



Foundation Document Overview

De Soto National Memorial

Florida



Contact Information

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Purpose



The purpose of DE SOTO NATIONAL MEMORIAL is to commemorate Hernando de Soto's 1539 expedition throughout what is now the southeastern portion of the United States and its overwhelming impact on the course of North American history.

Significance

Significance statements express why De Soto National Memorial resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- De Soto's 1539 expedition was the first large-scale organized European exploration, which traversed 4,000 miles during its four-year quest.
- The contact between De Soto's expedition and American Indians caused social and cultural instability among indigenous peoples. Within 200 years of the expedition, American Indian populations were drastically reduced as a result of warfare, the introduction of pigs, disease, and the capture and displacement of leaders.
- Written accounts by members of the De Soto expedition were the first widely published and translated documents of their kind, which encouraged and accelerated European powers to explore and colonize North America.



Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Commemoration of the 1539 expedition of Hernando de Soto** – De Soto National Memorial is entrusted to promote understanding of the natural, cultural, and historic resources and make them relevant to the time period of the expedition. The aftermath of the contact between the expedition and American Indians is also portrayed. Living history and educational programs are crucial to commemorating, educating, and conveying the importance of the expedition to the public. Living history at Camp Uzita, the historic weapons demonstrations, and ranger-led programs are some of the primary resources that the park has to explain the expedition.
- **Granite monument dedicated on the 400th anniversary of Hernando de Soto's 1539 landing in Florida (1939)** – The National Society of the Colonial Dames of America dedicated the monument during the 400th anniversary commemorating the landfall of De Soto's expedition.

De Soto National Memorial contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **William H. Shaw tabby house ruins**
- **Natural resources**
- **Museum collection**
- **Middens**



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- The expedition provides written accounts of the tactics and warfare between the two cultures.
- The people who were a part of the expedition were a product of their time and their place in their beliefs, cultures, and societies.
- De Soto National Memorial is a unit of the National Park Service, which educates and promotes the values of conservation and preservation of the places set aside by the American people for the unimpaired enjoyment of present and future generations.
- In present day, this expedition would have traveled through 10 states and approximately 20 NPS units.
- De Soto National Memorial is entrusted to promote understanding of the natural, cultural, and historic resources resulting from the written accounts of the De Soto expedition.
- The Spanish entradas (expeditions) of the 16th century brought about drastic change in native cultures and existing native landscapes due to the introduction of nonnative organisms that would transform the history of the southeastern United States.



Description

De Soto National Memorial was authorized by Congress on March 11, 1948, to establish an appropriate memorial to Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto, and to construct a suitable memorial structure for the benefit of the people of the United States.

De Soto National Memorial commemorates De Soto's landing in Florida in 1539 and the first large-scale European exploration of what is now the southeastern portion of the United States. Reports of the vast resources encountered by the De Soto expedition later spread throughout Europe and, as a direct result, colonization of "La Florida" commenced.

De Soto's exploratory force traveled 4,000 miles during its four-year mission. In opening the southeastern United States to European expansion, the expedition had an overwhelming impact on the course of North American history as well as its native inhabitants. Traditional social and cultural patterns were severely affected as a result of clashes between De Soto's forces and native warriors and a forced interaction of independent and disparate cultures. The expedition brought pigs with them from Europe for sustenance; however nonnative species competed for food with native species and could destroy a native village's food resource overnight. It had no predators and reproduced prolifically. Native inhabitants had no immunities to the many diseases that this nonnative species would bring. Native populations were decimated. After initial contact with De Soto, Native American lifeways were never the same.

De Soto National Memorial is in the National Register of Historic Places as a district and a site. Archeological resources included are 11 shell middens, the oldest of which dates to 365 BC, and the William H. Shaw "tabby house" ruins. Also included is a historic structure, the granite monument dedicated on the 400th anniversary of De Soto's 1539 landing in Florida.

De Soto National Memorial comprises 30 acres in Manatee County on the west coast of central Florida. Situated on a spit of land at the mouth of the Manatee River at its confluence with Tampa Bay, the park has more than 3,000 feet of shoreline. Roughly 80% of the park is mangrove estuary with the remainder consisting of pine uplands and mixed hardwoods, remnant shell ridges, and deposited dredge material from the adjacent Manatee River. Live oaks and gumbo limbo trees command much of the landscape of the memorial. Though not occurring naturally on the site, these trees have become a valuable park resource, adding significantly to visitor enjoyment. The most notable wildlife in the park is birds; however, small mammals and reptiles are also found.

The memorial offers robust programming for visitors including living history demonstrations, reenactments, seasonal kayak tours, Junior Ranger Program, museum exhibits, a park web page and Facebook page, special events, and other activities.

