



Chief Powhatan as described by Capt. Smith.

Thought to be the only actual picture of Pocahontas - painted when she visited England with her husband, John Rolfe.



Captain John Smith.

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To learn more about the Werowocomoco research project visit: www.powhatan.wm.edu

Sources:

Joe McClain. "Getting Past Pocahontas", Ideation, Research & Scholarship at William & Mary, Spring 2006.

E. Randolph Turner, III. "Werowocomoco Ye Seate of Powhatan", Notes on Virginia, Fall/Winter 2003.

E. Randolph Turner, III. "Werowocomoco Archaeological Research Project Fact Sheet".

Werowocomoco



Seat of Sacred Leadership

"Arriving at Werawocomoco, their Emperour proudly lying upon a Beadstead a foote high upon tenne or twelve Mattes, richly hung with manie Chaynes of great Pearles about his necke, and covered with a great Covering of Rahaughcums: At his head sat a woman, at his feete another, on each side sitting upon a Matte upon the ground were raunged his chiefe men on each side the fire, tenne in a ranke, and behind them as many yong women, each a great Chaine of white Beades over their shoulders, their heads painted in redde, and [he] with such a trave and Majesticall countenance, as drave me into admiration to see such state in a naked Salvage."

Captain John Smith's description of his first encounter with Powhatan, paramount leader of the Powhatan chiefdom.

Information compiled by Gloucester Parks, Recreation & Tourism 804-693-0014

Colonial encounters within the Powhatan village of Werowocomoco in Tidewater Virginia have captured the public's imagination through romantic literature and popular films. Shifting the focus of inquiry away from English colonial narratives and toward a history of landscape provides an alternative understanding of Werowocomoco as a Native Place.

How do we know that the site of the excavation is the Werowocomoco of history and legend?

Researchers point to three lines of evidence:

1. Maps. John Smith left them, as did Robert Tyndall. There's also a third, known as the Pedro Zuniga map. Each one depicts Werowocomoco on the York River and allows researchers to project the location of Wero in the vicinity of Purtan Bay.
2. John Smith's Narrative Accounts. Capt. Smith described distances between Werowocomoco and Jamestown and other landmarks in the area. He also described the physical layout: "on a broad shallow bay fed by three creeks" - just like the study site.
3. Archaeological Finds. The site is clearly a large Contact-era community with ties to Jamestown. For instance, copper recovered at Werowocomoco has been chemically matched to Jamestown copper.

Why is Werowocomoco important?

It was the residence of paramount chief Powhatan in 1607 when the English arrived at Jamestown, and through early 1609 when he moved further west to distance himself from the English.

Werowocomoco also served as the capital of the Powhatan chiefdom over which Powhatan ruled. This chiefdom encompassed much of modern-day coastal Virginia and had a population of 15,000 or more persons. From the perspective of economic, social, political, and religious institutions, the Powhatan chiefdom was likely the most complex Native American society in eastern North America during the early 17th century.

When Capt. John Smith was captured in December 1607, while exploring the Chickahominy River, he eventually was taken to Werowocomoco where he first met Powhatan. While the two met later on other occasions, it always was at Werowocomoco.

This is also where Smith writes of Pocahontas saving his life, though historians have questioned for decades whether or not this actually took place.



At the age of 11, Pocahontas may have saved Smith as part of a rite of initiation, or out of genuine concern.

What are researchers finding at Werowocomoco?

The 2002 archaeological field survey documented that Werowocomoco covered nearly 50 acres, much larger than most Native American village sites in Virginia. Indians were living at the site as early as 8,000-10,000 years ago. Besides Native Americans living here, European settlement begins in the latter half of the 17th century.

In recognition of the archaeological and historical significance of Werowocomoco, the site was placed on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places.



Archaeological excavations since 2003 have better documented both Indian and European settlement on the property. Most importantly, these excavations have revealed a major settlement dating to the Late Woodland/Contact periods (ca. A.D. 800-1609), the most intensive period of occupation here and representing the actual settlement of Werowocomoco. These excavations have shown that the site is remarkably well preserved.

Approximately 1,500-1,800 feet from the waterfront, archaeologists found two parallel ditches that were radio-carbon dated to have existed in the 15th century 200 years prior to the settlers landing at Jamestown. These ditches are described by Smith in his writings, and visually represented in the now famous "Zuniga Map" as a mysterious double D shape. The ditches appear to be double Ds. Archeologists believe that these represent a separation from the secular to the spiritual regions of the village. These ditches are unprecedented in Algonquin sites, and would give further credibility to the reason Powhatan would choose Werowocomoco as his seat of power, so that he could not only control his empire from a strategic location, but also a sacred place, a place of spiritual power, representing his importance as a Paramount Chief.

