

Hernando DeSoto



In the later part of May and first of June 1540, DeSoto and his army of Spanish Conquistadors made their journey down the Chattooga River in what is now northwest Georgia. Passing through the vicinity of present day cities of LayFayette and Summerville, Georgia they entered the present state of Alabama by following the course of this small river to the mouth of Chattooga where it flows into the Coosa River near the present town of Cedar Buff, Alabama. They arrived at this point June 4, 1540 and camped for nearly a month on an island, later to be named McCoy's island. DeSoto's Historians called this island in the Coosa River "Chiaha".

The purpose for their long encampment at Chiaha (McCoy's Island) was two fold. One reason was to allow both horses and men to rest and recover from their long and difficult journey across the Appalachian Mountains, a journey they described as " a way over rough and lofty ridges." The other reason for their long stay in this area was because of an abundant supply of food at the fork of these two rivers on the plains of the beautiful Coosa Valley. At Chiaha, DeSoto continued to hear rumors of gold to be found to the north and west, in the hills and valleys of Lookout Mountain. His thirst for gold finally won and he sent a small group of men, under the leadership of two of his lieutenants, named Silva and Vilabo, on a side trip

exploration onto Lookout Mountain. These men left Chiaha in the latter part of June 1570 and made their way up on Lookout Mountain somewhere between the present towns of Blanche, Alabama and Menlo, Georgia and onward to DeSoto Falls near the present town of Mentone, Alabama.

They camped at DeSoto Falls at least two days and perhaps longer and searched the area for gold and precious stones. From DeSoto Falls this small group of brave men went west across Big Wills Valley at about the present town of Hengar, Alabama. From there they followed the east side of what is now called South Sauty Creek, through the area of Sylvania and arrived at what is now known as the Point Rock area of Buck's Pocket State Park. Silva and Vilabo, and their small group of companions must have reacted in

