

# **De Soto National Memorial**

## **Long Range Interpretive Plan**

**National Park Service  
Southeast Region Support Office  
Atlanta, Georgia**

**Summer 1998/Revised 2003**

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## PREFACE

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Interpretive planning in the National Park Service (NPS) has changed significantly in the past four years with the agency's reorganization and restructuring. This change was long overdue. The planning process that evolved into the late 1980's focused attention on several components that had been proven elements of interpretive planning for many years. Alone, they worked well, but they did not speak the language consistent with government reform. And no single document addressed interpretation and education functions in broad terms.

What has emerged out of this need is the Comprehensive Interpretive Plan (CIP). For the first time, park managers have a planning document that includes both long and short term needs addressing the full range of interpretive media and personal services. In addition, the document examines process rather than individual tasks within the organization and emphasizes the most efficient use of new technologies. The process addresses streamlining concerns as well by building in credibility and allowing park staffs to share in creating and achieving a vision of their future. Furthermore, the new planning process provides a framework, which will help staffs measure inputs, outputs, outcomes, and other elements of the Government Performance and Results Act.

The implementation of the new thematic framework within the NPS will also have a profound affect on how the Service develops its interpretation and education programs. Public Law 101-628, Section 1209 (1991) directed the NPS to revise its thematic framework for history and prehistory to reflect current scholarship and represent the full diversity of America's past. The new framework is a dramatic departure from the former one because the practice of history has changed dramatically.

The revision presents a larger and more integrated view of history. It emphasizes the process of how to study history but does not identify what to study. It allows flexibility for identifying appropriate time periods and regions. It stresses the interplay of race, ethnicity, class, and gender within and among the frameworks broad topics. It makes it far easier to incorporate the insights of social and cultural history, which seeks to tell the stories of broad social trends and ordinary periods.

Interpretive planning is a vital component of all General Management Planning efforts. One of the basic principles guiding interpretive planning is that it is based on current research so that recommendations may be rooted in solid subject matter expertise. The new thematic framework is used as a conceptual tool to develop a knowledge of the resources and therefore to be able to evaluate what stories there are to be told about a particular NPS unit. Understanding the holistic and interconnected story of the resource contributed to the goal of telling compelling stories, which represent the greater meaning and significance of the resources. The thematic framework may also be helpful as an interpreter evaluates the stories that are available for telling. The key to successfully using the framework to organize knowledge of the resources is to start broadly and then narrow down the stories to the most compelling ones.

As an interpretive planning tool, the thematic framework provides us with several advantages. One is the encouragement of interdisciplinary dialogue between interpretive and resource divisions in the park. A second advantage is that using the framework increases the opportunity to tell integrated, compelling stories that enrich each parks visitor experience. A third is that holistic stories may be used to connect significant events and activities in one park with those in other parks, thereby enriching visitor experience of the whole system.

Taken together, the new comprehensive interpretive planning process and thematic framework enable park managers and planners to more successfully face the increasingly complex challenge of resource interpretation. With that challenge in mind, this plan for De Soto National Memorial takes full advantage of the new methodology.

## **Role of Interpretation**

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Although the interpretation and education function in the National Park Service has a long and proud history, it has not come without a struggle. Whether newly created or transferred to the NPS as existing parks, units often had to contend for years with little or no interpretive staff. Museum facilities and collections, if they existed at all, were eclectic and inert. The Great Depression brought the first significant wave of improvement to the parks in the form of development, restoration, research, and staffing. Through their attempt to restore the national economy and workforce in that difficult time, the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Progress Administration also established a nation-wide benchmark for NPS service and ethic. Prosperity and mobility following World War II led to intense pressure on the parks and the creation of the Mission 66 program in 1956. Park improvements growing out of this program were similar to those found in the Great Depression program thirty years earlier. In the late 1960's, preparations for the American Bicentennial focused attention on parks associated with American Revolution themes. Two other development initiatives, the Park Restoration and Improvement Program (1983) and the Columbus Quincentenary (1992), stand out in NPS history as sources of park development.

Authorized by Congress on March 11, 1948, De Soto National Memorial's development history occurred over the twenty-year period following its authorization. Most site development was a result of the Mission 66 program. From an interpretive perspective, this development included a visitor center with an information and sales desk, exhibit alcove and audiovisual room. Exterior development included a trail system and wayside exhibits.

Personal services in the form of guided walks, talks, and later, very popular costumed demonstrations provided the necessary flexibility required by the site and its story. In 1992, the Columbus Quincentennial brought only modest change to the program. An interactive computer was installed in the visitor center. This program described the Columbus voyages, early explorers and their explorations, park facilities and activities and additional information on surrounding attractions. Since 1992, staff available for personal services has decreased by about half. As result, interpretive activities during the traditional winter high season were cut by two weeks.

Since 1992, the program has remained relatively intact; however, nearby development pressures and regional population growth have hindered the staff's ability to deliver an essential, successful message to both actual and potential visitors.

## **Purpose and Significance**

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The Memorial was authorized for two primary reasons:

1. To establish an appropriate memorial to Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto and,
2. To construct a suitable memorial structure together with connecting roads and public facilities for the benefit of the people of the United States.

The significance of De Soto National Memorial is derived largely from Hernando de Soto's remarkable journey across, what is today, the southeastern United States. Made over a four-year period beginning in 1539, the journey was the first large-scale organized European exploration of that landscape. Reports of the vast resources encountered by that expedition spread throughout Europe and, as a direct result, the colonization of La Florida began.

De Soto's exploratory force traveled 4000 miles during its mission and had an overwhelming impact on the course of North American history. In addition to opening the southeast United States to European expansion, the expedition affected American Indians directly with its frequent practice of slavery and subsequent cultural displacement and the introduction of diseases. The life ways of these American Indians were forever changed by the visit.

## Themes

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The following theme statements were developed during the long range-planning workshop. These themes, listed in priority order, are key elements in developing the park's compelling story statement, which is at the heart of the interpretive program. NPS Thematic Framework themes are both capitalized and in bold type. Topics that define the theme appear in bold type followed by a priority listing of the preferred interpretive media

**I.      PEOPLING PLACES: Family and Life Cycles C**  
Audiovisuals, Museum Exhibits

1. Hernando de Soto was a product of his times, a conquistador who opened the southeastern North American continent to European influence.

**I. PEOPLING PLACES: Health, Nutrition and Disease,**  
**VII. TRANSFORMATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT**  
Audiovisuals, Museum Exhibits

2. The expedition brought about devastating upheaval and relocation of American Indian populations and, within two centuries, led to the assimilation or destruction of some historic tribes.

**IV. SHAPING THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE:**  
**Parties, Protests and Movements**  
Museum Exhibits, Publications

3. The political climate in Europe, spawned by Spain's success in the New World, encouraged worldwide expansion

**I. PEOPLING PLACES: Ethnic Homelands**  
Audiovisuals, Museum Exhibits

4. The story of Hernando de Soto and his expedition is one of conflict and violence between polar opposite cultures



## **II. CREATING SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS AND MOVEMENT: Religious Institutions**

Publications, Wayside Exhibits

5. The Catholic Church exerted a powerful influence on the government of Spain and its priests, in the same manner, influenced the de Soto expedition as chroniclers, combatants, and evangelists.

## **IV. SHAPING THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE: Military Institutions**

Personal Services, Museum Exhibits, Audiovisuals

6. Traditional weapons and tactics used by the expedition and American Indians against each other failed. The result was new weaponry, better navigational skills, and more accurate maps.

## **I. PEOPLING PLACES: Health, Nutrition and Disease**

Wayside Exhibits, Publications

7. The expedition brought about significant biological exchange between Europe and the New World.

## **VII. TRANSFORMING THE ENVIRONMENT: Protecting and Preserving the Environment**

Museum Exhibits, Audiovisuals

8. De Soto National Memorial is a unit of the National Park Service, the nation's premier conservation and preservation agency

## **A Thematic Analysis of the De Soto Story**

The thematic analysis of the De Soto story produced a list of facts

and concepts that will be helpful in the interpretive media planning and design process. The list is presented here to provide guidance and is by no means, the sole source of story material for the program. The major themes and defining topics are capitalized. The site-specific facts and concepts that emerged are presented in bold type.

## Theme: I. PEOPLING PLACES

### Defining topic: FAMILY AND LIFE CYCLE

- a.) second-born son who would inherit nothing from his father's estate, forced to make his own way in the world
- b.) he was 13-14 on his first voyage to the New World
- c.) he met his future wife on the first voyage and married her about a dozen years later
- d.) average life span at the time was 45-50 years
- e.) De Soto's earlier expeditions and other expeditions of that period add some much-needed context to the story
- f.) the Catholic Church exerted great influence on Spanish families
- g.) De Soto left home as a boy, went to the New World, and returned a wealthy man
- h.) De Soto died in the New World believing himself to be a failure because he did not find gold, but had he returned, the King of Spain would have deemed him a failure for not founding a colony
- i.) There are American Indian and European family and life cycle parallels that need to be part of this story

### Defining topic: HEALTH, NUTRITION AND DISEASE

- a.) describe/discuss the significant food and biological exchange that occurred as a result of De Soto's

### Defining topic: COMMUNITY AND NEIGHBORHOOD

- a.) Spain was an emerging world power at the time of the expedition
- b.) the expedition brought significant community disruption to American Indians

- c.) the park faces a serious information void about American Indian society in the Tampa Bay/Central-West Florida area. There may be a general academic research void as well

Defining topic: ETHNIC HOMELANDS

- a.) describe people, time, and place in 16<sup>th</sup> century Spain
- b.) describe people, time, and place in pre colonial Florida and what would become the southeast United States

Defining topic: ENCOUNTERS, CONFLICTS AND COLONIZATION

- a.) the expedition brought violence to the American Indians in the form of cultural displacement, plunder, rape, and slavery.
- b.) King Charles V of Spain told De Soto to establish colonies in the New World but he failed to do it from the outset.
- c.) American Indians used deception, guerilla tactics and intertribal conflict to move Spaniards from their land
- d.) compare and contrast the Mississippian and Spanish cultures

Theme: CREATING SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS AND MOVEMENTS

Defining topic: CLUBS AND ORGANIZATIONS

- a.) De Soto had been knighted, which, by 16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish standards was of more social than military significance
- b.) American Indians had cultural as well as military alliances

Defining topic: REFORM MOVEMENTS

No entry

Defining topic: RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

- a.) the Catholic Church was a profoundly powerful institution in 16<sup>th</sup> century Spain
- b.) De Soto came to the New World in the name of the King of Spain and the Catholic Church
- c.) the expedition priests chronicled the journey and participated in combat
- d.) American Indians relied on the powerful chieftains who claimed to be descendants of the sun

Defining topic: RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

No entry

Theme: EXPRESSING CULTURAL VALUES

Defining topic: EDUCATIONAL/INTELLECTUAL CURRENTS

- a.) the bellicose attitudes of both sides may seem barbaric today, but they were acceptable behavior in the context of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.
- b.) the crossbow (close tie with military topic)
- c.) in De Soto's terms, the acquisition of gold was the only way he could achieve success

Defining topic: FINE, APPLIED AND POPULAR ART

- a.) DeBry woodcuts of LeMoyne's 1564-65 drawings at Fort Caroline
- b.) American Indians expressed their values through pottery, effigies and village design and decoration

Defining topic: MASS MEDIA

no entry

Defining topic: ARCHITECTURE, LANDSCAPE  
ARCHITECTURE, AND URBAN DESIGN

- b.) middens and villages, chieftain house placement, communities and neighborhood connections

Defining topic: POPULAR AND TRADITIONAL CULTURES

- a.) examine De Soto and American Indian trade goods

Theme: SHAPING THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

Defining topic: PARTIES, PROTESTS, AND MOVEMENTS

- a.) Spain is the leading European power at the time of the expedition
- b.) the concept of conquest and national power on a world scale originates in Spain and spreads throughout Europe

Defining topic: GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

- a.) the monarchy/government and the Catholic Church are rulers of Spain

Defining topic: MILITARY INSTITUTIONS

- a.) the De Soto expedition was a search for wealth carried out by an armed force
- b.) the expedition had to adapt and counter the unfamiliar tactics of guerilla warfare to fight the American Indian
- c.) this was a significant period of change in armor and weapons for both sides

Defining topic: POLITICAL IDEAS, CULTURES AND THEMES

- a.) Spanish political ideas, cultures, and themes were very close to the cultural values, especially wealth and power
- b.) culture, predominantly in its religious form and expression, drove Spanish politics. Was it the same for the American Indian?

Theme: DEVELOPING THE AMERICAN ECONOMY

no entry

Theme: EXPANDING SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

- a.) significant period of change in military institutions and practices

- b.) the expedition improved navigational skills
- c.) the expedition brought about better maps of the New World

Theme: TRANSFORMING THE ENVIRONMENT

Defining topic: MANIPULATING THE ENVIRONMENT

- a.) the expedition encountered American Indian cultures that significantly modified their environment through farming
- b.) the biological exchange brought about by the expedition modified the environments of both continents

Theme: CHANGING ROLE OF THE UNITED STATES IN THE WORLD COMMUNITY

Defining topic: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

- a.) the DeSoto expedition and others of the same period strengthened the Spanish Empire

Defining topic: EXPANSIONISM AND IMPERIALISM

- a.) the expedition reinforced the potential of and illustrated the value of imperialist politics

Defining topic: IMMIGRATION AND EMIGRATION POLICIES

- a.) the expedition stimulated further exploration and immigration to the New World

## Objectives

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After visiting De Soto National Memorial, visitors will be able to:

- Explain the values/beliefs of Hernando de Soto and his motivations for the La Florida Entrada
- Explain the relative uncertainty of the precise landfall location of Soto's fleet and the lack of archeological evidence to support anything beyond current scholarly conjecture.
- Explain the hardships and challenges of the land and its people that facilitated the failure of the expedition.
- Explain the importance of the De Soto Chronicles as this first hand relation offers a valuable insight to the ethnography of pre colonial America and the scope of the Entrada.
- Describe the destructive impact of the De Soto expedition upon the aboriginal cultures of the American Southeast following the introduction of 16<sup>th</sup> century European ideologies and "old world diseases".
- Explain the types of weapons and tactics used by conquistadors and how these tactics were adapted to the type of protracted warfare practiced by the American Indians
- Develop an understanding of the importance and preservation of archeological resources as they relate to our knowledge of preliterate aboriginal cultures.

## Visitor Experience Statement

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Current research tells us that the de Soto expedition entered Tampa Bay on May 30, 1539. The exact location of the landfall is open to debate and there is no archeological evidence to suggest that the thirty acres selected for the national memorial is the true site.

Currently, it is the only site in the United States dedicated as a memorial to de Soto, the man, his expedition and its consequences.

This is a challenge for the park staff because both the attractive mangrove coastline and recreation use from surrounding residential developments competes with the memorial's primary purpose.

Many of these challenges can be overcome with non-personal services media; however, a long-term focus on personal services may offer De Soto National Memorial its best chance to reach out to on-site visitors. Any program will need a wide variety of activities and themes to reach out to all visitors. In short, it will need to focus primarily on the De Soto story and integrate themes and theme topics of American Indian lifeways and the surrounding natural environment. In addition, the program will need to address the mitigation of a variety of recreational uses and impacts on the site. They include walking, running, biking, fishing, wading, shelling and boating. Each of these pursuits has its own set of special impacts, including soil and shoreline erosion, volunteer path systems, soil compaction, and user conflicts. Most of these recreational pursuits are by local users who are in the park after hours.

What would visitors want to do, learn, and experience at De Soto?

For the everyday visitor, the desirable elements of a De Soto visit may include the solitude and relaxation found on the benches and trails in the maritime forest and along the shoreline. Frequent visitors may enjoy the familiar sights, sounds, and smells associated with coastal rhythms and cycles. They may use the visitor center rest rooms and porches. With additional research and new exhibits, the De Soto story may be a priority experience even for the frequent visitor. Many such visitors would enjoy bringing their guests to experience the park. The guests, who may be on their first or annual visit, would enjoy opportunities to explore the park's natural environment. More importantly, they would



probably bring a greater interest in the De Soto theme. Children, whether first-time visitors or not, would enjoy any number of techniques including, sensory experiences, games and puzzles, storytelling, role playing, and costumed interpretation. Parents generally enjoy experiencing parks with their children. Given that so many of these techniques are particularly useful in historic site interpretation, the children or grandchildren could be a key to capturing adult audiences with the de Soto story.

Indeed, the NPS hopes that all visitors go away knowing the park's compelling story. In addition, a successful interpretive program would also weave elements of the natural environment into the story within the historical context.

## Issues and Influences

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The following issues were identified as affecting the long-range interpretive development at De Soto National Memorial:

### 1. Visitor center space

The visitor center is frequently crowded with tourists, school groups, and local residents and their guests from December through May. School group visitors put special pressure on the facility, often overwhelming the modest public contact area and the restrooms. A small area in the center has been reserved for the cooperating association (Eastern National) bookstore, as well.

Today, the existing visitor center space is too small to meet the needs of an essential interpretive program. Recent rehabilitation of the museum exhibits - including the addition of a large archeology panel on the patio - and the production of a new video have greatly improved the park's ability to tell its stories. On the other hand, a class of thirty students overwhelms the facility.

### 2. Office space

As with park operations, administrative services and office space requirements far exceed what the existing structure can offer. The space currently occupied by these functions could meet the needs of perhaps all the visitor services requirements. In an effort to improve visitor services, park management plans to remove administrative functions to leased space outside the park or to build new space in the park. Much of the freed space will be devoted to the relocation and expansion of the bookstore. Opportunities for expanding museum exhibits and enlarging on all but the essential parks themes will be very limited.

### 3. Agency and site identity

Rapid residential growth and expansion has created a neighborhood park identity for De Soto National Memorial. Many visitors are unaware that the park is a unit of the National Park

Service and that it's memorialization of De Soto is of national significance. Furthermore, the park is often confused with a nearby local park (Fort De Soto) that offers a wide variety of recreational activities including camping.

#### 4. Florida Park Service & De Soto Connections

The relationship with the Florida Park Service has broken down over time and through changes in staffing. Currently there is a De Soto Auto Trail and the Hernando de Soto State Historic Site. The Auto Trail extends from our park to the Georgia State line. Trail signs used to be located at five-mile intervals along with roadside exhibits that allowed the motorist to trace De Soto's route through Florida. There was also a trail brochure, (last produced in 1989) and which has been long out of print. Currently, the park's exhibit marking the beginning of the Auto Trail was damaged in Tropical Storm Gabrielle. This damage is not being addressed and reflects negatively on the park. The State Historic Site preserves a couple of acres in downtown Tallahassee, Florida marking the 1539-1540 winter encampment of the expedition in the Indian village of Anhaica. This is the only site in the U.S. directly linked to the *Entrada*. The Florida Park Service provides three days of educational programs to students and opens the site to the public one-day a year (normally the third Saturday in January). None of the extensive list of artifacts recovered (owned by the Florida Department of State) are on display.

The relationship with Florida should be reestablished and perhaps a cooperative agreement should be explored to share resources and pursue mutual goals and objectives.

Contact should be made with the Florida Department of State to obtain a loan of artifacts from the Archeological dig at the De Soto Winter Encampment Site for display in the Visitor Center

#### 5. Erosion and Flood

Shoreline erosion brought about by wind and tidal action on the Manatee River has been a perpetual problem at the park. Although this is a NPS site with the "National Memorial" designation, visitors are encouraged to imagine what it would have been like to land with De Soto's expedition along a beach similar to the one we have here and begin the expedition in a Mangrove Forest environment. Without a "beach" the park will fail in this

objective. Visitors are also encouraged to walk along the park's narrow beach to enjoy the river vistas as well as the mangrove forest edge. In 2002, park management completed a major shoreline erosion mitigation project on the bluff near the visitor center and along most of the park's shoreline and trails. This will continue to be a management concern with no sure solution apparent, for the foreseeable future.

#### 6. Exotic plants

A variety of exotics exist within the park. Some are a part of the landscape plan; others have appeared naturally. They represent a threat to native plants that would have been present at the time of the De Soto landing. The exotics, which are not part of the landscaped area, should be removed. Periodic visits by the NPS Florida EPT should be requested to keep this small site exotics free.

#### 7. Neighboring development

The park will soon find itself with residential development on all of its land boundaries. Intense residential and commercial development along Florida State Route 64W will continue to place pressure on the park.

#### 8. Community involvement and Partnerships

As a very small green space already intensively used by its neighbors as well as other visitors, De Soto National Memorial's appreciation as a historic site will depend on the development of strong ties to the local community as well as frequent involvement in community activities. Such ties would include a friends group and closer alliances with existing and potential partners such as the De Soto Historical Society and the County Conservation Lands Program (MOU with Riverview Pointe). Community involvement could take on any number of broad forms ranging from participation in local festivals and parades to membership in local convention and tourism organizations. Park management has an active and expanding community outreach program in place.

#### 9. Highway signs

Direction signs to the park in the Bradenton area are adequate;

however, there are no signs to the park on Interstate 75 or 275. Other recreational and cultural points of interest do have signs on the highway, which is the major travel route between the west central United States and Florida. Every other NPS site in Florida has an interstate sign. Given the parks theme and its importance in telling the story of Hispanic history in the New World, it is important that travelers be aware of this site.

#### 10. Wayside exhibits

Over several years, the park has installed a variety of wayside exhibits at several locations throughout the park. They make an important contribution to the interpretive program, but the wide variety of sizes, styles, and media leaves visitors with a poor visual impression. The use of waysides, including their effectiveness at DeSoto, needs a complete review. Park management has called for a new exhibit plan that will be completed in 2004. Funding is in place for implementation of a parkwide system of waysides.

As a NPS site with the "National Memorial" designation, the trail should be used to explore all of the park themes and stories and be considered an extension of the Visitor Center exhibits. Waysides should be used creatively and not be used in the traditional interpretive sense, e.g., be based on site-specific connections (as there are none to the De Soto expedition).

#### 11. Hispanic heritage site identity

Although De Soto is a key site in the story of Spanish exploration and settlement in the New World, relatively few people of Hispanic descent actually visit the park. This situation exists in a state with one of the largest, fastest growing Hispanic populations in the United States. Attempts to reach this audience should be made through appropriate use of bi-lingual materials, e.g. the web site, pamphlets and waysides.

#### 12. Off-site interpretive linkage

The park does have an interesting opportunity to network with several NPS sites with Hispanic themes. These sites include, among others, Coronado National Memorial, Cabrillo National Monument, Pecos National Monument, and Chamizal National

Memorial. Coronado and Cabrillo are contemporary expeditions and included in the same NPS handbook. The sharing of resources and the pursuit of mutual goals should be attempted.

### 13. De Soto Heritage Areas?

The De Soto Trail Study Act of 1987 created a lot of local interest in the ten states that the expedition traveled through. Although it was determined in the final report that the route is of national significance, there is currently a lack of evidence as to the actual route. The park should work with sites along the "trail" to assist with interpretation or authentication of any new archeological discoveries. As archeological information is uncovered or as local segments of the "trail" provide evidence of the actual route, greater emphasis and interpretation should be pursued with the support of the NPS (De Soto NM).

### 14. Web Page and on-line Resources.

As it is unlikely that this NPS unit will ever have year round personal services or an on-site historian. The park should pursue the development of an expanded web page to provide year round interpretation, virtual visit opportunities and on-line primary resources for researching the De Soto Entrada.

## Visitor Profile

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The park has a near complete history of visitor statistics dating from 1951, but there has been no formal visitor survey. Average annual visits number just under 200,000. The heaviest use comes during winter and spring: early December through the Easter holiday, generally mid-April. Most of the visitors are more than 50 years old and they normally travel in peer or family groups. About 65% of visitors are home based day users; 35% are through visitors. The point of origin for visitors is 40% local residents, 25% regional residents, 28% national, and 7% international.

The broadest spectrum of age groups visits during the Christmas and Easter holidays, and during summer, the traditional family vacation period. The staff has observed a significant increase in international visitors over the last several years. Virtually all use is resource related. User groups include fisher persons, shellers, walkers, runners, bikers, and boaters. Much usage occurs after hours when the park is available only to walk-in visitors. Daily use trends are affected more by inclement weather -- precipitation and wind --than temperature extremes.

Visitors usually spend a little more than 90 minutes in the park. Slightly less than half of the visitors use orientation services. About 40% attend conducted activities while 10% are considered non-program users.

## Existing Interpretive Facility and Media Condition

### Interpretive Structures

#### Visitor Center:

This is a Mission 66 era building in fair condition. For more than six months a year, building usage exceeds design capacity. Rest rooms facilities are marginally adequate.

#### Living History Camp:

This site consists of a campsite backed by a solid wood palisade, a seating area for visitors and two chickees or palmetto leaf and pole structures. The facility was rehabilitated following an arson attack in early 2002 to include an extended palisade, gate to rear of palisade (with storage area), running water and security cameras.

The camp provides an appropriate and safe forum for historic weapons demonstrations (**matchlock musket only**).

Demonstrations are supervised by the black powder safety officer, Chief Ranger, and all personnel using historic weapons (**matchlock musket only**) are certified annually by the Chief Ranger according to NPS historic weapons standards.

#### Trails:

The 0.62 mile loop trail winds through the maritime forest and along the Manatee River shoreline east of the visitor center. The trail also features a 470-foot boardwalk through a mangrove swamp. This trail is in good condition and provides management with opportunities to make significant and innovative improvements to the park's interpretive and education program.

### Personal Services



The visitor center information desk is attended daily when the facility is open. Auditorium talks are given before each showing of the film. The Living History Camp is open and staffed daily from mid-December to early April and features hourly demonstrations. Guided walks may also be available by special request during this season. Off-site presentations are available on request. Given its size and responsibilities, the park staff is doing all that it can to provide a maximum of personal services.

### **Museum Exhibits**

Installed in 2001, the permanent exhibit consists of several artifacts and reproductions. Colorfully illustrated panels along the walls and surrounding the entrance to the audiovisual room add depth and interest to the subject. Overall, these improvements are an outstanding example of the effective use of interpretive museum exhibits in a limited space. Attempts should be made to secure the loan of real De Soto expedition artifacts.

### **Wayside Exhibits**

There are 31 wayside exhibits of various shapes, sizes, materials, and conditions throughout the park. For several years, this program has developed at random without the benefit of a plan to provide stability and direction. Management will have a new plan in place by early 2004.

### **Traveling Exhibits/Curriculum Based Teacher Led Program**

The park had a series of traveling trunks, which were available for classroom use in the Tampa Bay region. What remains of the traveling exhibit program has been combined into one trunk which will be used to support the on-site education program.

Starting in 2001 a partnership was formed with Manatee County School System and the Diocese of Venice (Local -Catholic School System) and Manatee County Conservation Lands (Owners of River View Pointe Park). Local teachers, rangers and Management of all partners worked to develop Teacher led curriculum based activities for use in the school as pre and post site materials as well as on-site activities. Numerous In -Service training opportunities

were conducted in the summer of 2002 and starting with the 2002-2003 school year, trained teachers have been providing a "Parks as Classroom" experience for at least 30 classes of local elementary program. The park plans to continue to support and grow this program.

### **Audiovisuals**

The park shows a new DVD (2001) as part of its visitor center orientation. The 21 minute film entitled "Hernando de Soto in America" is shown daily in the VC and for off sites. In March of 2004, this title was finally offered for sales as a DVD in the Eastern Sales Outlet.

### **Publications and Sales**

The park has an attractive and informative sixteen-panel brochure in the Unigrid format. It is updated as necessary with the last update occurring in 2003, to digitize the brochure and update the park map to reflect the establishment of Riverview Pointe Park to the southern border. The brochure is complemented with a 111-page handbook, also produced in the Unigrid format. As a Quincentennial project, the handbook links the de Soto, Coronado, and Cabrillo stories in the context of the *Entrada* concept. It also contains site guides to the three commemorative parks. Both the brochure and the handbook are excellent interpretive publications.

The park also operates a small sales area affiliated with Eastern National Park and Monument Association. Although interpretively essential, the sales area is too small and is currently generating minimally cost-effective sales of approximately \$15,000 per year.

## **Essential Interpretive Program: Action Plan**

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The compelling story statements and several topics will drive the park's interpretive program. The current interpretive and education program is a starting point from which to build an essential program that the park and agency would be pleased to offer the public.

Recommended changes are:

### **Interpretive Structures**

#### Visitor Center

The available space for interpretation and visitor services should be expanded.

Responsibility: Superintendent

Target Date: 2005

Funding and target date: All sources

#### Living History Camp

No changes recommended at this time.

#### Trails

The trail should be developed as an integral and innovative extension of the park's core interpretive program.

### **Personal Services**

The Living History Camp and guided presentations throughout the park represent the most effective methodology of telling the complex De Soto story to the broadest range of visitors. Only the information desk is currently staffed year round. The camp and walks are provided on a regular basis for less than six months per year. Park management needs to develop a strategy to expand these services to include summer weekends.

Responsibility: Chief Ranger  
Target Date: In progress  
Funding: ONPS, other

### **Museum Exhibits**

No major changes recommended at this time; however, the opportunity to install an innovative interpretive experience along the park's trail may impact how this exhibit fits into the overall program. Obtain artifacts from the expedition may cause the redesign of exhibit space being currently filled with reproduction items.

Responsibility: Chief Ranger  
Target Date: Ongoing for minor rehabilitation  
Funding: All sources

### **Wayside Exhibits**

The memorial needs a comprehensive wayside exhibit plan in order to provide both design and thematic integrity. The plan should be developed as part of an innovative interpretive experience for visitors. Such an experience should incorporate elements of museum and wayside exhibitry.

Responsibility: Chief Ranger  
Target Date: 2004  
Funding: All sources

### **Traveling Exhibits**

No longer a functional program.

### **Curriculum Based Teacher Led Program**

Continue to grow and support this program. Seek an OFS base increase to provide an additional ranger who could support this program during the school year.

Responsibility: Superintendent

Target Date: 2006

Funding and target date: All sources

### **Junior Ranger Program**

The memorial needs a comprehensive redesign of the existing Junior Ranger program to meet current De Soto scholarship and NPS interpretive standards. The program should be innovative, incorporate the entire family into support of the potential "Junior Ranger", should be interactive with the current exhibits, movie, and waysides. The park should continue to provide Junior Ranger Badges and make the Junior Ranger hats available in the sales area.

Responsibility: Chief Ranger

Target Date: 2003

Funding: All sources

### **Audiovisuals**

No change recommended at this time.

### **Publications and Sales**

The sales area should be relocated to the existing administrative space once the administrative function relocates off-site. Staff should take steps to insure that the following items are available at all times:

NPS brochure

NPS Handbook

NPS Movie in VHS & DVD

De Soto Chronicles

Hernando De Soto among the Apalachee

Los Sobrevivientes De La Florida

Knights of Spain, Warriors of the Sun  
Hernando de Soto A Savage Quest in the Americas

Park-produced map of nature trails

German, French, Spanish and Portuguese translations of the NPS *Destinations* Article on De Soto

Site bulletins:

Gumbo Limbo

Flora and Fauna

Nature Trails

Responsibility: Chief Ranger

Target Date: Ongoing

Funding: ONPS, Eastern National, other

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## **Library and Collections Needs**

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Collections housed at the park face threats from flood, fluctuations in temperature and humidity, and salt air.

The park library collection consists of 1500 volumes. Some are in Spanish and all are available for on-site research. Major topics include Spanish and European history, exploration and colonization, Native American cultures, arms and armor, and NPS history and philosophy. This collection is currently shelved in the Superintendent's Office. New guidelines have established that library collections are to be treated as curatorial resources. This collection needs to be managed according to those guidelines.

The museum collections contain 418 items in twenty accessions. Only 25 items are historic; the remainders are archeological. Over 15,000 items in twenty six accessions are held at the Southeast Archeological Center. Most of these items are of archeological importance. The park's most impressive artifact is its complete suit of 16<sup>th</sup> century Maximillian armor, donated in 1955. The armor is the focal point of the park's small museum exhibit. In a joint project between the park and Harper's Ferry Center, the armor was conserved and placed in an environmentally controlled case in FY95.

## **Research Needs**

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The park has completed the archeological survey of the park in 2002. This research reveals new information on the prehistoric cultures that occupied the site and fills some of the voids in this aspect of the De Soto story.

The park staff recognizes that they know very little about research on the American Indian experience in 16<sup>th</sup> century Florida. In order to proceed with this plan and build successful partnerships with the American Indian community, the staff needs to fill this information void. Should they find that little information is available, additional research will be essential to the success of the program.

The Tabby House Ruins site continues to be an area of significant interest. Management needs to support continued archeological research at this site in order to develop a more complete picture of the cultural history there, as well as provide additional information for historic preservation planning and treatment. The 2002 archeological survey indicates that the house may be older than previously thought and pre-date the Shaw family occupation. Further investigation should be pursued.

## **Staffing Needs and Associated Costs**

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Given the current fiscal posture of the Federal government, any additions to the paid staff using traditional means seem remote. Special hiring authorities and funds that emerge in the near future may provide some relief; however, the best source of more help will most likely come from partnerships, volunteers, and cooperating association staff.

Partnership issues were discussed earlier in this document, but further mention should be given them as potential sources for volunteers. For example, a modest friends group at the park could grow into a larger organization supported by a coordinator who is a



volunteer. De Soto, with its large number of affluent retirees, seems like an ideal environment to develop and maintain this kind of group.

Another potential source of help is the cooperating association. Park facilities, which permit the expansion of the sales outlet as a fundamental aspect of the interpretive program, are most likely to benefit. The major drawback is the large startup investment of time and energy required by the park staff in order to produce the momentum. Currently, National Park Service cooperating associations have determined that, from a business perspective, a successful store will sell \$1.00 in merchandise to every visitor entering the visitor center/sales area. Given the \$1.00 figure, the De Soto Park store should be able to achieve gross sales well over \$100,000 per year. This amount would bring the park a significant return in the form of donations and/or paid sales staff.

The park's management objectives are certainly broad enough for the creation of a significant interpretive bookstore on De Soto and particularly on the influence of Spanish exploration and heritage on the cultural evolution of North America. Furthermore, there is as great an opportunity for the interpretation of the different American Indian tribes encountered by De Soto and the effect those encounters had on their cultures. Few National Park Service areas interpret these themes together. Studies, perhaps conducted through cooperative park study agreements, can determine the feasibility of such a store. If those studies confirm that a need exists, the park should not hesitate to expand its sales area, develop the potential, and use the benefits to advance its interpretive program.

## **Team Members**

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### 1998 Review

#### DeSoto National Memorial

Barbara Goodman, Superintendent  
Brian Loadholtz, Chief Ranger  
Pat Moriyasu, Administrative Officer  
Susan Sernaker, Park Ranger  
Bill Muzzey, Park Ranger  
Bill Hiemenz, Park Ranger  
Tim Burke, volunteer (reviewer)  
Larry May, volunteer (reviewer)

#### Southeast Region Support Office

John Beck, Resource Education/Planner, (team leader)

#### Sarasota County, Florida

William B. Burger, Sarasota County Archeologist  
(reviewer)

#### University of Georgia

Dr. Charles Hudson, Professor of Anthropology (reviewer)

### 2003 Update

#### De Soto National Memorial

Charles Fenwick, Superintendent  
Raymond Hamel, Park Ranger

#### Southeast Regional Office

John Beck, Resource Education Planner (team leader)

## **Appendices**

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This section is reserved for legislative actions, current goals, and any other significant documents relative to the memorial's interpretive program.