

## Recent Clues

Souvenir seekers have been digging on Roanoke Island at least since 1653, when trader John Farrar and three friends from Virginia landed on the island and left with artifacts from the English colonies. Union soldiers stationed on Roanoke Island during the Civil War dug for artifacts, and in 1895, Philadelphia journalist Talcott Williams, who was also an amateur archaeologist, did some excavations in the area now enclosed by the national park boundaries.

Professional archaeologists have done several excavations since the late 1940s. They found artifacts undoubtedly left by the colonists, including remains from Harlot's science laboratory. But they didn't find the site of the colonists' village.

The members of the First Colony Foundation hope to learn more about Harlot's laboratory and the location of the village. Their curiosity has been piqued by several clues.

In 1982 Evans—who was then a student working at the Fort Raleigh National Historic Site—discovered the remains of an old well thought to be from the 16th century. Evans found the remains in Roanoke Sound, an indication of serious erosion on the northern end of the island.

In 2000 National Park Service archaeologists using ground-penetrating radar discovered rectangular-shaped objects buried beneath several feet of sand. (Park Service staff did not excavate the objects, but suspect they could be related to Harlot's work.) In 2002 a swimmer stepped on a 16th-century ax head in shallow water just off the northern end of Roanoke Island.

Finding the well and the ax head offshore has prompted some members of the First Colony Foundation to wonder if the site of the colonists' village eroded away and now is submerged. Underwater archaeologist Gordon Watts says that at least 600 feet (180 meters) and perhaps as much as a quarter-mile (0.4 kilometer) of the island has gone underwater since the 16th century.

"That's one fact that you cannot ignore," Watts said. "If you're doing a comprehensive search for the 1585-1587 settlement, you can't ignore the possibility that the site is now underwater."

Like any classic mystery, however, there's polite disagreement among some of the experts about where the village might have been. Acclaimed archaeologist Ivor Noël-Hume, who led an excavation in the Fort Raleigh National Historic Park in the 1990s, thinks it's highly unlikely the village site is now underwater.

"That's only a personal view, I do assure you," Noël-Hume said. "I wouldn't want to discourage further excavations. But I think you're going to find the remains of the settlement on a piece of land."

Noël-Hume says he'd like to see an excavation done in an area of sand dunes near the beach on the northern end. That could be "very informative," he says.

Virginia archaeologist Nick Luccchetti, who also has worked at Fort Raleigh, says he has a reason to believe that maybe the village site hasn't been lost to erosion. "I've talked to collectors who have walked the beach on the north end for 30 years, and they don't have any 16th-century European artifacts in their collections," Luccchetti said. Despite their disagreements about where the colonial village may have been, the experts concur that the English effort to plant colonies on Roanoke Island was a milestone in U.S. history.

"It earned its place in American history when Thomas Harlot worked in the science center and sent back a report that said America is worthy of commercial investment," Noël-Hume said.

Luccchetti thinks lessons learned at Roanoke Island helped ensure the survival of the Jamestown colony 20 years later. Harlot told the Jamestown colonists about the Native Americans' extreme fondness for copper ornaments, and so the colonists brought copper with them. When the Jamestown colonists were on the verge of starving, they traded copper to the Indians for food, and that saved the Jamestown colony from extinction, Luccchetti says.

Still, Evans thinks the mystery of the Lost Colony also is important because it lures people into the story of Roanoke Island.

"As long as the Lost Colony is unexplained, it stays fascinating for a lot of people," Evans said. "It's their entry into the story. They go in trying to figure out what happened to the colonists, and then they learn history. I don't want to take away the mystery. That's what makes it different and exciting."

Data Set 5:  
Drye, Willie. "America's Lost Colony: Can  
New Dig Solve Mystery?," *National  
Geographic News*, 2 March 2004.

# Extreme Droughts Played Major Role In Tragedies At Jamestown, "Lost Colony"

Date:

April 28, 1998

Source:

College Of William And Mary

Summary:

The worst droughts of the past 800 years likely played a major role in the mysterious disappearance of Roanoke Island's "Lost Colony" and in the "starving time" endured by colonists at Jamestown, researchers from the College of William and Mary and the University of Arkansas have concluded after studying growth rings of ancient trees in the Tidewater area.

# Disappearing Act

Most researchers think the colonists likely encountered disease—caused by New World microbes their bodies had never encountered before—or violence.

The research team thinks that when the crisis—whatever that may have been—hit, the colonists split up into smaller groups and dispersed.

"It's a good strategy," he said, explaining that the previous group from 1585 had been ordered to do so if disaster struck. "We don't definitely know that they do, but it's obvious that that's the only way they could have survived. No single Indian tribe or village could have supported them. They would be even larger than some villages—I mean, they were over a hundred people."

The prevailing theory has been that the colonists abandoned Roanoke and traveled 50 miles south to Hatteras Island, which was then known as Croatoan Island. But, Klingelhofer said, what if they went in another direction?

What if some of the colonists traveled west via Albemarle Sound to the mouth of the Chowan River, to a protected inlet occupied by a sympathetic tribe? (See "What 'Sleepy Hollow' Didn't Tell Us About Roanoke's Lost Colony.")

Furthermore, archaeologists have identified the nearby site of a small Native American town named Mettaquem, which may have adopted some of the colonists. Klingelhofer said that while researchers don't know much about the Native American town and its inhabitants, its existence has been verified.

"It's a very strategic place, right at the end of Albemarle Sound," he said. "You can go north up the Chowan River to Virginia or west to the Blue Ridge Mountains. They were big trading partners" with other Native American tribes.

By Tanya Basu, National Geographic  
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# THE LOST COLONY IN NORTH CAROLINA

