

Exploration, European- Part 4: Seventeenth-Century Explorers ^[1]

Exploration, European

by John Hairr, 2006

See also: [Amadas and Barlowe Expedition](#) ^[2]; [De Soto Expedition](#) ^[3]; [Lederer Expedition](#) ^[4]; [Lost Colony](#) ^[5]; [Pardo Expeditions](#) ^[6]; [Roanoke Voyages](#) ^[7]; [Verrazano Expedition](#) ^[8].

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Part 4: Seventeenth-Century Explorers

The middle decades of the seventeenth century were marked by several other explorations in the future colony and state of North Carolina. In 1622 [John Pory](#) ^[13], secretary of the Virginia colony, traveled 60 miles along the Chowan River. In 1646 [Gen. Richard Bennett](#) ^[14] and Col. Thomas Dew led a force south to engage the Indians along the Chowan River. They traveled by sea to Currituck Inlet, then up the [Roanoke](#) ^[15] and Chowan Rivers to the mouth of Weyanook Creek, where the battle was fought. In August 1650 [Edward Bland](#) ^[16], [Abraham Woode](#), [Sackford Brewster](#), and [Elias Pennant](#) ^[16] left Fort Henry, Va., to explore lands to the south and west. Their journey took them across southern Virginia and into the northern [Piedmont](#) ^[17] of North Carolina.

In July 1653 [Roger Green](#) ^[18] and a group of inhabitants on Nansemond River petitioned the Virginia Assembly to grant 10,000 acres to the first 100 people "who shall first seate on Moratuck or [Roanoke river](#) ^[15] and the land lying upon the south side of Choan river and branches thereof." Green was given 1,000 acres ^[18] "in reward of his charge, hazard and trouble of first discoverie." The extent of Green's explorations into the interior of North Carolina is unknown, but an old Indian trail running from Virginia to the Pee Dee River was referred to as "[Green's Path](#) ^[19] to the Pee Dee" as late as the 1770s, when [John Collet](#) ^[20] included it on his map of the colony.

At the invitation of the "Emperor of Rhoanoke," [Francis Yeardley](#) ^[21] of Virginia sponsored a group of traders who traveled south in the fall of 1653 to visit the site of the earlier English fort on [Roanoke Island](#) ^[22]. From there, some of the men journeyed overland to the [Neuse River](#) ^[23] area, where they met with the "Emperor of the [Tuskarorawes](#) ^[24]," who spoke of a Spaniard who had been living among his people for seven years. The Spaniard's identity is unknown. Yeardley's expedition returned to Virginia in the spring of 1654.

[Capt. William Hilton](#) ^[25] of Massachusetts twice explored the coasts of North Carolina and South Carolina for potential colonization by fellow New Englanders. His first journey occurred between August and November 1662. Aboard his ship *Adventure*, Hilton and his companions traversed the lower part of the [Cape Fear River](#) ^[26], which they called the "Charles River," upstream for "15 or 16 leagues." Later Hilton sailed to Barbados and there made the acquaintance of parties interested in establishing a colony on the North American mainland, thus prompting his second visit to North Carolina. In early August 1663 Hilton departed Spikes Bay, Barbados, in the service of "several Gentlemen and Merchants of the island of Barbadoes." For the next two months, he and his crew explored the rivers and tributaries of Lower Cape Fear.

In May 1670 German explorer [John Lederer](#) ^[4] set out overland from the falls of the James River in Virginia on a trek to the south and west. Initially, he was accompanied by a Major Harris and five Indians, but his companions refused to go farther than a branch of the James River. Lederer continued on his own, escorted by one Indian guide. There has been much debate as to Lederer's actual route. Most historians maintain that he made it as far south as the Catawba and Cheraw in the vicinity of modern [Charlotte](#) ^[27] before returning to Virginia through land occupied by the Tuscarora. Though many have ridiculed Lederer's description of a "desert" in the North Carolina interior, it is actually an apt portrayal of the [Sandhills](#) ^[25] region in summer.

With Lederer's travels, one and a half centuries of European exploration drew to a close. Trailblazers had traversed virtually every section of North Carolina. Settlers and colonists followed in their wake, carving homes from the wilderness and adding details to the rough maps supplied by the early pathfinders.

Keep reading >> [Exploration, European- Part 5: References](#) ^[12] 

Additional Resources:

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Bland, Edward, Abraham Woode, Brewster Sackford, and Elias Pennant. *The Discovery of New Brittain, Began August 27, Anno Dom. 1650*. New York: J. Sabin and Sons, 1873. <https://archive.org/details/discoveryofnewbr00blan> [16] (accessed February 13, 2019).

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[Colonial period \(1600-1763\)](#) [31]

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