



The Lost Colony of Roanoke

Introduction

On August 17, 1590, a boat carrying John White and eighteen other English sailors attempted to visit the Island of Roanoke in what is now known as the Outer Banks of North Carolina. John White had left a colony of over 100 people on the island in 1587 and had gone back to ask for supplies. He hadn't been able to return for three years. The following cards provide the evidence of what he found when he returned to the island



Return to Roanoke - Is there smoke?

“At our first coming to anchor on this shore we saw a great smoke rise in the isle [Roanoke] near the place where I left our colony in the year 1587, which smoke put us in good hope that some of the colony were there expecting my return out of England.”

- John White, 1590

On August 15th, 1590, John White's ship was at anchor at Hatorask. When he looked towards the Island of Roanoke, he believed that he saw smoke near where the colony had been established. This gave him a strong degree of hope that he would soon find his colony.

On August 17th, they would attempt to cross over the Outer Banks sand bar and sail to Roanoke Island.



Return to Roanoke -- Is there fire?

“...before we could get to the place, where our planters were left, it was so exceeding darke, that we overshot the place a quarter of a mile: there we espied towards the North end of the Iland ye light of a great fire thorow the woods, to the which we presently rowed: when wee came right over against it, we let fall our Grapnel neere the shore, & sounded with a trumpet a Call, & afterwardes many familiar English tunes of Songs, and called to them friendly; but we had no answeare,

On August 17, 1590, John White and several members of the ship's company planned to cross over the bar and sail to Roanoke. This was much more challenging than they had imagined. The high surf overwhelmed the ships. One lost much of its supplies but the other one ran aground in the high surf and seven men were drowned, including one of the captains.

Many of the men did not want to continue to Roanoke after this tragic event but John White and Captain Cooke insisted. They rowed to the island of Roanoke but arrived after darkness had fallen. They thought they saw a fire through the woods.

Return to Roanoke - Footprints in the sand

“...we therefore landed at day-breake, and coming to the fire, we found the grasse & sundry rotten trees burning about the place. From hence we went thorow the woods to that part of the Iland directly over against Dasamongwepeuk, & from thence we returned by the water side, round about the North point of the Iland, untill we came to the place where I left our Colony in the yeere 1586. In all this way we saw in the sand the print of the Salvages feet of 2 or 3 sorts troaden ye night.”



After John Smith and the other sailors spent the night on the water near the island of Roanoke, they landed and investigated the area where they saw the fire. There was evidence of a fire but no people.

After that, they traveled to the north point of the island where John White left the colony in 1586. Along the way, they saw the prints of bare feet. John White judged that they were made by two or three individuals and they were fresh enough to be made the evening before.

Return to Roanoke - The first sign



“...as we entred up the sandy banke upon a tree, in the very browe thereof were curiously carved these fair Romane letters C R O: which letters presently we knew to signifie the place, where I should find the planters seated, according to a secret token agreed upon betweene them & me at my last departure from them, which was, that in any wayes they should not faile to write or carve on the trees or posts of the dores the name of the place where they should be seated; for at my comming away they were prepared to remove from Roanoak 50 miles into the maine.”

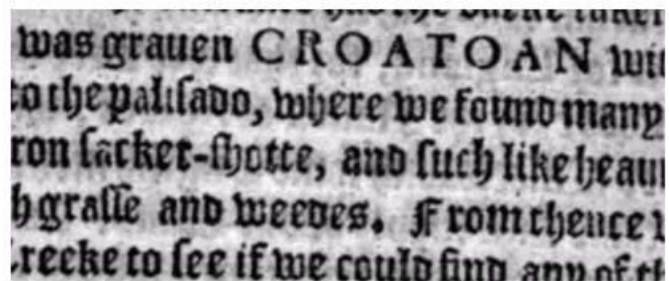
John White and the sailors had finally arrived at the spot where the colonists had once been and came upon a tree with the letters C R O carved into them.

John White and the colonists had made a plan that, if they chose to leave Roanoke before he returned, they would carve the place where they were going on trees or “posts of the doors.”

In this passage, John White also mentions that the colonists had been preparing to leave Roanoke and travel 50 miles into the mainland.

Return to Roanoke - The Palisade

"We passed toward the place where they were left in sundry houses, but we found the houses taken downe, and the place very strongly enclosed with a high palisado of great trees, with cortynes and flankers very Fort-like, and one of the chiefe trees or postes at the right side of the entrance had the barke taken off, and 5 foote from the ground in fayre Capitall letters was graven CROATOAN without any crosse or signe of distresse..."



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After John White and the sailors had considered the tree with the letters C R O carved into them, they walked toward the place where the houses should hve been standing.

The houses had been taken down and in their place was a palisade of tree trunks. A palisade is a way of creating a fort by sinking tree trunks into the ground to make a wall. John White describes this as being very fort-like with "curtains and flanks." These were defensive parts of a fort.

John White finds another carved message for him on the right side of the entrance to the fort. This time, the word C R O A T O A N is carved. There is no cross.

Return to Roanoke - The Cross



“Therefore at my departure from them... I willed them, that if they should happen to be distressed in any of those places, that then they should carve over the letters or name, a Crosse in this forme, but we found no such signe of distresse.”

John White had not only asked his colonists to carve the name of the location where they could be found if they left the island, he also asked them to carve a cross if they were in distress.

John White and the sailors did not find a cross.

Questions to think about:

What were some of the reasons why they would have carved a cross to show that they were in distress?

What might it mean that they did not carve a cross?

Return to Roanoke - What's left

"We entered into the palisade where we found many bars of iron, two pigs of lead, four iron fowlers, iron sacker-shot and such like heavy things, thrown here and there, almost overgrown with grass and weeds."

From thence wee went along by the water side, towards the point of the Creeke to see if we could find any of their botes or Pinnisse, but we could perceive no signe of them, nor any of the last Falkons and small Ordinance which were left with them"



John White and the sailors entered the palisade and found many heavy items scattered around in the grass and weeds.

After that, they went to a place where a creek meets the island's water line. The colonists must have been known to keep boats or their pinnace (shallop) there, but they weren't there nor were any of the small weapons or arms that they had with them.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT:

- *List some of the things that were missing from the place where the village stood.*
- *List some of the things that remained where the village stood.*
- *Why do you think these items remained while the houses were missing?*

Return to Roanoke - White's belongings

"...wee found five Chests, that had bene carefully hidden of the Planters, and of the same chests three were my owne, and about the place many of my things spoyled and broken, and my bookes torne from the covers, the frames of some of my pictures and Mappes rotten and spoyled with rayne, and my armour almost eaten through with rust; this could bee no other but the deede of the Savages our enemies at Dasamongwepeuk, who had watched the departure of our men to Croatoan; and as soone as they were departed, digged up every place where they suspected any thing to be buried..."

Finally, White and the sailors found five chests that had been buried in a location that White would have known about. Three of the chests were Whites. They had already been broken into and most of his possessions were spoiled or broken, including his pictures and map. White believes that this is the work of the Native Americans of a close village called Dasamongwepeuk.

John White's account of his fourth voyage to Roanoke mentions the village of Dasamongwepeuk. He said that the men of this village were accused of killing George Howe. The planters retaliated for the death but their revenge action was somewhat botched because the tribe seemed to have moved elsewhere.

While John White does not have much evidence to accuse this village of pillaging his supplies, he does not consider this mainland village to be friendly.

Where does White think they are?

“...but although it much grieved me to see such spoyle of my goods, yet on the other side I greatly joyed that I had safely found a certaine token of their safe being at Croatoan, which is the place where Manteo was borne, and the Savages of the Iland our friends.”



John White and the sailors in his company had spent the day exploring the location where the colony of Roanoke had been established. White had found that his three buried chests had been dug up and ruined and, while that caused him some grief, he was happy to have found a token that led him to believe that they were safe on the Island of Croatoan with Manteo's tribe?

So why didn't White travel there next?

He wanted to but the weather was starting to making sailing difficult and one of the ships in his company had lost all but one anchor. It was decided that they should sail south to Hispaniola, St. John's or Trinidad to resupply.



The Lost Colony of Roanoke

More evidence

On September 30th, 1590 after having been in the West Indies for over a month and seeing that the wind was bearing strongly for England, the ship that White was travelling on set sail for home. They reached port in Plymouth on October 24, 1590. White never managed to return to the New World to find out what happened to his colony.

The following cards provide further evidence that can be used to consider what happened to the Lost Colony of Roanoke.



John White's map - "La Virginea Pars"



This is a larger map of the Virginia colony painted in watercolor by John White. It shows the area as far north as the Chesapeake and as far south as Cape Lookout. It also names inland Native American villages and shows shallows or pinnaces exploring some of these other locations as well as larger ships waiting off the coast. Richard Grenville's flagship *Tiger* is at the bottom of the map.

The body of water that is in the center of the map is now called the Albermarle Sound. Roanoke is pictured at the edge of Albermarle Sound.

John White painted this map in 1585, during his first visit to Roanoke. Other members of that expedition probably provided sketches of some areas.

The area around Roanoke



This is a map of the Roanoke colony drawn by Theodor de Bry. He used drawings by Captain John White to create this map for a history he wrote of Virginia.

Questions to Think About:

The artist emphasizes some things by drawing them out of scale. What is the artist trying to explain about this area?

What things do you see in the water off the coast?

What is the mapmaker trying to say about the water around the islands by including these fantastic pictures in his maps?

Can you identify Roanoke on the map?

Can you identify two of the closest Native American tribes to Roanoke?

Detail of the island of Roanoke



Questions to Think About:

What structures do you see around the island?

What human activities are represented around the island?

This map was drawn to be viewed by people in England to create interest in the Virginia colony. What was the artist trying to convey with this map?

○ ———— →
This is a detail of the map that was drawn by Theodore de Bry after a drawing of John White's. It depicts a Native American village on Roanoke prior to any English settlement.

The Outer Banks in detail



This map was created by Theodor de Bry, who copied and colored the original map drawn by John White. This map is facing west. The island of Roanoke is pictured above the barrier island of Hatorask. The barrier island of Croatoan is also pictured to the left of the inlet. The Native American village of Pomeiok is also identified.

Graveyard of the Atlantic



The detail of this map shows a sea monster next to two sinking ships off the coast of the Outer Banks.

While very unlikely that there is a sea monster lurking off the coast of the Outer Banks, this stretch of coast is one of two places known as the "Graveyard of the Atlantic." This is due to the many ships that have run aground or wrecked near its shores.

The reasons for the high number of shipwrecks include shifting currents and wind, sand bars that are hardly visible above the water and challenging weather, especially hurricanes. The most recent ship to be sent to the "Graveyard of the Atlantic" was the *Bounty*, which was a replica of a famous three-masted British ship.

John White and his sailors also experienced the power of the Outer Banks first-hand when they attempted to cross the bar to Roanoke Island and sank with seven men.

Geography of the Outer Banks

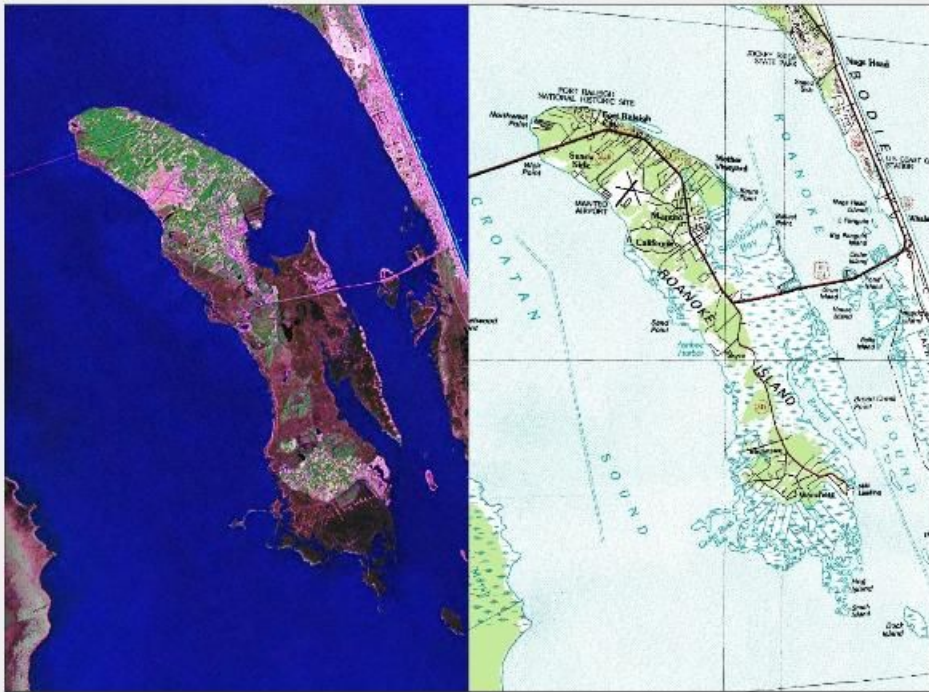


The Outer Banks is a series of low lying barrier islands that stretch for 200 miles off the coast of North Carolina. They are primarily made up of sand dunes. Because of how low they are to the water, they are usually evacuated during a hurricane. They are also very treacherous for ships to navigate near. There are many shipwrecks that have occurred near the Outer Banks. Because of this, it has gained the nickname the Skeleton Coast or the Graveyard of the Atlantic.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT:

- *Is the term "skeleton coast" a good description of how dangerous this area is?*
- *Would this area have been a good place for colonists to live year round?*

How big is Roanoke?



Here are two maps of Roanoke, a satellite image paired with a road map.

Roanoke Island is attached to the mainland by two causeways. Causeways are roads that are elevated over a body of water. Can you find them in the photograph? Roanoke is also large enough to have two small towns, Manteo and Wanchese.

There is a small airport in the town of Manteo. You can see the runways crossing in both maps. This may help you imagine Roanoke's size.

It's very hard to tell how big Roanoke Island is based on the maps from the time period which all have larger than life drawings of ships on them! ▼
Roanoke is eight miles long and two miles wide.

The 1854 Expedition to North America

... the fourth of the same month we arrived upon the coast, which we supposed to be a continent and firme lande, and we sayled along the same a hundred and twentie English miles before we could finde any entrance, or river issuing into the Sea...



How did Sir Walter Raleigh know so much about the land where the colonists were settling? He had sent an expedition. There were two ships and they were led by captains Philip Amadas and Arthur Barlowe. Barlowe was very descriptive in his log book. They arrived at the coast on July 4, 1854.

“The fourth of the same month [July 4] we arrived upon the coast, which we supposed to be a continent and firm land, and we sailed along the same a 120 English miles before we could find any entrance or river issuing into the ocean.

Where is the island of Croatoan?



Croatoan was the site of the village where Manteo was born. Manteo was a Native American who was friendly to the colonists. He had been to England with the captains who first explored the area around Roanoke.

John White believed that the colonists must have moved there because they carved that word on a fence post near their old village on Roanoke.



Questions to Think About: How would the colonists have reached this island? What would they have taken with them if they had gone to this location? What would they have left behind?

The "Cittie of Raleigh" on the Chesapiok

...after he had done so, to returne againe to the fleete, all passe along the coast, to the Bay of Chesepiok, where we intended to make our seate and forte, according to the charge given us among other directions in writing under the hande of Sir Walter Raleigh: but as soone as we were put with our pinnesse from the ship, a Gentleman by the meanes of Ferdinando, who was appointed to returne for England, called to the sailers in the pinnesse, charging them not to bring any of the planters backe againe, but to leave them in the Island...



John White and his planters did not intend to locate their colony on the Island of Roanoke. They planned to locate their "Cittie of Raleigh" on the Chesapeake Bay.

But first, they had planned to visit Roanoke and talk to the soldiers that Sir Richard Grenville had left at the fort. When they got there, they discovered that the fort had been destroyed and the soldiers were likely dead.

Once John White and several of his men had boarded the pinnace (or shallop) for the island, the ship's captain, Simon Fernandes, refused to let them reboard or take them further up the coast.

They had no choice but to remain at Roanoke.

What is a Shallop?



This is a detail of Theodor deBry's 1590 map of the arrival of the English to Roanoke in a shallop.

A shallop is a boat small enough to row with oars but would also carry a sail.

It could carry up to 15 people and was useful for navigating very shallow water. The shallop's draw (how much of the hull is underwater) was only two feet. It could also carry cargo.

Shallops did not do very well in rough seas, however.

Note that there were over 100 people left on the Roanoke Colony when John White left. The Roanoke colonists had a shallop and it was not on the island when John White returned.

The Roanoke "Planters"



In his writings, John White refers to the colonists as "planters." This was in contrast to the earlier expeditions that were made up of soldiers and scientists.

At the time that John White left the Roanoke Colony, there were 90 men but also 17 women and 11 children. Note that this number of planters may have been larger than some of the Native American villages in the area. Could any one village have taken them all in?

Henry Howe created this image of Virginia Dare's christening in 1880, 293 years after the event which happened on August 24, 1587.

Manteo and Wanchese



This is a detail from Theodor de Bry's engraving which was based on John White's illustration of the Native American clothing for young men.

Manteo and Wanchese are young Native American men who agreed to travel to England when Captains Amadas and Barlowe returned there after the first expedition to the area. They lived in Sir Walter Raleigh's home in London and taught Thomas Hariot their Algonquian language.

Manteo was from the island of Croatoan and was on the expedition that brought the planters to Roanoke. Here's more from John White on what happened when they made a visit to Croatoan.

"[We] passed by water to the Island of Croatoan, with Manteo, who had his mother, and many of his kinred dwelling in that island... to renew our old friendship with them. At our first landing they seemed as though they would fight with us... Then Manteo their countrey man called to them in their owne language, whom, as soone as they heard, they returned, and threwe away their bowes and arrows."

A Sketch of a Native American village



John White was an artist and mapmaker who sailed on two voyages to Virginia. His illustrations of plants and animals and Native American life were impressive. This was a detailed illustration that he made of the village of Pomeiok.

QUESTION TO THINK ABOUT:

- What can you learn about whether or not the Native Americans would have been able to help the colonists if they needed it?

A colony or a military base?



There were two voyages to Roanoke before the colonists arrived. The second one was an attempt to build a fort with soldiers on Roanoke Island. The soldiers would use the fort as a position from which to strike at the Spanish treasure ships.

Two men were in charge of this effort: Sir Richard Grenville and Ralph Lane. Sir Richard Grenville is pictured on the left.

They had very different opinions of the Native American tribes: Grenville tried to build a friendship with the Secotans.

Friendship was the last thing on Ralph Lane's mind. When Grenville returned to England to get more supplies, Lane remained behind with several soldiers. At the end of a very long and difficult summer, Ralph Lane ordered his soldiers to kill all the people in one of the local Secotan villages.

QUESTION TO THINK ABOUT:

- How might the opinion of the Native Americans changed about the English after this brutal attack?

A patch on a map

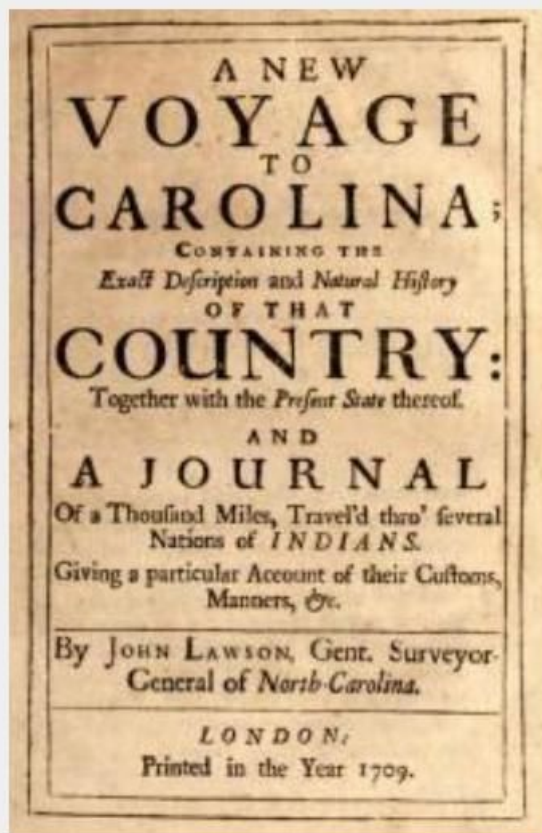


In 2012, researchers at the British Museum with the help of the First Colony Foundation, noted that there is a patch on John White's map called "La Virginea Pars." When they scanned the map with infrared light, it revealed that the patch is hiding a red and blue four pointed object. The shape is similar to ones that would signify a fort.

Why might a fort have been drawn on the map at this location?

And why might someone have chosen to cover it with a patch?

An Englishman Visits Croatoan



John Lawson was an English explorer who arrived on the island of Croatoan 115 years after the Roanoke Colony disappeared. Here is his first person account of the people that he met who, by that time, called themselves the Hatteras Indians.

Here are his words:

Have from the Hatteras Indians, who either then lived on Ronoaks island, or much frequented it. These tell us, that several of their Ancestors were white People, and could talk in a Book, as we do; the Truth of which is confirm'd by gray Eyes being found frequently amongst these Indians... We may reasonably suppose that the English were forced to cohabit with them... and that in process of Time, they conform'd themselves to the Manners of their Indian Relations.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT:

- This is only one person's account. Is that enough to make it strong evidence?
- Did any other English people explore the island of Croatoan before 100 years had passed?

Recent archaeological evidence



“...for at my coming away they were prepared to remove from Roanoke 50 miles into the maine...”

Archaeologists during the summer of 2016 decided to dig at a site located along with Chowan River in the hopes of finding artifacts that date back to the time of the Lost Colony. They had chosen to do so after seeing the fort-like symbol that was hidden on John White's map of the coast of the New World. (See Card 28 for this story).

The archaeologists found many things that were from the time period of the Lost Colony including nails, seals that were used to identify the quality of cloth and pottery for storing food.

Other groups also inhabited that location, including a Native American village and later colonists so it is hard to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that some of the colonists moved there.

John White did mention that the planters had a plan to move 50 miles into the mainland. The location of this archaeological site is approximately that distance from Roanoke.