

WHAT HAPPENED to the **LOST COLONY?**

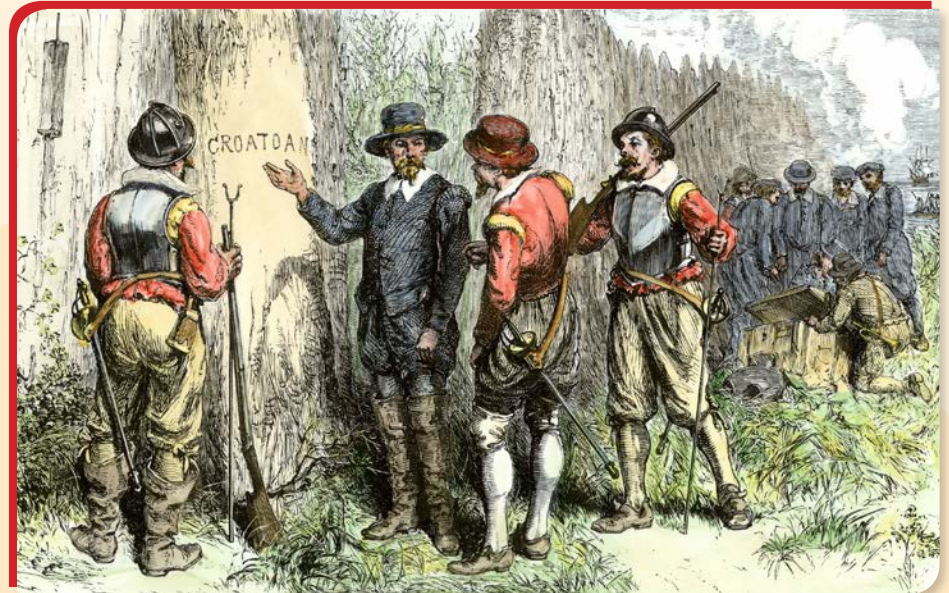
When John White left the new English settlement on Roanoke Island, in today's North Carolina, in 1587, he planned to return soon. He had established a colony of more than 100 settlers. He was returning to England for supplies. However, war between England and Spain prevented his return for three years. When he finally returned to the new colony, he found... nothing.

The settlers and their animals were gone. Their simple buildings were in disrepair. The only clue was the unknown word "Croatoan" carved on a tree. The fate of the "lost colony" has puzzled historians for more than four centuries.

In 1607, England sent new settlers to North America. This colony, Jamestown in Virginia, was more successful than the earlier one farther

south. From it grew the thirteen original colonies and, eventually, the nation we now know as the United States. But what happened to that first colony so long ago?

Historians have looked at many possible causes to try to solve the mystery of the colonists' disappearance. The site of the colony was a sandy island protected from the Atlantic by other islands. Like all coastal islands, Roanoke was threatened by waves, storms, and beach erosion, or the washing away of land. Perhaps the tiny colony was destroyed by a big storm and massive waves.





Map of the North Carolina coast made in 1585.

Other historians have looked at local Native Americans. At first, the English considered them friendly and helpful. But some historians believe that the Native Americans began to feel threatened. Vastly outnumbering the colonists, the Native Americans could have wiped them out. In fact, the mysterious word “Croatoan” may refer to a tribe in southern North Carolina.

Another theory is that Native Americans may have played a helpful role. Some historians believe that the English settlers realized the site of their colony was too dangerous. They may have moved inland and mingled with the Native Americans. As they learned to live like the natives, these early colonists disappeared from history.

Another possibility is the threat from Spanish colonists. Raiders from Spanish colonies farther south in Florida might have attacked the English colonies. To them, a colony founded by their hated enemies would be a rival. Still other researchers think an outbreak of disease might have killed all the English settlers.

After the colonists vanished, the site of the colony itself began to disappear. Low coastal islands often lose land to the constant waves of the ocean. Historians today are not even sure where the colony stood. Many believe that the site is now underwater. Others claim it is still on land.

Archaeologists, scientists who study old civilizations, have performed much research, including studying old maps. They have discovered remains from the colony scattered around the northern part of Roanoke Island and in the surrounding waters. A swimmer even stepped on a 16th-century axe head! However, the fate of this lost colony remains one of history’s greatest mysteries.

DID YOU KNOW?

The first child born to English parents in North America was **Virginia Dare**, John White’s grand-daughter.