

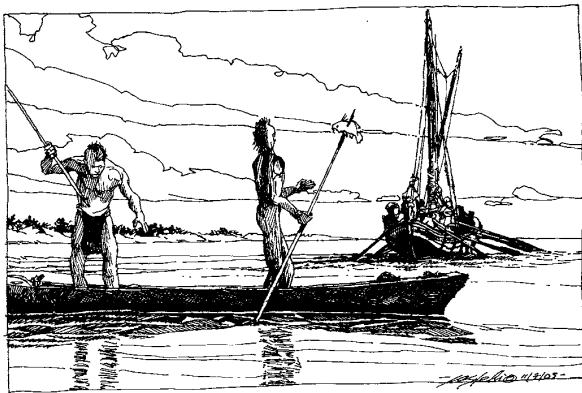


Captain John Smith's First Voyage

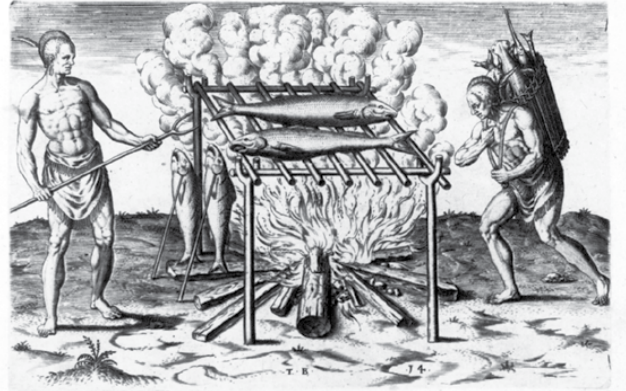
June 2 – July 21, 1608

One year after the founding of Jamestown, Europeans still knew very little about the Chesapeake Bay. Many settlers still held out hope that some of the Bay's beaches were lined with gold and silver. Others believed that one of its rivers might stretch all the way to the Pacific Ocean! If such a river existed, it would allow English merchants to sail their ships directly to India, China, and other parts of the Orient to trade for spices and silks. Since these goods were highly valued in Europe, it would make whoever found this new, all-water trade route—known as the "Northwest Passage"—very rich.

The settlers also knew little about the lay of the land. Those who had explored outside of Jamestown had not gone much farther than the James and York Rivers. As a result, nobody knew how far inland the Chesapeake Bay stretched or how many rivers emptied into it. Even less was known about the Indians that lived on the middle and upper Bay.



The first Indians Smith encountered on the Eastern Shore were fishing in the shallows with spears. Drawing courtesy Marc Castelli.



One year after the founding of Jamestown, the settlers still knew little about the Bay and even less about the Indians of the Chesapeake region. Engraving by Theodor de Bry, 1590. Courtesy Library of Congress.

On June 2, 1608, Captain John Smith and fourteen settlers set out from Jamestown in a small, open boat known as a "shallop" to see if the Chesapeake contained gold, silver, or an all-water route to the Pacific Ocean. The explorers also wanted to make a map of the region, learn more about the Indian tribes that lived in the area, and record the natural resources that were found in other parts of the Bay.

After leaving Jamestown and sailing down the James River, the explorers crossed the lower Bay to Cape Charles, where they met two Indians spearing fish in the shallows. This was the first meeting between the Jamestown settlers and Indians from the Eastern Shore. The natives led Smith to the Indian town of Accomack, where they had friendly talks with the chief.

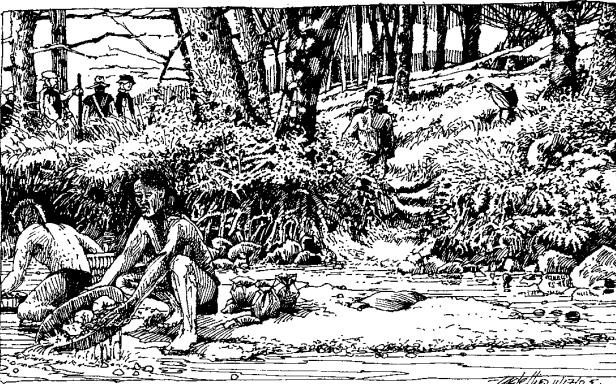
Two days later, Smith and his men were sailing towards Tangier Island when they were caught in a powerful storm. Large waves crashed over the sides of the shallop so often that they nearly sank. Luckily, the men survived by bailing out the water and heading back to the Eastern Shore.



After this close call, Smith made a quick trip up the Pocomoke River and then headed north through Tangier Sound. Near Bloodsworth Island, the explorers got caught in another severe storm. This time, the ship's mast blew overboard and the sail was ripped in the heavy winds. For two days, the crew stayed on the island to make repairs.

When the weather cleared, Smith and his men sailed into the Nanticoke River. They were quickly met by hundreds of Indians firing arrows from shore. After some tense moments, Smith convinced the Natives that he had come to trade, and the two sides had peaceful meetings. Smith would later call the Nanticoke Indians "the best merchants" (traders) on the Bay.

On June 11, 1608, the shallop sailed across the Bay to the Western Shore. After anchoring in front of Calvert Cliffs for the night, the men sailed north and explored the Patapsco River. One thing that seemed strange to Captain Smith and his crew was that there were no Indian towns anywhere in sight on the Upper Bay. Historians now believe that by 1608 most of the Indians living in this area had been driven from their lands by raiding tribes from the north and west.



On the Potomac River, Smith and his men were led to a mine where the Indians were digging for a shiny stone that looked like silver. Smith collected samples of these rocks, but he later found that they did not contain silver. Drawing courtesy Marc Castelli.



Near Bloodsworth Island, the explorers were caught in a storm that blew over the mast and ripped the sail. Drawing courtesy Marc Castelli.

After exploring the Patapsco River, the men were hungry and tired. They convinced Captain Smith to turn back for Jamestown. On their way down the Bay the Englishmen saw the mouth of the Potomac River for the first time. Perhaps, they thought, this large river might lead to the Pacific Ocean! There were also rumors that the river contained gold and silver. The hope of finding riches put new life back into the tired men, and they spent the next month on the Potomac looking for the Northwest Passage and digging for gold.

On July 17, 1608, the crew headed south to explore the Rappahannock River. At the mouth of the river, the shallop got stuck on a sand bar. Smith ordered his men to pass the time by spearing fish in the shallows. After stabbing a stingray, Smith was stung by its poisonous barb while trying to get it off his sword. The pain was so great that he ordered the crew to dig his grave. Luckily, he survived and ate the ray for supper! This area is still known today as Stingray Point.

Wounded and tired, Smith decided to head back for Jamestown to get some rest. Just three days later, he would set out again to finish exploring the Bay.



Captain John Smith's First Voyage

June 2 – July 21, 1608

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

DIRECTIONS: Use information from the reading to answer each of the following questions in a complete sentence.

1. Why were the settlers interested in finding an all-water route to the Pacific Ocean?

2. What was the first Indian town that Captain John Smith visited on the Eastern Shore?

3. What happened to the explorers near Bloodsworth Island?

4. When Captain John Smith explored the upper Patapsco River, what had happened to most of the Indians living on the Upper Bay?

5. Why were the men so excited to find the mouth of the Potomac River?
