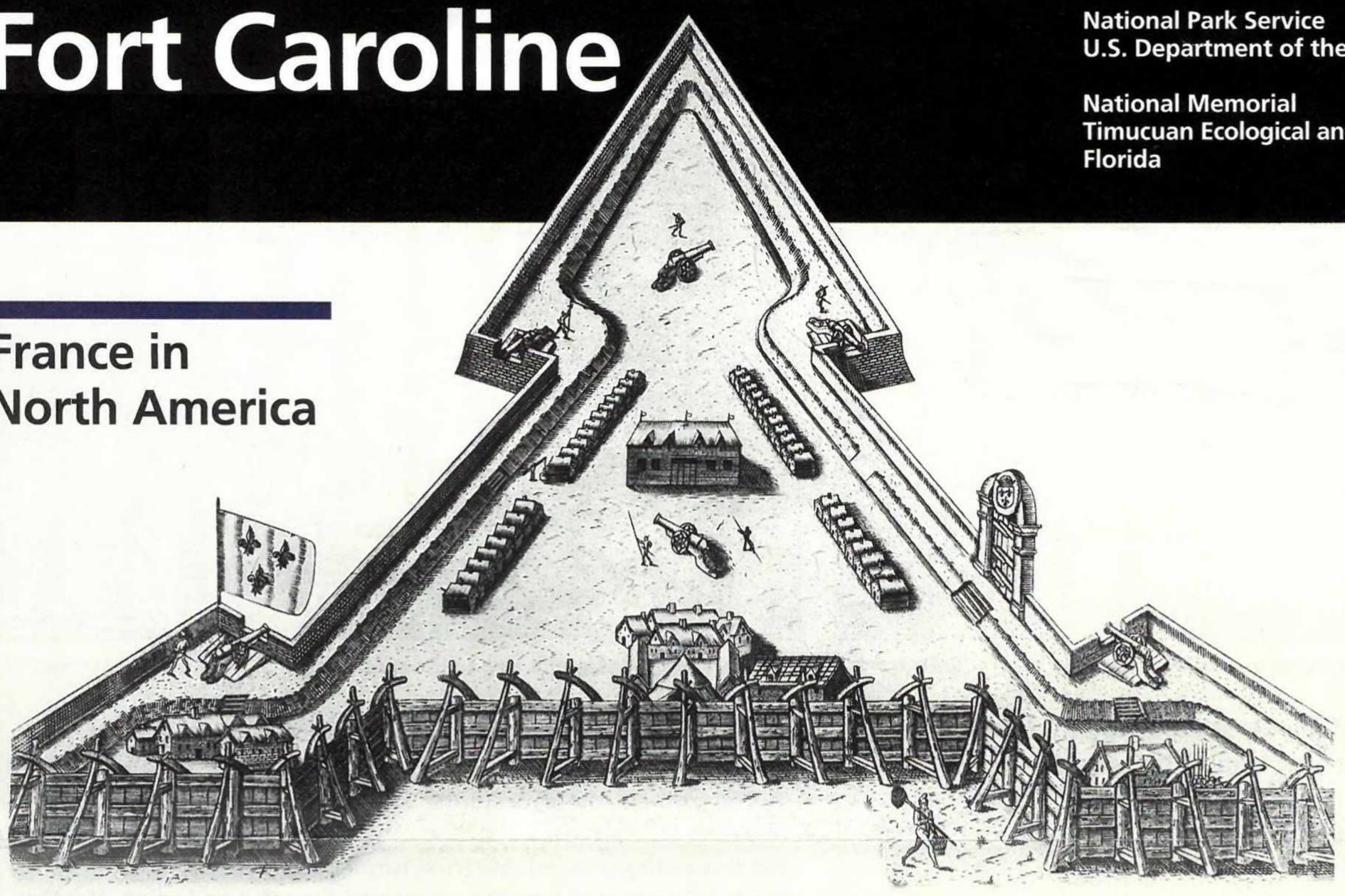
Fort Caroline

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Memorial
Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve
Florida



Fort de la Caroline protected the first planned French settlement in what is now the United States. *Above*: the French royal coat of arms. Engraving of the fort is by Theodore de Bry, after an illustration by Jacques le Moyne.

France in North America

In the mid-1500s a vigorous, expansionist France was emerging from feudalism and dreaming of empire. Spain, the world's leading power, already had a foothold in the Americas, and France wanted to share Spain's riches gained by trade and plunder. France's first attempt at a permanent claim in North America was La Caroline, a settlement near the mouth of the St. Johns River in Florida.

The settlement was a commercial venture at first, but religious conflict in France enlarged its goals. Growing persecution of French Protestants (Huguenots) led their most powerful member, Admiral Gaspard de Coligny, to propose to the crown that the colony also be a refuge for Huguenots. An exploratory expedition commanded by Jean Ribault left France in February 1562. After erecting a monument at the River of May (now St. Johns River), Ribault went northward, left a small garrison at Charlesfort near Port Royal Sound, and sailed home. Within months his men's situation became desperate and they returned to France.

Coligny urged another attempt in April 1564, planning a permanent settlement of 200 soldiers and artisans, and a few women. Led by René de Goulaine de Laudonnière, who was with Ribault on his previous expedition, the colonists first touched at the River of May on June 22. Helped by Indians, they began building a village and fort on the river's south bank, naming the area La Caroline (*land of Charles*) after their king, Charles IX. Relations with the Indians soon soured and by spring 1565 the colonists faced starvation. Mutinous parties sailed off to seek their fortune—some to be captured by the Spanish, revealing the French colony's presence. Remaining colonists, discovering no silver or gold, were set to quit Florida in August 1565, when Ribault arrived with a relief expedition of supplies and 600 soldiers and settlers, including more women and some children.



NPS

With Indian allies Dominique de Gourgues recaptured Fort de la Caroline—called San Mateo by the Spanish—in 1568.

Learning that Ribault had left for Florida, Philip II of Spain sent Admiral Pedro Menéndez to dislodge the French. Initially rebuffed off the coast, Menéndez set up a base to the south at San Augustín. Ribault sailed down the coast to attack the Spanish, but a hurricane scattered his ships and he beached far to the south. Seizing the opportunity, Menéndez marched north with 500 soldiers to attack the weakly guarded colony. In early morning, September 20, his troops massacred 140 settlers, sparing only about 60 women and children. Forty to 50 others, including Laudonnière, escaped and sailed for France. Menéndez next marched south and found the shipwrecked Frenchmen, Ribault among them. They threw themselves on his mercy, but to Menéndez they were heretics and enemies of his king. At a place later to be named Matanzas (*slaughter*) he killed about 350 men—all but those professing to be Catholics and a few musicians.

The French exacted their revenge in April 1568, when Dominique de Gourgues attacked and burned the fort, killing all who did not escape, and then sailed home. Spain rebuilt the fort, only to abandon it in 1569. France, however, never again would strongly challenge Spanish claims in North America.

Sea Lanes of Settlement and Conflict

In Florida both France and Spain hoped to claim their piece of the "new world." By the time the French planted a settlement at La Caroline, Spain was entrenched in South and Central America and its sea routes through the Caribbean were well established *(see map)*. Spanish ships bearing gold and silver from mines in Mexico and Peru stopped at Havana before sailing for Spain. They rode the Gulf Stream through the Bahama Channel (now the Straits of Florida) and up North America's southeast coast. Spain feared a French settlement because its treasure ships, although following Florida's coast, could be easy prey for French raiders in their nearby haven at La Caroline.



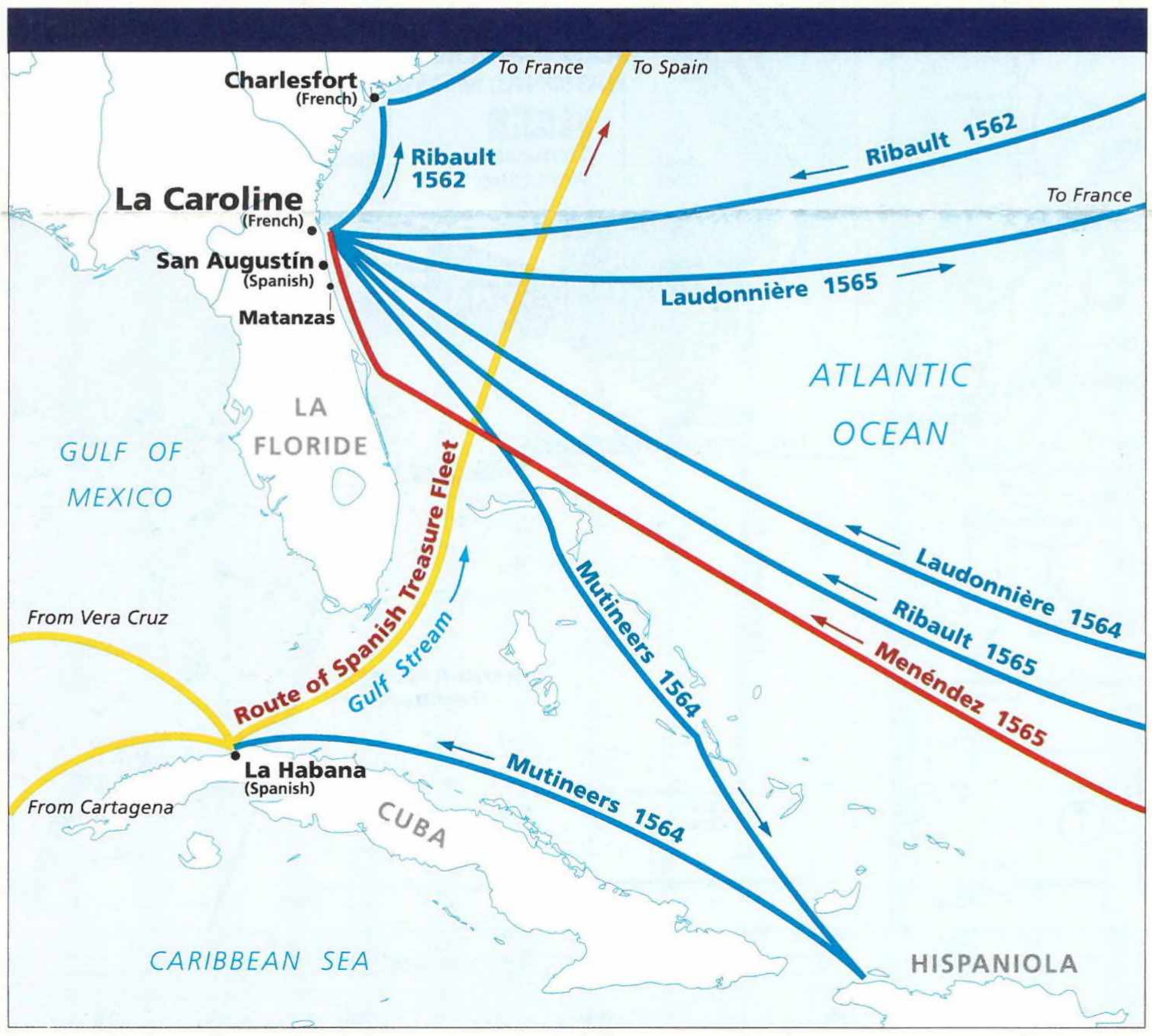
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Charles IX (1550–74) became king of France at age 10. His mother Catherine de Medici and Admiral Coligny counseled the king to license Ribault's North American voyage.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Gaspard de Coligny (1516–72), Admiral of France and prominent Huguenot, was supported by Catherine de Medici in his plan to colonize New France with Huguenots.





COURTESY OF SMITH COLLEGE. PHOTO BY RICHARD FISH

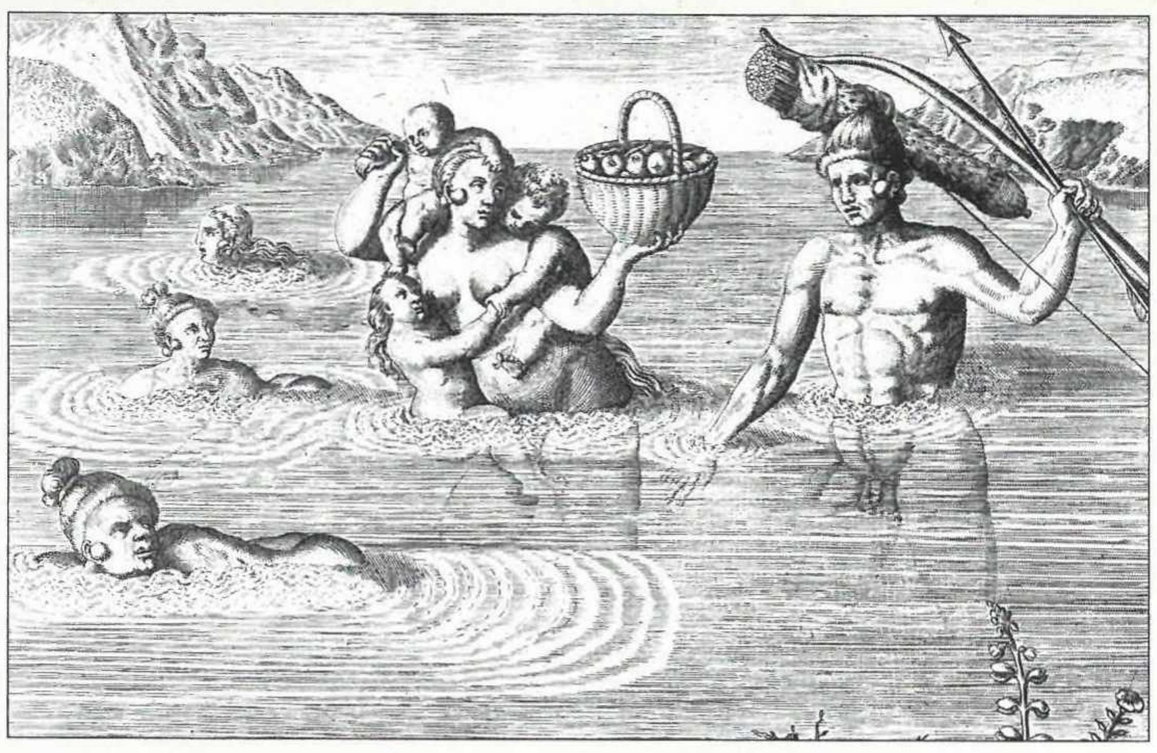
Jean Ribault (ca. 1520–65), chosen by Admiral Coligny to explore Florida, brought reinforcements to Fort de la Caroline in 1565 and died in its defense.



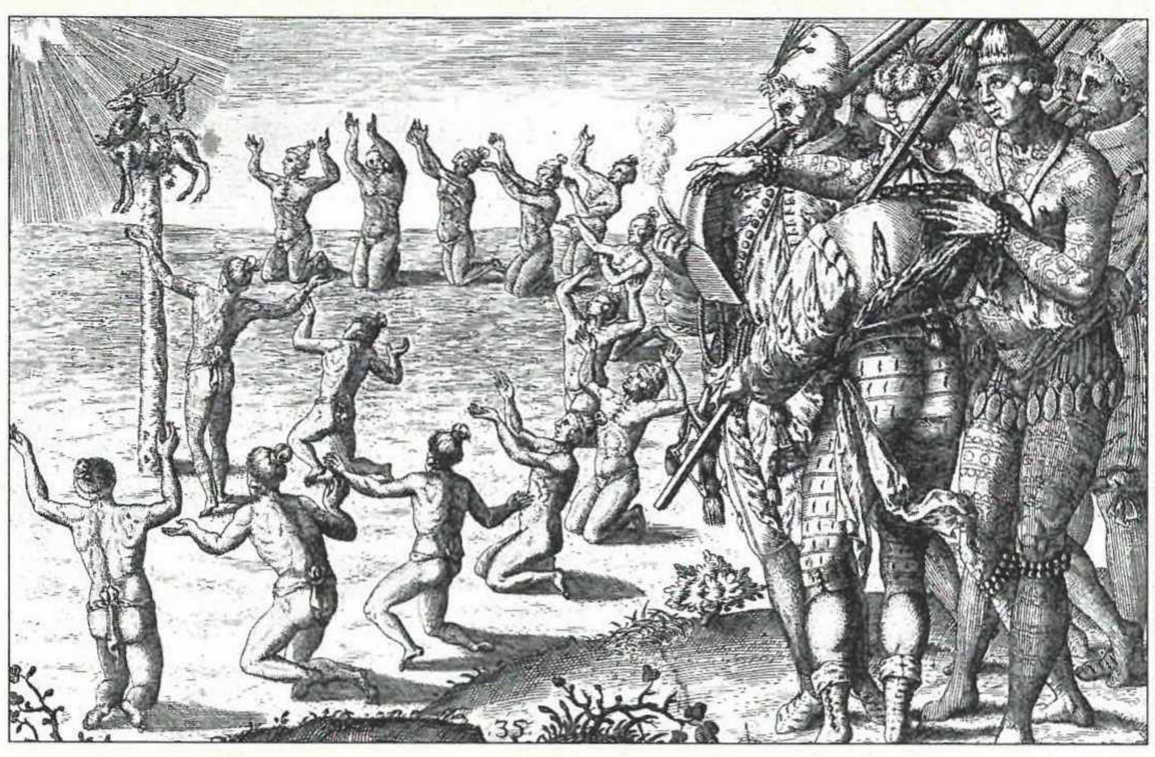
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René de Laudonnière (ca. 1529–74) commanded Fort de la Caroline. He survived the Spanish massacre of the French, and later wrote his *L'Histoire notable de la Floride*.

The Native Floridians



"Floridians crossing over to an island to take their pleasure." LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



"Consecrating the skin of a stag to the sun." LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

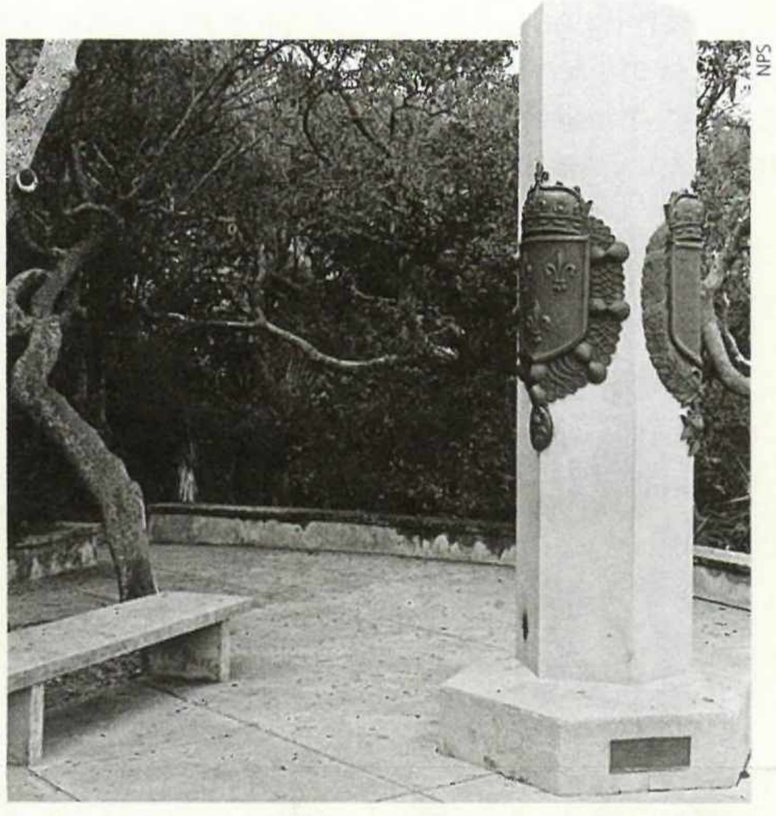
ENGRAVINGS BY THEODORE DE BRY AFTER SKETCHES BY JACQUES LE MOYNE

"They be all naked and of goodly stature, mighty, faire and as well shapen . . . as any people in all the worlde, very gentill, curtious and of a good nature . . . the men be of tawny collour, hawke nosed and of a pleasant countenance . . . the wemen be well favored and modest . . ."

French explorer Jean Ribault was impressed by the first native peoples he met in Florida. The Timucuans under Chief Saturiwa who met the French at the mouth of the River of May in 1562 were one of several Timucua-speaking tribes who lived in central and north Florida and southeastern Georgia. Their culture and way of life had been essentially unchanged for over 1,000 years.

The Timucuans looked to the water to sustain them, settling along rivers or near the coast. (Their prehistoric ancestors are called "People of the Shell Mounds.") Besides collecting shellfish and fishing, they hunted and gathered in the forests and swamps and planted maize, squash, and beans. In their often pallisaded villages, they lived in circular dwellings with conical, palm-thatched roofs and walls of woven vines caulked with clay. Ceremonial squares in larger villages were the scenes of festivals, dances, and religious ceremonies.

Related villages formed a loose political confederation under a head chief. In this caste society commoners deferred to a hereditary elite whose chief sat at the pinnacle. Within the clan, wealth and title were inherited through the mother's brother.



Replica of the stone column placed by Jean Ribault at the mouth of the River of May (St. Johns River), May 2, 1562.

The Timucuans helped their new neighbors adapt to the area—sharing food and even helping them build a village and fort. Well aware of their minority status, the French at first made every effort to avoid alienating local tribes. Only when starvation threatened did this policy unravel. Mistrust turned to armed conflict, ending the brief period of harmony between French and Indian. Yet the Timucuans apparently remained neutral during the Spanish attack in 1565, and they helped French forces under de Gourgues recapture the fort in 1568.

Florida tribes could not long survive contact with Europeans. After driving out the French, Spain imposed tribute on the Timucuans and forced them into missions. Devastated by European disease and attacks by other Indians, the Timucuan culture rapidly disintegrated. From a population possibly numbering tens of thousands at the time of contact, there were only an estimated 550 Timucuans still alive in 1698. No known Native Americans today call themselves Timucuan.

Timucuans hold an early place in European consciousness of the native peoples of the Americas. French colonist Jacques le Moyne's sketches of Timucuan ceremonies and customs, two of which inspired the engravings above, gave many Europeans their first views of American Indians. Francisco Pareja, a Franciscan priest, translated a set of catechisms and confessionals from Spanish into the Timucuan language in 1612, the first known translation of an American Indian language into a European language.

Visiting Fort Caroline

Fort Caroline National Memorial, a unit of Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve, is 13 miles east of Jacksonville. Take the Arlington Expressway (Fla. 115/Alt. U.S. 1/90) to Atlantic Boulevard (Fla. 10). Turn north on Monument Road and then travel east on Fort Caroline Rd.

The original site of La Caroline no longer exists, possibly washed away after the river channel was altered in the 1880s. The fort exhibit is based on a 1500s sketch by Jacques le Moyne, colony artist and mapmaker.

Protect Yourself and the Park
Use caution when walking along bluff trails and near the river. Insect repellent is advised. Picnicking is permitted, but no fires or grills are allowed. Use litter containers. It is illegal to disturb, move, or remove any historical or natural feature.

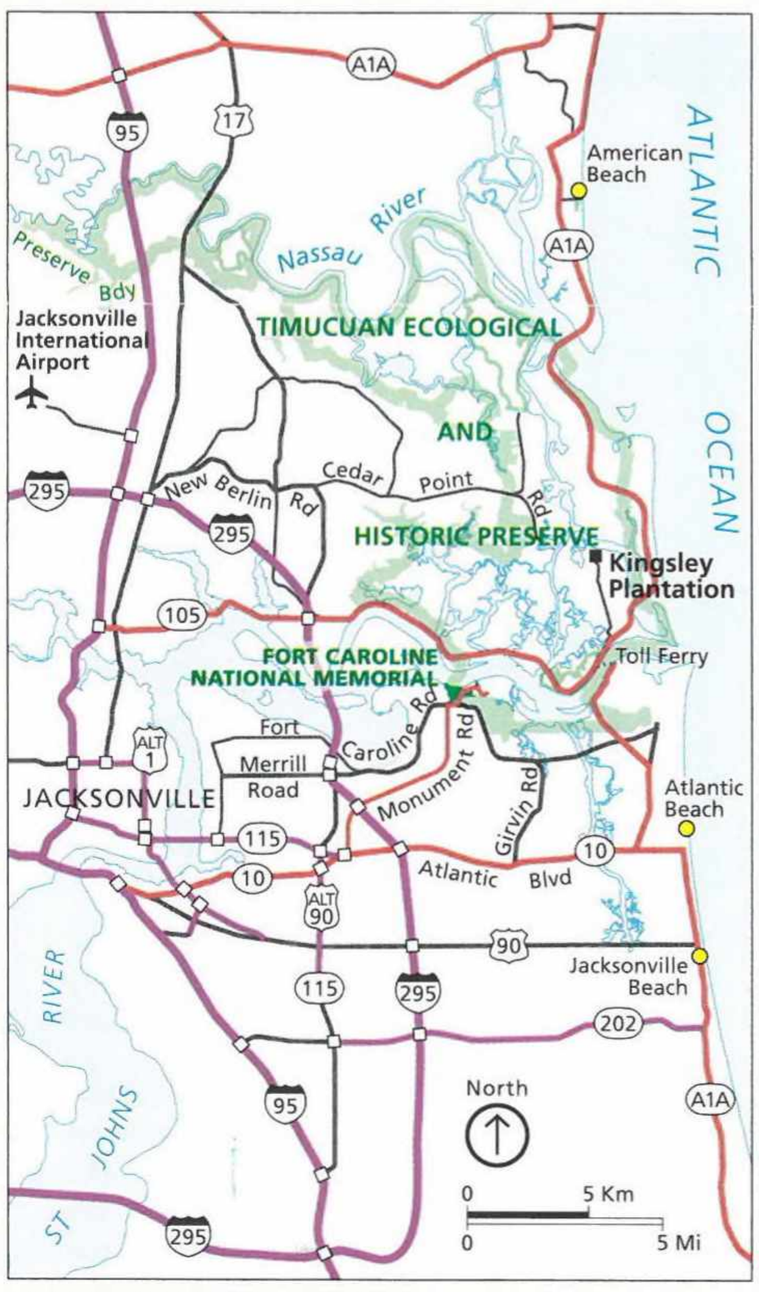
Timucuan Preserve Visitor Center *(see map at right)* is accessible and service animals welcome.

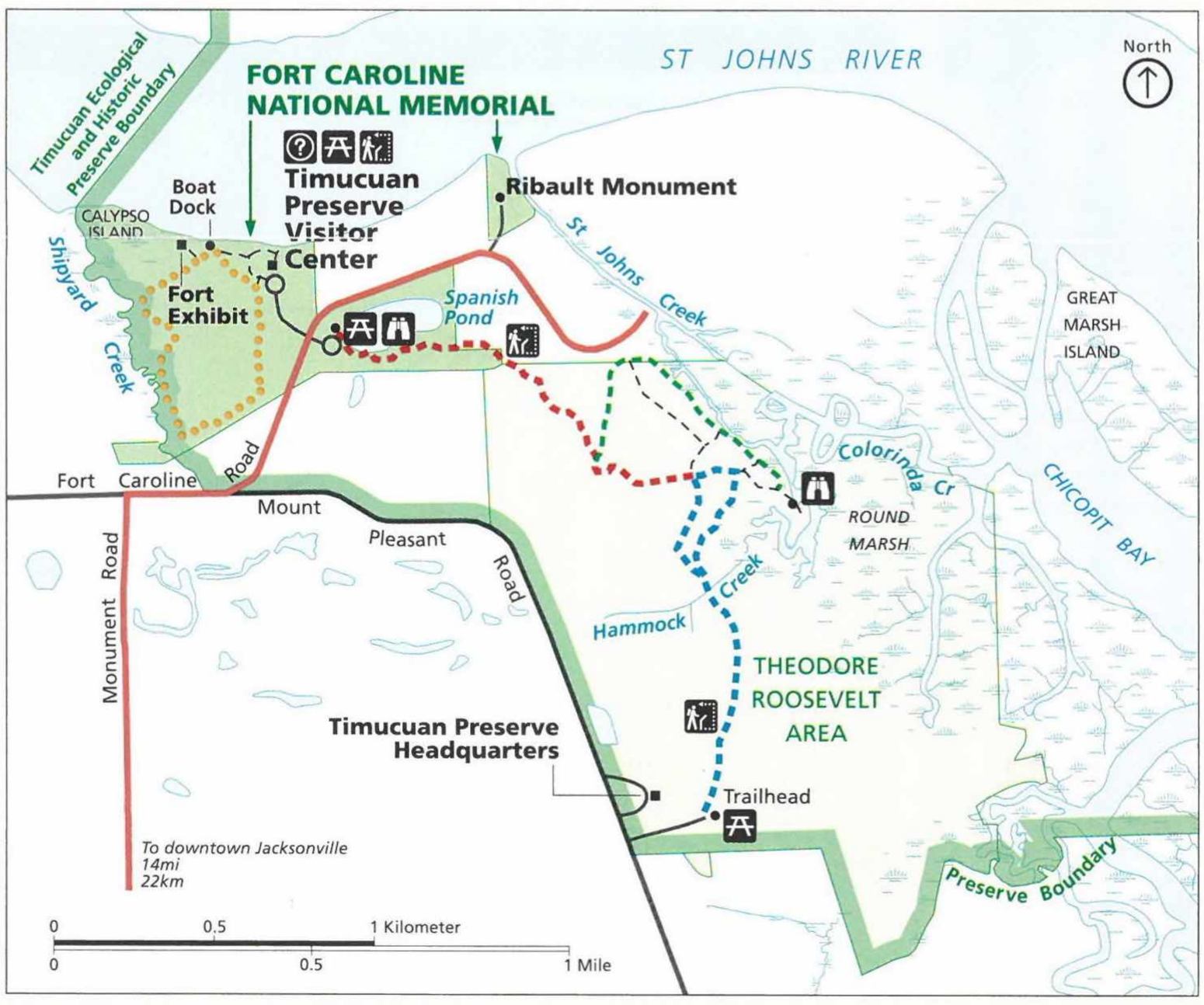
More Information
Fort Caroline National Memorial
13165 Mt. Pleasant Rd., Jacksonville, FL 32225
www.nps.gov/foca

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