

settlement. Fear set in over lack of food and shelter, and a revolt broke out among the colonists. The African slaves rebelled—the first case of a slave revolt in America—and the Indians rose up against the Spanish colonists.

Soon, San Miguel de Gualdape was abandoned, and the survivors set sail for Hispaniola. Only 150 of the colonists are known to have made it back to the island alive.

Hernando de Soto Explores Georgia

In 1537, Hernando de Soto decided he would succeed where Ayllón had failed. Using gold and silver from his conquests in Peru, de Soto asked the king of Spain for permission to colonize La Florida. The king agreed, giving him 18 months to explore an area 600 miles inland from the Florida coast. De Soto was to look for riches and conquer hostile Indians there. In return, he would be given a title, land, and a portion of the colony's profits.

In 1538, de Soto and 600 followers sailed from Spain to Cuba, where they spent most of a year preparing for their expedition. In 1539, they sailed for the North American mainland, landing on Florida's western coast. After spending the winter near present-day Tallahassee, they headed north, crossing into Georgia in March 1540. On this journey, the Spanish encountered the Indian chiefdoms of the Mississippian period.

De Soto's route through the Southeast quickly became a journey of death and disappointment. Food was a continual problem, and de Soto often seized stored food supplies from the Indians. Meat was in such short supply that the expedition reportedly even ate the dogs in some Indian villages. The four-year search turned up practically no gold or silver. Almost half of the expedition—including de Soto himself—died from disease, exposure, Indian attacks, or other causes.

More tragic was the fate of the Indians of the Southeast. The natives had never seen guns, steel swords, metal armor, and horses. They had only weapons of stone and wood and were often unable to defend themselves successfully. Many were killed in battle or forced into slavery by the Spanish. Worst of all, they were exposed for the first time to European diseases against which they had little resistance, such as measles and chicken pox. Smallpox, which spread rapidly throughout the Southeast, killed about one in three Indians. In just a matter of years, chiefdoms were abandoned and entire villages stood vacant.

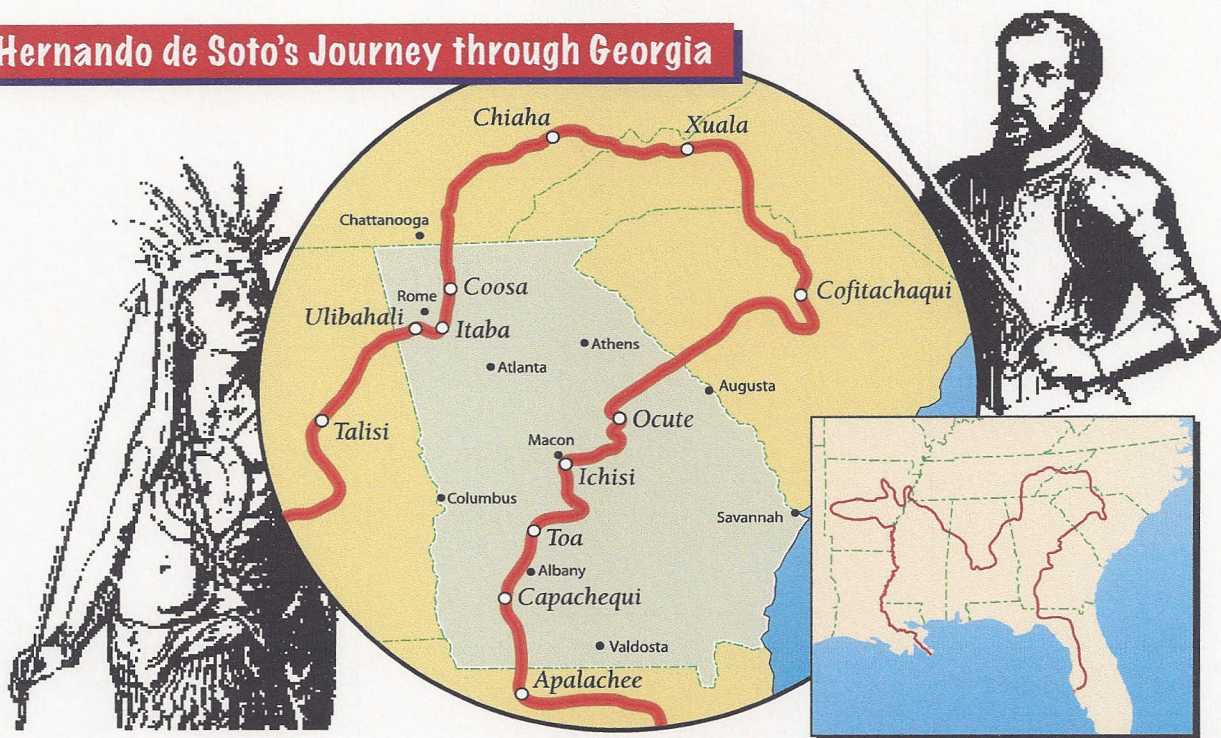
Twenty years after de Soto's expedition through the Southeast, Spain decided to create an inland colony in the territory de Soto had explored. In 1559, Tristán de Luna sailed from Mexico with 500 soldiers and 1,000 colonists and servants. Landing near Pensacola on the Gulf Coast, they proceeded northward into



Snapshot

A detail from a mural by Georgia artist Art Rosenbaum shows Hernando de Soto encountering Mississippian Indians that were part of the Coosa chiefdom.

Hernando de Soto's Journey through Georgia




Alabama, arriving eventually at the Indian chiefdom of Coosa in northwest Georgia. However, the effort failed, and de Luna's colonists returned to Mexico in 1561. Other Spanish expeditions to Georgia followed, but none of the colonization efforts succeeded.

During the two centuries following the discovery of the New World, over 90 percent of the native population vanished. As a result, the Spanish began importing black slaves from western Africa to work the fields and mines of the Caribbean islands. For the few Indians who survived in the Southeast, life was forever changed. Their descendants would later emerge as the Cherokee, Creek, and other native tribes and nations.

Hernando de Soto's journey through Georgia in 1540 was part of a four-year exploration through the Southeast from 1539 to 1543.

French Claims in the Southeast



France had been the third European power to enter the race for North America. In 1524, only three years after Ponce de León's death, Giovanni de Verrazano sailed from France. Like Columbus, Verrazano believed that he could sail westward from Europe to Asia. Instead, he found his way blocked by North America. He first came ashore on the Carolina coast, or possibly even as far south as Georgia or Florida. From there, he sailed up North America's east coast to Nova Scotia before returning home. France later used Verrazano's exploration as the basis for its claim to the Southeast.



Giovanni de Verrazano