

## ABOUT YOUR VISIT

De Soto National Memorial is on Tampa Bay, 5 miles west of Bradenton, Fla. Exhibits and an audiovisual program in the visitor center will help you better understand De Soto's accomplishments. A nature trail in the park features native flora, and markers along the trail tell how the plants were used by Indians and Europeans.

## ADMINISTRATION

De Soto National Memorial is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Box 1377, Bradentown, Fla. 33505, is in immediate charge.

**THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR** — the Nation's principal natural resource agency — has a special obligation to assure that our expendable resources are conserved, that renewable resources are managed to produce optimum benefits, and that all resources contribute to the progress and prosperity of the United States, now and in the future.

U. S. Department of the Interior

National Park Service



# De Soto

NATIONAL MEMORIAL • FLORIDA

Of strange lands, strange peoples, and strange customs; of danger, gallantry, and despair; of priceless data on a new land and an ancient way of life — of these Hernando de Soto, historian and adventurer, found much on his 16th-century expedition into the vast unknown North American wilderness. And when we trace the growth of the United States from the founding of the English colony at Jamestown in 1607, we sometimes forget that it was the encouraging results of this expedition that, in large measure, sustained the faltering colonial enterprise in Virginia. While the English "Adventurers of Person" were dying by the hundreds, the "Adventurers of Purse," the Virginia Company stockholders in Britain, ironically, were using the record of De Soto's journey to drum up support for the Jamestown colony. The great conquistador would have been considerably less enthusiastic about exploring this unknown and hazardous wilderness had he known that the English, not the Spanish, would ultimately gain from his efforts.

In De Soto's time there were many who believed that an expedition into North America would prove as lucrative and as successful as the expeditions of Hernando Cortéz in Mexico and Francisco de Pizarro in Peru. There, in the 1520's and 1530's, Spanish conquistadors discovered and conquered vast empires of golden

temples and sophisticated civilizations. Tales abounded of similar riches to be had in the interior of North America. Since no one had as yet penetrated deep into the continent, hope gave rise to speculation, speculation to rumor, and rumor was soon accepted as fact. So De Soto, the noble-born, veteran conquistador, decided to find the fantastic "golden cities" of North America.

The Spanish Crown granted him the "opportunity" to invest his personal fortune in the enterprise, and on April 7, 1538, his flotilla left Spain for the wild lands that became the southeastern United States. De Soto stopped first in Cuba (he had been appointed governor), gathered his forces and supplies, and on May 30, 1539, landed about 600 men and 220 horses somewhere on the southwest coast of Florida. Four years and 4,000 miles of discomfort, disappointment, and death followed that landing.

It was clear from the beginning that the army would eventually have to depend upon Indian stores of food and upon Indian bearers to carry them; but friendly relations with the Indian tribes were the exception rather than the rule. The natives' fierce pride and their warrior traditions prompted them to rebel time after time against these strange, sometimes cruel invaders with their shiny armor and awesome mounts.

