

1935

## Ponce de Leon's First Voyage and Discovery of Florida

T. Frederick Davis

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq>  
University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Florida Historical Quarterly by an authorized editor of STARS. For more information, please contact [STARS@ucf.edu](mailto:STARS@ucf.edu).

---

### Recommended Citation

Davis, T. Frederick (1935) "Ponce de Leon's First Voyage and Discovery of Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly*: Vol. 14 : No. 1 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol14/iss1/5>

**PONCE DE LEON'S FIRST VOYAGE  
AND  
DISCOVERY OF FLORIDA**

## THE RECORDS

**JUAN PONCE DE LEON**, after serving in the armies of Spain, embarked for the West Indies where he became active in the subjugation of the Indians, a service in which he was engaged many years. He was a soldier and led a military life until he was forty-five years of age or more. He appears in official civil life with his appointment as governor of the eastern part of Hispaniola (Haiti), known as the province of Higüey. Soon afterward he was appointed governor of the island of San Juan (now Porto Rico), which he had already partially explored and conquered from the Indians. This office he held until relieved (c1511) without prejudice, as a result of the decision of the Council of Spain to favor others, principally the heirs of Columbus, for the high positions in the West Indies. Hitherto, Spanish exploration had been directed south and west of the West Indies, but rumors had become current that lands had been found toward the north. Yielding to the wanderlust that possessed these early Spaniards, Ponce asked permission of the King to explore in that direction.

The capitulation or patent granting the authority for the voyage of discovery will be found in *Documentos Ineditos del Archivo de Indias*, XXII. 26. The translation of this patent was rendered for me by Dr. James Alexander Robertson, author of many standard historical works and internationally known as an authority on Spanish-American history. Presented here directly from the pen of Dr. Robertson the reader is assured of having before him a correct interpretation of this important Ponce de Leon document.

## THE PATENT

Whereas you, Juan Ponce de Leon, send to entreat and beg as a favor from me that I grant you permission and authority to go to discover and settle the Islands of Beniny, under certain conditions which will hereafter be declared, therefore, in order to show you favor, I grant you permission and authority so that you may go to discover and settle the island aforesaid, provided that it be not one of those already discovered, and under the conditions and as shall hereafter be set forth, as follows:

Firstly, that, with the ships you wish to take at your own cost and expense you may go to discover, and you shall discover, the island aforesaid; and for it, you may have three years' time counted from the day on which this my patent shall be presented to you, or when the contract shall be made with you in regard to the settlement aforesaid, provided that you shall be obliged to go to discover within the first year of the three years aforesaid, and that on going you may touch at any islands and mainland of the Ocean Sea, both discovered and to be discovered, provided they be not among the islands and mainland of the Ocean Sea belonging to the very serene king of Portugal, our very dear and very beloved son ; and it is understood that you may not take or possess any profit or any other thing from them or any of them lying within the limits stipulated between us and him beyond only the things which should be necessary for your maintenance and provision of ships and men, by paying for them what they should be worth.

Item, That you may take, and there shall be taken on your part in these kingdoms of Castile, or in the said Isla Espanola, for the abovesaid, the ships, sup-

plies, officers, sailors, and men that you should find necessary, by paying for them in full according to custom, in the presence of our officials in Isla Espanola at present residing and who should reside in our House of Trade thereof, and in Castile, in the presence of our officials residing and who should reside in our House of Trade of Seville.

*Item,* In order to show you favor, I order that during the period of the three years, no person may go, nor shall he go, to discover the island of Beniny aforesaid ; and if any one should go to discover it, or should discover it by accident, the stipulations of this my patent shall be carried out with you and not with the person who should thus discover it; and if another discover it, you shall lose nothing of the right which you have therefor, provided that, as aforesaid, you should set sail to go to discover it within the first year aforesaid, and that it will be of no value in any other way ; and provided that it be not one of those of which report and certain knowledge is had.

*Item,* That when you find and discover the island aforesaid in the manner abovesaid, I make you the gift of the government and justice of it for all the days of your life, and for it I give you full power and civil and criminal jurisdiction, with all their incidences and dependencies, and annexes and rights.

*Item,* That when you find the island aforesaid, as abovesaid, you shall be obliged to settle at your cost in the sites and places that you can best do it; and that you may have possession of the houses and farms and settlements and heriditaments that you should make there, and of the gain you should have in the island aforesaid, in accordance with the provisions of this contract.

*Item,* That, if fortresses should have to be built in the island aforesaid, they must be and shall be at

our cost, and we shall place therein our wardens, as we should see best fulfils our service; and if, while the forts aforesaid are being built, you should build any house or houses for habitation and for defense from the Indians, these shall be your own ; and if there should be need thereof for our service, you shall have to give them on being paid their value.

Item, That I shall give you, and by the present I do give you, for the space of twelve years, counted from the day on which you should discover the island of Beniny aforesaid, the tenth of all the revenues and profits belonging to us in the island aforesaid, if this is not from the tithes of our profits or in any other manner whatsoever.

Item, That the allotment of the Indians who should be in the island aforesaid, shall be made by the person or persons who should be appointed by me, and in no other manner.

Item, That I shall order you, and by the present I do order you, that the Indians who should be in the island aforesaid, shall be allotted in accordance with the persons there should be [in your expedition] ; and that this be observed and that the first discoverers be provided for before any other persons; and that all the preference that should conveniently be shown in this be given to them.

Item, That I grant for the space of the ten years aforesaid that those persons who should go to discover the island aforesaid and who should settle on that voyage, enjoy the gold and other metals and profitable things which should be in the island aforesaid, without paying us from them other fees or tithes the first year; in the second, the ninth part; in the third, the eighth part; in the fourth, the seventh part ; in the fifth, the sixth part; and the other five years after that paying the fifth, in accordance with and in the form and manner in which it is now

paid in the Isla Espanola; and that the other settlers who should go later, who are not included among the discoverers should pay the fifth from the first year; for I order another exemption to be given to the latter instead of that from gold.

**Item,** To show greater benefit and favor to you, the said Juan Ponce de Leon, it is my will and pleasure that you are to have the government and settlement of all the islands lying near the island of Beniny aforesaid which you should discover in your person and at your cost and expense in the manner aforesaid, and which are not among those islands of which information is had, as abovesaid, under the conditions and in the form that is set forth in this my agreement ; and as, by virtue thereof, you are to have of the island aforesaid.

**Item,** That I grant you the title of our adelantado of the island aforesaid, and of the other islands you shall discover in the manner aforesaid.

**Item,** That you collect the gold, if there should be any, in the same way in which it is now collected in the Isla Espanola, or in the form and manner that I shall order.

**Item,** That you can not take in your company, for the aforesaid, any person or persons who are foreigners from outside our domains and seigniories.

**Item,** That for assurance that you, the said Juan Ponce and the persons who should go with you will execute, carry out, and perform and that the contents of this patent which it pertains to you to observe and carry out shall be carried out, performed, and observed, before making the said voyage shall give trustworthy and creditable bonds to the satisfaction of our officials residing in the Isla Espanola.

**Item,** That you, the said Juan Ponce, and the other persons who should go and remain there, shall execute and observe and perform all that is con-

tained in this my said agreement, and every part and parcel of it, and you shall not cause any fraud or deceit, nor shall you give favor, or aid or consent thereto; and if you should learn of any, you will inform us and our officials in our name, under penalty that any person of you who should do the contrary, by that very fact he who does not so act, shall have lost any grace or benefit which he should have from us, and shall pay in his person and goods all the penalties which we should consider it fitting to order executed on the persons and goods of those who should do it, or consent to it, or conceal it.

**Item,** That after having reached the island and learned what is in it, you shall send me a report of it, and another to our officials who reside in the Isla Espanola, so that we may know what should have been done and take the measures fitting to our service.

Therefore, if you, the said Juan Ponce carry out all the abovesaid and every part and parcel of it, and shall have given the said bonds or give and pay the things abovesaid, I promise and assure you by the present to order everything contained in this patent and every part and parcel of it to be observed and carried out, and order our officials who reside in the Isla Espanola that in our name, in accordance with the abovesaid, they should make the said contract and agreement with you and receive the said bonds. For your despatch, I am ordering Don Diego Colon, our admiral and governor of the said Isla Espanola, and our appellate judges and the officials of our treasury who reside there, and all the justices of the said Isla Espanola that they give you all the favor and aid that you should find necessary, and that no impediments be offered you therein or in

any part or parcel of it.

Done in Burgos, February twenty-three, one thousand five hundred and twelve.

I the King

By command of his Highness

Lope Conchillos.

Sealed by the Bishop of Palencia.

### SOURCE AUTHORITY

**ANTONIO DE HERRERA** (1559-1625). In 1592, Philip II of Spain appointed Herrera to the position of official historiographer of the Indies. His monumental work *Historia General de los hechos de los Castellanos en las Islas tierra firme del Mar oceano* appeared in 1601 and contained an inexhaustible mine of facts relating to early Spanish activities in America. ***In it is the only account giving the details of Ponce de Leon's voyage and discovery of Florida.*** His official position allowed him access to original and secret papers, many of which have since been destroyed no doubt.

Although Spanish historians prior to Herrera mentioned the voyage of Ponce de Leon, their accounts are vague and inaccurate in many particulars and appear to have been partly founded on hearsay. Herrera seems to have had before him the original notes or possibly the report Juan Ponce was required to make to the King, now believed to have been destroyed. Now and then a document is found having a bearing upon the voyage, but it is very improbable that an authentic contemporaneous record will ever be discovered which will materially alter Herrera's account. In the original (1601) edition the account is in Decada I, Libro IX, Caps. X & XI, pages (311) 301-305.

I have two translations of Herrera's account in full, made by experienced translators competent to render old Spanish correctly. They vary in style; but are exactly alike in interpreted meaning. The translation used here is by Florence P. Spofford, who rendered it directly from the 1601 edition of Herrera in the Library of Congress.

## HERRERA'S ACCOUNT

*1512\**

Juan Ponce de Leon, finding himself without office, on account of Juan Ceron and Miguel Diaz having been restored to those of the island of San Juan, and seeing himself rich, determined to do something by which to gain honor and increase his estate; and as he had news that there were lands to the northward, he resolved to go to explore toward that part; for which he armed three vessels, well provided with food, men and mariners, which for the purpose of discovery are most necessary. He sailed from the island Thursday, in the afternoon, the 3rd of March, setting out from the harbor of San German. He went to Aguada, in order to set from there his course. The night following he went out to sea; northwest a quarter by north, and the vessels went eight leagues of a day's run, before the sun rose. They sailed on until on Tuesday, the 8th of the said month, they came to anchor at the banks of Babueca, at an island that they call El Viejo, which is in twenty-two and one-half degrees [latitude]. Next day they anchored in an islet of the Lucayos called Caycos. Soon they anchored in another called La Yaguna, in twenty-four degrees. On the 11th of the same month they reached another island called Amaguayo, and there they remained for repairs. They passed on to the island called Manegua, which is in twenty-four and one-half degrees. On the 14th they reached Guanahani, which is in twenty-five degrees and forty minutes, where

---

\*Herrera's running-head date. Modern historians use 1513 as will be explained later.

they made ready one ship to cross the Windward gulf of the islands of the Lucayos. This island Guanahani was the first that the admiral Don Christoval Colon discovered, and where, in his first voyage, he went ashore and named it San Salvador. They set out from here, running Northwest, and on Sunday, the 27th, which was the day of the Feast of the Resurrection, which commonly they call [the feast] 'of Flowers', they saw an island but did not examine it. And Monday, the 28th, they ran fifteen leagues in the same direction, and Wednesday went on in the same manner, and afterward, with bad weather, until the 2nd of April, running West-Northwest, the water diminishing to nine fathoms, at one league from land, which was in thirty degrees and eight minutes [latitude], they ran along beside the coast seeking harbor, and at night anchored near the land in eight fathoms of water. And believing that this land was an island, they named it La Florida, because it had a very beautiful view of many and cool woodlands, and it was level and uniform ; and because, moreover, they discovered it in the time of the Feast of Flowers [Pascua Florida], Juan Ponce wished to conform in the name to these two reasons. He went ashore to get information, and take possession. On Friday, the 8th, they set sail, running in the same direction: and Saturday they sailed to the South a quarter by Southeast; and keeping the same course until the 20th of April, they discovered some huts of Indians, where they anchored: the day following, all three vessels following the seacoast, they saw such a current that, although they had a strong wind, they could not go forward, but rather backward, and it seemed that they were going on well ; and finally it was seen that the current was so great it was more powerful than the wind. The two vessels that found

themselves nearest the land anchored, but the current was so strong that the cables twisted ; and the third vessel, which was a brigantine, which was farther out to sea, could find no bottom, or did not know of the current, and it was drawn away from land, and lost to their sight, though the day was clear with fair weather. Here Juan Ponce went ashore, called by the Indians, who immediately tried to take the boat, the oars, and the arms. In order not to break with them, they suffered it [not wanting] to cause trouble in the land. But, because they struck a seaman in the head with a stick, from which he remained unconscious, they had to fight with them ; they, with their arrows and armed shafts-the points of sharpened bones and fish spines-wounded two Spaniards, and the Indians received little hurt. The night separating them, Juan Ponce regathered the Spaniards after hard work. He set out from there to a stream where he took water and firewood, and stayed awaiting the brigantine. Sixty Indians went there to hinder him. One of them was taken for a pilot, and so that he might learn the language. He gave this stream the name of La Cruz and he left by it a cross hewn from stone, with an inscription; and they did not finish taking water, because it was brackish. On Sunday, the 8th of May, they doubled the cape of La Florida, which they named Cabo de Corrientes, because the water ran so swift there that it had more force than the wind, and would not allow the ships to go forward, although they put out all sails. They anchored behind a cape close to a village called Abaioa. All this coast from Punta de Arracifes as far as this Cabo de Corrientes runs north and south a quarter by southeast, and it is quite clear with a depth of six fathoms; and the cape is in twenty-eight degrees and fifteen minutes. They sailed on

until they found two islands to the south in twenty-seven degrees. The one having an extent of one league they named Santa Marta, and there they found water. On Friday, the 13th of May, they hoisted sail, running along the coast of a sandbank and reef of islands as far as the vicinity of an island that they named Pola, which is in twenty-six and one-half degrees, and between the shoal, the reef of islands, and the mainland, the open sea extends in the form of a bay. On Sunday, the day of the Feast of the Holy Spirit, the 15th of May, they ran along the coast of rocky islets ten leagues, as far as two white rocky islets. To all this line of islands and rocky islets they gave the name of Los Martires because, seen from a distance, the rocks as they rose to view appeared like men who were suffering ; and the name has remained fitting, because of the many that have been lost there since. They are in twenty-six degrees and fifteen minutes. They continued sailing, sometimes to the North and at other times to the Northeast, until the 23rd of May, and on the 24th they ran along the coast to the south (not trying to see if it was mainland) as far as some islets that extended out into the sea. And because it appeared that there was an entrance between them and the coast for the ships, in order to take on water and firewood they stayed there until the 3rd of June, and careened one vessel called the San Christoval. And at this time Indians in canoes repaired there to reconnoiter the Spaniards for the first time. They saw that the Spaniards did not go ashore, although the Indians called them when they raised an anchor to repair it and they thought that they were going away. They put to sea in their canoes and laid hold of the cable to carry away the ship; for which the bark was sent among them and, going ashore, they took four women and broke up

two old canoes. At other times when they repaired there they did not come to a rupture, because they saw no disposition [toward it] but they traded skins and guanin [low gold]. On Friday, the 4th, while awaiting wind to go in search of the chief Carlos, as the Indians on the ships said that he had gold, a canoe came to the boats; and an Indian who understood the Spaniards, who, it was believed, must be from Hispaniola or from another island of those inhabited by the Spaniards, said that they should wait, as the chief wished to send gold in order to trade. And while waiting there appeared at least twenty canoes, and some fastened together by twos. Some went to the anchors, others to the ships, and began to fight from their canoes. Not being able to raise the anchors they tried to cut the cables. An armed bark was sent against them and made them flee and abandon some canoes. They took five and killed some Indians and four were captured. Two of them Juan Ponce sent to the chief that they might tell him that notwithstanding they had killed a Spaniard with two arrow wounds he would make peace with him. The following day the bark went to sound a harbor that was there, and the party went ashore. The Indians arrived and said that the next day the chief would come to trade (but it was a deception). Meanwhile the people and canoes gathered together, and at 11 eighty men in breech-clouts appeared on the ship that was nearest. They fought from the morning until the night without hurt to the Spaniards, because the arrows did not reach them, while on account of the crossbows and artillery shots they dared not draw near, and in the end the Indians retired. The Spaniards after having stayed nine days, on Tuesday, the 14th, resolved to return to Hispaniola and San Juan, with the intention of discovering on the way some islands of which the

Indians that they carried gave them information. They returned to the island, where they took water, and they named it Matanca, from the Indians that they killed. On Wednesday they went in search of the eleven rocky islets that they left to the west. On Thursday and Friday they ran in the same direction until, on Tuesday, the 21st, they reached the rocky islets, which they named Las Tortugas, because in one short time in the night they took, in one of these islands, one hundred and sixty tortoises, and might have taken many more if they had wanted them. They took also fourteen seals, and there were killed many pelicans and other birds that amounted to five thousand.\* On Friday, the 24th, they ran to the southwest a quarter west. On Sunday they sighted land. On Monday they proceeded along the coast, in order to examine it, and on Wednesday they made harbor thereon and dressed the yards and sails, although they were unable to learn what country it was. The greater number considered it Cuba, because they found canoes, dogs, cuttings from knives and from iron tools; and not because anyone knew that it was Cuba, but by the argument that for Cuba they' took that course, and that it ran east and west like it, except that they found themselves eighteen long leagues off the route for it to be Cuba. On Friday they set sail from here in search of Los Martires. On Sunday they reached the island of Achecambei, and passing by Santa Pola and Santa Marta, they reached Chequescha. They sailed as far as some islets that are on the shoals of the Lucayos more to the west, and anchored on them on the 18th of July, where they took on a supply of water. And they gave to them the name La Vieja, from an old Indian woman that they

---

\*That is to say, of the five thousand birds on the island they killed many.

found, and no other person. They are in twenty-eight degrees. The name that La Florida had in the beginning could not be learned in the opinion of its discoverers, because, seeing that that point of land projected so much they considered it as an island; the Indians, as it was the mainland, gave the name of each province and the Spaniards thought that they were deceiving them ; but in the end, because of their importunities, the Indians, said that it was called Cautio, a name that the Lucayos Indians gave to that land because the people of it covered certain parts of their body with palm leaves woven in the form of a plait. On the 25th of July they set out from the islets on the lookout for Bimini, sailing among islands that seemed water-swept. And, being stopped, not knowing by what way to pass with the ships, Juan Ponce sent the bark to examine an island that he considered overflowed and found it to be the island of Bahama. So said the old woman that they carried with them, and Diego Miruelo, the pilot, whom they met with a bark from Hispaniola that was going on its own venture, although others say that by luck they had made port there. They set out Saturday, the 6th of August, by the route they had been following, and until finding the depths they ran Northwest a quarter West as far as an islet of rocks alone at the edge of the depths. They changed course and ran by the edge of the shoals to the South. They changed this course next day, although Bimini was not in that direction. And for fear of the currents that another time were driving the ships to the coast of La Florida or Cautio (as they then called it) they took up their return route for the island of San Juan de Puerto Rico. And having sailed until the 18th of August they found themselves at daybreak two leagues from an island of the Lucayos, and ran three leagues, as far as the

point of this island, where on the 19th they anchored and stayed until the 22nd. From here they delayed four days in arriving at Guanima, because wind and passage failed them. And they turned back from its coast to the island of Gautao; and by storms they were kept engaged there without being able to go from it twenty-seven days, until the 23rd of September. And the bark from the island of Hispaniola that had joined them was lost there, although the people were saved. Having overhauled the vessels, it appearing to Juan Ponce that he had labored much, he resolved, although against his will, to send some one to examine the island of Bimini ; for he wished to do it himself, because of the account he had of the wealth of this island, and especially of that particular spring so the Indians said that restores men from aged men to youths, the which he had not been able to find, by reason of shoals and currents and contrary weather. He sent then, as captain of the ship, Juan Perez de Ortubia, and as pilot Anton de Alaminos. They carried two Indians for pilots through the shoals, because they are so many that one proceeds with much danger because of them. This ship departed on the 17th [27th?] of September, and Juan Ponce the next day for his voyage. And in twenty-one days he arrived within sight of San Juan and went to make harbor in the bay of Puerto Rico; where, after having found Bimini, although not the spring, the other ship arrived with the account that it was a large island, cool, and with many springs and woodlands. The discovery by Juan Ponce of La Florida so ended, without knowledge that it was the mainland ; nor for some years thereafter was that assurance obtained.

## REVIEW

**EARLY MAPS.** Several maps purporting to antedate Ponce de Leon's voyage of 1513 have been found that may be interpreted as crudely outlining the south Atlantic and Gulf coasts of North America, with a projection in the relative position of Florida. Of chief interest among them is the Cantino map, supposed to have been made in 1502. These maps have been widely discussed by eminent historians and cartographers. Some are of the opinion that they are the product of a mapmaker's fancy; others, that they may have been intended to represent the popular conception of another coast, and all treat their authenticity with more or less caution. A voyage of the character indicated would have in that day excited the civilized world to such an extent that a record of it or some reference to it would certainly have been preserved somewhere. No account of any kind, printed or in manuscript, is known. We should naturally suppose that among the early writers one would have had knowledge of such a discovery and would have indicated it; but all give the credit of Florida's discovery to Ponce de Leon, and until it is proven by authentic source record that the white man had been here before he will continue to be credited by history with the honor.

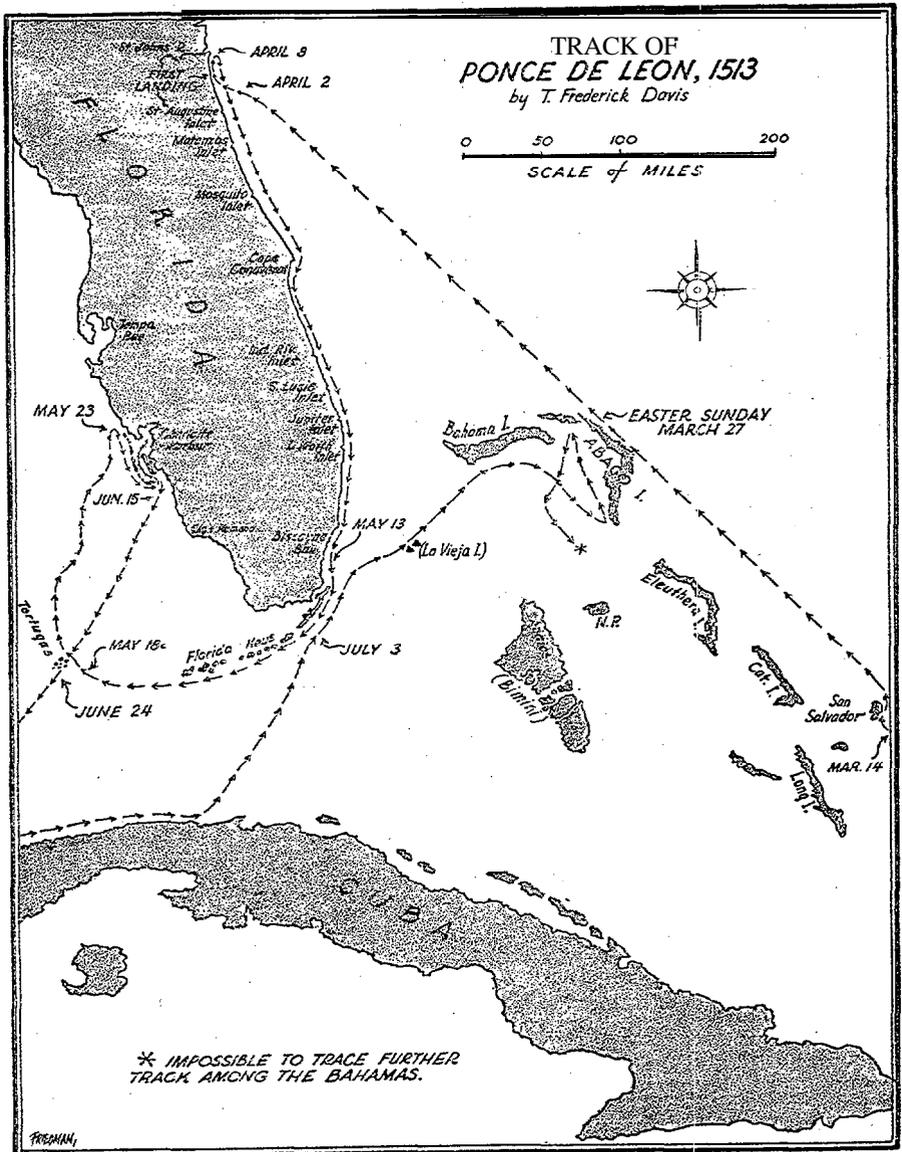
**NAUTICAL AIDS.** At the time of this voyage several devices were in use for ascertaining latitude. They were correct in principle, but in practice great care was necessary for accurate results. These devices were designed for zenith (noon) observations only; consequently, when the sun was obscured at noon no readings could be taken with them. Evidently some method was in use for estimating the speed of vessels. The *compass* had been perfected and its variations were known and understood. Serviceable un-

der all conditions, it was the navigator's main reliance at sea. Sailing directions recorded by these early voyagers therefore cannot be questioned for instrumental error. Fortunately Herrera gave Ponce de Leon's sailing directions minutely and they are of the utmost importance in a study of the voyage.

PURPOSE OF **THE** VOYAGE. According to an Indian legend of the West Indies there existed an island called Bimini<sup>1</sup> (supposed by the Spaniards to be one of the Lucayos, or as we call them now, the Bahamas), which contained a "spring of running water" having the quality of restoring youth to the aged; and to this lure the usual modern account attributes Ponce de Leon's voyage. When we recall that Juan Ponce, still within the zone of the prime of life at 52, had spent years fighting these Indians and was familiar with their characteristics, it is rather difficult to comprehend his expenditure of a large part of his fortune in an expedition just to verify their tradition. His patent authorized him to explore for Bimini and other lands. In the first sentence of his account Herrera states with unmistakable clearness that as Juan Ponce had knowledge that lands had been found to the northward he resolved to go to explore in that direction. This was the main objective of the voyage. The lands to the northward referred to could have been none other than the Cabot and the Cortereal discoveries of the Labrador and Canada coasts, to which the fishermen of Europe afterward found their way and the rumors of which by the process of slow dissemination had sifted through to the West Indies. This fact is partly indicated by the patent prohibiting Juan Ponce from encroaching upon the discoveries of Portugal—the only Portuguese discovery in the north up to that time was that of Cortereal.

<sup>1</sup> Bimini is spelled Beniny in the patent to Ponce de Leon.

THE FIRST VOYAGE



Base map U. S. H. O. Pilot Chart.

### THE DISCOVERY OF FLORIDA

(The following extract from Herrera's account is repeated here for emphasis and easy reference. It is the only historical record concerning Ponce de Leon's actual discovery of Florida and the place of his first landing, what he did there and why he named the land Florida. The interpolations in brackets are mine.)

“ . . . This island Guanahani was the first that the admiral Don Christoval Colon [Columbus] discovered, and where, in his first voyage, he went ashore and named it San Salvador. They set out from here, running Northwest, and on Sunday, the 27th [March], which was the day of the Feast of the Resurrection, which commonly they call [the feast] 'of Flowers', they saw an island but did not examine it. And Monday, the 28th, they ran fifteen leagues in the same direction [northwest], and Wednesday went on in the same manner [northwest], and afterward [northwest], with bad weather, until the 2nd of April, [when] running West-Northwest, the water diminishing to nine fathoms, at one league from land, which was in thirty degrees and eight minutes [latitude], they ran along beside the coast [northerly] seeking harbor, and at night anchored near the land in eight fathoms of water. And believing that this land was an island, they named it La Florida, because it had a very beautiful view of many and cool woodlands, and it was level and uniform: and because, moreover, they discovered it in the time of the Feast of Flowers [Pascua Florida], Juan Ponce wished to conform in the name to these two reasons. He went ashore to get information, and take possession. On Friday, the 8th, they set sail, running in the same direction [northerly] : and Saturday they sailed to the South a quarter by Southeast; and keeping the same course until the 20th of April, they discovered some huts of Indians, where they anchored: . . . ”

**FLORIDA WAS NOT DISCOVERED ON EASTER SUNDAY.** A northwest course from San Salvador, the course that Juan Ponce held, would pass close to and in sight of the island of Abaco, the northernmost of the Bahamas, and the first land that would be seen after leaving San Salvador. It must be remembered that this was long before the invention of the telescope and the low-lying islands to the westward (Eleuthera and Cat), 35 miles away, would not have come into eye view. The land that Ponce de Leon saw on Easter Sunday, March 27, could not possibly have been the Florida coast as generally believed, because the coastal trend between Palm Beach and the mouth of the St. Johns River is NNW and the NW and WNW course held by the vessels during the six days between March 27 and April 2 would have carried them across the peninsula into the Gulf of Mexico. It would appear certain, therefore, that the island Juan Ponce saw on Easter Sunday was Abaco Island, and further indication that this is true will be shown later.

**THE BAD WEATHER.** The vessels ran into "bad weather" the fourth day out from Abaco Island. They were then (estimated from their average sailing speed of two miles an hour as determined presently) some seventy-five miles off Cape Canaveral and near or in the Gulf Stream. "Bad weather" is a relative term and does not necessarily signify a storm; in another place Herrera uses "storm" in its proper sense. The season was too early for tropical hurricanes, and too late for continental cyclones that drift northeasterly across the United States to have a material effect upon the weather as far south as Canaveral. The "bad weather" was evidently the result of an area of high barometric pressure over the north Atlantic—a frequent condition in the spring causing thick weather off the

Florida east coast, often, but not always with strong winds. The ships were not scattered, indicating moderate winds. The Gulf Stream in weather like this is usually "choppy" and doubtless bounced the vessels around considerably, justifying the term "bad weather." The failure of Juan Ponce to mention the Gulf Stream at this time, as he did later on in his voyage down the east coast, was because he could not detect it under such conditions. The wind sequence off the Florida northeast coast as the result of weather of this kind would be northeast, veering gradually through east to south and southwest, usually requiring three days to make the half circle at that season. Thus it is probable that while Ponce de Leon tacked for a time against a side wind, it soon veered to a favorable wind and April 2 when he reached the Florida coast he found an off-shore wind and a moderate surf.<sup>2</sup> I have seen the ocean here like a lake with practically no surf running for several days at a time with light to moderate off-shore winds.

HERRERA'S LATITUDES. At the time of this voyage the astrolabe method of ascertaining latitude had been supplemented by the cross-staff. They provided only for noon observation. The device was held in the hand and angles obtained by direct eye observation, a method requiring a steady nerve and stable base for accurate results. Mariners sometimes went ashore for especially accurate work, as observations with these devices on a pitching or rolling vessel were obtained with extreme difficulty and often resulted in considerable error.<sup>3</sup> Such errors are called "accidental" to distinguish them from instrumental

<sup>2</sup> Based on the author's own knowledge of weather conditions on this coast derived from long service as an official of the U. S. Weather Bureau at Jacksonville.

<sup>3</sup> Justin Windsor, *Christopher Columbus, 1492*, p. 260.

errors. The latitudes assigned by Herrera to those islands of the Bahamas that can now be recognized (supposedly) are not true latitudes, which has led to discussions and attempts to derive a correction to be applied to all of the latitudes mentioned in the account under the assumption that all were wrong. A general correction for accidental errors is impossible of determination ; and a correct instrumental error could be found only after a series of perfect observations at each location under exactly similar conditions. In other words, it cannot be done; and besides, to change all of Herrera's latitudes in proportion to the apparent errors for the Bahamas would produce situations irreconcilable to the meaning of the proven text. Herrera records a total of ten latitudes as follows and in the sequence, named: <sup>4</sup> 22 $\frac{1}{2}$ ° ; 24° ; 24 $\frac{1}{2}$ ° ; 25° 40' ; 30° 8' ; 28° 15' ; 27° ; 26 $\frac{1}{2}$ ° ; 26° 15' ; 28°. When judged carefully six of these ten latitudes have every appearance of being simply approximations or dead-reckoning ; three are in doubt; and only one, the 30° 8' landfall of Ponce de Leon on the Florida coast, has the earmarks of a carefully obtained instrumental reading, which may have been checked by him on shore.

The latitude 30° 8' plays an important part in all of the discussions concerning Ponce de Leon's discovery of Florida. The expression "those old latitudes" is often used, which creates in the mind a doubt as to the possibility of ascertaining true latitude in the time of this voyage. Strange to say no one has attempted to analyze the circumstances in support of the record in this specific case, and to this end let us now examine the circumstantial evidence for a check on the accuracy of the 30° 8' record of Herrera.

---

<sup>4</sup> One degree of latitude here is approximately 68.9 statute miles.

**CIRCUMSTANTIAL VERIFICATION**

**THE NORTHWEST SAILING COURSE FROM SAN SALVADOR.** A northwest course from San Salvador passes close to Abaco Island and reaches the Florida coast near or slightly above the mouth of the St. Johns River. It is the course that Herrera says Ponce de Leon held until April 2, when he turned to west-northwest and at noon (when observations for latitude were taken) was approaching the coast. From Abaco Island the distance is about three hundred and twenty-five miles, which he sailed in six days more or less, or at a rate averaging around two miles an hour. This is what might be expected of vessels of their type in the open sea under varying weather conditions. As they changed course on April 2, and were in sight of land at noon, it follows that they sailed not more than half a day in the new direction. There being only a slight change in direction, northwest to west-northwest, the distance short and the speed slow, the landfall could not have possibly been many miles below the point where they would have reached the coast had they continued the original northwest direction. From these facts it can be easily determined that the contact must lie between St. Augustine Inlet and the mouth of the St. Johns River. Herrera records that it was in  $30^{\circ} 8'$  latitude. True latitude  $30^{\circ} 8'$ ; is almost exactly half way between St. Augustine Inlet and the mouth of the St. Johns.

**HYDROGRAPHIC CONDITIONS.** Storm waves have undoubtedly caused some erosion of this part of the coast since Ponce de Leon's time, but the tendency is to build up again during intervals. The projecting point at the mouth of the St. Johns River on the south side shown on the earliest maps and mentioned in early records was where the sand fields and

dunes near the south jetty are now building up. This point was originally a ridge of high sand dunes with some wooded growth, shutting out the view of the river to a vessel approaching from the south, even from the topmast, until it had rounded the point. In any case, along the beach the shelving or depth of water would remain relatively the same. Herrera records that in latitude 30° 8' Ponce found nine fathoms of water three miles off shore, and modern hydrographic maps show the same.

**NO HARBOR WHERE PONCE LANDED.** Coming in nearer than three miles, Ponce sailed up the beach looking for a harbor, but he did not reach the St. Johns River, as he certainly would have noted a river of that size; nor did he find any other harbor, as his anchorage in eight fathoms, or about 48 feet of water proves. Even with the aid of modern dredging operations there is no such depth of water as that at either St. Augustine or in the St. Johns River. The complete omission of coastal details from Herrera's account indicates that there were none to record, which fits exactly the situation where he says Ponce's landfall was. Ribault, the first to visit this part of the coast after Ponce de Leon, verifies these facts in the report of his voyage. Coming up from the direction of St. Augustine Inlet, Ribault anchored Thursday, April 30, 1562, close under the projecting point on the south side of the St. Johns, of which he wrote as follows:<sup>5</sup>

"And because there appeared to us no sign of any port, about the setting of the sun, we cast anchor again, which done, we did behold to and fro the goodly order of the woods wherewith God hath decked everywhere this land.<sup>6</sup> Then perceiving

<sup>5</sup> See Jeannette Thurber Connor's *Jean Ribaut*, 1927, p. 65.

<sup>6</sup> Note that Ribault also mentioned the woodlands that entered into the naming of Florida by Ponce de Leon.

towards the north a leaping and breaking of the water,<sup>7</sup> as a stream falling out of the land into the sea, forthwith we set again up sail to double the same [the point] while it was yet day. And as we had done so, and passed beyond it, there appeared to us a fair entry of a great river, which caused us to cast anchor again, and tarry near the land, that the next morning we might see what it was."<sup>8</sup>

There is nothing in Herrera's account to indicate that Ponce de Leon's anchorage was off a river or inlet or inside a harbor; to the contrary the inferences that can be drawn from it all point the other way.

**THE INDIANS.** The patent under which Ponce sailed gave detailed instructions as to the Indians that might be found. They were one of the main objects of the voyage and it is natural that he should note them wherever he saw them, which he seems to have done. Failure to mention them at the first landing place consequently indicates that no Indians were found there. This in turn indicates that the landing was neither at the site of St. Augustine nor at the St. Johns River, because at both of these points, as later recorded by the French and the Spanish colonizers (1562-65), there were found established Indian towns, which we may reasonably assume were there in Ponce de Leon's time. Below St. Augustine to Cape Canaveral the Indians inhabited at frequent intervals—a concentration that later led the Spaniards to establish permanent missions for them. Between St. Augustine Inlet and the mouth of the St. Johns was the longest stretch on the upper east

<sup>7</sup> Caused by an ebbing tide over the shoals and sandbars at the mouth of the river.

<sup>8</sup> This was the discovery of the St. Johns River. Ribault named it 'River May, because he actually entered it on the 1st of May. It was among the last of the great sea-flowing rivers of North America to be discovered by white men.

coast for which history does not record Indian habitation. It would seem under the circumstances that the only place where Ponce could have landed without the probability of finding evidence of Indians was along this stretch and in the locality where Herrera said he landed. In passing St. Augustine Inlet the vessels were too far out to be seen by the Indians of Seloy (the ancient Indian town found by Menendez on the site of St. Augustine in 1565), and the landfall north of there was likewise far out of their range of vision. The anchorage was much nearer the St. Johns River and at other seasons of the year some roving Indian from those towns might be expected to see the ships, but Laudonniere says this was the season when these Indians were in the interior on their annual hunt "during which time by no means a man can see one Indian."<sup>9</sup>

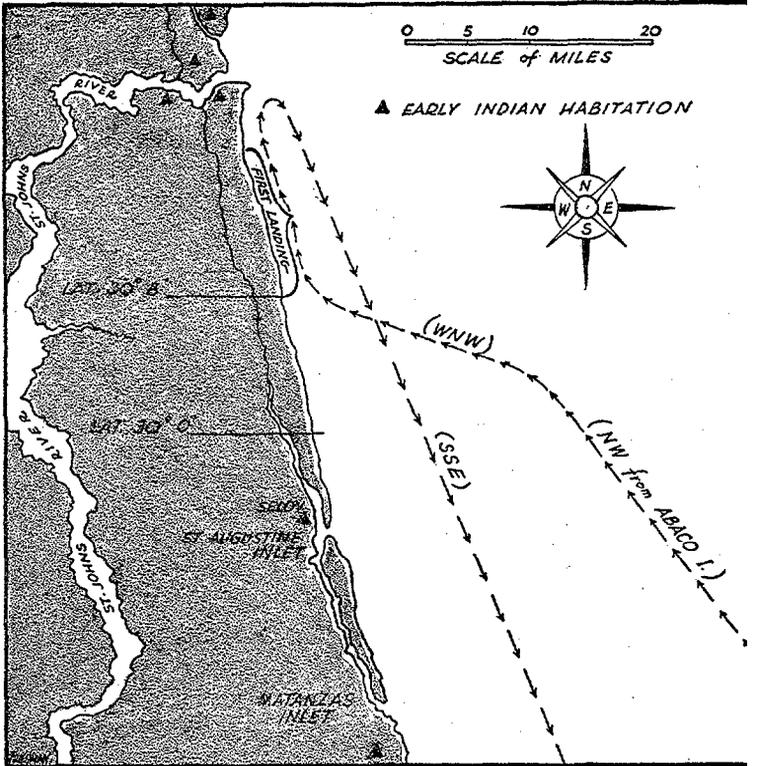
EVIDENCE CONCLUSIVE. With all contributing factors in the determination of the question focusing at true latitude  $30^{\circ} 8'$ , there appears to be no reason for doubting the accuracy of Herrera's record that Ponce de Leon came upon the coast of Florida at that point. The next question is the distance he sailed up the coast before anchoring at dark on April 2, where he afterward went ashore and took possession of the country for Spain.

#### FIRST LANDING IN FLORIDA

ALONG THE COAST LINE. The coastal trend between St. Augustine Inlet and the mouth of the St. Johns River is generally north-northwest. Ponce approached the coast sailing west-northwest and continued along its length until he anchored. It does not seem possible to construe this clear record of Herrera in any other way than that he continued up the coast toward the mouth of the St. Johns.

<sup>9</sup> Translation of Laudonniere's account in Virginia Historical Society Early Voyages to America, 1848, p. 444. Laudonniere was the commander of Fort Caroline, the French settlement on the St. Johns six miles above its mouth, 1564-65.

THE FIRST LANDING IN FLORIDA



Record of Indian town near Matanzas Inlet is inferential.

Ponce de Leon, running to west-northwest, approached the coast on April 2 in latitude  $30^{\circ} 8'$ ; the water lessening to 9 fathoms at one league from land he ran along the length of coast seeking harbor and at dusk anchored off shore in 8 fathoms of water. Here sometime between April 2 and 8 he went ashore to take possession (first landing). On Friday, the 8th, he made sail in the same direction (up the coast), but soon turned back for the next day he was sailing south a quarter by southeast; he sailed in this direction until April 20, when he saw indications of Indians and anchored (below Cape Canaveral-the second recorded anchorage and the first mention of Indians in Florida).

**THE LANDING PLACE.** On April 2, at noon, the vessels were three miles off shore half way between St. Augustine Inlet and the mouth of the St. Johns River. They came in closer and continued up the coast until dark, when they anchored. Dusk in this locality at that season of the year comes about half past six. Allowing say thirty minutes for coming in, making soundings and preparing for anchorage (a very reasonable and proper deduction), there were six hours sailing time along the coast to be considered in determining the distance they sailed before anchoring. The speed of the vessels out at sea has already been estimated at two miles an hour, and it is not probable that here along a strange shore their speed would be greater, as Juan Ponce must be credited with being an experienced seaman too cautious to forge full sail ahead under such circumstances. Sailing six hours at two miles an hour therefore indicates a maximum distance along shore of twelve miles. This is as close a determination as can be constructed from Herrera's record. The place of landing can be designated only as a locality-somewhere along the 12-mile length of beach indicated on the foregoing map, with circumstances favoring the upper part of this stretch.

#### **LANDING CEREMONIES AND ACTIVITIES**

**LANDING CEREMONIES UNKNOWN.** Some time between Saturday night, April 2nd, and Friday, the 8th, Ponce de Leon went ashore to view the country and take possession. No mention is made of any ceremony attendant upon the act of taking possession. This omission of details seems to have been accepted by later writers as an invitation to supply them and this has been done in many elaborate interpretations. The scene of taking possession is

usually pictured with Ponce surrounded by priests and soldiers kneeling in prayer amidst the banners of Church and state, with an audience of interested Indians in the background. Some go so far as to repeat the words used in taking possession, and it has been said that he ended the ceremony with the proclamation that he took possession of the land in the name of Ferdinand and Isabella. Since Isabella had been in her tomb more than eight years, the statement must be wrong. These descriptions may be picturesque, but I can find nothing in the record to support them.

**NO PRIESTS WITH THE EXPEDITION.** There is no evidence that priests or other ecclesiastics were with the expedition. The patent under which Ponce sailed indicated nothing in this particular, nor does Herrera or any other Spanish historian mention them. The voyage was an expeditionary one and did not necessarily warrant the presence of priests, whose purpose would have been largely to Christianize the Indians. There were situations during the voyage where the presence of a priest aboard would naturally have been indicated had there been one.

**ACTIVITIES UNKNOWN.** With the exception of the simple statement that Ponce went ashore for information and to take possession, nothing is known historically of what the Spaniards did in the five days they remained at the first anchorage. Any interpretation can be only on the basis of what Ponce's subsequent activities indicate, from which it would appear that he remained in the immediate vicinity of his vessels without any attempt to explore the country. It may be inferred with at least a semblance of backing that the purpose was to await the appearance of Indians (who, however, did not appear), in the meantime making repairs to

sails and rigging, which doubtless needed attention as a result of the rough weather through which the vessels had just passed.

### WHY NAMED FLORIDA

**"BECAUSE IT HAD A VERY BEAUTIFUL VIEW OF MANY AND COOL WOODLANDS, AND IT WAS LEVEL AND UNIFORM":** The floral decorations usually added originated with Washington Irving, the first American writer upon the subject. Mr. Irving expanded "many and cool woodlands" into "The whole country was in the fresh bloom of spring ; the trees were gay with blossoms, and the fields covered with flowers. "<sup>11</sup> Woodbury Lowery attempted to identify the flowers, though he explained that his list was made up from Bartram's record of the flora of Florida. <sup>12</sup> I have made many visits to that part of the coast around the first of April and have yet to see more than what Herrera said Ponce de Leon saw. The woodlands were probably much denser then than now, as much of the timber has been cut out for commercial purposes.

**"AND BECAUSE, MOREOVER, THEY DISCOVERED IT IN THE TIME OF THE FEAST OF FLOWERS [PASCUA FLORIDA]."** In the time of the Feast of Flowers means during the season of Easter. Had the discovery been made on Easter Day, March 27th, Herrera unquestionably would have said so in this connection, as that was the most important of all the feast days with the Spaniards. This is further evidence that the land Ponce de Leon saw on Easter Sunday was Abaco Island of the Bahamas as already discussed, and that the discovery of Florida was on Saturday,

<sup>11</sup> *Voyages and Discoveries of the Companions of Columbus-Ponce de Leon, Chapter Seven.*  
<sup>12</sup> *Spanish Settlements, I, pp. 138-9.*

April 2, 1513, which was yet in the season of Easter as celebrated in that day. Emphasis has been placed on this fact because practically all histories and encyclopedias state that Florida was discovered on Easter Sunday.

### **JUAN PONCE TURNS BACK**

**DOWN THE COAST LINE.** Leaving his first anchorage Juan Ponce started up the coast, but from a cause unknown and impossible to surmise he sailed only a short distance, then turned back and headed south-southeast parallel to the coast line. In doing so he just missed a most important discovery, for had he sailed a little farther and rounded the south cape of the St. Johns River, he would have seen the river and known from its size that he had discovered the mainland instead of an island as he imagined Florida to be throughout the voyage. The vessels worked their way southward, around Cape Canaveral, where they came in contact with the Gulf Stream. Somewhere below Canaveral Juan Ponce anchored. In this neighborhood he made his second recorded landing in Florida and it was here that he saw the first evidence of Florida Indians.

**BISCAYNE BAY, FLORIDA KEYS AND TORTUGAS.** Ponce de Leon continued to follow the coast southward, anchoring here and there. He evidently examined Biscayne Bay, for Herrera mentions a bay north of the Florida Keys. He sailed along the entire length of the Florida Keys and on out to the Tortugas, in the vicinity of which he changed course to north.

That Ponce de Leon reached the Tortugas at this time unlocks mysteries that hitherto have been impossible for historians to solve. Describing the voyage Herrera indicates that Juan Ponce was at Biscayne Bay on May 13, and was sailing along the

Florida Keys (Martires) on the 15th, "and kept on sailing, sometimes to the north and other times to the northeast." This has been generally taken to mean that he sailed through one of the openings between the Keys and set the north-northeasterly course from there, which would have carried the vessels to the coast east of Cape Sable and not to the west coast at all, a circumstance that could not be reconciled with the text following. The fact that Ponce de Leon "kept on sailing" to the Tortugas before turning north is found in Herrera's statement "On Wednesday [June 15] they went on the lookout for the eleven rocky islets that they left to the west. On Thursday and Friday they ran in the same direction until, on Tuesday, the 21st, they reached the rocky islets, **which they named Las Tortugas.**" From this we learn that Juan Ponce had passed the Tortugas before and had now returned to them (from a point on the west coast of the Florida peninsula as will be shown presently). This accounts for the "sometimes to the north and other times to the northeast" sailing directions that have always puzzled historians. Passing the Tortugas "to the west" about May 18, Ponce de Leon kept his north course for a time and not finding the Florida mainland, which he had not seen for some days, he turned to northeast, then back to north, and again to northeast, etc., in order to find it, for he knew that Florida had a southern or western coast somewhere.

#### ON THE WEST COAST

**PINE ISLAND AND CHARLOTTE HARBOR.** Had Ponce de Leon sailed continuously north from the Tortugas he would have sighted the coast at or near Tampa Bay. Had he taken a straight northeast di-

rection he would have come upon it in the vicinity of Cape Romano. It follows then that under any circumstances the actual contact was within these limits. Let us examine the coast between Tampa Bay and Cape Romano, with Herrera's full description and a modern detailed map of the Florida peninsula before us, It does not require a lengthy study to convince anyone that the only situation corresponding in every way to the description is the region around Charlotte Harbor. Juan Ponce came upon the coast just north of Charlotte Harbor on May 23, and the next day was sailing southerly along the outlying islands, speaking of them as the "islets that extended out into the sea." He found the passage for vessels next to the coast into Carlos Sound and anchored off Pine Island, which he afterward named Matanca, because in a fight with the Indians there several Indians and a Spaniard were killed.<sup>13</sup> In this haven he careened the San Christoval - the only vessel of the fleet whose name has been preserved. Later he sent a boat to examine and sound a harbor nearby-Charlotte Harbor.<sup>14</sup> Now back to the sailing directions: The zig-zag north and northeast course that Ponce de Leon set would result in an average NNE track and we should look in that general direction from the Tortugas for the landfall. Charlotte Harbor is directly NNE of the Tortugas.

<sup>13</sup> No other death is mentioned among the Spaniards on the voyage. This man then was the first white man to die in Florida and perhaps in the United States.

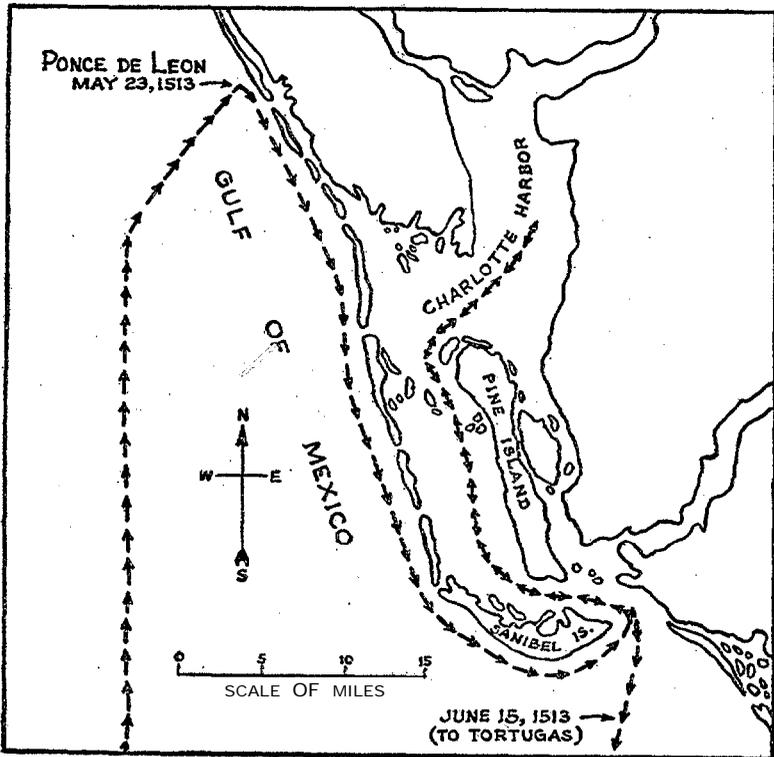
<sup>14</sup> These early navigators made the same distinction between a bay and a harbor that we do now.

Our examination of the coast located the landfall with reasonable certainty by the description of the locality and the sailing directions now come in to verify it. The evidence is indisputable, and establishes the fact that Ponce de Leon on his voyage of 1513 did not reach a point on the west coast of the Florida peninsula farther north than the 27th parallel; and further, that his activities on that coast on this voyage were confined to the region shown by the accompanying map.

**PONCE DE LEON LEAVES FLORIDA.** Juan Ponce sailed from Matanca out into the Gulf and headed for the Tortugas. It required nearly a week for him to find them, indicating calms or light airs en route. He named these islands Las Tortugas, because he took in them many turtles, seals (manatee?) and sea birds. From the Tortugas he set a southwesterly course, came upon the extreme western end of Cuba and examined its northern coast for some (distance. From Cuba he sailed back along the Florida Reys and on to the Bahamas again.

**EXPLORATION OF FLORIDA CONFINED TO THE COAST.** Nowhere can it be inferred from Herrera's account that Ponce de Leon made any attempt to explore the country away from the immediate coast. His landings everywhere appear to have been for purposes other than exploration, and, after the first landing to take possession, chiefly to get water and firewood for the vessels or to meet the Indians seen on shore, until he came upon the west coast, where at Charlotte Harbor, he seems to have examined the region with a thought of future settlement. The Spaniards associated gold with mountains and as Florida was level and uniform as far as the eye could reach it did not have the appearance of a gold-producing land. At Charlotte Harbor, however, the

AT CHARLOTTE HARBOR



Juan Ponce sailed along the Florida Keys and westward as far as the Tortugas, in the neighborhood of which, about May 18, he turned to a "sometimes north and at other times northeast" course that carried him to the west coast of the Florida peninsula on May 23rd. On the 24th he was sailing southerly along a chain of islands "that extended out into the sea" and coming to a passage for vessels between these islands and the coast he entered and anchored off an island inside. In this haven he repaired the San Christoval. He was in the vicinity three weeks and examined and sounded a harbor nearby. On June 15 he sailed out into the Gulf and headed for the Tortugas again. (The 'upper border of this map represents the 27th parallel of latitude.)

Indians had. a specimen of guanin, an inferior quality of gold, and Ponce de Leon understood from them that a chief of that neighborhood named Carlos<sup>15</sup> had gold in his possession. It is evident that the implacable fury of the Indians was engendered by every contact with them. Four battles between them and the Spaniards are recorded—two on the lower east coast and two in the Charlotte Harbor region. The cause of the hostility is not explained and must find its solution in the imagination. Students interested in the subject will find in Herrera the first account of the Indians in continental United States, with a description of their weapons and mode of fighting, and enough to form some judgment of their character and habits. They did not fear the white men and only the noise of artillery seemed to frighten them.

This voyage may be properly divided into a primary and a secondary stage. The primary stage was the hope of discovering new lands with gold mines and Indian slaves to work them, the dream of all of the prominent Spaniards of that day. It was Ponce de Leon's main design. He discovered Florida, followed its coast on the east side and visited the west coast far enough up for him to form the impression that it was a point of land which projected so much that he thought it must be an island. We have followed his track around Florida guided by Herrera's remarkable record and have observed, what must have been true, his hardships and discouragements resulting from failure to find the material things sought or any indication of them. We come now to the other stage of the voyage, the

---

<sup>15</sup> This is the first mention of this famous Florida Indian name. It was probably not the real Indian name, but was so interpreted by the Spaniards from the guttural sound of the Indian pronunciation.

secondary or so-called romantic phase, when Juan Ponce, now in the Bahamas again on his way home, starts his search for Bimini as required by his patent and to satisfy himself of the truth or falsity of the Indian tradition about it.

#### **JUAN PONCE SEARCHES FOR BIMINI**

**AMONG THE BAHAMAS.** Upon his return to the Bahamas after leaving Florida, Juan Ponce found an old Indian woman on a lonely island and took her aboard as a guide; her name is not mentioned, though he named the island La Vieja, meaning "old woman." After a while he reached an island that the old woman said was called Bahama. Sailing from island to island in the Bahamas, confused by sea currents that he had not seen in the spring, and afterward beset by storms (hurricane influences probably), Ponce de Leon tired of the quest and sailed for Porto Rico the latter part of September, leaving one of his vessels in the Bahamas to continue the search for Bimini.

**BIMINI FOUND.** In time the vessel left in the Bahamas returned to Porto Rico and reported that Bimini had been found ; that it was a large island, well wooded and watered, but contained no spring that "restores old men to youths." Bimini is supposed to have been Andros Island.

And says Herrera, "discovery by Juan Ponce of La Florida so ended, without knowledge that it was the mainland ; nor for some years thereafter was that assurance obtained.

#### **THE INDIAN LEGEND**

**BELIEVED BY MANY, BUT NOT BY ALL.** The Bimini tradition is the oldest North American legend, as it

was in after years that legends of the Vikings in the North began to be considered. It is difficult to determine whether it was really a legend or something manufactured by the Indians to induce the Spaniards to leave. The most complete account of the mythical spring was written by Peter Martyr, probably before the result of Ponce de Leon's voyage became known. Martyr mentions Bimini under another name. His account follows :

"Among the which [the Lucayos or Bahamas] there is an Island, about three hundred and XXV. leagues from Hispaniola, as they say which have searched the same, named **Boiuca** or **Agnaneo**, in the which is a continual spring of running water of such marvelous virtue, that the water thereof being drunk, perhaps with some diet, maketh old men young again. And here must I make protestation to your holiness, not to think this to be said lightly or rashly. For they have so spread this rumor for a truth throughout all the court, that not only all the people, but also many of them whom wisdom or fortune hath divided from the common sort, think it to be true. But if you shall ask my opinion herein, I will answer that I will not attribute so great power to nature, but that God hath no less reserved this prerogative to himself, than to search the hearts of men, or to give substance to privation (that is) being to no being."<sup>16</sup>

THE "FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH." The nature of this legend kept it alive during the credulous age, but after Ponce de Leon's voyage little attention was paid to it until comparatively modern writers, seeking a romantic theme, revived it and centered it

<sup>16</sup> Peter Martyr, *The Decades of the New World or West India*, Second Decade., Tenth Book-Eden's translation. The Second Decade was addressed to "The Bishop of Rome, the tenth of that name", (Pope Leo X)

around Juan Ponce like a veil through which the light of history was not allowed to penetrate. And so it has come about that in the popular mind a "fountain of youth" is inseparably associated with the voyage to the exclusion of almost everything else, which elevates it to an importance far greater than it deserves historically.<sup>17</sup> Though the tradition properly belongs to the Bahama Islands, where Bimini was supposed to be, it is now generally applied to Florida. There is no evidence that Ponce de Leon associated Bimini with the land that he discovered on April 2 ; had he entertained such an idea he would have expressed it at the time of the discovery without bestowing a new name upon the country. The romance of Ponce de Leon's land of Florida is found not in a visionary "fountain of youth", but in its true history of discovery, settlement and subsequent development; in its climate and sunshine, and in its natural and man-made wonders.

#### YEAR OF DISCOVERY WAS 1513

It was not until the 1850's that any question was raised concerning the date, 1512, given by Herrera as that of Ponce de Leon's first voyage to Florida. In his researches a German historian, Oscar Peschel, questioned the date and assumed that the voyage was in 1513, because Easter Sunday of that year fell on March 27, as recorded by Herrera, and did not in 1512. Sometime in the 1880's this question came up in the general press of the country, I think originally in the *Saturday Evening Post*, and brought on a wide discussion by historians and historical magazines. About the same time Henry

<sup>17</sup> See Charles B. Reynolds, *The Landing of Ponce de Leon, A Historical Review*. 1934.

Harrisse published his *Discovery of North America*, which advanced Peschel's idea of the 1513 date. The investigation proceeded and Juan Ponce was accounted for during the summer of 1512 as being engaged elsewhere. Finally the numerous dates given in Herrera's account were considered and the week days and feast days mentioned therein were checked with the modern calendar and found to agree in no case with the calendar for 1512, but did agree in every case with the calendar for 1513. This brought on a consideration of old style and new style dates. Though simple in fact, the explanation of the conversion of one calendar to another using a different date to begin the year is a confusing one generally and will be excused here with the statement that the result of the investigation convinced historians and scholars that according to our present system of chronological reckoning the year of the voyage was 1513. This will explain why earlier histories give 1512 as the year of Ponce de Leon's voyage and discovery of Florida, whereas modern historians (subsequently to the 1880's) use the corrected year 1513.

#### FIRST FLORIDA NAMES

GIVEN OR MENTIONED BY JUAN PONCE IN 1513.  
 Florida: The oldest European name for any part of the United States. *Punta de Arracifes*: Cape Canaveral. *River La Cruz*: On the lower east coast. *Cape Corrientes* : Extreme eastern part of the coast near Palm Beach. *Abaioa*: Indian village in the neighborhood of Cape Corrientes. *Chequescha*:<sup>18</sup> Biscayne Bay. *Santa Marta* and *Pola*: Islands off

<sup>18</sup> This, I believe, is the original Indian name for Biscayne Bay, as derived from the circumstances of Ponce de Leon's two visits there in 1513. Fifty years later Menendez called the region Tequesta, and Herrera on his map of 1601 shows it as a coastal indentation called Jequesta.

Biscayne Bay. **Martires:** Florida Keys. **Achecam-  
bei:** One of the Florida Keys, possibly Matecumbe.  
**Tortugas** : As named now. **Matanca:** Pine Island  
at Charlotte Harbor. Carlos: Indian chief presum-  
ably of the Charlotte Harbor-Fort Myers region.  
Cautio: Name for Florida among the Bahama  
Indians.

