

# Curvy Course

Navigating the curving meanders of the river above Jamestown was tedious for boaters in John Smith's day. Too difficult to sail, men had to row through long stretches known as the oxbows. Yet the colonists made numerous trips upstream to "discover" the river and obtain food from the Indians. Smith's map records more Indian towns above Jamestown than below. The rich soils and aquatic life along the meanders attracted native—and later European—settlements.

Bypassed when man-made channels straightened the course of the river for easier navigation, the oxbows still offer abundant natural resources and views the early explorers might have known.

Smith's map clearly shows the river meanders and Indian settlements above Jamestown. He knew this part of the James well from frequent trading expeditions.

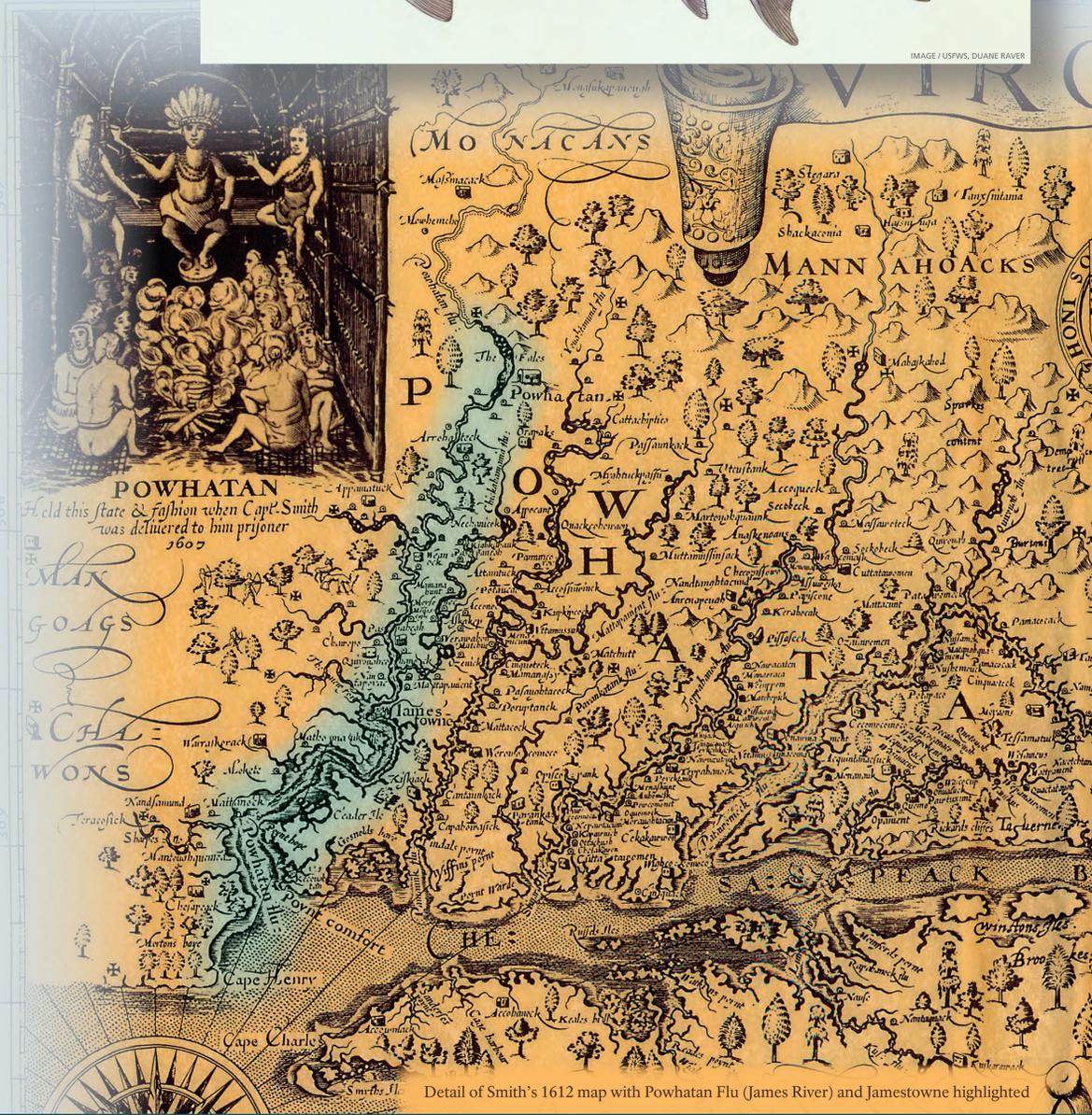
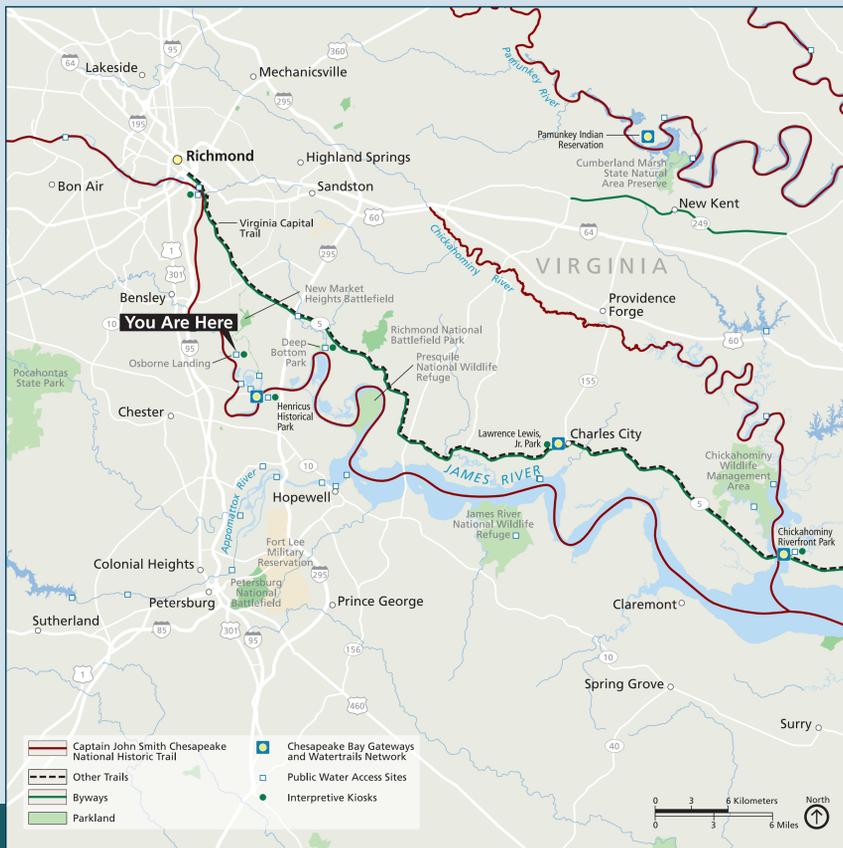
*"We are set down 80 miles within a river for breadth... length navigable up into the country, deep and bold channel so stored with sturgeon and other sweet fish as no man's fortune hath ever possessed the like..."*

— First Letter to the Council of Virginia, 22 June 1607  
Signed by John Smith and five other Jamestown colonists

Atlantic sturgeon—abundant in colonial times—nearly disappeared from the Chesapeake Bay due to overfishing and deteriorating habitat. Recent sightings in the James River give hope that the species may be recovering.



IMAGE / USFWS, DUANE RAVER



Detail of Smith's 1612 map with Powhatan Flu (James River) and Jamestown highlighted

Explore more of the John Smith Trail at nearby sites along the James River:

- ◆ Experience hands-on history at Henricus Historical Park amidst a re-created 17th-century English colony and Arrohatock Indian town.
- ◆ Paddle the Lagoon Water Trail at Dutch Gap Conservation Area and see how nature has reclaimed a former industrial site.
- ◆ Watch for bald eagles and other species at Presquile National Wildlife Refuge, on an island nearly surrounded by a James River oxbow.



IMAGE / HENRICUS HISTORICAL PARK, JIM BYRD



IMAGE / VIRGINIA TOURISM CORPORATION, SARAH HAUSER



IMAGE / NPS, MIDDLETON EVANS