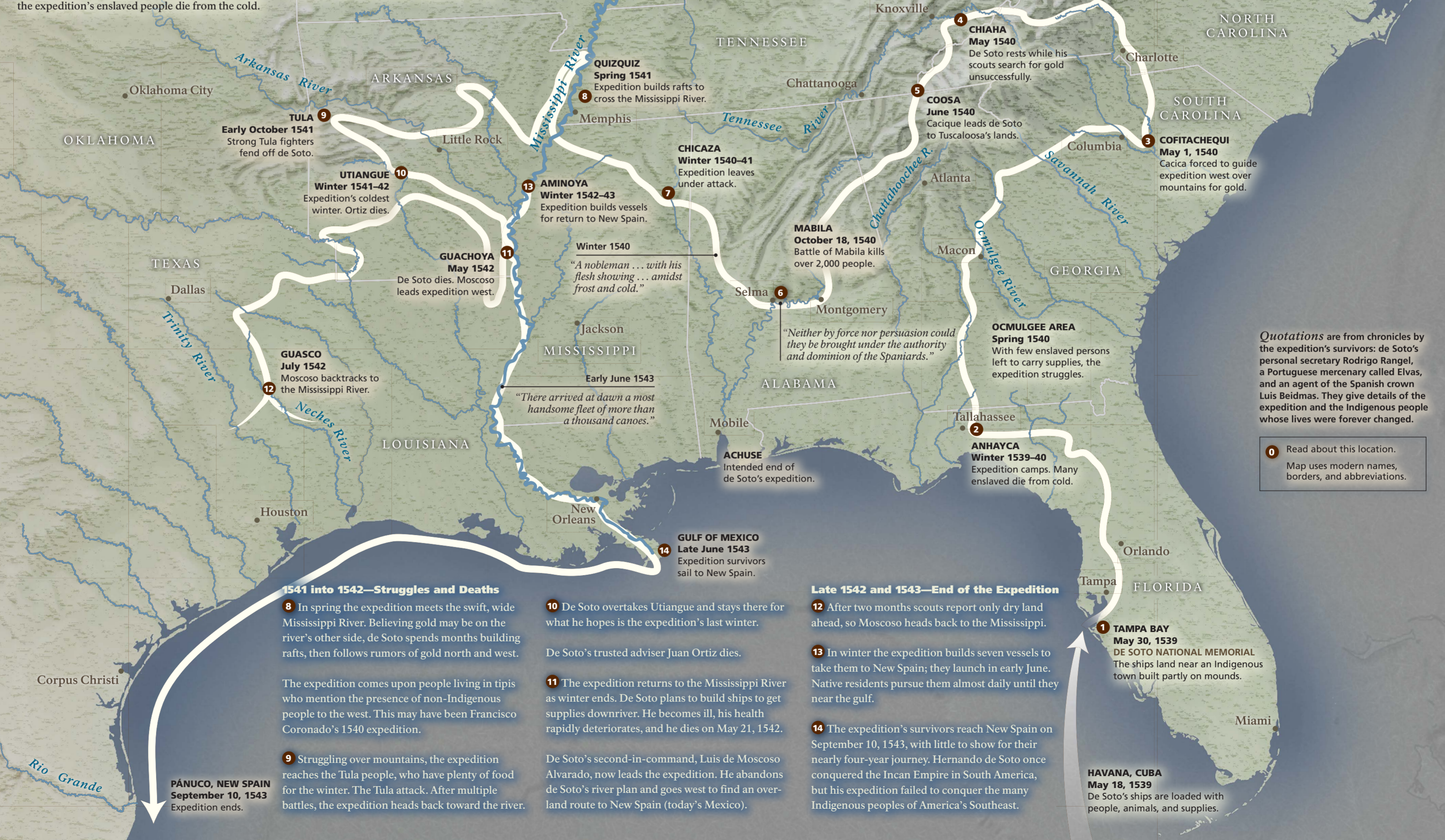
Tuscaloosa says he will let de Soto winter at Mabila. This suits de Soto's plan to send a detachment south to Achuse, where Spanish supply ships wait.

Late 1540 into 1541—Surprise Attacks

6 At Mabila, a walled town on a wide river, de Soto demands to speak with Tuscaloosa about supplies. Tuscaloosa's warriors ambush de Soto. The battle ends when the Spaniards set the town on fire. Over 2,000 Indigenous people die. The fleeing Spaniards lose few people but most supplies.

With mutiny stirring, de Soto turns his expedition west. They face the oncoming winter with low supplies and dim hopes.

7 The Chicaza cacique lets de Soto use an abandoned village and provides food and supplies. Relations sour when the Spaniards execute several Chicaza people for stealing a pig. The Chicaza, in turn, attack them at night using arrows tipped with flaming herbs. Barely escaping, the expedition battles on the run for two weeks. The Chicaza pursue until the expedition leaves their territory.



"Having seen our determination, they gave us 800 Indians to carry our food and clothes, and other Indians to guide us."

Quotations are from chronicles by the expedition's survivors: de Soto's personal secretary Rodrigo Rangel, a Portuguese mercenary called Elvas, and an agent of the Spanish crown Luis Beidmas. They give details of the expedition and the Indigenous people whose lives were forever changed.

0 Read about this location. Map uses modern names, borders, and abbreviations.

1541 into 1542—Struggles and Deaths

8 In spring the expedition meets the swift, wide Mississippi River. Believing gold may be on the river's other side, de Soto spends months building rafts, then follows rumors of gold north and west.

The expedition comes upon people living in tipis who mention the presence of non-Indigenous people to the west. This may have been Francisco Coronado's 1540 expedition.

9 Struggling over mountains, the expedition reaches the Tula people, who have plenty of food for the winter. The Tula attack. After multiple battles, the expedition heads back toward the river.

10 De Soto overtakes Utiangue and stays there for what he hopes is the expedition's last winter.

De Soto's trusted adviser Juan Ortiz dies.

11 The expedition returns to the Mississippi River as winter ends. De Soto plans to build ships to get supplies downriver. He becomes ill, his health rapidly deteriorates, and he dies on May 21, 1542.

De Soto's second-in-command, Luis de Moscoso Alvarado, now leads the expedition. He abandons de Soto's river plan and goes west to find an overland route to New Spain (today's Mexico).

Late 1542 and 1543—End of the Expedition

12 After two months scouts report only dry land ahead, so Moscoso heads back to the Mississippi.

13 In winter the expedition builds seven vessels to take them to New Spain; they launch in early June. Native residents pursue them almost daily until they near the gulf.

14 The expedition's survivors reach New Spain on September 10, 1543, with little to show for their nearly four-year journey. Hernando de Soto once conquered the Incan Empire in South America, but his expedition failed to conquer the many Indigenous peoples of America's Southeast.

Tribal Homelands
Most descendants now live elsewhere.



CADDO Modern Tribe
Tula Tribal ancestors linked to de Soto's expedition
Expedition route

PROTECTING HOMELANDS In the lands de Soto sought to claim for Spain lived many Indigenous people. Most were of long-established cultures archeologists today call Mississippian or Eastern Woodland.

Their towns often had tall earthen mounds; some were shielded by intricate wooden walls. Mounds protected their departed leaders and were used for gatherings. De Soto arrived at Indigenous towns that were hundreds of years old. Some were abandoned,

but many thrived with thousands of people: families, hunters, farmers, traders, builders, and artists.

Indigenous leaders were clever and strategic, though de Soto dismissed them as weak and primitive. Some protected their interests by sending him in aimless directions. Attacks on the expedition were incessant until its end. The Indigenous people successfully chased the expedition out of their homelands, down the Mississippi River to the gulf.

Top to bottom:
Stone axe head, 800–1500 CE
Chert projectile point, 5000–1000 BCE
Spanish coin from Anhayca, 1539 CE



Below:
Chunky stone, 1500–1600 CE. In this ancient game, competitors threw spears at a rolling stone. The closest spear won. Consequences for losing could be severe.



ILLUSTRATION—NPS / ROBERT HUNT

Those Who Lived Here

Imagine life in the American Southeast before de Soto arrived. This illustration shows the typical Indigenous city he would have found, including the field above for chunky and other activities.

When European expeditions arrived in the 1500s, the Indigenous people faced slavery, rape, battles, imprisonment, deadly diseases, and the destruction of their towns. For the next 200 years they adapted and reorganized in response to colonization.

Their Descendants

Over 40 Tribes are descended from the Indigenous people de Soto's expedition encountered (*map at left*). The Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee, Miccosukee, and Seminole are among those associated with De Soto National Memorial. Tribal Nations carry forward ancestral customs, languages, and histories.

Today's Explorers

Keep exploring stories told at De Soto National Memorial as they emerge. The National Park Service works with Tribal Nations and local communities to recover more stories and honor Indigenous people and cultures.

The park is part of the Trail of Florida's Indian Heritage, whose sites feature Florida's Indigenous people. Learn more at www.trailoffloridasindianheritage.org.

De Soto National Memorial is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. Continue exploring national parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities at www.nps.gov.

1400s–1500s POPULATIONS



GETTING HERE From downtown take FL 64W (Manatee Ave.) for about 5 miles, then 75th St. NW for 2 miles to the park.

PLAN YOUR VISIT

HOURS The park is open daily except Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. Grounds are open dawn to dusk. The visitor center is open 9 am to 5 pm. The parking lot closes at 5 pm. Call or check the park website for the current status.

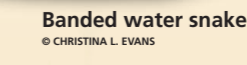
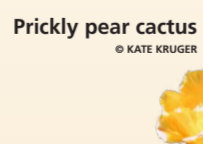
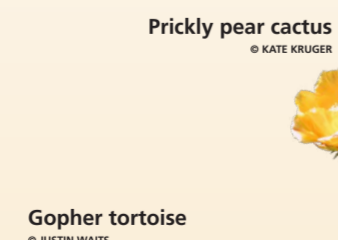
ACTIVITIES At the visitor center learn about the expedition, area, ranger-led programs, kayak tours, and the NPS Junior Ranger program. • At the Replica Spanish Camp (Camp Uzita) learn about Indigenous and expedition life. Rangers in period dress offer demonstrations January to mid-April. • Take Nature Trail to a mangrove forest along the Manatee River.

ACCESSIBILITY We strive to make facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to the visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check the park website.

SAFETY AND REGULATIONS No camping in the park. • Stay on developed trails. • No bicycles on trails or walkways. • Keep pets on a leash of six feet or less. • Using remotely piloted aircraft like drones is prohibited. • Be alert for fire ants, cactus, and poison ivy. • Be careful while wading. Sharp shells and barnacles can cut, some rays can sting, and deep holes in the river can catch you unaware. • For firearms regulations check the park website.

EMERGENCIES CALL 911

National Park Foundation
Join the park community.
www.nationalparks.org



MANGROVES



Mangroves on the Move
Mangroves grow along the shore, building and protecting fragile coastal habitat. Red mangrove is the pioneer. Its long roots act like a basket to trap soil and plant matter that make more soil and expand the shoreline. Black and white mangroves continue to build land with roots that reach above water. This mangrove forest provides food and shelter for marine life and protects higher ground from storm waves.

Living Memorial Many plant and animal species at the park today were here when de Soto arrived. Ospreys circle above water looking for fish. White ibis probe mud for small animals. A water snake or marsh rabbit might swim by. The gopher tortoise may stay in its burrow.

The background photo shows what much of Florida looked like in the 1500s—a savanna of grasses and palms. Pigs and armadillos were not here then but are here now. Some pigs brought by the de Soto expedition made it into the wild; their descendants now thrive elsewhere in Florida. Armadillos from Texas were brought to Florida as pets as early as the 1920 and also made it into the wild.