

John Smith

English explorer John Smith (1580–1631) sailed to North America and helped found the Jamestown (Virginia) colony in 1607. The record of his exploration, *A True Relation of Virginia*, was published in 1608. This journal and its sequel, including his experience with the leader Powhatan and his daughter Pocahontas, played a pivotal role in the early settling of the continent, though the famous rescue by Pocahontas is not mentioned in the original account. Smith's storytelling resulted in some discrepancies among the early accounts of relations with the Chesapeake and other tribes, but his adventures helped popularize the idea of settlement and helped the early colonizing efforts. Smith later explored the northeastern coast of the continent, which he named New England.



From *The Journal of John Smith*

Chapter II

What Happened till the First Supply

Being thus left to our fortunes, it fortuned that within ten days, scarce ten amongst us could either go or well stand, such extreme weakness and sickness oppressed us. And therat none need marvel if they consider the cause and reason which was this: While the ships stayed, our allowance was somewhat bettered by a daily proportion of biscuit, which the sailors would pilfer to sell,

give, or exchange with us for money, sassafras, furs, or love. But when they departed, there remained neither tavern, beer house, nor place of relief but the common kettle. Had we been as free from all sins as [we were free from] gluttony and drunkenness, we might have been canonized for saints; but our President would never had been admitted [to sainthood], for [he was guilty of] engrossing to his private,^o oatmeal, sack,^o oil, aqua vitae,^o beef, eggs, or what not but the kettle; that indeed he allowed equally to be distributed, and that was half a pint of wheat and as much barley boiled with water for a man a day, and this, having fried some twenty-six weeks in the ship's hold, contained as many worms as grains so that we might truly call it rather so much bran than corn; our drink was water, our lodgings castles in the air.

With this lodging and diet, our extreme toil in bearing and planting palisades^o so strained and bruised us, and our continual labor in the extremity of the heat had so weakened us, as were cause sufficient to have made us as miserable in our native country or any other place in the world. From May to September, those that escaped [death] lived upon sturgeon and sea crabs. Fifty in this time we buried; the rest [of us] seeing the President's projects to escape these miseries in our pinnace by flight (who all this time had neither felt want nor sickness) so moved our dead spirits as we deposed him and established Ratcliffe in his place (Gosnold being dead), Kendall [having been] deposed. Smith [being] newly recovered, Martin and Ratcliffe were by his care preserved and relieved, and the most of the soldiers recovered with the skillful diligence of Master Thomas Wotton our surgeon general. But now was all our provision spent, the sturgeon gone, all helps abandoned, each hour expecting the fury of the savages, when God, the patron of all good endeavors, in that desperate extremity so changed the heart of the savages that they brought such plenty of their fruits and provision as no man wanted.^o

And now where some affirmed it was ill done of the [London] Council to send forth men so badly provided, this incontradictable reason will show them plainly they are too ill advised to nourish such ill conceits.^o First, the

engrossing to his private: keeping for himself

sack: a dry white wine

aqua vitae: alcohol (brandy, whiskey, etc.; from Latin "water of life")

palisades: long narrow stakes to be used as fence

as no man wanted: that no one did without

conceits: ideas, notions

fault of our going was our own; what could be thought fitting or necessary we had; but [of] what we should find, or want, or where we should be, we were all ignorant; and supposing to make our passage in two months, with victual to live and the advantage of the spring to work, we were at sea five months, where we both spent our victual and lost the opportunity of the time and season to plant, by the unskillful presumption of our ignorant transporters that understood not at all what they undertook.

Such actions have ever since the world's beginning been subject to such accidents, and everything of worth is found full of difficulties, but nothing [is] so difficult as to establish a commonwealth so far remote from men and means and where men's minds are so untoward^o as neither do well themselves nor suffer^o others. But to proceed.

The new President [Ratcliffe] and Martin, being little beloved, of weak judgment in dangers, and less industry in peace, committed the managing of all things abroad^o to Captain Smith, who, by his own example, good words, and fair promises, set some to mow, others to bind thatch, some to build houses, others to thatch them, himself always bearing the greatest task for his own share, so that in short time he provided most of them lodgings, neglecting any for himself. This done, seeing the savages' superfluity^o begin to decrease, [Smith] (with some of his workmen) shipped himself in the shallop^o to search the country for trade. The want of the language, [the want of] knowledge to manage his boat without sailors, the want of a sufficient power (knowing the multitude of the savages), [the want of] apparel for his men, and [the want of] other necessaries were infinite impediments yet no discouragement.

Being but six or seven in company he went down the river to Kecoughtan, where at first they [the Indians] scorned him as a famished man and would in derision offer him a handful of corn, a piece of bread, for their [the Englishmen's] swords and muskets, and such like proportions also for their apparel. But seeing by trade and courtesy there was nothing to be had, he made bold to try such conclusions^o as necessity enforced; though contrary

untoward: perverse

suffer: allow, tolerate

abroad: out of doors

superfluity: overabundance (i.e., extra provisions)

shallop: small open boat

conclusions: actions

to his commission, [he] let fly his muskets [and] ran his boat on shore, whereat they all fled into the woods.

So marching towards their houses, they might see great heaps of corn; much ado he had to restrain his hungry soldiers from present taking of it, expecting as it happened that the savages would assault them, as not long after they did with a most hideous noise. Sixty or seventy of them, some black, some red, some white, some parti-colored, came in a square order, singing and dancing out of the woods with their Okee (which was an idol made of skins, stuffed with moss, all painted and hung with chains and copper) borne before them; and in this manner, being well armed with clubs, targets,^o bows, and arrows, they charged the English that so kindly^o received them with their muskets loaded with pistol shot that down fell their god, and divers^o [Indians] lay sprawling on the ground; the rest fled again to the woods and ere long sent one of their Quioughcosucks to offer peace and redeem their Okee.

Smith told them if only six of them would come unarmed and load his boat, he would not only be their friend but restore them their Okee and give them beads, copper, and hatchets besides, which on both sides was to their contents^o performed, and then they brought him venison, turkeys, wild fowl, bread, and what they had; singing and dancing in sign of friendship till they departed. In his return he discovered the town and country of Warraskoyack.

Thus God unboundless by his power,
Made them thus kind, would us devour.

Smith, perceiving (notwithstanding their late misery) not any regarded but from hand to mouth (the company being well recovered),^o caused the pinnace^o to be provided with things fitting to get provision for the year following, but in the interim he made three or four journeys and discovered the people of Chickahominy, yet what he carefully provided the rest carelessly spent.

The Spaniard never more greedily desired gold than he [Smith] victual, nor his soldiers more to abandon the country than he to keep it. But . . . he found plenty of corn in the river of Chickahominy, where hundreds of savages

targets: small round shields

kindly: appropriately, in kind

divers: diverse, various

contents: content, satisfaction

perceiving . . . recovered: i.e., the men were using up their provisions and putting nothing aside for later

pinnace: a small sailing ship

in divers places stood with baskets expecting his coming. And now [with] the winter approaching, the rivers became so covered with swans, geese, ducks, and cranes that we daily feasted with good bread, Virginia peas, pumpkins, and persimmons, fish, fowl, and divers sorts of wild beasts as fat as we could eat them, so that none of our tuftaffaty^o humorists^o desired to go for England.

But our comedies never endured long without a tragedy; some idle exceptions^o being muttered against Captain Smith for not discovering the head of [the] Chickahominy river and [being] taxed by the Council to be too slow in so worthy an attempt,^o the next voyage he proceeded so far that with much labor by cutting of trees asunder he made his passage; but when his barge could pass no farther, he left her in a broad bay out of danger of shot, commanding [that] none should go ashore till his return; himself with two English and two savages went up higher in a canoe, but he was not long absent but his men [in the barge] went ashore, whose want of government^o gave both occasion and opportunity to the savages to surprise one George Cassen, whom they slew, and [they] much failed not to have cut off the boat and all the rest.

Smith little dreaming of that accident,^o being got to the marshes at the river's head twenty miles in the desert,^o had his two men slain (as is supposed) sleeping by the canoe, while himself by fowling^o sought them victual, who finding he was beset with 200 savages, two of them he slew, still defending himself with the aid of a savage his guide, whom he bound to his arm with his garters^o and used him as a buckler,^o yet he [Smith] was shot in his thigh a little, and had many arrows that stuck in his clothes but no great hurt, till at last they took him prisoner. . . .

The manner how they used and delivered him is as follows:

The savages having drawn from George Cassen whither Captain Smith was gone, prosecuting^o that opportunity they followed him with 300

- tuftaffaty*: a taffeta (fabric) with a tufted pile
- humorists*: people subject to whims or caprices
- exceptions*: as in "I take exception to that"
- so worthy an attempt*: so vital an effort
- government*: discipline
- accident*: incident
- desert*: wilderness
- fowling*: hunting game birds
- garters*: leather bootstraps
- buckler*: shield
- prosecuting*: pursuing

bowmen, conducted by the King of Pamunkey, who in divisions searching the turnings of the river found Robinson and Emry by the fireside; those they shot full of arrows and slew. Then finding the Captain, as is said, who used the savage that was his guide as his shield (three of them being slain and divers others so galled) all the rest would not come near him. Thinking thus to have returned to his boat, regarding^o them, as he marched, more than his way, [he] slipped up to the middle in an oozy creek and his savage with him, yet dared they not come to him till being near dead with cold he threw away his arms. Then according to their composition^o they drew him forth and led him to the fire where his men were slain. Diligently they chased his benumbed limbs.

He demanding for their captain, they showed him Opechananough, King of Pamunkey, to whom he gave a round ivory double compass dial. Much they marveled at the playing of the fly^o and needle, which they could see so plainly and yet not touch it because of the glass that covered them. But when he demonstrated by that globe-like jewel the roundness of the earth and skies, the sphere of the sun, moon, and stars, and how the sun did chase the night round about the world continually, the greatness of the land and sea, the diversity of nations, variety of complexions, and how we were to them antipodes,^o and many other such like matters, they all stood as amazed with admiration. Notwithstanding, within an hour after, they tied him to a tree, and as many as could stand about him prepared to shoot him, but [seeing] the King holding up the compass in his hand, they all laid down their bows and arrows and in a triumphant manner led him to Orapaks, where he was after their manner kindly feasted and well used.

Their order in conducting him was thus: Drawing themselves all in file, the King in the midst had all their pieces and swords borne before him. Captain Smith was led after him by three great savages holding him fast by each arm, and on each side six went in file with their arrows nocked.^o But arriving at the town (which was but only thirty or forty hunting houses made of mats, which they remove as they please, as we our tents), all the women

- regarding*: watching
- composition*: compact, agreement
- fly*: compass face
- antipodes*: opposites
- noctured*: fitted to the bowstring, ready to fire