



Published: 05.13.2007

Crew is off to retrace John Smith 1608 trip

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

JAMESTOWN, Va. — A group of modern-day John Smiths rowed away Saturday in a small, open boat from the site of the first permanent English settlement in America, which Smith helped found 400 years ago this weekend.

The replica of a boat like one Smith used to explore the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries shoved off as the commemoration of Jamestown's anniversary entered a second day filled with concerts, cultural and artistic demonstrations and military drills.

President Bush is to speak today, the closing day of the festivities and the actual anniversary of the settlers' arrival at this swampy island on the James River on May 13, 1607.

The boat's 121-day voyage over 1,500 miles will retrace much of Smith's journey and inaugurate the Capt. John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail, the country's first national historic water trail.

The boat departed from Historic Jamestowne, where the colonists built a triangular fort.

Archaeologists found the fort's ruins, long thought to have been washed away, in the 1990s. Since then, they've unearthed more than 1 million artifacts.

On Saturday, dozens of visitors ringed the fort site to watch archaeologists sift through the soil and show off some of their recent finds, including a sword that was among armor and weapons buried in a well that became a trash pit.

Several hundred cheering people lined the shore of the river as Capt. Ian Bystrom, followed by his crew of 11, slowly stepped onto large rocks at the water's edge and into the 28-foot boat, called a shallop.

The boat will stop at more than 20 spots in Virginia, Maryland, Delaware and Washington, D.C., before returning to Jamestown on Sept. 8. The crew will try to complete the entire trip entirely by oar and sail.

Workers with the nonprofit Sultana Projects Inc. of Chestertown, Md., crafted the boat using mostly tools like those in Smith's time. Smith's trip in 1608 yielded a comprehensive map that guided English settlers for nearly a century.

Smith observed the bay's ecosystem along the way, and the new national trail will do the same with a system of "smart" buoys that will collect information about water and atmospheric conditions and transmit them wirelessly, said retired Vice Adm. Conrad C. Lautenbacher, administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

On the Net

Jamestown 2007:

<http://www.Americas400thAnniversary.com>

Capt. John Smith Four Hundred Project: <http://www.johnsmith400.org/>

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