

# DE SOTO TRAIL

National Historic Trail Study  
Final Report



**FRONT COVER:** *Illustration of the Hernando de Soto entrada by Dan Feaser, National Park Service, Harpers Ferry Interpretive Design Center. The original 4' x 8' oil on wood mural completed in 1969 is on display at the visitors center, De Soto National Memorial, Bradenton, Florida. It is said to be the only piece of artwork in the United States which accurately portrays the arms and armor used by the De Soto expedition.*

*This draft report has been prepared in response to the requirements of Public Law 100-187, De Soto National Trail Study Act of 1987.*

P99/D3611

# **DE SOTO TRAIL**

## **DE SOTO NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL STUDY**

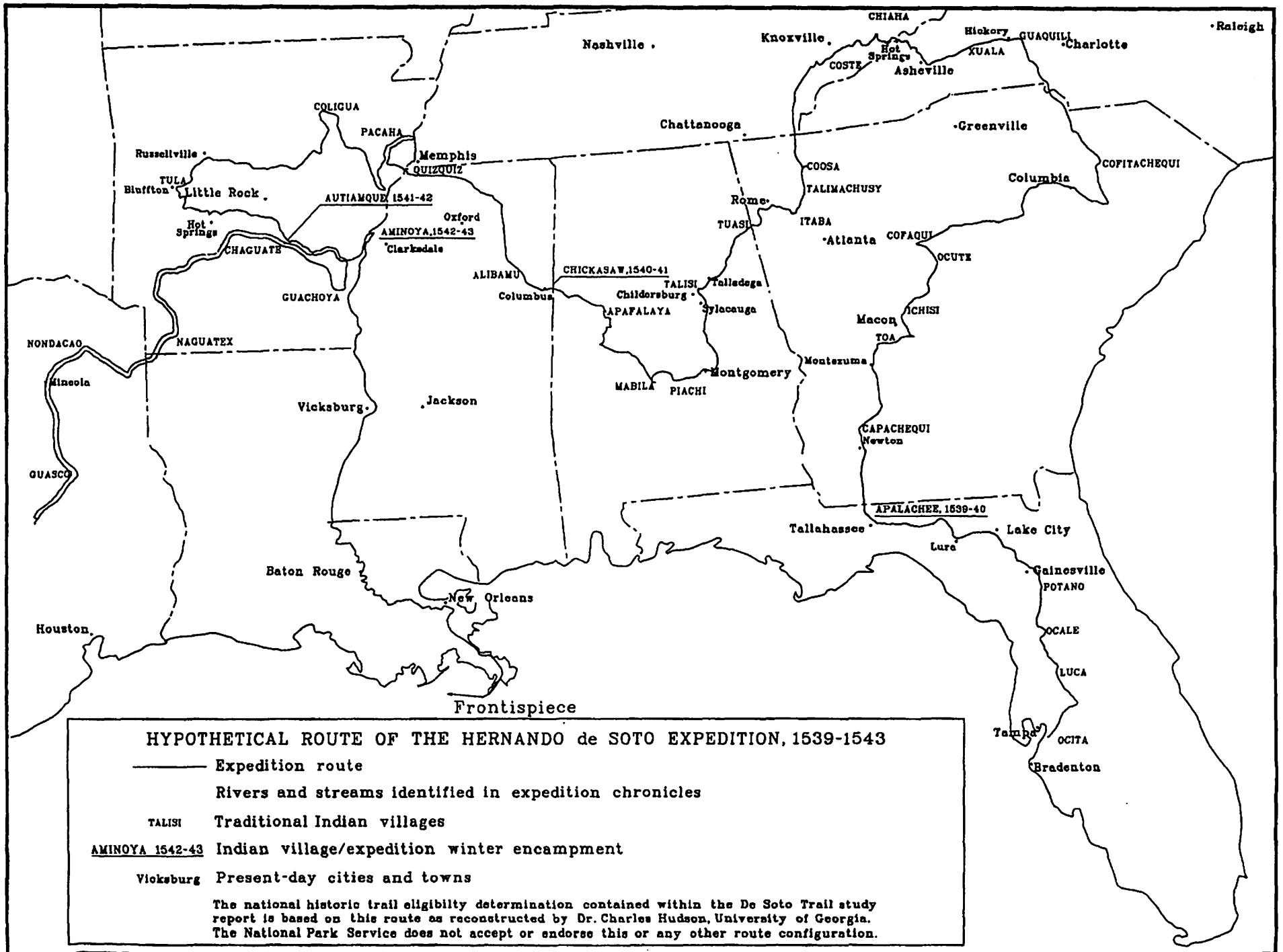
**Final Report  
Prepared by the National Park Service  
as required by the  
De Soto National Trail Study Act of 1987**

**National Park Service  
Southeast Regional Office  
March 1990**

*As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally-owned public lands and natural cultural resources. This includes fostering wise use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environment for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also promotes the goals of the Take Pride in America campaign by encouraging stewardship and citizen responsibility for the public lands and promoting citizen participation in their care. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. Administration.*



*The Department of the Interior, National Park Service is an equal opportunity agency and offers all persons the benefits of participating in each of its programs and competing in all areas of employment regardless of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, handicap or other non-merit factors.*



**HYPOTHETICAL ROUTE OF THE HERNANDO de SOTO EXPEDITION, 1539-1543**

- Expedition route
- Rivers and streams identified in expedition chronicles
- TALISI Traditional Indian villages
- AMINOYA 1542-43 Indian village/expedition winter encampment
- Vicksburg Present-day cities and towns

The national historic trail eligibility determination contained within the De Soto Trail study report is based on this route as reconstructed by Dr. Charles Hudson, University of Georgia. The National Park Service does not accept or endorse this or any other route configuration.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	7
<b>Preface</b> .....	9

### PART I STUDY REPORT

<b>Chapter 1.</b>	<b>Introduction</b> .....	13
	Purpose of the Study .....	13
	The National Trails Systems Act .....	13
	The Hernando de Soto Expedition .....	14
	Study Process .....	14
<b>Chapter 2.</b>	<b>Significant Characteristics</b> .....	17
	Eligibility for Designation as National Historic Trail .....	17
	Statement of Historical Significance .....	17
	Findings and Conclusions .....	20
<b>Chapter 3.</b>	<b>Special Planning Considerations</b> .....	21
	Background and Description of the De Soto Expedition .....	21
	Route Hypotheses .....	23
	Regional, State, and Local Activities .....	28
<b>Chapter 4.</b>	<b>Analysis of Alternatives</b> .....	39
	Alternative A: National Historic Trail Designation .....	40
	Alternative B: State and Local Commemoration .....	42
	Alternative C: National Heritage Corridor .....	43
	Alternative D: De Soto Expedition Trail Commission .....	43
	Alternative E: Expansion of Existing Interpretive Facilities ...	44
<b>Chapter 5.</b>	<b>Environmental Assessment of Alternatives</b> .....	45

### PART II SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

<b>Consultation and Coordination</b> .....	53
De Soto Advisory Committee .....	53
The De Soto Trail Commission .....	54
United States and State Congressional Representatives .....	60
Private Organizations and Special Interest Groups .....	64
<b>Report Preparation</b> .....	67

**PART III  
APPENDICES**

<b>Appendix A</b>	-- De Soto National Trail Study Act of 1987 (Public Law 100-187) ..	71
<b>Appendix B</b>	-- A Synopsis of the Hernando de Soto Expedition, 1539-1543 .....	75
<b>Appendix C</b>	-- Materials Distributed to the Public During the Study .....	127
<b>Appendix D</b>	-- Southeast Archaeological Conference .....	139
<b>Appendix E</b>	-- Resolution of the National Park System Advisory Board .....	143
<b>Appendix F</b>	-- Summary of Public Comments .....	147

**FIGURES**

<b>Frontispiece</b>	-- Hypothetical Route of the Hernando de Soto Expedition .....	3
<b>Figure 1</b>	-- Various Hypothetical Routes of the Hernando de Soto Expedition .	26
<b>Figure 2</b>	-- Distribution of Late Mississippian Archaeological Sites .....	29
<b>Figure 3</b>	-- Florida De Soto Trail .....	32
<b>Figure 4</b>	-- Alabama Highway Route of the De Soto Trail .....	36

**TABLES**

<b>Table 1</b>	-- Summary of State-Initiated De Soto Highway Route Designations .	31
<b>Table 2</b>	-- Archaeological and Historical Sites Associated with the De Soto Expedition .....	34
<b>Table 3</b>	-- Summary of Costs by Alternative .....	41
<b>Table 4</b>	-- Environmental Assessment of Alternatives .....	46

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The De Soto National Trail Study Act of 1987 (Public Law 100-187) directed the National Park Service to conduct a feasibility study of the approximate route traveled by Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto and provide recommendations to Congress as to its suitability for national historic trail designation. This report, prepared by the Southeast Regional Office of the National Park Service (NPS), assisted by the Southwest Regional Office, describes the study and provides an analysis of national historic trail designation as well as other alternatives for the commemoration of the De Soto expedition.

Hernando de Soto and 600 men landed on the west coast of Florida in May of 1539. They explored the southeastern United States--Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Texas, and Louisiana--for more than 4 years, searching for gold and silver, and fighting repeated battles with Native Americans. More than 300 soldiers, including De Soto himself, died during the expedition. Although the expedition was judged to be a failure because it discovered no easy source of new wealth, it was the first group of Europeans to explore the vast interior portion of the southeastern United States.

During this century, a number of attempts have been made to delineate the actual route of the De Soto expedition. The most thoroughly researched route hypothesis was that of the United States De Soto Expedition Commission whose findings were completed in 1939. A substantial advance in archaeological data subsequent to the Commission's findings has resulted in several more recent hypotheses. The most widely accepted--that of Dr. Charles Hudson, University of Georgia--is based on the expedition chronicles (as were the Commission's findings), the travels of related expeditions and substantial data from a number of archaeological investigations. Even though a number of investigators are actively working on various route hypotheses, the only location to which De Soto can be linked with a reasonable degree of certainty is the site of the expedition's first winter encampment in Tallahassee, Florida.

As a result of the De Soto Trail Study, the NPS has determined that the route of the expedition fails to meet two of the three criteria for national historic trail designation. Further, the National Park System Advisory Board recently approved a resolution which recommended against the designation of the De Soto route as a national historic trail. Although the expedition is of national significance, the determination indicated that there is a substantial lack of evidence as to the actual route location and that potential for historic interpretation cannot be adequately assessed at this time. In view of this determination, several alternatives to national historic trail designation have been analyzed including the completion of the highway marking effort first initiated in 1985 by the state of Florida, the enactment of special legislation to formally commemorate the expedition, and the expansion of existing Federal and state interpretive facilities associated with the De Soto expedition.



---

Public comments received with respect to the draft study report represented a wide range of views. Some commentators indicated that national historic trail designation and trail marking should not occur at this time due to insufficient information as to the actual route location while others believed there was a consensus among De Soto scholars regarding the approximate route location warranting designation and marking efforts. In addition, several comments provided historical or archaeological interpretations in support of various route hypotheses or in rebuttal to the route reconstruction of Dr. Charles Hudson.

## PREFACE

If there is a point of agreement regarding the expedition of Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto, it is the fact that his route through the southeastern United States will never be fully retraced throughout its entire course. To wit, after extensive study by the U.S. De Soto Expedition Commission and years of intensive research by numerous scholars, it is still not possible to identify the actual route of the expedition. If anything, debates regarding the route which have raged for years are far from resolved and appear to be more intense than ever before. Today, there are several hypotheses which have been advanced, all attempting to locate the route followed by De Soto and his expedition.

In order to conduct the De Soto Trail Study, it was necessary to focus on a single route hypothesis for the determination of national historic trail eligibility. This is particularly important with that historic trail criterion addressing trail "integrity" or location; the consideration of multiple routes would certainly argue against national historic trail designation. Therefore, the route reconstruction of Dr. Charles Hudson, University of Georgia, was selected for purposes of completing the study. The work of Dr. Hudson is widely accepted among De Soto scholars, while his route reconstruction is based on years of intensive study and collaboration with numerous authorities on the subject. In addition, Dr. Hudson is the only contemporary student of De Soto attempting to reconstruct a definitive route (as opposed to a general corridor) throughout the entire 3,500 mile journey of the expedition.

The sole intent of this study is the determination of national historic trail eligibility; it is not concerned with the evaluation of various route hypotheses. The use of Dr. Hudson's route reconstruction in this study was toward this end alone. The National Park Service neither accepts nor endorses the route reconstruction of Dr. Hudson or the work of any other De Soto scholar.

---

**PART I**  
**STUDY REPORT**

---

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### **Purpose of the Study**

In December 1987, Congress enacted the De Soto National Trail Study Act (refer to Appendix A, page 71) directing the National Park Service (NPS) to conduct a feasibility study of the "...De Soto Trail, the approximate route taken by the Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto in 1539, extending through portions of the states of Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi to the area of Little Rock, Arkansas, on to Texas and Louisiana, and any other states which may have been crossed by the expedition." Although other Europeans had already explored the fringes of the southeastern United States, the De Soto expedition was the first to penetrate and explore vast interior areas of the continent including the lower Mississippi River.

### **The National Trails System Act**

The National Trails System Act (Public Law 90-543) was approved in 1968 by Congress "...to provide for the ever-increasing outdoor recreation needs...and...to promote the preservation of...the open-air, outdoor areas and historic resources of the Nation...". The purpose of the Act and subsequent amendments was to (1) institute a national trail system consisting of scenic, recreation, historic and side or connecting trail components to maximize recreational opportunities and preserve scenic, natural, cultural, and historic areas; (2) designate the Appalachian Trail and the Pacific Crest Trail as the initial components of the system; and (3) provide guidelines by which additional trails could be added to the system.

National historic trails are nationally significant historic routes of travel which follow as closely as possible the original route. The purpose for such trails is "...the identification and protection of the historic route and its historic remnants and artifacts for public use and enjoyment." Although the designation of such routes is continuous, the actual established or developed trail need not be. In cases where the trail follows an existing road to approximate the original location, such segments may be marked to facilitate retracement of the historic route. Similarly, an existing road which parallels a historic trail may be marked to commemorate the historic route. A historic trail may be managed by Federal, State or local governments, or private organization either individually or through a cooperative arrangement.

National scenic and historic trails can only be designated by Congress. The Secretary of the Interior or the Secretary of Agriculture, as applicable, may establish and designate national recreation trails with the consent of the Federal agency, state, or political subdivision having jurisdiction over the lands involved, upon finding that such trails meet the established criteria.

Currently the eight national historic trails within the system are Lewis and Clark Trail, Oregon Trail, Mormon Trail, Iditarod Trail, Overmountain Victory Trail, Trail of Tears, Nez Perce Trail and the Santa Fe Trail.

### **The Hernando de Soto Expedition**

Spanish explorer, Hernando de Soto and 600 men landed on the west coast of Florida on May 30, 1539. They explored the southeastern United States for more than four years, searching for gold and silver and fighting several battles with Native Americans. More than 300 soldiers, including De Soto himself, died during the expedition.

After marching through Florida, De Soto's group is believed to have traveled northeast through Georgia and into South Carolina and North Carolina before turning west and southwest into parts of Tennessee, Alabama and Mississippi. On May 8, 1541, the expedition sighted the Mississippi River, then headed into Arkansas. They then returned to the Mississippi River where De Soto died on May 21, 1542. Following an ill-fated attempt to reach Mexico over land by way of Arkansas and Texas, the remaining members of the expedition sailed down the Mississippi River and along the Gulf Coast. A detailed description of the expedition's journey is contained in Appendix B, page 75.

Because the expedition did not locate new sources of gold and silver for the Spanish crown, it was judged to be a failure. By many accounts, however, the expedition was quite successful. It was the De Soto expedition that first succeeded in penetrating and exploring the vast interior areas of southeastern United States. As the first Europeans to see the interior of the continent, the De Soto expedition is comparable in significance to the Coronado Expedition (1540-42) which explored the western United States. Written accounts of the journey contain the only descriptions of the people who inhabited the region prior to European contact. Further, expedition reports about the land later helped stimulate colonization.

### **Study Process**

The Southeast Regional Office of the NPS conducted the De Soto Historic Trail Study with the assistance of the Southwest Regional Office. Staff members of both offices served on the study group and provided planning coordination with states in their respective Regions. This group was responsible for determining the feasibility and desirability of national historic trail designation; identifying trail issues; developing alternative plans; and assuring for appropriate public involvement. The study report was prepared by staff of the Southeast Regional Office.

Shortly before Congressional authorization for a De Soto National Trail Study, each state (except Georgia) along the route approved a resolution creating The De Soto Trail Commission and appointed one or more representatives to serve on the

Commission. Following study authorization and at the request of the NPS, a De Soto Trail Advisory Committee was organized and included representatives from each of the involved states (except Georgia). Both the Commission and Advisory Committee supported activities of the study group by providing relevant information, reviewing draft materials and assisting with public involvement. The state of Georgia recently established the Georgia de Soto Trail Commission and selected two Commission members to serve on the De Soto Trail Commission and the NPS De Soto Trail Advisory Committee. Additional information regarding the Commission and Advisory Committee is contained in Part II, Consultation and Coordination, page 53.

Through a Cooperative Agreement between the NPS and the University of Georgia, Dr. Charles Hudson prepared a detailed description of a proposed expedition route based on research he has been involved with for the past 10 years. Dr. Hudson also mapped this route on a series of U.S. Geological Survey maps (scale of 1:500,000) including the tentative location of numerous traditional villages and mound centers.

In September and October 1988, approximately 330 people attended public meetings held at 15 locations throughout the 10-state study area. In addition to comments of meeting attendees, the NPS received written statements or requests for information from 60 people. All comments, both written and oral, supported designation of the De Soto expedition route either as a national historic trail or another similar form of Federal recognition. To a large degree, the public appeared to be thinking more in terms of a marked "commemorative highway route" as opposed to the development of the actual expedition route as a trail. This is attributed primarily to the lack of consensus regarding the actual route location and also due to the precedent of the commemorative highway route recently established by the state of Florida. Although there was agreement regarding the national significance of the expedition, lively discussions occurred at numerous meetings with respect to the identification of De Soto's actual route. The discussions focused on two theorized routes; the route location recommended by the U.S. De Soto Expedition Commission (1939), and the more recent route reconstruction advanced by Dr. Charles Hudson and several colleagues. Materials provided to the public during the study included a brochure describing the process and a summary of the public meetings (Appendix C, page 127).

In conjunction with the October 1988 annual Southeastern Archaeological Conference, the NPS sponsored a symposium (refer to Appendix D, page 139) to discuss the De Soto National Trail Study. The key subject of the symposium was a discussion of the expedition route reconstruction by Dr. Charles Hudson. During this discussion, Dr. Hudson delineated the route based on his extensive research. Several archaeologists attending the symposium provided Dr. Hudson with additional or supporting information, but none indicated disagreement with the reconstruction. Closing remarks were provided by Dr. Douglas Jones (Chairman of The De Soto Trail Commission) indicating that the Commission would continue its efforts to mark a commemorative highway route; that it

---

was not possible at this time to arrive at a scholarly consensus regarding the actual route; a commemorative De Soto route should be marked and described for public benefit; and that it was important for the public to be aware of the Nation's Spanish heritage and early Native American cultures.

During the October 1988 meeting of the National Park System Advisory Board, the NPS presented its preliminary recommendations with respect to national historic trail designation. The NPS recommended that until the actual location of the De Soto expedition route is determined it does not qualify as a national historic trail. The NPS recommendation is described in detail in Chapter 4, Analysis of Alternatives, page 39. Review of the recommendation was deferred to the Advisory Board's subcommittee for Historic Trails and a formal position on the matter would be approved at a subsequent Board meeting. At the April 1989 meeting of the Advisory Board, a resolution was approved which recommended against the designation of the De Soto route as a national historic trail. The full content of the resolution is contained in Appendix E, page 143.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **SIGNIFICANT CHARACTERISTICS**

#### **Eligibility for Designation as a National Historic Trail**

The National Trails System Act requires that a historic trail meet specific criteria in order to qualify for designation as a national historic trail. Specifically, Section 5(b)(11) of the Act reads as follows:

(11) To qualify for designation as a national historic trail, trail must meet all three of the following criteria:

(A) It must be a trail or route established by historic use and must be historically significant as a result of that use. The route need not currently exist as a discernible trail to qualify, but its location must be sufficiently known to permit evaluation of public recreation and historical interest potential. A designated trail should generally accurately follow the historic route, but may deviate somewhat on occasion of necessity to avoid difficult routing through subsequent development, or to provide some route variation offering a more pleasurable recreational experience. Such deviations shall be so noted onsite. Trail segments no longer possible to travel by trail due to subsequent development as motorized transportation routes may be designated and marked onsite as segments which link to the historic trail.

(B) It must be of national significance with respect to any of several broad facets of American history, such as trade and commerce, migration and settlement, or military campaigns. To qualify as nationally significant, historic use of the trail must have had far-reaching effects on broad patterns of American culture. Trails significant in the history of Native Americans may be included.

(C) It must have significant potential for public recreational use or historical interest based on historic interpretation and appreciation. The potential for such use is generally greater along roadless segments developed as historic trails and at historic sites associated with the trail. The presence of recreation potential not related to historic appreciation is not sufficient justification for designation under this category.

#### **Statement of Historical Significance**

It has been determined that the expedition of Hernando de Soto is of national significance. Reasons for which the expedition is significant include the fact that it was



the first major European exploration of interior southeastern United States; subsequent Spanish expeditions were planned, in large part, on knowledge acquired during the expedition; the knowledge of the absence of state-level societies and material wealth in the southeast significantly altered Spanish imperial ambitions; and expedition chronicles reveal a rare description of southeastern societies including mound-building chiefdoms in a full state of indigenous development.

The expedition led by Hernando de Soto succeeded in exploring, for the first time, the interior of the southeastern United States. As a consequence of the expedition, substantial knowledge of the region was gained. Subsequent Spanish expeditions into the southeastern interior during the latter half of the 16th century—Tristan de Luna (1559–61) and Juan Pardo (1566–68)—were planned, in part on the basis of knowledge derived from the De Soto expedition. Other Europeans had already explored the fringes of the southeast. Such explorers included Juan Ponce de Leon, 1513; Alonso Alvarez de Pineda, 1519; Lucas Vasquez de Ayllon, 1526; and Panfilo de Narvaez, 1528. It was De Soto and his comrades, however, who first saw the interior.

The De Soto expedition is historically significant in that it altered Spain's imperial ambitions in eastern North America. De Soto and his comrades wished to discover another state-level society with stores of precious metals and gems like those possessed by the Incas. But to his ruin, he discovered that precious items to southeastern cultures consisted of freshwater pearls, seashells, pieces of copper, and slabs of mica. Moreover, he discovered no society whose ranks included a peasantry accustomed to strenuous labor. With the knowledge that precious substances could not simply be taken from the Native Americans, and that there was no peasantry to be used for mining or agriculture, Spanish interest in the region waned. Interest in the region did not truly revive until the mid 17th century, when France and England began to pursue imperial designs.

The De Soto expedition is historically significant because the participants observed and interacted with a large number of native societies while they were still intact. The most important of these societies were chiefdoms, a type of society which was intermediate in complexity between egalitarian hunter-gatherers and state-level societies. These chiefdoms had relatively large populations dominated by reigning elites. The societies built large mound centers, such as those at Etowah, Ocumlgee, Parkin, and Belcher. In addition, these societies developed modes of cultivating corn, beans, and squash in quantities sufficient to sustain sizeable populations. They were dynamic societies which were troubled by internal instability and external competition. In several instances warring chiefdoms were separated by vast wilderness areas, which formed buffer zones between them.

In the late 17th century, when Europeans again began exploring the southeastern interior, they found that the social texture of native societies had changed dramatically. A majority of the large chiefdoms had fallen apart and the survivors had begun coalescing

and reorganizing themselves into the historic Indian tribes which included the Creeks, Choctaws, Chickasaws, Cherokees, and Catawbas. Thus, the route of the De Soto expedition is a historical thread connecting archaeological sites which are the remains of a native social order that had essentially vanished by the beginning of the 18th century. Recent attention to the De Soto expedition has stimulated archaeological research that is shedding new light on this little known period.

The De Soto expedition was the occasion of the first collision between Europeans and Native Americans in what would be a protracted struggle for supremacy in much of the southeastern United States. It was the first time the Native Americans could measure themselves against a people who had come from outside their known world. It was the beginning of a struggle that would last for three centuries. When it was over, the Native Americans would finally relinquish their rights to the land they had occupied for more than 10,000 years.

During the course of the De Soto expedition, fundamental lessons were learned by the Native Americans. They learned of the superiority of European weapons, and had their first experience with European military organization. The greatest military encounter of the expedition was the battle of Mabila on October 18, 1540. In this battle, De Soto lost 22 men and as many as 150 were wounded, while Native American casualties were estimated at 2,500 to 3,000. Those who experienced or heard about this battle must have realized that they could not defeat the Europeans in head-on military encounters. Certainly this was the case with the Chickasaws, who in the winter of 1540-41, fought the Spaniards most effectively using partisan tactics, wisely avoiding direct military confrontation.

The expedition had a devastating effect on the Native American cultures of the southeast. By the beginning of the 18th century, the population of the region was dramatically reduced. Many researchers believe it likely that the expedition was responsible in part for this depopulation due to the size and duration of the expedition and the extent of the area explored. Not only had populations dramatically declined by the early 1700s, but the moundbuilding cultures had largely vanished, replaced by historic tribes. Although these new tribes farmed, hunted, and fished as had their ancestors, their societies were more loosely organized and governed by tribal consensus. Further, they did not exhibit the complex political and religious characteristics observed by De Soto.

It is no wonder that the 16th century has been called America's forgotten century. De Soto and his comrades were more like medieval knights than the European soldiers and explorers of the 17th and 18th centuries. They wore body armor and fought with lances, halberds, crossbows, and matchlock guns. They saw the Native Americans as infidels, whose cultures and societies were not worthy of attention. They saw the hand of God in incidents and occurrences where modern men would not. Even though De Soto and his

men are our historical forebears, many of their actions are intelligible only through special explanation.

Similarly, the Native Americans of the 16th century were vastly different from the "Five Civilized Tribes" who survived into the 18th and 19th centuries. Further, because southeastern societies had no method of writing, they retained next to nothing of their history of De Soto or their own chiefdom ancestors. The trader Thomas Nairne, for example, reported in 1708 that the Chickasaws were the only southeastern cultures he had met who had any memory of the De Soto expedition, and from all appearances, their memory of it was slight. By the end of the 18th century, many southeastern tribes had little or no memory of the chiefdoms to which their ancestors belonged.

The De Soto expedition was the historical context in which these two cultures met. It was the historical moment in which our forgotten European forebears came into conflict with the likewise forgotten native lords of the southeast. It constitutes one of the great episodes in the age of European exploration.

### **Findings and Conclusions**

Following an analysis of relevant information with respect to eligibility for national historic trail designation, the NPS has determined that the route of the De Soto expedition is of national significance, but there is a substantial lack of evidence as to the actual route location and that it is not possible to assess the potential for historic interpretation at this time. A summary of this determination is contained in Chapter 4, Analysis of Alternatives, page 39.

As a result of this determination, the NPS provided the National Park System Advisory Board with a recommendation that until the actual location of the De Soto expedition route is determined it does not qualify as a national historic trail. The Advisory Board at its April 1989 meeting approved a resolution recommending against designation of the De Soto route as a national historic trail (Appendix E, page 143).

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **SPECIAL PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

#### **Background and Description of the De Soto Expedition, 1539-1543**

The discovery of the New World by Columbus in 1492 was a significant factor influencing Spanish exploration and colonization during the early years of the Age of Discovery. A substantial amount of energy and attention was diverted toward the New World resulting from news of Columbus' journey. One of the marvels of this period is the rapidity with which Spaniards explored and colonized the New World. The conquest or settlement of numerous areas which followed the conquest of Mexico by Cortes and Peru by the Pizarro brothers immediately preceded De Soto's expedition—Santo Domingo in 1498; Cuba and Panama in 1519; Ecuador in 1533; Columbia, 1537; and Chile in 1540. This rapid advance of Spanish power was due, in large part, to the discovery of wealthy civilizations in what is now Mexico and Peru.

Although attempts to colonize the southeastern region of North America had been made by Lucas Vasquez de Ayllon, Panfilo de Narvaez and others, De Soto was the first to succeed in penetrating into the interior. No one knew what mysteries and wealth were contained in such a vast unexplored area. The combination of an undiscovered region and great wealth previously amassed during the conquest of Mexico and Peru provided the power and motivation for the De Soto expedition. Further, the expedition was launched during the golden age of Spanish power. It was under such circumstances that in 1537 King Carlos I (Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire) granted De Soto an "asiento" to conquer and settle La Florida.

As De Soto had already experienced a brilliant career, he was the logical recipient of such an "asiento." Born in Jerez de los Caballeros in Estremadura, Spain, Hernando Mendez de Soto was the second son of wealthy parents. As was the custom of the day, Hernando's older brother would inherit the family estate. Thus, Hernando was encouraged to establish his own career. At the age of 14, Hernando went to Central America as a page for Pedrarias Davila. In later expeditions, De Soto participated in the exploration of Panama and Nicaragua and the conquest of the Incas in Peru with Francisco Pizarro. By the time he was commissioned to lead the expedition to Florida, De Soto was widely recognized for his wealth, courage, and important family ties.

On April 7, 1538, De Soto and approximately 650 people set sail from Seville, Spain, to Cuba for completion of final plans and preparations. In May 1539, the expedition which included knights, foot soldiers, artisans, priests, boatwrights, and scribes, as well as a large herd of pigs, departed from La Habana. By May 30, 1539, the ships had been unloaded on the west coast of Florida at the Indian town of Ocita, probably in the Tampa Bay area. The landing is believed to have been in the general vicinity of the Panfilo de Narvaez (1525) landing site.

During the first months, the expedition explored the area around the landing site, then traveled north and northwest to Anhayca, the principal town of the Apalachee. De Soto and his men spent the winter of 1539–1540 in Anhayca and several nearby settlements. The encampment, located in what is now Tallahassee, was occupied from October 1539 to March 1540.

After leaving Apalachee, the expedition traveled north into Georgia passing through settlements such as Ichisi and Ocute. Subsequent travels took the expedition into South Carolina, North Carolina and Tennessee, then heading southwest through the northwestern corner of Georgia and into Alabama. Principal settlements visited by the expedition included Cofitachequi, Chiaha, Coste, Coosa, Talisi, and Mabila. Upon entering the heavily palisaded town of Mabila, the expedition was attacked by warriors and allies of Chief Tascaluza. A fierce battle raged for the entire day. The battle took a toll on both sides and the expedition remained in Mabila for about a month to recover from its wounds. During this time, De Soto learned of ships awaiting the expedition at Achuse on the Gulf coast. De Soto, however, was able to convince the expedition to continue. They traveled on to Chickasaw, the location of the 1540–41 winter encampment.

The expedition had encountered several chiefdoms during this portion (1540) of the journey including Ichisi, Ocute, Cofitachequi, Coosa, and Tascaluza. These people—ancestors of historic southeastern tribes (Creek, Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Cherokees)—were primarily farmers raising corn on river bottomlands and other fertile soils. These civilizations were characterized by the use of earth mounds for ceremonial activities. The cultures were socially stratified (ranked societies) and organized into chiefdoms. Such chiefdoms were generally quite productive with centers established for economic, social, and religious activities. Although these cultures may have been past their peak at the time of the De Soto expedition, they were still flourishing with active mound building, high status families, and strong authoritarian chiefs.

In early March 1541, the expedition was attacked by Chickasaws as it was preparing to leave winter encampment. The attack killed 12 Spaniards and wounded many more. A large number of horses and pigs were also lost. After recovering from this battle, the expedition set out in a northwesterly direction through the chiefdoms of Alibamu and Quizquiz. Shortly after entering the latter chiefdom, the expedition encountered the Mississippi River. After crossing the river, De Soto and the expedition traveled through several regions of Arkansas (including the chiefdoms of Aquixo, Casqui, Pachaha, Quiguate, Coligua, Cayas, and Tula), arriving at Autiamque in early November. Here the expedition spent its third winter (1541–42). At Tula, the expedition had encountered Native Americans who hunted buffalo, thus reaching the territorial fringes of the Plains Indians.

The expedition set out from Autiamque in early March 1542 and traveled to the chiefdom of Anilco. The principal town of Anilco had a large supply of corn and was the most

densely populated chiefdom encountered by De Soto up to that time. The expedition then traveled to Guachoya which lay on the Mississippi River. From this location, a small group of expedition members traveled south in search of people or trails but found neither. This news must have been very disturbing to De Soto, for he knew of no state-level society east of the Mississippi River. Further, Native Americans had already informed him that the area north and west of the river was a wilderness, and his own men saw no signs of habitation to the south. Shortly afterward, De Soto was stricken with a fever and died on May 21, 1542.

De Soto was succeeded by Luis Moscoso de Alvarado. Under new command, the expedition survivors debated whether to escape to New Spain (Mexico) via the Mississippi River or an overland route. It was decided to attempt an overland route and in early June the expedition traveled in a northwesterly, then southwesterly direction through Arkansas and into southeastern Texas. By fall, the expedition encountered a group of people who subsisted solely by hunting and gathering. If they continued west, the expedition would not find adequate supplies of corn. In addition, the people they encountered spoke a language which was not understood by the Native American translators traveling with the expedition. At this point, they decided to return to the Mississippi River and travel via boat to the Gulf.

In December, the expedition arrived at Aminoya where they occupied a large palisaded town. During the winter and spring, they built several boats and on July 2, 1543, embarked on their journey down the Mississippi River. As they traveled downstream, the expedition was continually attacked by various groups of Native Americans in canoes. By late July or early August, the expedition arrived at the mouth of the river and on September 10, 1543, arrived at Tampico, Mexico.

In the four years and four months since the expedition sailed from La Habana, they had walked or ridden approximately 3,500 miles. One half of the expedition (311 people) survived the ordeal. Some of the survivors remained in Mexico; some went to Peru; while still others returned to Spain.

At the time, the De Soto expedition was considered to be a failure. The expedition's leader and more than half of its members had died either from battle wounds or disease and, of greater significance, they discovered no gold or state-level societies.

### **Route Hypotheses**

Even though the expedition traveled thousands of miles and was on the continent for more than four years, the Apalachee site (Tallahassee, Florida) is the only known location which confirms the presence of De Soto in North America. The actual route of the expedition has eluded scholars and the public for centuries. In large part, this is due to the vagueness of the chronicles which provide a contemporary account of the expedition. In addition, the expedition journeyed through unexplored and uncharted

areas. Further, the principal object of the expedition was the search for gold and other riches, not the exploration of North America. Finally, with the exception of a few locations such as winter encampments, the expedition did not remain at a single location long enough to discard substantial amounts of materials to permit discovery by modern-day archaeological investigations.

There are four chronicles which provide an account of the expedition—three are first-hand accounts written by expedition members while a fourth is an account based on the testimony of several participants. These chronicles consist of the work prepared by “the Gentleman of Elvas” published in 1591; Garcilaso de la Vega, a second-hand account published in 1605; Luys Hernandez de Biedma published in 1841; and Rodrigo Ranjel (De Soto’s private secretary during the expedition) published in 1851. The account by Elvas was compiled relatively soon after the expedition and appears to be uninfluenced by other accounts. The volume compiled by Garcilaso is the longest of the chronicles, but is heavily romanticized and of doubtful accuracy. The Biedma account appears to have been an “official” report of the expedition prepared after the expedition, but is very brief. The chronicle by Ranjel is based on a diary written during the expedition; the surviving portions provide an account from the landing in Florida to the winter encampment of 1541. In addition to the four chronicles, a crude map referred to as the “De Soto Map” locates a number of Native American villages while documents from later expeditions in southeastern United States (Tristan de Luna and Juan Pardo) describe areas previously visited by De Soto.

Although much remains unknown, information regarding the location of Native American societies during the time of the De Soto expedition has provided information regarding the route. In some cases, societies encountered by the expedition were in the same general locations as those reported by De Soto when visited by British and French explorers in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. This is particularly so with the societies of Florida. There is, however, much to be learned about the dramatic cultural changes which occurred during the early historic period.

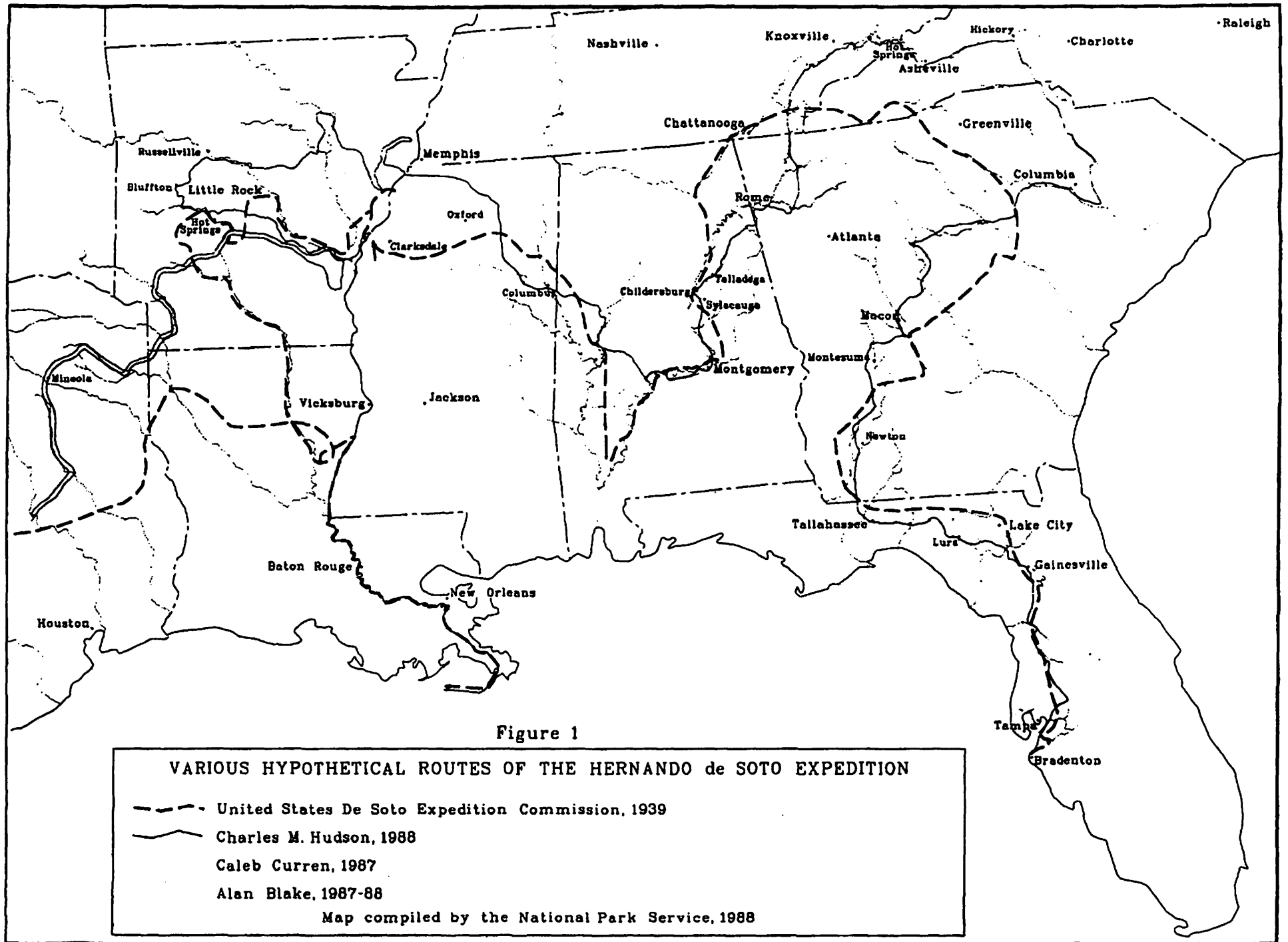
The recent accumulation of archaeological data has provided a key to the route through the location of 16th century Spanish and Native American materials, the accurate dating of materials associated with the expedition, and the location of areas devoid of inhabitants at the time of the expedition. As data becomes available, specific points along the route can be fixed with varying degree of certainty. To date, the Apalachee site in Tallahassee, Florida (winter encampment site of 1539–40), is the only location confirmed to have been occupied by the expedition. Additional archaeological investigations in Florida, northern Georgia, eastern Tennessee and Arkansas have revealed sites likely to have been associated with the expedition. Ongoing and future investigations are likely to provide further information for the location of points along the route.

Over the years, a number of attempts have been made to locate the route of the De Soto expedition. Several of the more recent attempts are delineated on Figure 1. Although Spanish maps as early as 1544 attempted to locate the route, the first careful attempt was by French cartographer Guillaume de L'Isle in 1718. The De Soto Expedition Commission in its final report of 1939 identified 11 theories ranging from that of De L'Isle to Lewis. The location of the route according to each theory varies widely. The earliest hypotheses were based only on the chronicles of Elvas and Garcilaso. Somewhat later, the Biedma chronicle was made available, but it was not until 1900 that all four chronicles were available. This is particularly significant in view of the fact that the Ranjel chronicle (the most recently discovered chronicle) is generally considered to be the most accurate account.

In 1936, the United States De Soto Expedition Commission was established to complete "...a thorough study of the subject of De Soto's expedition." The Commission, under the leadership of Dr. John R. Swanton of the Smithsonian Institution, published its findings in 1939. The Commission report reviewed the various routes proposed by earlier scholars and, based on its own criteria, established a recommended route. The criteria used by the Commission consisted of a detailed analysis of the chronicles, the "De Soto Map," and the Luna and Pardo documents; topographic features; location of Native American cultures; and the time necessary for the expedition to travel from one location to another. Although few of the Commission's recommendations ever materialized, a few historical markers were erected by local groups in various states. The Commission's report also indicated that "[T]here is much valuable work...to be done...as the nascent State archaeological surveys expand and begin to reconstruct the aboriginal history of the Southeast." The report, which intended to advance a hypothesis for further testing, has generally been accepted by the public as fact. One of its major shortcomings was the lack of archaeological data available at the time of the report.

Following the Commission's final report, the basis for a new understanding of De Soto became possible due to extensive archaeological research. Archaeological sites, primarily in Florida, east Tennessee, and north Georgia, have been linked with some degree of scientific probability to the expedition. Such sites include Ocita and Apalachee in Florida; Cofitachequi in South Carolina; Coosa in Georgia; Chiaha and Coste in Tennessee; and Casqui in Arkansas. As a result of more recent research, the locations of a number of sites—Cofitachequi, Coosa, and Apafalaya, to name a few—identified by the Commission have proven to be incorrect. Areas thought by the Commission to have been inhabited by Native Americans during the time of the expedition, and hence logical areas through which De Soto would have traveled, have recently been shown to have been uninhabited at the time of the expedition. In addition, the De Soto Expedition Commission assumed that villages remained in a single location over time, while more recent research indicates that some towns moved over a hundred miles between the 16th and 18th centuries. Coosa, a key in the Commission's route, was one of these towns.





A number of route hypotheses have been advanced recently by various scholars. The majority of these address specific portions of the route. Most notable of these hypotheses include Warren H. Wilkinson and Rolfe F. Schell, the Florida landing site; Richard Melvin, Apalachee to Chiaha; Alan Blake, Tampa Bay to the Mississippi River; and Caleb Curren, Alabama portion. Because each addresses a portion of the route, the hypotheses lack comprehensiveness. The location of a given town must be consistent with those which precede as well as those which follow throughout the entire route. Further, the location of a route crossing the Mississippi River must exhibit continuity from one riverbank to the other.

The only hypothesis subsequent to the De Soto Expedition Commission which attempts to delineate the entire route is that of Charles Hudson, Marvin T. Smith, and Chester B. DePratter (Frontispiece). It also appears to be the most thoroughly researched, logically constructed, and most widely accepted. This reconstruction is based on the De Soto chronicles, use of modern and historic maps, and use of supporting evidence.

The route reconstruction by Dr. Hudson relies primarily on the chronicles in the same order of reliability as did the U.S. De Soto Expedition Commission—Ranjel (most reliable); Elvas, Biedma, and Garcilaso (least reliable). The principal advances of the route achieved by Hudson over that of the Commission include (1) reconstruction of other 16th century Spanish expeditions to assist location of population centers and determination of accurate travel distances, (2) correlation of towns with known archaeological sites, and (3) a knowledge of towns located by the Commission route which have since been refuted due to archaeological research. The supporting evidence consists of the documentary record of expeditions which visited some of the same Native American towns and polities encountered by De Soto (Tristan de Luna, Alabama and Georgia; Rene Laudoniere, Florida; and Juan Pardo, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Tennessee); the archaeological record of late prehistoric sites in the southeast; discovery of 16th century European artifacts; and the occurrence of culturally similar sites in definable geographic areas. Thus, the hypothesis of Dr. Hudson builds on both the knowledge and the flaws of the Commission's route as well as considering an array of new data. If the Commission's report had a fatal flaw, it was its authoritative and comprehensive tone which caused the public to accept its theories as fact. In view of this, it is important to recognize the route reconstruction of Dr. Hudson for what it is—a well-researched, scholarly theory subject to modifications or adoption of alternate routings as new data becomes available.

Several recent initiatives are anticipated to result in the acquisition of additional data to identify specific locations visited by the expedition. Ongoing archaeological research at the Apalachee site by the state of Florida will continue to provide more data regarding 16th century Spanish materials and a description of the Native American culture. Artifacts removed from the site will be extremely valuable for comparative purposes. The University of Alabama has recently initiated an inventory of Late Mississippian period

sites (locations of Native American occupation during the 16th century) and those sites yielding probable 16th century European artifacts within the state of Alabama. Such information will enable (1) correlation between towns mentioned in the chronicles and archaeological sites, (2) mapping of polity boundaries, and (3) the identification of those unoccupied territories referred to by the chronicles. The delineation of polity boundaries and their centers is anticipated to provide substantial assistance in locating the route. As a result of National Park Service funding, the University is in the process of completing similar maps for the remaining states traversed by the expedition. The results of the mapping effort in Alabama as well as parts of Georgia and Tennessee are delineated in Figure 2.

Recent route hypotheses have also been used by various researchers to select key locations for archaeological investigations. Sites such as Ocale, Ocute, Coosa, Mabila, Chickasaw, Autiamque, and Aminoya are most likely to yield significant quantities of 16th century European materials, confirming key points along the route. Several archaeological investigations have been initiated on this basis, including an excavation by the University of Alabama at the Hightower site thought to be in the vicinity of Casiste.

### **Regional, State, and Local Activities**

The U.S. De Soto Expedition Commission was established to study the expedition and to provide a report to Congress with recommendations for a celebration of the expedition's 400th anniversary. After publication of the Commission's final report, controversy regarding the De Soto route subsided for a number of years. In 1948, the De Soto National Memorial was established by Congress to commemorate the landing of Hernando de Soto in Florida and the travels of the expedition through the southeastern United States. The memorial, administered by the National Park Service, is located on the banks of the Manatee River in Bradenton. Since its establishment, thousands of people have visited the memorial and benefited from numerous programs and displays. Subsequent to the Commission's findings, the advancement of archaeological procedures has resulted in new data disproving many hypotheses contained in the Commission's final report. These archaeological advances as well as the approaching 450th anniversary of the expedition have renewed interest in the De Soto route.

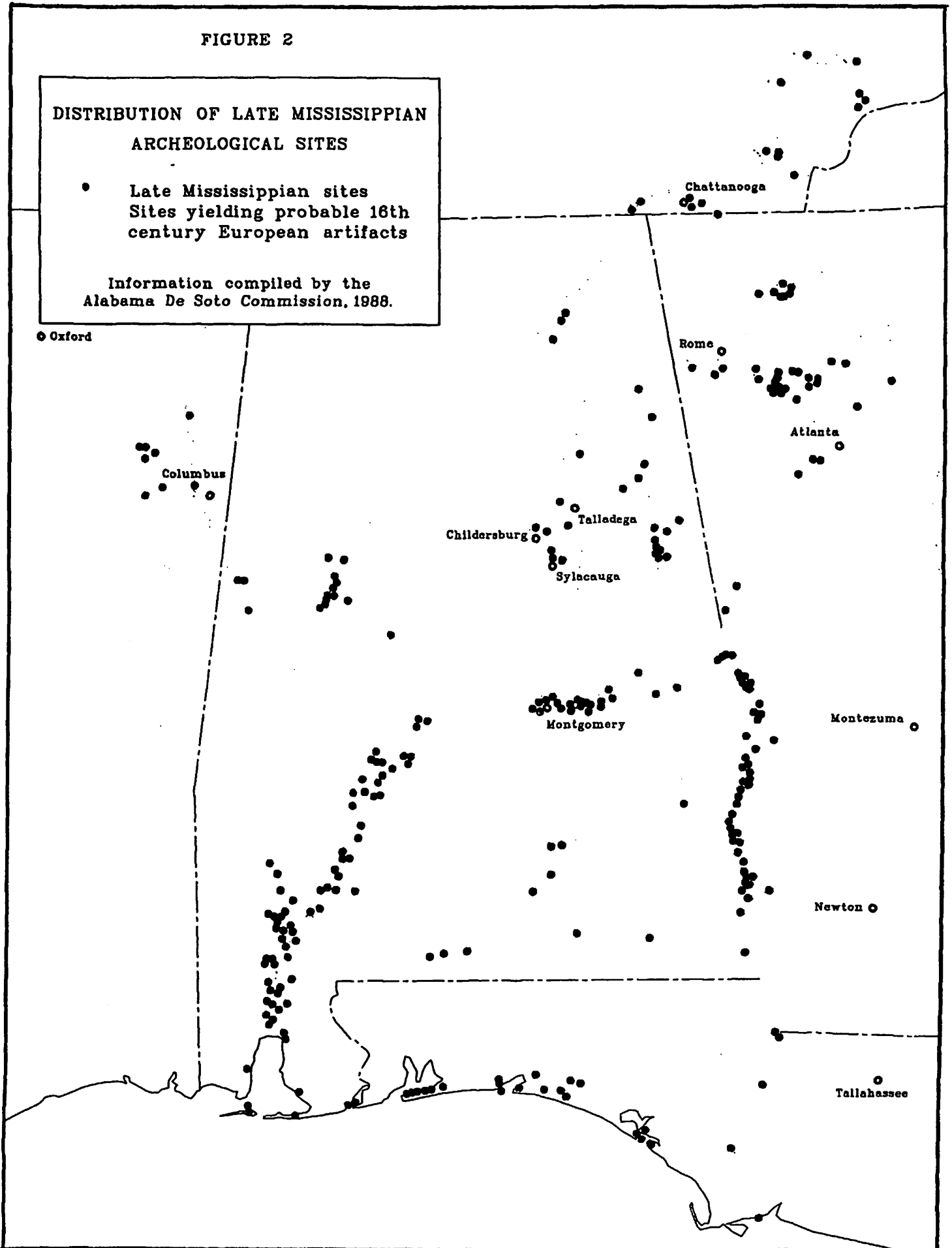
In 1987, the formation of a 10-state Commission was initiated to promote research related to De Soto, establish a commemorative highway route, and identify the location of the actual expedition route. By 1988, the De Soto Trail Commission had been formally established by resolution of a majority of states along the expedition route.

FIGURE 2

DISTRIBUTION OF LATE MISSISSIPPIAN  
ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES

- Late Mississippian sites
- Sites yielding probable 16th century European artifacts

Information compiled by the  
Alabama De Soto Commission, 1988.



With the recent creation of the Georgia De Soto Trail Commission, all states have approved the resolution and appointed one or more members to serve on the Commission. The organization has been very active in promoting archaeological research and conducting related activities throughout the southeast. The Commission at its October 1988 meeting passed a resolution which acknowledged the ongoing National Park Service trail study and promoted designation of the expedition route as a national historic trail (refer to Part II, Consultation and Coordination, page 53). At its February 3, 1989, meeting, the Commission discussed at length the identification of a "Highway Route of the De Soto Expedition." It was agreed that the selected route should represent a consensus within a state and that there must be route continuity from state to state. Although a route location could not be identified for the entire route, the Commission unanimously adopted the following motion:

"This Commission supports the adoption of the Charles Hudson route as the normative route from Tampa Bay to Columbus, Mississippi, and as an hypothesis for the remainder of the trail, given present differences in professional opinion and continuing studies; and it furthermore supports the development of alternate routes in those states where consensus of professional opinion is lacking."

A description of the route adopted by the Commission (Tampa Bay to Columbus, Mississippi) is located on page 59.

In the early 1980s, the state of Florida assembled a committee to establish a highway route of the De Soto expedition. A consensus was reached regarding the majority of the route's location and, in 1986, roadside markers and interpretive exhibits were completed. Subsequent to this initial effort, the route's most controversial area--the expedition landing site--has been resolved and the remaining portion of the route has recently been marked. The Florida De Soto Trail was officially dedicated on May 27, 1989. An interpretive exhibit describing the expedition's landing has been erected at the De Soto National Monument in Bradenton, Florida. The Florida portion of the expedition route follows the route reconstruction of Dr. Hudson. Due to considerable controversy regarding the landing site, an interpretive display has been placed in the Charlotte Harbor area indicating that some researchers believe De Soto landed in that area. The state is prepared to modify the routing as new data warrants. A description of the Florida De Soto Trail is included in Table 1 and the location of the commemorative highway route is illustrated in Figure 3.

**TABLE 1****SUMMARY OF STATE-INITIATED DE SOTO HIGHWAY ROUTE DESIGNATIONS**

<b>STATE</b>	<b>INITIATION/ ADMINISTRATION</b>	<b>STATUS</b>	<b>FACILITIES</b>	<b>ROUTE DESCRIPTION</b>
Alabama	Alabama De Soto Commission/Alabama Highway Department	Route designation completed.	Highway route markers at 10-mile intervals; kiosk exhibits; signs at welcome centers; information brochures.	U.S. 278, GA/AL border- Piedmont; S.H. 21, Piedmont-Winterboro; S.H. 76, Winterboro-Childersburg; U.S. 231, Childersburg- Montgomery; U.S. 80, Montgomery-Uniontown; S.H. 61, Uniontown- Greensboro; S.H. 69, Greensboro-Tuscaloosa; U.S. 82, Tuscaloosa-AL/MS border.
Florida	Florida Division of Recreation and Parks	Route designation completed; dedication ceremony held on May 27, 1989.	Highway route markers at 5-mile intervals; kiosk exhibits; landing site exhibit at De Soto National Memorial; information brochures.	S.H. 64, De Soto National Memorial-Bradenton; U.S. 301, Bradenton-Bushnell; U.S. 48, Bushnell-Floral City; U.S. 41, Floral City-Williston; S.H. 121, Williston-Gainesville; U.S. 441, Gainesville-Lake City; U.S. 90, Lake City- Tallahassee; U.S. 319, Tallahassee-GA/FL border.

Note: Route location in Alabama and Florida is based in principal on the route reconstruction of Dr. Charles Hudson, et al.

Information compiled by the National Park Service, 1988

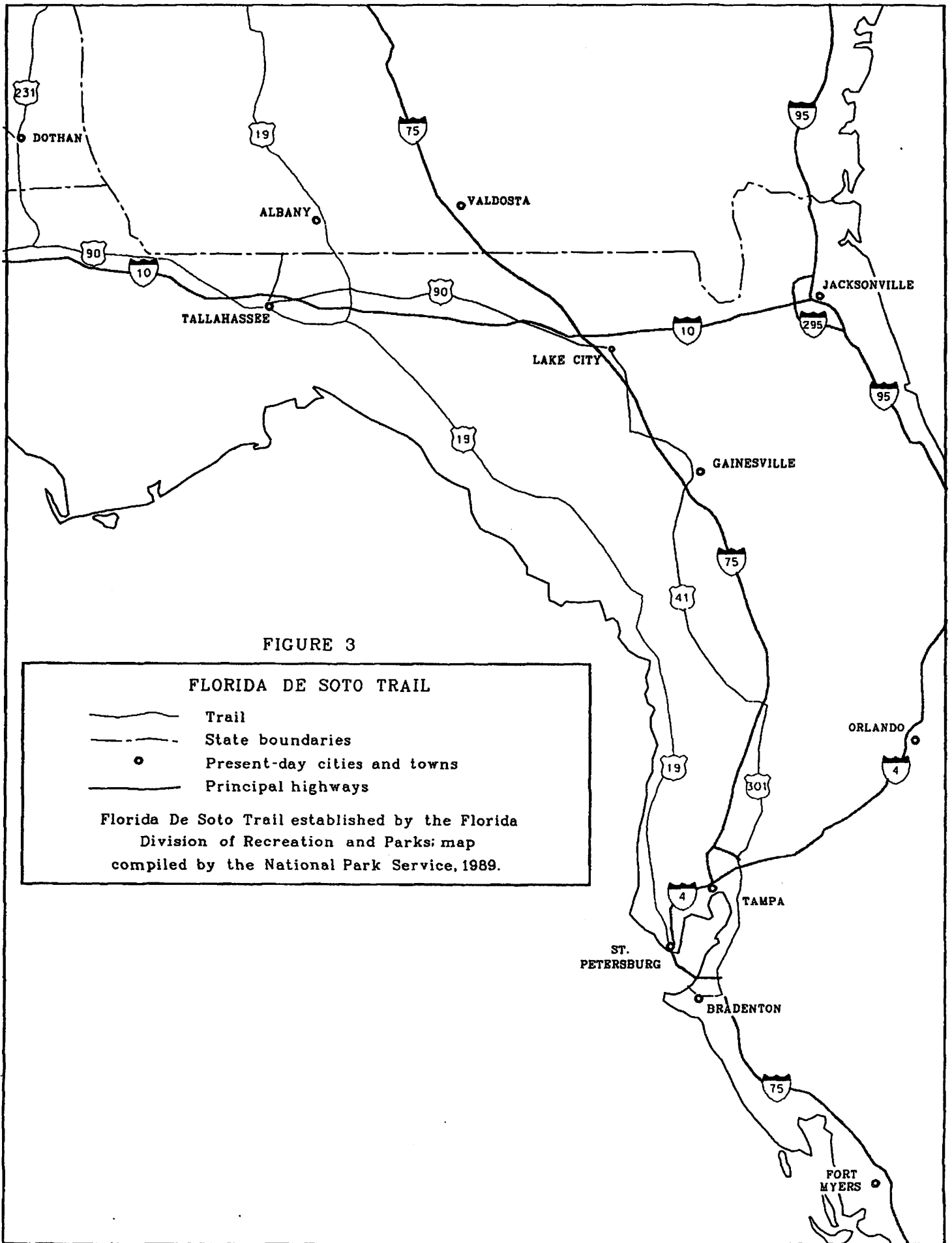






FIGURE 3

FLORIDA DE SOTO TRAIL

-  Trail
-  State boundaries
-  Present-day cities and towns
-  Principal highways

Florida De Soto Trail established by the Florida  
 Division of Recreation and Parks; map  
 compiled by the National Park Service, 1989.

In addition to the highway marking effort, the state of Florida has recently purchased the Apalachee site, location of De Soto's 1539-40 winter encampment in Tallahassee. Initial excavations at the site produced a large assemblage of Native American and Spanish materials currently under analysis. Additional reconnaissance-level surveys will be conducted to delineate the site boundaries and guide future excavations. The state is tentatively planning to establish an interpretive museum at the site (Table 2).

Legislation recently introduced in the U.S. Senate (S.555) and U.S. House of Representatives (H.R. 2202), if enacted, would establish a De Soto Expedition Trail Commission comprised of 19 members appointed by the Secretary of the Interior. The purpose of the Commission would be the establishment of a commemorative highway route of the De Soto expedition, preparation of a comprehensive plan for administration of the highway route and establishment of a grants program for archaeological and historical studies related to the De Soto expedition. Under this legislative proposal, an initial commemorative highway route would be designated from the De Soto National Memorial at Bradenton, Florida to the Alabama/Mississippi state line (U.S. Highway 82), which coincides with the route identified by the De Soto Trail Commission. Additional segments of the highway route would be established by the Secretary of the Interior with appropriate state concurrence

In 1985, the Alabama De Soto Commission was established to research "...early Spanish exploration and colonization of Alabama, designate portions of existing highways as the De Soto Trail, and plan a commemoration of De Soto's travels through Alabama." The Alabama State Museum of Natural History, the Alabama Historical Commission, and the Alabama Department of Archives and History provide support and technical staff to the State Commission. In June 1988, the Alabama De Soto Commission announced the selection of a route to be designated as the "Highway Route of the De Soto Trail." Route identification was based on a detailed analysis of three proponents (Alan Blake, Caleb Curren, and Charles Hudson) and correlation with the recently completed archaeological site mapping project by the University of Alabama. The route selected by the state Commission follows the route reconstruction of Dr. Hudson (Figure 4). The Commission has completed trail marking activities including the erection of roadside trail markers and interpretive kiosks along the route, establishment of exhibits at state welcome centers, and the distribution of information brochures (Table 1).

The Mississippi state legislature created the Mississippi De Soto Trail Commission in 1988, and the Commission has now been appointed. As one of its functions, the Commission will identify a commemorative route for the De Soto expedition through the state. To assist in this task, a symposium of leading De Soto scholars was held in December 1989 to provide the Commission with information regarding possible routes of the expedition. Top priority archaeologically has been assigned to the discovery of the 1540-41 winter camp site. Using remote sensing data, Dr. Jay Johnson of the University of Mississippi, on a grant from the National Geographic Society, is currently identifying sites in the



**TABLE 2****ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL SITES ASSOCIATED WITH THE DE SOTO EXPEDITION**

<b>SITE NAME</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>ADMINISTERING AGENCY</b>	<b>ASSOCIATION WITH DE SOTO EXPEDITION</b>	<b>FACILITIES</b>
De Soto National Memorial	Bradenton, FL	National Park Service	Commemorates the May 1539 landing of the De Soto expedition.	Interpretive displays and brochures describing Hernando de Soto, the expedition and 16th century Indian cultures.
De Soto-Apalachee Archaeological and Historic Site	Tallahassee, FL	Florida Division of Historical Resources	Site of the 1539-40 winter encampment of the expedition.	Ongoing archaeological investigation including analysis of artifacts and delineation of site boundaries; tentative plans to establish a state park with interpretive museum at Martin House.
Ocmulgee National Monument	Macon, GA	National Park Service	The Lamar site, possible location of the principal town of Ichisi, a chiefdom visited by the De Soto expedition in 1540.	Interpretive displays, information material and preserved earthworks of the region's pre-historic and historic cultures.
Etowah Mounds State Historic Site	Cartersville, GA	Georgia Department of Natural Resources	Probable location of Itaba, a Native American town within the province of Coosa; a chiefdom encountered by De Soto in 1540.	Interpretive displays and Spanish and Native American artifacts; information regarding the De Soto expedition; preserved earthworks.

(continued)

**TABLE 2 (continued)**

<b>SITE NAME</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>ADMINISTERING AGENCY</b>	<b>ASSOCIATION WITH DE SOTO EXPEDITION</b>	<b>FACILITIES</b>
Mound State Monument	Moundville, AL	The University of Alabama Museum of Natural History	Possible location of Zabusta, town within the Apafalaya chiefdom; a traditional Indian town encountered by the expedition.	Interpretive displays and reconstructions, museum and information regarding native cultures; archaeological research facility.
Parkin State Park (undeveloped)	Parkin, AR	Arkansas State Parks	Probable location of Casqui, an Indian village visited by the expedition in 1541.	Ongoing archaeological investigation including analysis of Spanish and Native American materials; planning currently underway to establish a state park with interpretive facilities.
Arkansas Post National Memorial	Gillett, AR	National Park Service	Possible location of Anilco, a chiefdom encountered by the expedition.	Interpretive displays and information materials describing 17th century Native American cultures.

---

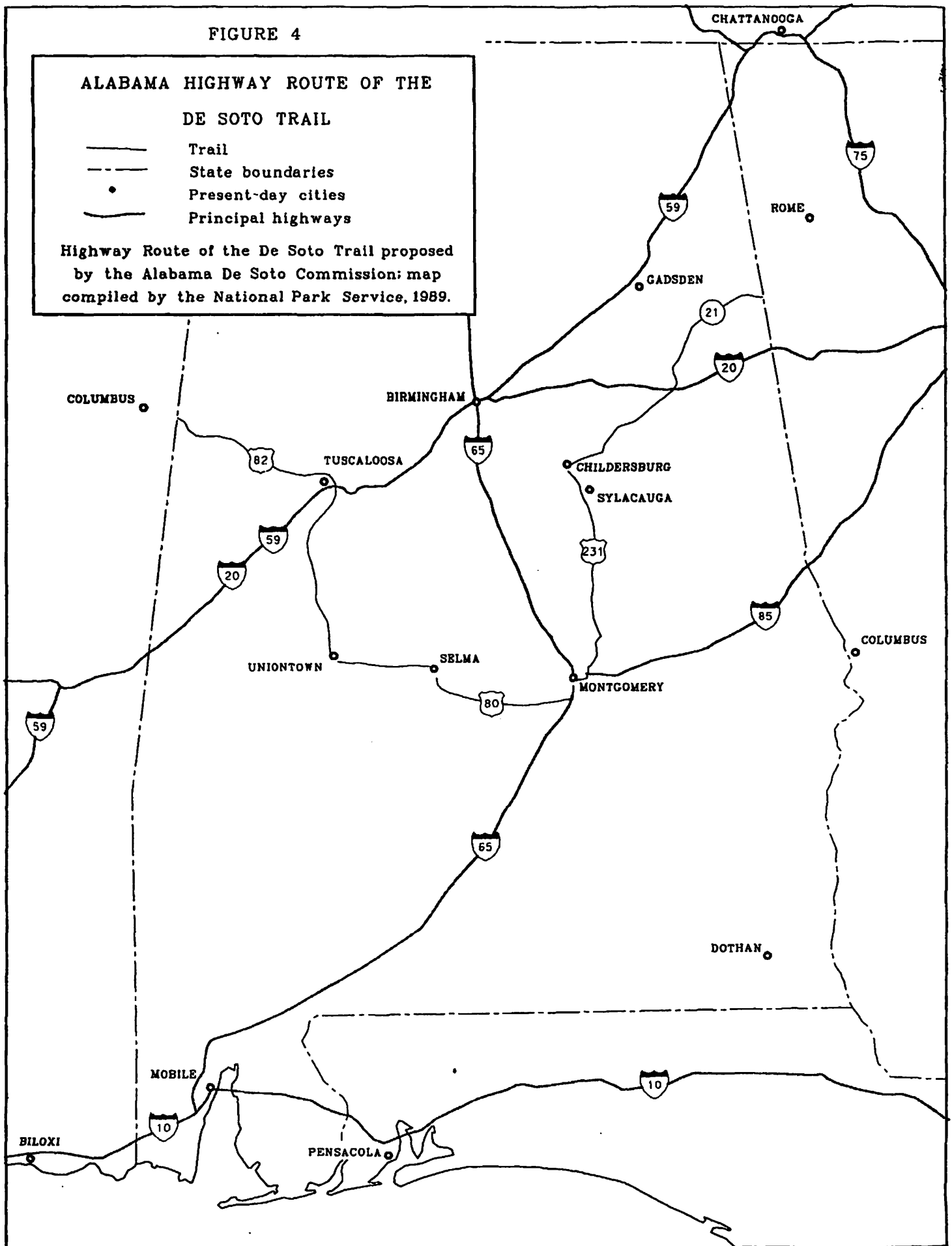
Information compiled by the National Park Service, 1988

FIGURE 4

ALABAMA HIGHWAY ROUTE OF THE  
DE SOTO TRAIL

- Trail
- - - State boundaries
- Present-day cities
- Principal highways

Highway Route of the De Soto Trail proposed  
by the Alabama De Soto Commission; map  
compiled by the National Park Service, 1989.



northeastern part of the state with a high potential for containing De Soto related materials. In cooperation with the Mississippi Department of Archives, Dr. Johnson will undertake intensive survey on the basis of the remote sensing results in the summer of 1989. Sites identified will be scheduled for archaeological investigation in 1990.

An Ad Hoc De Soto Committee has been formed in North Carolina and state approval is anticipated in the near future. Two small De Soto-related archaeological investigations were recently conducted in the Catawba River area. The South Carolina Division of Parks, Recreation and Tourism approved a resolution supporting the concept of trail marking. Archaeological investigations at the Mulberry site, probable location of Cofitachequi, have not, as yet, uncovered any Spanish materials.

The state of Arkansas has designated the Parkin site, probable location of Casqui, as a state park (Table 2). In addition, the state plans to establish a commemorative highway route of the De Soto expedition. The state of Louisiana plans to conduct archaeological investigations at high priority sites identified by the De Soto Expedition Commission. In Tennessee, the majority of interest has been focused in the Chattanooga area where archaeological investigations have resulted in the discovery of Spanish materials on Williams Island and Moccasin Bend. According to several archaeologists, however, this material is late 16th and early 17th century and, therefore, cannot be attributed to the De Soto expedition. Extensive archaeological investigations have been conducted in southeastern Tennessee where the routes of the U.S. De Soto Expedition Commission and Dr. Charles Hudson intersect.

The state of Georgia created the Georgia De Soto Trail Commission in June 1989 "... to coordinate the efforts of state agencies in the commemoration of the De Soto expedition, to publicize events across the state, to designate sections of existing highways in Georgia as the De Soto Trail and plan appropriate public events at significant points in Georgia". The Commission has recognized a highway route through the state to commemorate the De Soto expedition. Consistent with the route identified by the De Soto Trail Commission (based on the reconstruction of Dr. Charles Hudson), a series of six interpretive markers will be erected between March and September 1990 coinciding with the 450th anniversary of De Soto's journey through the state. In addition, the state will sponsor a symposium on the De Soto expedition in June 1990.

The state of Texas has not actively pursued the formation of a state De Soto commission nor have they conducted any state-sponsored archaeological investigations.

**HIGHWAY ROUTE OF THE DE SOTO EXPEDITION FROM TAMPA BAY,  
FLORIDA TO COLUMBUS, MISSISSIPPI ADOPTED BY THE DE SOTO  
TRAIL COMMISSION**

---

<b>FLORIDA</b>	Florida Highway 64, De Soto National Memorial to Bradenton; U.S. 301 to Bushnell; U.S. 48 to Floral City; U.S. 41 to Williston; Florida Highway 121 to Gainesville; U.S. 441 to Lake City; U.S. 90 to Tallahassee; and U.S. 319 to the Florida/Georgia border.
<b>GEORGIA</b>	U.S. 319, Florida/Georgia border to Thomasville; U.S. 19 to Americus; Georgia Highway 49 to Oglethorpe; Georgia Highway 26 to Henderson; U.S. 41 to Macon; Georgia Highway 49 to Milledgeville; Georgia Highway 22 to Sparta; Georgia Highway 16 to Warrenton; U.S. 278 to Augusta; and Interstate 20 to the Georgia/South Carolina border.
<b>SOUTH CAROLINA</b>	Interstate 20, Georgia/South Carolina border to Columbia; U.S. 176 to St. Matthews; U.S. 601 to Camden; South Carolina Highway 97 to Great Falls; South Carolina Highway 200 to Lancaster; South Carolina Highway 5 to York; and U.S. 321 to the South Carolina/North Carolina border.
<b>NORTH CAROLINA</b>	U.S. 321, South Carolina/North Carolina border to Hickory; Interstate 40 to Asheville; and U.S. 25 to the North Carolina/Tennessee border.
<b>TENNESSEE</b>	U.S. 25, North Carolina/Tennessee border to Newport; Interstate 40 to Tennessee Highway 66; Tennessee Highway 66 to Sevierville; and U.S. 411 to the Tennessee/Georgia border.
<b>GEORGIA</b>	U.S. 411, Tennessee/Georgia border to Rome; U.S. 27 to Cedartown; and U.S. 278 to the Georgia/Alabama border.
<b>ALABAMA</b>	U.S. 278, Georgia/Alabama border to Piedmont; Alabama Highway 21 to Winterboro; Alabama Highway 76 to Childersburg; U.S. 231 to Montgomery; U.S. 80 to Uniontown; Alabama Highway 61 to Greensboro; Alabama Highway 69 to Tuscaloosa; and U.S. 82 to the Alabama/Mississippi border.
<b>MISSISSIPPI</b>	U.S. 82, Alabama/Mississippi border to Columbus.

Public Law 100-187  
100th Congress

An Act

To amend the National Trails System Act to provide for a study of the De Soto Trail, and for other purposes.

Dec. 11, 1987

(S. 1297)

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

De Soto National  
Trail Study Act  
of 1987.  
16 USC 1241  
note.

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "De Soto National Trail Study Act of 1987".

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

The Congress finds that—

- (1) Hernando de Soto landed in the vicinity of Tampa Bay on May 30, 1539;
- (2) de Soto then led his expedition of approximately 600 through the States of Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and Arkansas;
- (3) de Soto died on the banks of the Mississippi River in 1542;
- (4) the survivors of de Soto's expedition went on to Texas, then back through Arkansas, and into Louisiana in search of a route to Mexico;
- (5) the de Soto expedition represented the first large group of Europeans to explore so deeply into the Southeastern region;
- (6) archeologists have recently uncovered, in Tallahassee, Florida, what may have been de Soto's first winter camp;
- (7) the State of Florida has completed identification and marking of close to three-fourths of de Soto's trail in that State; and
- (8) several other States are in the process of identifying and marking de Soto's trail within their borders.

SEC. 3. DESIGNATION OF TRAIL.

Section 5(c) of the National Trails System Act (82 Stat. 919; 16 U.S.C. 1244(c)) is amended by adding the following new paragraph at the end thereof:

"(31) De Soto Trail, the approximate route taken by the expedition of the Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto in 1539, extending through portions of the States of Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, to the area of Little Rock, Arkansas, on to Texas and Louisiana, and any other States which may have been crossed by the expedition. The study under this paragraph shall be prepared in accordance with subsection (b) of this section, except that it shall be completed and submitted to the Congress with recommendations as to the trail's suitability for designation not later than one calendar year after the date of enactment of this paragraph."

Southeastern  
States.

Approved December 11, 1987.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY—S. 1297:

HOUSE REPORTS: No. 100-462 (Comm. on Interior and Insular Affairs).  
SENATE REPORTS: No. 100-177 (Comm. on Energy and Natural Resources).  
CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, Vol. 133 (1987):  
Oct. 1, considered and passed Senate.  
Dec. 1, considered and passed House.

## APPENDIX I: LEVELS OF CONFIDENCE FOR DE SOTO ROUTE LOCATIONS

### FLORIDA

1. A village of Ocita (probable). The landing and camp site. Located on the northern side of the lower Little Manatee River. Extensive shell mounds once existed on both sides of the river. There are eight known Safety Harbor sites within about 3 miles of the mouth.

The Thomas Shell mound (8HI1) is perhaps the most promising of these sites. A number of early Spanish artifacts have come from this site, and it is Safety Harbor phase. The Goat Bayou West and Goat Bayou East sites are adjacent to the Thomas site. Unfortunately all of these sites have been mined for shell since about 1900, and they are almost completely obliterated.

About 10-15 miles upriver from the Thomas site, the Parrish Mound sites (8MA1,2,3) have produced 16th-century European artifacts, including a good De Soto period bead.

2. The River of Mocoso is probably the Alafia River. It was a boundary between the territory of Ocita and the territory of Mocoso. At the Bell Shoals site (8HI79), a possible crossing place, Safety Harbor materials have been found along with a fragment of olive jar.

3. Guazoco (problematic). Vicinity of present Dade City. This is where De Soto's men first found corn, and in this area the quality of soil improves over that further south. Sites in this area are poorly known.

4. Luca (problematic). Vicinity of present Lacoochee. The site is possibly in the area of numerous small lakes between the upper Withlacoochee River and the Little Withlacoochee River. There is a destroyed mound (8HE14) in this area which produced glass beads, but these have not been seen by archaeologists in recent times.

5. Urriparacoxi (possible). This was a polity at some distance from Luca. It was possibly the cluster of St. Johns phase sites around the vicinity of Lake Apopka and Lake Butler. The Gotha Mound (80OR11,12) was possibly the central town. It has produced a number of early-seeming European artifacts which have not yet been examined by Florida archaeologists.

6. Vicela (problematic). In the vicinity of present Nobleton. There is no known site in this area. To the west there is the Weeki Watchee site (8HE12), with a quantity of early 16th-century Spanish materials.

7. Tocaste (problematic). On a large lake. Possibly the Du Val Island site (8CI7). It is at the south end of Tsala Apopka. A metal axe from this site may be early Spanish.

8. River and swamp of Ocale. The Withlacoochee River. This was a very swampy and difficult crossing. There are two possible crossings. One is the Turner fish Camp Road from Inverness to the Gum Slough area. The other is the Camp Izard crossing. It is not possible to decide between these two at the present time.

9. Ocale (possible). This polity was east of the Withlacoochee River, probably in southwestern Marion County. The Marion Oaks site, Ruth Smith Mound and the Tatham Mound (8CI203) probably were all villages of Ocale. The latter two have produced quantities of early 16th-century Spanish materials. The central town of Ocale has not yet been located. There is presently no phase designation for this area, but Pasco plain ware appears to be the main ceramic marker. Possible locations for the central town of Ocale include the Ross Prairie area (8MR100,101); and the Drake Ranch area with several large shell middens. Ocale appears to have dominated the general area of the Cove of the Withlacoochee.

10. From Ocale they sent a raiding party to Acuera (possible) for food. This polity was possibly the cluster of sites around Lake Weir and Lake Griffin.

11. Itarraholata (problematic). Possibly in the vicinity of present Lake Stafford. There are many small Alachua tradition sites in northern Marion County.

12. Potano (possible). Possibly on the western side of Lake Orange. There are many Alachua tradition sites in this area. It could be the Belk site (8MR450) or the Huff Mound (8MR48). Both are poorly known. Another possibility is (8A100), from which early majolica has been recovered.

13. Utinamocharra (possible). Vicinity of Newnan's Lake. There is a very large series of Alachua tradition sites in present Gainesville. The Moon Lake cluster (8A325-337) dates to the late prehistoric and early historic. The mission of San Francisco de Potano was in this area.

14. "Malapaz" (possible). Vicinity of present Alachua. There are many small Alachua tradition sites in this locality. 8A166 is a possibility. Mounds are known to have existed here, but they have been destroyed. Spanish artifacts have been reported, but not seen by archaeologists.

15. Cholupaha (possible). On the south side of the Santa Fe River north or northeast of present Alachua. Possibly at the Santa Fe Mission site. One possible location is the group of sites in the Robinson Sinks area. At least ten sites are here. For example, 8A187, 189, 190. Glass beads have been reported from this area, but not seen by archaeologists.

16. "River of Discords". The Santa Fe River. The crossing may have been near present SR 241. They may have crossed when the natural bridge was flooded.



17. Aguacaleyquen (possible). This has been very difficult to locate—the most problematic of the Florida sites. Our best candidate is the Fig Springs site (8Co1), on the Ichetucknee River. It is at least 12 acres in size. It includes the site of the San Martin de Ayacuto mission, a very early 16th-century mission.

18. The stream they bridged upon leaving Aguacaleyquen was possibly the Ichetucknee River and Rose Creek. In the past these two were connected, especially after heavy rain. Today much of the water goes into sinkholes.

19. Uriutina (problematic). Vicinity of present Lake City. The Indian Pond site (8CO229) is a possibility.

20. "Village of Many Waters" (problematic). In the ponds and prairies west of Lake City, possibly near Peacock Lake. Late sites are known to be present in this area.

21. Napituca (problematic). Possibly near Blue Lake, south of Live Oak. An area of lime sinks. Not well known archaeologically.

22. River of the Deer. The Suwannee River.

23. Uzachile (possible). This polity comprised several villages in eastern Madison County. Possibilities are 8MD20,21. Possibly also the mission site of San Pedro y San Pablo de Potohirriba near Sampala Lake (8MD30). Many possible sites in this general area.

24. Agile (possible). Southwestern corner of Madison Co., probably on or near the Aucilla River. A possibility is the mission of San Miguel de Asile (8MD5). There is a cluster of Indian sites near the mission (8MD6,7,56). All are Fort Walton phase.

25. River and swamp of Ivitachuco. The Aucilla River.

26. Ivitachuco (possible). Possibly at the mission of San Loenzo de Ivitachuco (8JE100), near Lake Iamonia.

27. Deep ravine where a battle occurred (if one can trust Garcilaso) — Burnt Mill Creek.

28. Calahuchi (possible). Possibly on the upper St. Marks River. Vicinity of Capitola or Chaires. Possibly at the mission of San Pedro de Patale (8LE152). Many small Fort Walton sites in this area.

29. Apalachee (Iviahica or Anhaica) (positive). The Governor Martin site (8LE853b). We've all heard about this one. Chain mail, fasceted chevron beads, crossbow bolt point, early 16th-century Spanish coins, pig bones.

30. Aute (Ochete) (probable). The St. Marks Wildlife Refuge Cemetery site (8WA15). In the 1930's many early Spanish artifacts were found here. Silver disc beads; gold and silver pendants; brass scale weight; Clarksdale bells.

31. "River of Guacuca". The Ochlockonee River. Their place of crossing depends upon whether they departed from Apalachee going west or east of Lake Jackson.

#### GEORGIA I

1. "River of Capachequi". The Flint, in the vicinity of present Newton.
2. The first village of Capachequi (problematic). This area is poorly known archaeologically. It was possibly 9LE7, immediately north of six or seven low limestone hills.
3. A stream they forded. Kiokee Creek.
4. Main town of Capachequi (problematic). The mound site on Magnolia Plantation (9DU1) is a possibility. No scientific excavation has been done at this site though it is known to be a Mississippian site.
5. The White Spring. Possibly James Pond, near Byne crossroads.
6. River of Toa. Again the Flint, about 8 miles north of present Montezuma.
7. Toa (possible). This has been another problematic site. A number of 16th-century (Lockett phase) sites have recently been located north of this point, but most of them are on the western side of the river. The village of Toa visited by De Soto was on the eastern side. Quite recently John Worth has located a likely site—The Redneck Hunting Club site—on the eastern side of the river. It has no site number as yet, but it is Lockett phase, and it appears to be extensive.
8. First town of Ichisi (problematic). On an "island" in the Ocmulgee River. In the vicinity of present Westlake. This area is not well known, but Cowart's phase sites are known to exist in the general area.
9. Swamp where Benito Fernandez drowned. Several possibilities. Possibly Thompson Mill Creek.
10. Ichisi village where they rested for three days (problematic). Here they waited for the main body of the expedition to catch up with them. Vicinity of present Bonaire. Poorly known, but Cowart's phase sites exist in the area.
11. Creek that rose rapidly on March 29, 1540. Probably Echeconnee Creek.
12. Small village of Ichisi (possible). Where they spent the night of March 29. Possibly the Cowart's Landing Site (9BI14).
13. Main town of Ichisi (possible). The Lamar Mound site (9BI2). Cowart's phase.