

Time Line of Exploration

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As early as 40,000 BC: People migrate in waves from present-day Asia across a land bridge that no longer exists. They follow river systems as they move into North and South America. These are the ancestors of the American Indians who later greeted European explorers.

Late 900s and early 1000s: The Vikings, who had previously reached Iceland and Greenland from Scandinavia, are believed to have reached North America.

1492: Christopher Columbus, an Italian hired to explore for Spain, reaches what we know as the Bahamas, Cuba, and Hispaniola. He thinks he is near India. The European race is on to explore and colonize the New World. About fifteen years later, the term America, based on the name of explorer Amerigo Vespucci, first appears on a map.

1520: Pedro de Quexoia leads a Spanish expedition from Santo Domingo that is believed to have passed through North Carolina's present-day Cape Fear region. Spain—more unified than many neighboring countries—will jump into the driver's seat of the exploration bandwagon.

1524: Giovanni da Verrazano, an Italian sailing for France, records the first definite exploration along what we know as the North Carolina coast, as far north as Hatteras. Scholars dispute whether he landed near present-day Wilmington or nearer to Bogue Banks.

July 1526: Lucas Vasquez de Ayllón leads a group in setting up a Spanish colony along "Rio Jordan," thought by some to be the Cape Fear River. Others think it is the Santee River in present-day South Carolina, or that the colony was located in present-day Georgia. (Archaeologists have not found the site. At any rate, the group of male and female colonists as well as slaves is believed to have sailed as far north as the Chesapeake Bay before settling.) Within three months, after a hurricane, starvation, and the deaths of more than 400 of 600 colonists, the discouraged group flees back to Santo Domingo.

1540: Hernando de Soto, of Spain—leading the first lengthy exploration of the Southeast by a European—stops in what is now western North Carolina. By this time, the Spanish have conquered the Incas and the Aztec. They expect similar results in North America. Searching for gold and often traveling along Native trade and communication paths, de Soto's group makes



This steel burgonet, or helmet, was made between 1550 and the early 1600s in Spain; it is the type that Spanish explorers of North Carolina probably would have worn. Image courtesy of the North Carolina Museum of History.

many enemies among the American Indians. It also introduces smallpox and other European diseases. (Many Indians live in well-organized societies in densely populated areas, so strange illnesses spread fast.)

The expedition becomes one in a long line of Spanish disasters—such a disgrace that de Soto reportedly lies down and dies near the Mississippi River in 1542. Some of his men kill their horses for the nails in their shoes, so they can build rafts to return to the Gulf of Mexico. Francisco Vasquez de Coronado's exploration party, which had moved from Mexico up through present-day Arizona and headed east, may have been within two hundred miles; if the two Spanish groups had met up, history might have been different!

August 1566: Looking for the Chesapeake Bay, Spaniards led by Pedro de Coronas land on the coast of present-day Currituck County. After exploring for a few days, they return to the West Indies. (In 1565 Spain had established Saint Augustine in present-day Florida, the first permanent European settlement in America.)

1566–1567: Juan Pardo leads an expedition from Santa Elena—a Spanish settlement at what is now Parris Island, South Carolina—through present-day western North Carolina. Pardo's mission is to set up outposts (against England and France), find supplies, convert American Indians to Catholicism and make them friends of the Spanish, and build a road to Spain's silver mines in Mexico. (The Spanish, to their misfortune, believed that to be a short trip across what we know as the Appalachian range.) Relations are a little friendlier at first. Many chiefs travel to meet and trade with Pardo. By spring 1568, though, the Indians have wiped out the Spaniards' six forts, effectively ending Spanish settlement efforts in the region and opening the door for the English.

Information left by the Pardo and de Soto expeditions offers some of the only written records of American Indian society before European contact changed it forever.

1622: An expedition from Jamestown, led by John Pory, explores the Chowan River region.

1650: From the northern colonies, white settlers begin trickling onto and exploring American Indian lands along Carolina's coastal sounds and rivers.

1651: Edward Bland travels from Virginia to explore Carolina. He publishes a description entitled *The Discovery of New Brittain*.

1653: Virginia legislator Francis Yearly hires trader Nathaniel Batts to explore the Albemarle Sound region for settlement. (Within a few years, Batts will be considered the area's first permanent white resident. A deed on file in Virginia shows him buying land from Indians in 1660.) Later in the year, the Virginia Assembly grants lands along the Roanoke and Chowan rivers to Roger Green, who had previously explored the area.

1661: King Kilcocanen of the Yeopim Indians grants land to George Durant in the earliest grant on record in the Carolina colony.

1663: King Charles II of England grants a charter for land to eight Lords Proprietors of Carolina. Their region stretches from the Albemarle Sound to present-day Florida and west to the Pacific Ocean. The Proprietors divide it into three counties: Albemarle, Clarendon, and Craven. By this time, settlers are moving steadily into present-day North Carolina from the north, which is easier than coming from the treacherous coast.

John Lederer

WHO: He was a German explorer, born ca. 1640, mostly dismissed during his lifetime.

WHEN: Lederer arrived in Virginia in 1669. Governor William Berkeley, of that colony, hired him to search for the Pacific Ocean, believed to be a short distance west. Lederer made three trips into the backcountry, including parts of present-day North Carolina. He reached the Piedmont (likely near modern Vance County) in May 1670 with 21 militiamen and an American Indian guide. Worried about getting lost, the group pursued a straight compass course, ignoring well-known trading paths and running into many natural obstacles. After twelve days of struggle, the militiamen turned back.

SO?: Lederer and his guide continued exploring for a couple of months without major problems, showing that one could survive without a large armed party. The men who deserted Lederer spread bad stories and made fun of him, and some people at the time said that the published account of his trip was made up. Although Lederer made errors in his map that later mapmakers repeated and details of his trip remain disputed, several scholars have seriously studied his observations of people and places in recent years. Some call him the first European explorer of the Piedmont.

—from the Research Branch, Office of Archives and History

1665: Sir John Yeamans leads a small colony from Barbados to the Cape Fear River, settling Charles Town in Clarendon (now Brunswick) County. It is abandoned within a couple of years, and the area will not really have permanent settlers until about 1725. (In 1670 a different Charles Towne, present-day Charleston, South Carolina, is built.)

1672: George Fox, founder of the Society of Friends (Quakers), and missionary William Edmundson travel through the Albemarle, still a rough wilderness, converting people. Quakers become the colony's first major religious group.

1701: Explorers and settlers begin pushing west and south out of the Albemarle with regularity. Soon, Chowan, Pasquotank, and Perquimans parishes are organized. In 1705 Bath becomes the colony's first incorporated town.

1709: John Lawson—who began a thousand-mile journey through Carolina in late 1700—publishes the widely read *A New Voyage to Carolina*. (In 1712 North Carolina and South Carolina become separate colonies.) The book describes animal and plant life, and groups of American Indians that Lawson has visited. Since Spanish explorers first arrived, many tribes have moved, merged, or disappeared.

1711: Tuscarora Indians capture Lawson, New Bern founder Baron Christoph von Graffenried, and two African slaves. Lawson is killed after he argues with the chief, Cor

Tom. The Indians release the others. The Tuscarora War soon begins when a group of Indians—angry about the seizure of their lands, enslavement of their people, and trading practices of whites—attacks white settlements near New Bern and Bath. The Indians kill about a third of Carolina’s colonists. Hundreds of Tuscarora will be killed in a 1713 siege. Two years later, a treaty sets up a tribal reservation, but most remaining Tuscarora migrate north. This defeat of the Indians opens up the colony’s interior for white exploration and settlement.

Bishop August Spangenberg

WHO: A native of Germany and leader of the Moravian faith, Spangenberg (1704-1792) led a surveying party that headed south from Pennsylvania in 1752 to choose a large piece of land to be bought from Earl Granville.

WHEN: Spangenberg’s group traveled down the Great Wagon Road, arriving in present-day Forsyth County in November 1753.

WHAT: The Moravian group selected a 100,000 acre tract of land they called Wachovia (“peaceful valley”), where important communities including Bethabara and Salem, would soon grow up.

SO?: Spangenberg, also called Brother Joseph, and the Moravians left extensive written records full of information and opinions. Spangenberg wrote about rich lands and exotic animals such as wolves, panthers, and buffalo. He described fearsome Natives and lazy (even criminal) colonists!



August “Brother Joseph”
Spangenberg.

Image courtesy of the State Archives,
North Carolina Office of Archives and
History.

1722: Naturalist Mark Catesby begins a four-year exploration of the Carolinas, Georgia, Florida, and the Bahamas.

1728: William Byrd and others begin to survey the North Carolina–Virginia boundary.

1761: After years of conflict during the French and Indian War, colonial lieutenant Henry Timberlake visits Cherokee Indians to explain a recently signed peace treaty and assure them that colonists will honor it. The next spring, he goes with several Cherokee leaders to London, England, and he tries to remain a peaceful go-between until his death in 1765. His published memoirs provide vivid descriptions and observations about the Cherokee, as well as a map of their villages.

Unfortunately, Timberlake’s friendly relationship with the tribe differs from that of many whites. The Cherokee make one more effort to protect their lands, rising up in 1776. A series of treaties chips away at the tribe’s land. The government eventually forces most Cherokee to move to Indian Territory, present-day Oklahoma.

1775: Naturalist, artist, and scientist William Bartram begins travels through the western half of North Carolina. He collects and describes native plants and spends time with American Indians. In 1791 Bartram publishes *Travels through North and South Carolina*,

Georgia, East and West Florida.

Richard Warfington

WHO: He was a U.S. Army corporal who had enlisted in Kentucky in 1799.

WHEN: In 1804 Meriwether Lewis and William Clark set out from St. Louis, Missouri, to explore the unchartered West. Warfington was among several soldiers who signed up to go on the first leg of a journey that in late 1805 reached the Pacific Ocean.

WHAT: After a tough winter in the Mandan villages in what is now North Dakota, Warfington in April 1805 led at least 10 other men back to St. Louis—a six-week, 1,600-mile trip. Warfington was in charge of safely transporting the expedition journals; the first draft of Clark’s map of the West; animal, mineral, and plant specimens; and some 45 American Indians who had agreed to meet with President Thomas Jefferson.

SO?: Warfington, born in Louisburg, is the only known North Carolinian associated with the Lewis and Clark “Corps of Discovery” trip. Lewis included him on a roster of men—most of whom had made the entire trip—recommended for back pay and 320-acre land grants.

—from the Research Branch, Office of Archives and History

1904: Horace Kephart moves to western North Carolina and writes about the environment, culture, and people during countless wanderings. He pushes for the creation of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, where a peak bears his name.

1972: Charles Duke, a Charlotte native, commands the lunar module for NASA’s Apollo 16 voyage. Duke is one of twelve people who have walked on the moon’s surface. Several astronauts on later space shuttle missions have grown up in North Carolina. Can you think of other modern types of exploration?

Daniel Boone

WHO: A tough woodsman, hunter, Indian trader, fisherman, and soldier born in 1734 and raised near Reading, Pennsylvania, Boone moved to North Carolina’s western Piedmont (near present-day Mocksville) in 1750.

WHEN: He left in 1769 for a territory he called Kante-ke—Kentucky.

WHAT: Boone explored the rugged Appalachian Mountain region and was among the men who blazed the Wilderness Road through the Cumberland Gap (now a national park in Tennessee, Virginia, and Kentucky) in 1775. This became the main route to the new West. The U.S. Congress in 1814 gave him land in Missouri as thanks for his exploration of the area from western North Carolina to that state.

SO?: Boone became a legendary figure and the model for numerous tall tales, movies, and television shows about pioneers and frontiersmen. Stories often place a coonskin cap on his head, but historians say that he never wore one! Boone preferred a brimmed hat made from beaver. One story says that Bear Creek in North Carolina got its name the year that Boone killed ninety-nine bears along its banks. Other tales have him swinging through the forests on vines—and doing other things that he probably never did.