

## RECONCILIATION: 470 YEARS AFTER DE SOTO ENTERED ALABAMA

22 January 2011 – De Soto Caverns, Childersburg AL  
23 January 2011 – Cloud’s Cove Cowboy Church, Huntsville AL

### Native American Reconcilers:

Negiel Bigpond – Yuchi/Creek  
Jeanne Allen – Choctaw  
Pat & Gary Walker – Creek & Cherokee

### Facilitators:

Tom Dooley (Path Clearer)  
Al Mathis (De Soto Caverns & Birmingham Prayer Furnace)  
Paul Hughes (Birmingham Prayer Furnace)  
Miles Albright (Cloud’s Cove Cowboy Church)  
Dale Cathey (Servants of Christ & Path Clearer)



Spanish Florida (La Florida)  
1513 - 1763



Alabama  
1895- present

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### **Hernando De Soto (c.1496/1497–1542) [© 2011 Wikipedia]**



**SUMMARY:** Hernando de Soto had been one of Francisco Pizarro's chief lieutenants in the Spanish conquest of the Inca Empire, and had returned to Spain a very wealthy man. He was appointed *adelanto* of *la Florida* and governor of Cuba, and assembled a large expedition to 'conquer' *la Florida*. On May 30, 1539, de Soto and his companions landed in Tampa Bay, where they found Juan Ortiz, who had been captured by the local Indians

a decade earlier when he was sent ashore from a ship searching for Narváez. Ortiz passed on the Indian reports of riches, including gold, to be found in Apalachee, and de Soto set off with 550 soldiers, 200 horses, and a few priests and friars. De Soto's expedition lived off the land as it marched. De Soto followed a route further inland than that of Narváez's expedition, but the Indians remembered the earlier disruptions caused by the Spanish, and were wary when not outright hostile. De Soto seized Indian men to serve as guides and porters, and Indian women to serve as consorts for his men.

The expedition reached Apalachee in October, and settled into the chief Apalachee town of Anhaica for the winter, where they found large quantities of stored food, but little gold or other riches. In the spring de Soto set out to the northeast, crossing what is now Georgia and South Carolina into North Carolina, then turned westward, crossed the Great Smoky Mountains into Tennessee, then marched south into Georgia. Turning westward again, the expedition crossed **Alabama**. They lost all of their baggage in a fight with Indians near Choctaw Bluff on the Alabama River, and spent the winter in Mississippi. In May 1541 the expedition crossed the Mississippi River and wandered through present-day Arkansas, Missouri and possibly Kansas before spending the winter in Oklahoma. In 1542 the expedition headed back to the Mississippi River, where de Soto died. Three hundred and ten survivors returned from the expedition in 1543.

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## 1540 – De Soto Enters Alabama [© 2011 Wikipedia]

From their winter location in the western panhandle of Florida, having heard of gold being mined "toward the sun's rising," the expedition turned north-east through what is now the modern state of Georgia. Recently archaeological finds were made at a remote, privately owned site near the Ocmulgee River in Telfair County, Georgia. These included nine glass trade beads, some of which bear a chevron pattern believed to be indicative of the de Soto expedition. Six metal objects were also found, including a silver pendant and some iron tools. The expedition continued on to present-day South Carolina. The expedition was received there by a female chief (*Cofitachequi*), who turned over her tribe's pearls, food and anything else the Spaniards wanted. The expedition found no gold, however, other than pieces from an earlier coastal expedition (presumably that of Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón.)

De Soto headed north into the Appalachian Mountains of North Carolina, where he spent a month resting the horses while his men searched for gold. De Soto then entered eastern Tennessee. At this point, De Soto either continued along the Tennessee River to enter **Alabama** from the north (according to John R. Swanton), or turned south and entered northern Georgia (according to Charles M. Hudson). Although the maps used on this page (and others) depict Charles Hudson's proposed route, it has not yet been substantiated by archaeological evidence. The route that Swanton proposed in 1939 is still generally accepted by most archaeologists and by the U.S. government as the actual route of the de Soto expedition.



De Soto's expedition spent another month in the Coosa chiefdom before turning south toward the Gulf of Mexico to meet two ships bearing fresh supplies from Havana. Along the way, de Soto was led into *Mauvila* (or *Mabila*), a fortified city in southern **Alabama**. The Mobilian tribe, under Chief Tuskaloosa, ambushed de Soto's army. Other sources suggest de Soto's men were attacked after attempting to force their way into a cabin occupied by Tuskaloosa. The Spaniards managed to fight their way out and retaliated by burning the city to the ground. During the nine-hour encounter, about two-hundred Spaniards died, and 150 more were badly wounded, according to the chronicler Elvas. Twenty more died during the next few weeks. The Native American warriors of that area—between 2,000 and 6,000 of them—died fighting in the fields, by fire in the city, or by suicide.

Even though the Spaniards won the battle, it was a Pyrrhic victory, as they had lost most of their possessions and forty horses. The Spaniards were wounded, sickened, surrounded by enemies and without equipment in an unknown territory. Fearing that word of this would reach Spain if his men reached the ships at Mobile Bay, de Soto led them away from the Gulf Coast, into Mississippi, most likely near present-day Tupelo, where they spent the winter.

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### 1542 – De Soto's death [© 2011 Wikipedia]

De Soto died of a semitropical fever on May 21, 1542, in the native village of Guachoya (historical sources disagree as to whether de Soto died near present-day MacArthur, Arkansas or in Louisiana) on the western banks of the Mississippi. Before his death, de Soto chose his former maestro de campo (roughly, field commander) Luis de Moscoso Alvarado to assume command of his expedition.

Since de Soto had encouraged the local natives to believe that he was an immortal sun god (as a ploy to gain their submission without conflict), his men had to conceal his death. They hid his corpse in blankets weighted with sand and sank it in the middle of the Mississippi River during the night. Native Americans had already become skeptical of de Soto's deity claims. Another possible location for his death is near present day Lake Village, Arkansas.

### ***1542 – De Soto's death*** [© 2003-2008 Sons of the South]

*As he had declared to the Indians, who were sun-worshippers, that he was a son of the sun, and that Christians could not die, it was thought wise to conceal his death from the pagans. He was secretly buried in the gateway of the Spanish camp. The Indians knew he was sick. He was not to be seen, and they saw a new-made grave. They looked upon it and pondered. Moscoso ordered the body to be taken up at the dead of night. He was wrapped in mantles in which sand had been sewed up, taken in a boat to the middle of the great river, and there dropped to the bottom in 19 fathoms of water. Herrera says it was sunk in a hollow live-oak log. When the Indian chief asked Moscoso for De Soto, that leader replied, "He has ascended to heaven, but will return soon."*

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### ***Examples of Treachery & Cruelty*** [© 2003-2008 Sons of the South]

*At the very outset the expedition met with determined opposition from the dusky inhabitants, but De Soto pressed forward towards the interior of the fancied land of gold. He wintered east of the Flint River, near Tallahassee, on the borders of Georgia, and in March, 1540, broke up his encampment and marched northward, having been told that gold would be found in that direction. He reached the Savannah River, at Silver Bluff. On the opposite side of the stream, in (present) Barnwell county, lived an Indian queen, young, beautiful, and a maiden, who ruled over a large extent of country. In a richly wrought canoe, filled with shawls and skins and other things for presents, the dusky cacica glided across the river, and with kind words welcomed the Spaniards and offered them her services. Presents were exchanged. A magnificent string of pearls was hung upon her neck. This she drew over her head and hung it around the neck of De Soto as a token of her regard. Then she invited him and his followers to cross over to her village. In canoes and on log-rafts they passed the stream, and, encamping in the shadows of mulberry-trees, they soon received a bountiful supply of venison and wild turkeys. There they enjoyed the young queen's hospitality until May, and when they departed De Soto requited the kindness of the royal maiden with foul treachery. He carried her away a prisoner, and kept her near his person as a hostage for the good behavior of her people towards the Spaniards. She finally escaped, and returned home a bitter enemy of the perfidious white people.*

*De Soto crossed the beautiful country of the **Cherokees**, and penetrated the fertile **Coosa** region, where the Spaniards practiced the most cruel treachery towards the friendly natives. De Soto was rewarded in kind not long afterwards, and in a terrible battle with*

*the **Mobilians**, on the site of Mobile, the expedition was nearly ruined. Turning northward with the remnant of his forces, he fought his way through the **Chickasaw** country, and reached the upper waters of the Yazoo River late in December, where he wintered, in great distress. Moving westward in the spring, he discovered the Mississippi River, in all its grandeur, in May, 1541. It was near the Lower Chickasaw Bluff, in Tunica county, Miss. Crossing the mighty stream, De Soto went westward in his yet fruitless search for gold, and spent a year in the country towards the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains. Returning to the Mississippi in May, 1542, he died of a fever on its banks on the 21st.*

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## **Spanish Florida / La Florida** [© 2011 Wikipedia]

Spanish Florida (Spanish: *La Florida*) refers to the Spanish territory of Florida, which formed part of the Viceroyalty of New Spain, the Captaincy General of Cuba, and the Spanish Empire. Originally extending over what is now the **southeastern United States, but with no defined boundaries**, *la Florida* was a component of the Spanish colonization of the Americas and the expansion of the Spanish Empire. Wide-ranging expeditions were mounted into the hinterland during the 16th century, but Spain never exercised complete control over *la Florida* outside an area of what is now the State of Florida, southern Georgia, **southern Alabama**, southeastern Louisiana, and other areas along the northern coast of the Gulf of Mexico.

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## **Significance of 470 Years**

De Soto arrived in central Alabama in late 1540, which represents 470 years.

The emergent Hebrew “nation” was in captivity 430 years in Egypt (Exodus 12:40-41), followed by another 40 years of wandering in the desert after the Exodus (Deuteronomy 2:7). So, they spent a total of 470 years in difficult and disheartening conditions prior to entering the “Promised Land” of Canaan, a verdant land “flowing with milk and honey”.

We believe that the completion of the 470 years since Hernando de Soto arrived in Alabama is significant for God’s redemptive purposes over Alabama and the larger region of the Southeastern USA. Very few of the descendents of the *Civilized Tribes* of the Southeast remain in Alabama, which included in this particular state the “4 C” tribes – Creek, Choctaw, Cherokee, and Chickasaw.

We are honored to be hosting Negiel Bigpond, the co-leader of the Two Rivers Native American Training Center [www.2-rivers.com]. He is Euchee (or Yuchi), who were Native American occupants east of the Tennessee River (i.e., a large portion of AL) prior to the forced removals westward during the 1830’s during the Jackson administration. The Euchee are part of the Muskogee Creek Nation (OK). Thus, Negiel is a descendent

of Aboriginal peoples from Alabama. He has a special ministry emphasis devoted to reconciliation, and he has been asked to help lead our weekend.

Negiel's colleague at Two Rivers, Jeanne Allen (Choctaw), will also be joining us in ministry, in addition to Pat Walker (Muskogee Creek) and her husband Gary Walker (Cherokee). They lead Firestarters Ministries [[www.firestarters-ministries.org](http://www.firestarters-ministries.org)]. Thus, we'll have out-of-state representatives of various First Nations of the *Civilized Tribes* ministering in song, dance, and word, and led by Negiel Bigpond.

Regarding the two chosen sites in Alabama -- *De Soto Caverns* in Childersburg is the historic mythic "womb" of the Creek Nation. It is also a sacred site containing Native American burials. Furthermore, Childersburg is the longest continuously occupied settlement in the USA since the Spaniards' arrival. *Cloud's Cove Cowboy Church* near Huntsville is located near the convergence of Tennessee River and the Flint River, and is immediately adjacent to a known Native American burial site.

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