



Finding James Fort

Subjects: History, Virginia Studies/3rd and 4th grade

Skills: Using historic documents, primary sources, and maps

Strategies: Reading primary sources, analytical thinking

Time: 30 to 45 minutes *Class Size:* Adaptable

Objectives:

Student will:	SOLs
Use the concepts of absolute location and relative location.	VS 4.2
Develop historical analysis skills using primary sources including artifacts, diaries, letters, photographs, art, documents, and newspapers.	VS 4.7
Summarize and sequence major events in Virginia history from 1607 to the present and locating significant places and events on a map.	VS 4.7
Describe the first permanent English settlement in North America, with emphasis on the people, their motives, the obstacles they encountered and the successes they achieved.	History 3.2

Background: The only visual representation of James Fort was sketched out in **1608** by **Pedro Zuñiga**, a **Spanish spy**. The beginning of the Jamestown Rediscovery project represented the first chance for new information in nearly 370 years.

Archaeologists at Jamestown Rediscovery were able to look below the surface of the ground to find traces of the original **James Fort**. What shape was the original fort? How accurate were the written records? Was the map made by a Spanish spy a quick sketch, or was it accurate enough to help answer many of these questions?

Historic documents are not always complete. They can be very helpful to historical archaeologists, but can often give a **limited point of view**. Archaeologists use a term for seeing what was really there: **ground proofing**. This means that the only way you can know how **accurate** different descriptions of James Fort are, is to look in the ground and see it themselves.

The archaeologists at Jamestown Rediscovery knew that there were two things that were needed to prove beyond a reasonable doubt

First, archaeologists needed to **find a fortification that matched the descriptions in the documents**, and second thing needed was to **prove the fortification dates to the first decade of the 17th century**.

Resources and materials: You have some quotations describing James Fort, from some historic documents from the earliest period at Jamestown. You also have a description from the archaeologists at Jamestown, describing what they discovered. Have the students read the following descriptions and complete the accompanying activity.

Discussion points:

- How did the archaeology add information to the primary documents? *The archaeology helped the historic documentation by showing exactly where the fort was, how large it might be, and by adding artifacts and other information to the historic record.*
- Did the historic documents help the archeologists? *The documents helped the archaeologists understand which fort they were excavating. James Fort took on many forms over its life. The archaeologists can identify the different phases of building because of the early descriptions in the primary sources.*
- What are some other ways that archaeology can help us to understand history? *Archaeology can tell us about buildings that are not described in historic documents. It can also help us understand some of the everyday ways that people lived in the past. This includes not just the famous people we study, but the Native Americans, Africans, women and children who are not always well represented in written histories.*

For more information: visit Jamestown Rediscovery at www.apva.org

Also visit some other sites that work well with the new research at Jamestown Rediscovery. Some suggestions: www.historyglobe.com , www.bermuda-online.org/forts.htm ,

For a summary of Jamestown Rediscovery in English and Spanish visit:

www.harcourtschool.com/newsbreak/jamestown.html

www.harcourtschool.com/newsbreak/jamestown_spn.html

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Descriptions in the primary sources:

"The fifteenth of June we had built and finished our Fort, which was triangle wise, having three Bulwarkes, at every corner, like a halfe Moone, and foure or five pieces of Artillerie mounted in them." We had made our selves sufficiently strong for these Savages. We had also sowne most of our Corne on two Mountaines."

George Percy, June 15, 1607

"Jamestowne being burnt, we rebuilt it and three forts more . . . invironed with a palizado of fourteen or fifteene feet, and each as much as three or four men could carrie ... we had three Bulwarkes, foure and twenty peeces of ordnance of Culvering, Demiculvering, sacar and falcon and most well mounted upon convenient platforms . . ."

John Smith, Summer 1608

"the fort growing since to more perfection, is now at this present in this manner: . . . about half an acre . . . is cast almost into the form of a triangle and so palisaded. The south side next the river (howbeit extended in a line or curtain sixscore foot more in length than the other two, by reason the advantage of the ground doth require) contains 140 yards, the west and east sides a hundred only. At every angle or corner, where the lines meet, a bulwark or watchtower is raised and in each bulwark a piece or two well mounted . . . And thus enclosed, as I said, round with a palisade of planks and strong posts, four feet deep in the ground, of young oaks, walnuts, etc. . . . the fort is called, in honor of His Majesty's name, Jamestown. The principal gate from the town, through the palisade, opens to the river, as at each bulwark there is a gate likewise to go forth and at every gate a demiculverin and so in the market-place."

William Strachey, 1609

“The Towne [James Town] it selfe by the care and providence of Sir Thomas Gates, who for the most part had his chiefest residence there, is reduced into a handsome forme, and hath in it two faire rowes of houses, all of framed Timber, two stories, and an upper Garret, or Corne loft high, besides the three large, and substantial Storehouses, joyned together in a length some hundred and twenty foot, and in breadth forty, and this town hath been lately newly, and strongly impaled, and a faire platforme for Ordence in the west Bulwark raised”

Ralph Hamor, 1611

The archaeological ground proofing:

Artifacts from the first shovel full in the first square dated to the right time period. The first season of excavation uncovered the **south palisade line of the fort** as well as a **trash pit dating to 1610–11**. The second excavation season focused on following the **palisade line** to the west, but the line soon disappeared in an area affected by seawall construction or confederate fort construction. By the end of the 1995 season the main goal was to locate a corner of the fort east of the area already uncovered. In December **the remains of the curved east bulwark were discovered**. Finally in the late summer of 1996 the **east palisade line was located**. The two sides of the fort came together at **46 ½ degrees, the exact angle the reported dimensions of the fort would create**. This, in connection with the large number of early artifacts, ruled out the possibilities that it could be anything other than James Fort. **James Fort has been discovered!**

Activity

1. How did the artifacts help the archaeologists decide that they found the original James Fort?
2. Why were the primary documents important in discovering the location of James Fort?
3. Read the descriptions of the fort. Which one do you think is the most accurate?
4. Which one is the easiest to understand today?
5. Did any of the primary sources tell you exactly where the fort was?
6. Now that the archaeologists have found exactly where the fort was, will there maps give a relative location, or an exact location?

Get **Zuñiga** image from web site www.apva.org