



Contacts and Connections - 1541 to 1670

Educator Content Introduction: The Hernando DeSoto and Juan Pardo expeditions

Expeditions from two Spanish conquerors, or **conquistadors**, Hernando de Soto and Juan Pardo, were likely the first Europeans to encounter North Carolinians. In May 1539, Hernando de Soto and his **entrada**, or army, of 600 men landed in La Florida. Soto's army began the journey inland along the Savannah River the following year on a quest to find gold and riches similar to those found in Mexico and Peru. They set off with hundreds of Natives, two hundred horses, several war dogs, and many hundreds of pigs. Soto's route took him through South Carolina and up the Wateree River to a town called Guaquili, located near the present-day town of Hickory in Catawba County. It is believed that Soto met with the ancestors of the Catawba and the Cherokee Indians as he crossed through western North Carolina. Soto's army may have then traveled through the Blue Ridge mountains into northern Tennessee before heading south into Georgia (Hudson, 1997, p. 63; Hudson, Smith, & DePratter, 1987; Mooney, 1902, p. 23; Ward & Davis, 1999, p. 229).

Soto relied on the Native peoples he encountered for food and supplies, which often meant that he **commandeered**, or took, all available food from a village. He traveled roughly 4,000 miles, but found no gold or silver, and very few gems. Running low on food, Soto arrived in the town of Cofitachequi, where he was greeted by a young woman of great **prestige** who was probably being carried on a litter by her male attendants. When Soto's entrada left Cofitachequi, they took the young woman as a hostage in hopes that she would help them obtain more food from the neighboring villages. Despite her presence, Soto's army found very little food or shelter. After traversing the upper Catawba River, the entrada came to the town of Xualla. This town has been located by archaeologists near the modern town of Morganton, and today is called the Berry site. Soto and his army left Xualla and began their trek across the dense wooded slopes of the Appalachian Mountains. It was there that the young woman from Cofitachequi and her personal attendants managed to escape, leaving Soto and his army to continue their **expedition**, or journey of exploration, without her. In May 1542 DeSoto fell ill and died on the banks of the Mississippi River. By then he had lost half of his army, and those soldiers who remained abandoned the search for treasures and fled to Mexico (Beck, 2013, p. 66-69; Hudson, 1997; Moore, 2006).

Thirty years after Soto's expedition, another Spanish conquistador, Juan Pardo, set off from the Spanish settlement Santa Elena on the coast of South Carolina. Pardo was tasked with **subduing**, or gaining control over, the Native people, and identifying a route from Santa Elena to Mexico through which the Spaniards could safely transport silver. In 1566 Pardo set off with 125 soldiers, following a small portion of Soto's path, which took him to Xualla, the town on the upper Catawba River earlier visited by Soto. Once there, Pardo established Fort San Juan, and sent detachment parties out to explore nearby towns. In March 1567 Pardo received word that Santa Elena was under attack by the French. He immediately headed back with most of his army,



leaving around 30 of his men to guard Fort San Juan in his absence (Beck, Rodning, & Moore, 2016, p. 8-11; Mooney, 1902, p. 28; Moore, 2006).

Sergeant Hernando Moyano de Morales was one of the soldiers who remained at Fort San Juan. In the six months Pardo was at Santa Elena, Moyano led a series of attacks on several nearby Native villages. Moyano and his men quickly built a small fort in the town of Chiaha on the French Broad River, and awaited Pardo's return. Pardo and his army returned to Fort San Juan in September 1567. There he learned that Moyano was under **siege**, or attack, at Chiaha. When Pardo arrived in Chiaha on October 7, he found Moyano was safe. After uniting with Moyano, the combined expedition explored the region west of the Appalachians for two weeks before returning to Fort San Juan (Beck et al., 2016, p. 8-11).

Pardo left 31 men to guard San Juan, and returned to Santa Elena on March 2, 1568. He never returned to the interior, nor were other expeditions sent out from Santa Elena. The men's mistreatment of the Natives settled near Fort San Juan, along with increasing demands for food, led Indians to attack and destroy all the interior forts Pardo and his men established. Natives soon attacked and destroyed all the interior forts Pardo and his men established. In 1587 Santa Elena was abandoned, restricting Spanish territory in the southeastern U.S. to St. Augustine and present-day Florida (Beck et al., 2016, p. 15-16; Moore, 2006).

Many Native American chiefdoms had little contact with Europeans for over 100 years after Soto and Pardo traveled through North Carolina and other parts of the South. In the mid-seventeenth century, many more Europeans arrived in the Southeast. They traded European-made goods, like glass beads and cloth, with nearby Native groups for deerskins and animal **pelts**, or the hides of animals with thick fur, like beavers. More trade with Europeans caused major changes in Native life. Europeans sickened with influenza, measles, and smallpox, carried **diseases** from their homelands to the Americas. Native Americans had never before been exposed to such diseases, therefore many people in Native communities became very sick or died. Another major change in Native life involved trade with Europeans. As more Europeans arrived in the New World, they wanted to build towns and farm crops. To do so, they relied on the forced labor of other peoples—first Native Americans, then **enslaved** Africans. They paid Native Americans to capture people from other tribes and sell them to Europeans for their labor. As new diseases, warfare between tribes, and enslavement of Native peoples increased, Native life in the Southeast became more unstable. This destabilization of Native communities that was created as a result of multiple effects from European colonization is referred to as the “**Mississippian shatter zone**.” This is because the impact of these multiple factors rippled out across Native American groups in all directions, causing disruption for Native Americans far away. The shatter zone began with the expeditions of de Soto and Pardo, but their travels had a lasting impact on Native peoples (Ethridge, 2009; Ethridge, 2018).



Possible Essential Historical Questions:

Middle grades

- What were early European explorers searching for in their expeditions into North Carolina?
- Who was the woman of Cofitachequi and why was she important in Soto's journey?

High school

- What impact did early Spaniards have on the Natives of North Carolina?
- What is the Mississippian shatter zone?

Keywords:

conquistador

disease

enslave

entrada

commandeer

Mississippian shatter zone

pelt

prestige

expedition

subdue

siege

Resources:

Exploring Joara Foundation: The Power of Archaeology & History in the Community.

exploringjoara.org



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