TRAILING DE SOTO

REFERENCE FOR SCOUTS & LEADERS PREPARING TO TAKE THE DE SOTO ARKANSAS TRAIL

EXCERPTS FROM:

"Trailing DeSoto", a radio address delivered on May 19th, 1929, by John R. Fordyce, E. M.

and

Report of the United States DeSoto Expedition Commission

QUAPAW AREA COUNCIL
Boy Scouts of America

6-22-61
On May 13th, 1699, Dauphin, with 200 men and 400 horses, had landed on the west coast of Florida, having come from Cuba. He then took his way through swamps and swamps, and finally reached the (missing text). He then crossed the river of Apalachee, thus entering into the land of the Indians, whom he came in contact with. In the spring of the following year, he crossed the Apalachee River, thus entering into the country of the Apaches. On the 20th of May, he had reached the village of the Cherokees, where he was in contact with the Cherokees, whom he then left.

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It was a safe place for the Indians to live as it was above overflow and because the ground was rich and easily cultivated. It was hard for their enemies to reach them; thus the Spaniards were able to surprise them for the Indians knew that they were at peace with their neighbors on the east. They lived under the protection of the powerful Quapaws who lived on both sides of the Great River--so why should they be on their guard?

The Spaniards were lean and hungry; they were tired of fighting and wanted rest and food so they set their captives free and tried to make friends. They moved on up this ridge to other towns where there were great stocks of corn.

They followed up this Sunflower River, through the present towns of Webb and Tutwiler. One day they came to an opening in the trees and there they saw the Great River--Saturday, May 21, 1541.

The Mississippi River at that time flowed over twelve miles to the east of its present bed. The drainage maps of Coahoma County, prepared by the U.S.G.S. show that the old bed swung all the way to the present city of Clarksdale and out of this bend in times of high water flowed the Sunflower River to take care of the overflow. Thus, at Clarksdale, Mississippi, now far inland, is the place where DeSoto first saw the great Mississippi River.

The timber was suitable for the building of barges and the engineers of the expedition, under the able direction of Francisco, the Genoses, started to work. It was he who built all the birdges and the boats. In thirty days he had four large barges ready. While this work was going on the Indians from up the river under their war chiefs, came many times in their great war canoes but, finding the Spaniards always alert, they would withdraw.

As this is the first place in recorded history where the early citizens of Arkansas are mentioned, I know that my audience will pardon my State pride, while I give a few short descriptions of them. Heretofore DeSoto had mostly travelled among the Muskogean Indians of various tribes. They spoke a language which varied but little. These Arkansas Indians were of Siouan stock. They were one of the southern branches of the great family which held the Mississippi River from Minnesota all the way to the mouth of the Arkansas River. These Arkansas Indians were fine specimens of physical manhood. They were modeled like Greek gods in bronze. The Elvas narrative says: "they were fine looking men, large and well-formed and what with their awnings, the plumes and the shields and pennants and the number of people in the fleet it appeared like a famous armada of galleys."

May I also take State pride in noting that the first boats built by white men to navigate the Mississippi River came straight over to Arkansas. Early one morning before daybreak they began to cross over and two hours before sunup they were all on the other side. It is evident that they crossed to a point or a sandbar on the Arkansas side because it is related that the cavalry jumped out and waded ashore. The first town they came to was called "Aquixo" which may have been the original name of Arkansas. After wandering around and bridging a small river or bayou they waded through a swamp and came to Casqui. This, they said, was a high, dry country in which pine trees grew. This description alone would fix the point of crossing the Mississippi River, for Crowley's Ridge, near Helena, Arkansas, is the only place in Arkansas on the western shore of the Mississippi River where such a description would fit. Many others who have determined his route have led him up to the eastern shore and then ignored the description of the country on the western shore, as given by the old historians.
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The Chief of Casqui was most friendly, for he needed these Spaniards to help him punish his ancient enemy, the Chief of the Pancahas. DeSoto, in order to demonstrate his religion and convert the Indians, ordered a huge cross of pine to be placed on a mound and the Indians joined his men in a religious ceremony. Again may I call attention to the fact that on the western bank of the Mississippi River this first cross was erected and the first Christian service was in Arkansas.

Many historians think that the Indians of Cascascia (Kaskaskia) who lived in later years on the Mississippi River in Illinois just below St. Louis were descendants of this tribe of Casqui, who had been compelled by the hostility of the Pacaha or Quapaws, to migrate.

The religious ceremony being concluded, DeSoto and his men marched northward, up the river toward Pacaha. The Indians of Quasqui preceded him to build bridges and clear the trail, and their main army followed him.

In two days they came in sight of the town of Pacaha in a plain surrounded by a man-made moat. The army of Spaniards and Indians did not attack at first and most of the people of Pacaha escaped by boats to the other shore but they were unable to carry off their possessions. DeSoto and his men captured the town and turned it over to the Casqui Indians to loot. Later he induced Pacaha to return and at a grand "get-together" dinner to which he invited both Pacaha and Casqui, a great discussion arose among the Indian chiefs as to which should sit at his right. In the absence of a foreign diplomatic corps DeSoto had to decide the question himself and seated Pacaha in the place of honor, as he was descended from an older line of Chiefs. In the last few months a similar victory was won by the descendants of a closely related Sioux tribe, the Kansa.

There is a picture in the Capitol at Washington which shows DeSoto discovering the Mississippi River. Evidently the artist did not read his history very carefully for he has shown the Spaniards in all their glory with banners flying and armour brilliant in the sun. Contrast this picture with the actual facts as given by Elvas--"numbers of soldiers who had been a long time badly covered, clothed themselves then. Of the shawls they made mantles and cassocks; some made gowns and lined them with cat skins as they also did the cassocks. Of the deer skins were made jerkins, shoes, stockings and shirts; and from the bear skins they made very good cloaks such as no water could get through. They found shields of raw cowhides out of which armour was made for horses.

Some day I would like to see a picture made of this crossing which would be true to history. DeSoto and his men would look like a bunch of Hula-Hula dancers in their grass clothes but the picture would be colorful enough if the Indians in their war paint and feathers and their war canoes were included. In the archives of Seville in Spain there is an old map without date, which shows the southern United States and on which are shown many Indian towns. It was evidently made by someone who was on the DeSoto Exposition. The towns bear names which occur in all of the old reports and some which are not given in any report which has come down to us. An attempt has been made by this old map maker to show the bends of the Mississippi River where the Spaniards crossed it. If this old map, which is without scale and out of proportion, is compared to a map made of the way the river in this part of the country must have been in the time of DeSoto, it is evident that the region around the mouth of the St. Francis River is the country which he is trying to show; and what is more conclusive, it is practically the only place on the western bank of the Mississippi in the State of Arkansas which it would fit.
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Now the Chickasaws were a brainy people and they knew that if they could divide De Soto's forces they could defeat him, so they asked his help to punish a rebellious vassal among the Chockchumas. They brought in supplies and appeared friendly, but they evidently kept him away from their "Great Village", for none of the historians speak of it. When it came near the time to travel again DeSoto demanded carriers for his baggage. The Indians agreed, but DeSoto, from his previous experiences under Pizarro in Peru, had learned Indian ways and mistrusted them and believed that they meant to attach him instead. The attack came and because of the neglect of some of the Spaniards, all but succeeded. Getting into town, the Indians set fire to the houses and the Spaniards were routed out of their sleep and forced to fight without clothing and with few arms. Practically everything which could burn was destroyed and the temper taken out of their weapons. The Indians withdrew but if they had followed up the fight the Spaniards would have been destroyed. For the balance of the night and the next day the Spaniards stood shivering around fires until some inventive genius made covering of grass which protected them from the keen March winds. They established a new camp on the hillside and made new lances of ash and new wooden parts for their saddles and equipment. The blacksmiths and the armorers retempered their weapons and put them in condition again.

Once more the indomitable DeSoto and his men were ready to march.

On the 26th of April they started west, says Elvas. DeSoto knew the country in this direction because he had explored this Chockchuma trail when he sent out a detachment to help the Chickasaws. He knew that for a week or two he would have to go through a deserted pine barren country. Two days later he found his way barred by a strong barricade such as he had never known before in all his Indian experience. Feeling sure that such a fortification must have been built to protect great supplies, and as he was desperately in need of supplies, he ordered his men to attack before a sufficient reconnaissance had been made. After his men had battered down the doors and made an entrance many of the Indians escaped by crossing the river over a frail and narrow bridge. Owing to the swampy conditions of the ground it was some time before the cavalry could follow in pursuit.

The place of the barricade is, I believe, near the present town of Houston, also in Chickasaw County. All of the topographical features agree; the steep bluff, the swampy ground, the rivers and the streams, etc. are all as the old historian describes them. Modern drainage ditches have reduced the size of both the stream and the swamp, but best evidence of all, the old trail to the west leads through here and a trail to the north leads direct to the "Great Village" of the Chickasaws only 14 miles away.

The Indians fought desperately at this barricade because they knew what destruction this army of invaders would bring to their "Great Village" if they could reach it. The Spaniards were much disgusted after they drove the Indians out of the barricade and across the swamp for they found no provisions. On Saturday, the last day of April, they set out again and by a rough way, mountainous (hilly) and swampy, they marched for seven days through a deserted country; a country which I rode through and found still deserted. On the 8th of May they came to the first village of "Quiz-quiz", surprised the Indians and took their village.

The old Trading Trail from the east comes out of the hill country of central Mississippi near the present city of Grenada in Grenada County. It winds over to the crossing of the Yalobush River just below the mouth of the Tippo Bayou and crosses the deep Tallahatchie River near Minter City. This town is located on a ridge in this low country between the Cassidy Bayou on the east and the Sunflower River on the west. This ridge is thickly dotted with Indian mounds.
to stayed at Pacaha for over a month, then marched back down the stream, passing a village of Casquia. This chief went with him to the end of his trail which led to lower White River and then helped him to cross over through the connecting cut-off to the Arkansas River, where he landed on the south bank. Marching still downstream along the western bank of the Mississippi, the Spaniards came to the town of "Aquiguata" which was located on an arm of the Great River. It was the largest town they had seen in all Florida, as all this country was then called. This town must have been located on Lake Chicot in the southeastern part of Arkansas, which is an arm of the Great River.

The Spaniards stayed here for several days. They learned afterward that the banks of this river were thickly populated farther down. This was probably learned the following year when they built their ships. Hearing from these Indians of Aquiguata that there were mountains toward the northwest, DeSoto determined to head in that direction because he hoped that the mountains might mean mines where gold could be found. The country over which they had to march for the first four days was low and swampy and the streams were filled with fish which came in on high water from the great river in times of overflow. This description fits the low, swampy region in Chicot and Drew Counties, which is soon to become the spillway for overflow waters of the Mississippi River. There was no road but an Indian acted as guide and at the end of seven days the Spaniards came suddenly to the town of Coligoa, whose inhabitants fled up and across a small river which flowed near. This river was evidently the Saline and the town of Coligoa must have been near the place where the Cotton Belt Railway crosses this river in Cleveland County. The town was well stocked with provisions and much salt was found there. Here the Spaniards went on a buffalo hunt. Starting again they crossed over some high ground or mountains and came to a salt spring from which they distilled very good salt. This location is near the Ouachita River on Bayou deSal in Clark County. Marching toward the northwest they reached the Ouachita River and came to the province of Cayas. "The town of Cayas itself they did not see as they later learned they had left it near the river", says the historian Rangel. Elvas, however, says that they did see it. The Spaniards stayed months in this province in which there were many towns -- "the horses fattened and throwe more than they had done at other places in a longer time". Here hot water was found and, as Hot Springs, Arkansas is the only place in this neighborhood where hot water occurs in any great quantity, we feel sure that DeSoto must have visited this town.

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EXCERPTS FROM "REPORT OF THE UNITED STATES DE SOTO EXPEDITION COMMISSION"
By John R. Fordyce

The United States DeSoto Expedition Commission was created by the following Public Resolution of the 74th Congress (No. 57):

**Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, that the President of the United States be, and he is hereby, authorized to appoint a commission consisting of not fewer than five nor more than seven members, to make a thorough study of the subject of DeSoto's expedition and to report back to the next session of Congress its recommendations for a suitable and appropriate celebration of the four hundredth anniversary of said expedition.

That in order to meet the necessary expenses of said commission there is hereby authorized to be appropriated out of any money in the United States Treasury not otherwise appropriated, such sum or sums as may be necessary to pay the expenses of said commission in making this investigation, preparing and filing its reports and recommendations to Congress, not to exceed $5,000. Approved, August 26, 1935.

(over)
TRAILING DE SOTO

(Excerpts from "Report of the United States DeSoto Expedition Commission"

The appropriation herein authorized was included in Public Act No. 440 of the 74th Congress, approved Feb. 11, 1936. Public Act No. 623 of the 74th Congress, approved May 27, 1936, extended the period within which the report of the Commission might be filed to Jan. 2, 1939, and by an enactment of June 17, 1936, the period during which the appropriation was made available was extended to June 30, 1937.

Personnel

Acting in accordance with the authority reposed upon him in the original resolution, the President appointed the following as members of the Commission:

Hon. W. G. Broerein, Tampa, Florida
Miss Caroline Dornom, Chestnut, Louisiana
Col. John R. Fordyce, Hot Springs, Arkansas —— Vice-Chairman
Andrew O. Holmes, Memphis, Tennessee
V. Birney Imes, Columbus, Mississippi
Dr. Walter B. Jones, U of A, Tuscaloosa, Alabama --- Secretary
Dr. John R. Swanton, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. ---Chairman

Page 8 -- Recommendations of the Commission: The Commission was fully conscious of the fact that the location of this route had been a subject of controversy for more than two hundred years and was aware that very different routes had been proposed for certain sections, some of which have received wide credence and have been made the basis for persistent and assured claims on the part of various local communities. In consequence, the Commission initiated an exhaustive study of the printed and the manuscript records of DeSoto’s expedition, going to original sources so far as that was possible, both in this country and abroad, for authoritative information on which to base its final conclusions. This study has required months of research. Sub-committees of the Commission have also toured and inspected in person many areas for the purpose of verifying physical, geological, topographical, and archaeological data, and have carefully checked and applied this information to the determination of the route. The Commission had access to, and availed itself of, the facilities of the Bureau of American Ethnology of the Smithsonian Institution, the Library of Congress, and other Federal agencies. The Commission believes that it has established the DeSoto route as closely as was possible in the light of available historical, ethnological, archaeological, geographical, and geological information.

The Commission therefore recommends to the Congress that it approve this route as the officially designated route of Hernando DeSoto and his successor Moscoso through the territory of the present United States, and submits herewith in support of this recommendation a detailed narrative containing its supporting data. The total length of the route is approximately 4,000 miles, including travel both by land and by water.

Having established the general route, this Commission, pursuant to the resolution of the Congress, recommends that suitable and appropriate celebrations be held in the states traversed to commemorate the 400th anniversary of this expedition, the most impressive ever undertaken into the interior of the North American Continent, and one which had a vital influence on the development of the territory it traversed.

In pursuance of the Joint Resolution, the Commission further recommends that permanent, suitable, and uniform markers be erected along this route, in order that it may be perpetuated and officially designated in the years to come. The Commission respectfully recommends that the present Fact Finding Committee, forming a part of the permanent Commission hereinafter recommended in this report, be charged with the duties and responsibilities of selecting the sites for these markers. It is prepared so to do -------
The course pursued by DeSoto's army during the season of 1541 as mapped out in the preceding pages, is as follows: Leaving the Chickasaw country in Pontotoc County, Mississippi, it immediately entered the territory of the Alabama Indians who seem to have lived at that time in the southeastern part of LaFayette Co. or northern part of Calhoun. After capturing a stockade manned by these Indians the Spaniards marched almost directly west to the neighborhood of the present Sunflower Landing probably following about the course of Yocona River but possibly swimming south as far as Charleston. After crossing the Mississippi, they came first to the towns of the province of Aquixo south of Modoc in the present Phillips Country, crossed on a bridge a branch of White River, waded through the swamps beyond it and entered the province of Casqui on Crowley's Ridge, the Casqui towns lying perhaps on Big Creek. From Casqui they marched north into the territory of another province called Pacaha which lay close to the Mississippi just above the mouth of the present St. Francis, or probably just beyond the course then followed by the L'Anguille. An expedition was sent from this province into northeastern Arkansas, probably penetrating the territory between the St. Francis and White Rivers.

Turning south from Pacaha, the Spaniards re-entered the head town of the Casqui Indians and marched southwest to the White between Roe and St. Charles where the Casqui Indians ferried them over. From this point they traveled south along the west side of White River and came to the town of Quiguate in the delta between the White and Arkansas. The most likely site of this town is at Menard (St. Charles written in) group of mounds 7 miles east of Arkansas Post. It is probable that this town was then on White River and that the Arkansas main channel was farther south than it is today.

On leaving Quiguate, they marched northwest, first through swamps and then over hills, crossing the Arkansas above Pine Bluff, re-crossing it some miles below Little Rock and coming upon the Coligua town on the north bank of the Arkansas at Little Rock. From here they turned southwest through Benton, probably followed the Saline a short distance toward the south and then turned west to the Quachita, coming upon it below Malvern. From that point they went up along the Ouachita about to Cedar Glades or Buckville where they turned south to the Tula country around Caddo Gap. On leaving the Tula Indians they traveled toward the east keeping near Caddo River, reached the Ouachita at Arkadelphia, crossed to the east bank, and followed it down to the neighborhood of Camden, an old trail-crossing where they spent the winter. I regard Clarksville as the only place in Mississippi west of the Chickasaw country so near the trail as to be mentioned with anything like certainty; I think that DeSoto passed a little south of this place.

In Arkansas Helena is the first place of consequence that may confidently be cited as having a location near DeSoto's trail. Pine Bluff probably lay a bit to the south but Little Rock (more exactly North Little Rock) seems to mark the site of Coligua and is therefore, exactly on the trail. Benton and Malvern are near it, Hot Springs just to one side and Arkadelphia again exactly upon it. Finally, whether Camden does or does not mark the site of the winter camp of 1541-42, there can be no question that DeSoto passed close by.

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(The above taken from the bound copy of the report, in the possession of Mrs. John Fordyce, 1801 Shadowlane, Little Rock, Ark.)
Little Rock to Camp Quapaw Segment

De Soto Arkansas Trail

Trail Mark
DeSoto Arkansas Trail Credential Card

CAMP QUAPAW TO HOT SPRINGS SEGMENT

Name: ___________________ Address: ___________________
City: ___________________ State: ________________ Unit: _______
Council: ________________ Date Trail Taken: ________________

Have you read "Trailing DeSoto" booklet? ____________
Have you taken complete hike on foot? ________________
Have you completed tour of Hot Springs National Park
Museum? ________________

__________________________________
(Signature of Camp Quapaw Ranger)

__________________________________
(Signature of Hot Springs Natl. Park Ranger)

Leader's Signature: _______________________
Your Signature: _______________________

DeSoto Arkansas Trail Credential Card

WHITE RIVER FLOAT SEGMENT

Name: ___________________ Address: ___________________
City: ___________________ State: ________________ Unit: _______
Council: ________________ Date Trail Taken: ________________

Have you read "Trailing DeSoto" booklet? ____________
Have you taken complete float trip without motor? ____________

__________________________________
(Signature Clarendon Police Officer -- Needed only if
you float upper segment)

__________________________________
(Signature Warden at White River Game Refuge)
Leader's Signature: _______________________
Your Signature: _______________________