

Modern sailors and American Indians re-created an encounter between John Smith and native people to commemorate the 400th anniversary of his explorations of the Chesapeake Bay region, including the James River.

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Along the James River, in the early 1600s...

The forest was thick, and the footpaths were long. Indians living along the James River traveled most easily by water. When the English arrived, they did too.

The James River brought these cultures together, shaping the landscape and the futures of their people for generations to come.

Stories of Indians and English along the James River survive in part through the personal accounts of Captain John Smith, who explored the Chesapeake Bay and its rivers between 1607 and 1609. Today, the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail helps people follow his travels while exploring great places in the Chesapeake region and learning about the American Indians, past and present, who have called it home.



John Smith's map of the Chesapeake, based on his travels between 1607 and 1609, was remarkably accurate. Smith explored the landscape by boat and on foot. Indians acted as guides and shared information about areas that he did not reach in person. The James River, highlighted here, was included in his travels.



Oysters were abundant in the Bay in the early 1600s. They continue to be harvested today.



Jamestown Settlement's replica of the Godspeed, one of three ships that brought colonists to the Chesapeake Bay in 1607, travels under full sail.

John Smith and Jamestown

Captain John Smith was among the 104 men sent by the Virginia Company of London in 1606 to establish the colony of Virginia. Their mission was to seek gold and find a river that could take them to the Pacific Ocean.

In April 1607, the colonists sailed three ships into the Chesapeake Bay. They built a fort along the James River, on an island about 60 miles upstream from the mouth of the Bay. The site gave them deep-water anchorage with easy access to the estuary and hid them from rival Spanish ships that might sail past. But this tidal stretch of the river is salty, and the fort backed to a large marsh—which means they had picked a place without fresh water. They also built their fort in territory occupied by the Paspahegh Indians. These and other problems made survival a challenge. Many of the colonists died from starvation, disease, and injuries.

Smith was one of the fort's leaders and helped see the men through difficult times. His efforts in building relationships with the Indians and trading for food were essential to the survival of the colony. He also explored the James River and led two expeditions on the Chesapeake Bay. Based on these travels and information gleaned from the native people, he created a remarkably accurate map of the region and published accounts of his time in Virginia.

Over time, James Fort became Jamestown, the first capital of Virginia. Archeologists discovered the remains of the fort in 1996, and excavations are still revealing details about the early years of the colony.

When the James River Was the Powhatan

Hundreds of Indian communities once dotted the shoreline of the Bay and its rivers. The English recorded names for the rivers that matched those of nearby communities. Indian names for the rivers are largely unknown. But in the early 1600s, the English knew the James River as the Powhatan. The Powhatan River was associated with the Indian town of Powhatan near the site of present-day Richmond.

Other Indian communities were also situated along the Powhatan River. Smith marked many of their names on his map, including the Chesapeake, Nansemond, Kecoughtan, Warraskoyack, Paspahegh, Chickahominy, Quiyoughcohanock, Weyanock, Appamattuck, Arrohatock, and Powhatan. The two groups had multiple conflicts, and the Paspahegh left their towns along the river by 1611.

To the Falls

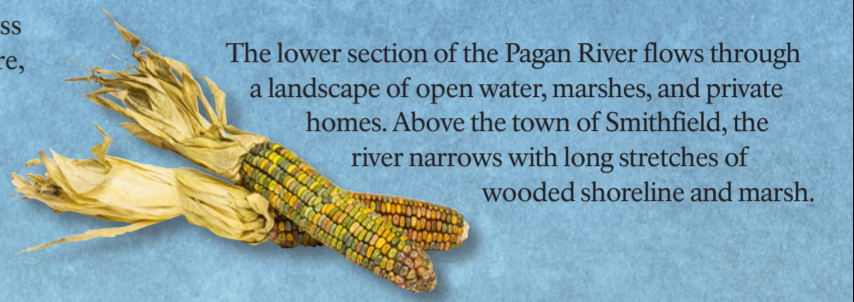
The English explored 74 miles of the river between James Fort and the falls at present-day Richmond in May 1607.

In a small boat, the men traveled dramatic bends in the river that still exist today, called "ox-bows" after the U-shaped piece of an ox yoke. They had friendly encounters and feasts with several Indian groups, noting fine trees, a variety of nuts and berries, and plentiful fish and oysters. Turkey Island, in the curve of the easternmost ox-bow, was named after the wild turkeys observed there.

The Indian town of Powhatan sat on a bluff near islands and cornfields. The English could not pass further west because of great craggy stones where, according to John Smith, "the water falleth so rudely and with such a violence as not any boat can possibly pass."

Warned by the Warraskoyack

Smith traveled up the Pagan River, a tributary of the James, to visit and trade with the Warraskoyack. Later, when writing about his travels, Smith claimed to have been warned by the Warraskoyack in the fall of 1608 that Powhatan intended to harm him. However, Smith remained a leader at James Fort until he returned to England in 1609. In 1610, the English attacked the Warraskoyack, burning homes and destroying fields.



The lower section of the Pagan River flows through a landscape of open water, marshes, and private homes. Above the town of Smithfield, the river narrows with long stretches of wooded shoreline and marsh.



Hundreds of Indian communities existed in the Chesapeake Bay region in the early 1600s. Some looked similar to the scene shown here in an artist's rendering based on scholarship and archeology.

Captured on the Chickahominy

Smith led several expeditions on the Chickahominy River, a major tributary to the James. He met with the Chickahominy Indians, who had several towns on that river, and traded with them for food. Some acted as guides.

While along the river in 1607, Smith was captured by Indians who took him by land to meet with Powhatan. Powhatan was an important leader in the Chesapeake region, said to have been born in the town of Powhatan in the mid-1500s. By 1607, he was living at Werowocomoco along the Pamunkey River (later known as the York). Smith's capture led to the first of several meetings with Powhatan, which influenced the survival of the colony.

Today, the Chickahominy remains a nearly unspoiled river and marsh system—and a place of pride and heritage for modern Chickahominy Indians. It offers many places to hike, paddle, and imagine events of the past.



Indians along the James River lived in yi-hakans, which the Europeans called longhouses. This example is part of the living history area at Henricus Historical Park.

Welcomed by Chippokes

When Smith and other colonists explored the Powhatan River across from their fort, they met with Chippokes, a leader of the Quiyoughcohanock, in the area of today's Chippokes Plantation State Park. Chippokes welcomed the English, although others in his tribe remained wary. The English allowed their hogs to forage at a place still known as Hog Island.

This broad section of the river is typical of the lower James, laced with more intimate creeks that provide a glimpse of how the area may have looked to Smith and the Indians in the early 1600s.



Undeveloped landscapes along the James, like this shoreline at Chippokes Plantation State Park, are similar to the settings encountered by Smith and his crew.



Chesapeake Bay Region
Delaware, Maryland, New York,
Pennsylvania, Virginia, and
Washington, DC

Captain John Smith
Chesapeake National Historic Trail
Lower James River

Plan Your Adventure

The Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail travels nearly 3,000 miles across the Chesapeake Bay and its rivers. The trail was officially launched in May 2007, as part of the 400th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown, Virginia.

Since then, the trail has been extended beyond the route of Smith's explorations to include the rivers and upper reaches of rivers that served as trade and transportation routes for Indians who lived here before the English arrived.

There are countless things to see and do along the Smith trail. The water routes offer great experiences for paddling and power boats, and there are lots of land-based sites to visit by car. You'll find opportunities for boating, hiking, bicycling, and watching wildlife, as well as historic settings with museums, living history exhibits, and visitor centers. Many sites along the trail offer several of these options in one setting or in a cluster of nearby sites.

Use these resources to learn more about what the Smith trail offers.

Visit the trail website at www.SmithTrail.net
Check out the map or use the "Adventure Planner" to design your itinerary. Explore your options on a variety of water trails, and read excerpts from the official boater's guide. This website also offers lots of information about Smith, American Indians (past and present), and the Chesapeake Bay of the early 1600s.



Paddle the Smith trail by launching a kayak at Powhatan Creek, Lawrence Lewis, Jr. Park, or another public site along the James.

Download Chesapeake Explorer, a free mobile app that can be found through your device's app store or at www.chesapeakeexplorerapp.com. Find places nearby by activity, trail name, or type of site. Take a suggested tour, build your own tour, tag favorites, share photos of your visit, or save places for visiting later.

Visit www.FindYourChesapeake.com to inspire your next adventure along the Smith trail and throughout the Chesapeake region. Read travel articles for trip ideas, enjoy stunning photography, and search for specific interests—like boating, camping, geocaching, maritime heritage, and more—in the places you would like to visit.



The pier at Windsor Castle Park in Smithfield is popular for fishing and watching wildlife.



This "smart buoy" near Jamestown is one of ten interpretive buoys located throughout the Chesapeake.

Call up a "smart buoy." These yellow buoys float on the water to mark places on the John Smith trail. They also transmit recordings about that location 400 years ago. Access buoy information at www.buoybay.noaa.gov and by phone toll free at 877-BUOY BAY.



The re-created fort at Jamestown Settlement provides a glimpse of early colonial life in Virginia.



The John Smith trail extends beyond the route of Smith's explorations to include additional river routes used by 17th-century Indians.



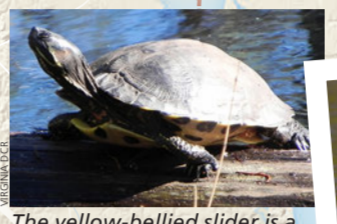
Map legend

- Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail
- Visitor information
- Trail point of interest
- Local water trail
- NOAA interpretive buoy
- Public water access site
- National & state capitals

Scale: 0 to 10 Miles / 0 to 10 Kilometers



Ride your bike from Jamestown to Richmond along the Virginia Capital Trail, which runs parallel to the James River and the John Smith trail.



The yellow-bellied slider is a common sight along the James River.



Calm waters on many portions of the Smith trail are ideal for families and those new to paddling. Rentals are available at several parks along the James.



Visitors at Historic Jamestowne view active archeological work at the site of the original fort.



Fossil hunting is fun for all ages at Chippokes Plantation State Park.

C H E S A P E A K E B A Y