

## The People: The American Indians

Long before John Smith's arrival, the indigenous people of the Chesapeake established deep connections to the area's abundant natural resources. Their strong cultural, political, and spiritual systems greatly influenced the English explorations in the 1600 and 1700s, and their impact remains visible throughout the region today.



### Intent to Claim

Beyond survival, the Virginia Company of England expected exploration and the claiming of land and resources for England. They turned to Smith to spearhead two expeditions that focused on the northern and western parts of the Chesapeake basin.

The English investors behind the Virginia Company thought that settlement and exploration would make them wealthy. In addition to profiting from North America's natural resources, they hoped to discover a route to the Pacific.

Captain John Smith's 1607-1609 voyages relied on the numerous interactions he had with Powhatan Indians. During his time in Virginia, Smith had become familiar with indigenous tribes and used his persuasiveness to negotiate with tribal leaders. He documented the various ways that Powhatan Indians assisted as guides, allies, and traders.



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After a brief confrontation with indigenous warriors during the first voyage, John Smith and his crew spent the night at Onawmanient, a site close to Westmoreland State Park at the mouth of Nomini Creek. A Wighcocomoco man named Mosco agreed to join the explorers as a guide and ambassador as they continued up the north shore of the Potomac. Mosco helped the crew as they neared present-day Widewater State Park. The landing site, called Onawmanient (meaning “trading place”) by Algonquian speakers, lies at the mouth of Aquia Creek. Mosco soothed the fears of the Patawomak people in the presence of the English explorers.

John Smith was aware of the desirable minerals that other tribes had obtained from Patawomek. After a brief expedition up Aquia Creek, Mosco and the Patawomek chief informed Smith that he could find matchqueon, black ore with a glittery quality, in the Aquia Creek headwaters. The colonial goal of finding valuable minerals seemed within reach.

Six crew members and several Patawomeck volunteers accompanied Smith up Aquia Creek. After 13 miles by barge and eight miles on foot, the group collected a large quantity of ore for analysis in England. The results were bad news. The mineral was neither gold nor silver.

Matchqueon was valued by Algonquian people for its reflective qualities. Warriors would mix the mineral with grease to paint their bodies and faces. It was also a valuable trade item.

*“The cause of this discovery was to search this mine, of which Newport did assure us that those small baggs (we had given him) in England he had tryed to hold halfe silver; but all we got proved of no value...”*