**Hernando De Soto Biography**

**Accomplishments**

De Soto, Hernando (1500?-1542), a Spanish explorer, helped to defeat the Inca empire and led the first European expedition to reach the Mississippi River. From 1539 to 1542, he led a large Spanish expedition through what is now the southern United States. His army landed in Florida and crossed about 10 present-day states. De Soto became known as a courageous explorer who helped conquer the New World for Spain. However, the era of exploration was marked by greed, intolerance, and cruelty. In their search for wealth, de Soto and his men tortured and brutally killed many Indians.

**Early expeditions**

De Soto was born in the province of Extremadura in Spain. As a teenager, he sailed to the New World and began his career as an explorer in the tropical rain forests of Panama. De Soto served in expeditions to enslave Indians and to search for wealth.

By the early 1530's, de Soto was known as an excellent soldier and horseman. He joined an expedition led by Francisco Pizarro, another Spanish explorer, against the empire of the Inca Indians in what is now Peru. De Soto helped Pizarro capture the Inca's capital, in 1533.

In 1536, de Soto returned to Spain a rich man from treasures collected during the Inca conquest. He could have led a noble lifestyle, but he sought his own command in the New World. King Charles I of Spain appointed him governor of Cuba and authorized him to conquer and colonize the region that is now the southeastern United States.

**Journey to the Mississippi**

De Soto arrived below present-day Tampa Bay in 1539. He brought more than 600 men equipped with horses to help him colonize the land and search for gold. De Soto planned to capture Indian chiefs,take hundreds of Indians as ransom, and march through their territories.

The army camped for the winter in what is now northern Florida and headed north during the spring and summer of 1540. They traveled through the present-day states of Georgia and the Carolinas, crossed the Great Smoky Mountains, and headed south through the Georgia and Alabama area. The men then traveled through the Mississippi area, crossed the Mississippi River, and explored the Arkansas region and other present-day states west of the river.

On May 21, 1542, de Soto died from a fever by the banks of the Mississippi River. The remains of his army, led by Luis de Moscoso, reached New Spain (now Mexico) the next year.

[**Hernando DeSoto biography**](http://www.mrprokop.net/resources.cfm?subpage=165326)

1. What were the two achievements of Hernando DeSoto?
2. What were some of the negative aspects of his legacy?
3. What did he do as a child?
4. What South American empire did he help to conquer?
5. Which other explorer did he work with?
6. After DeSoto returned to Spain, he could have lived a life of nobility. Why did he come back?
7. What job did the King give him?
8. Name the states that DeSoto reached during his exploration of Southeastern North America.
9. How did DeSoto die?