

Patapsco River History

Welcome to NOAA's Patapsco River interpretive buoy, located at latitude 39 degrees 9.11 minutes north longitude 76 degrees 23.47 minutes west.

It lies in the upper Chesapeake just east of the intersections of the Craig Hill and Brewerton ship channels entering in the Patapsco River in Baltimore's harbor from the south and north, respectively. The buoy sits in 20 feet of water surrounded by shallower lumps that would have been large oyster reefs when Captain John Smith and his crew arrived here, June 12, 1608, during their first exploratory voyage up the bay that summer.

After leaving the Eastern Shore and crossing the bay to the Calvert Cliffs Smith and his crew sailed North in this direction. "We passed" he said "many shallow creeks" and that would be including today's West, Roads, South, Severn and Magothy Rivers, "but the first we found navigable for a ship we called Bolas. For the to clay in many places under the cliffs by the high water mark did grow up in red and white knots which made us thinke it Bole-Armoniack and Terra sigillata.", which were medicinal clays of the day. Over the next 2 days captain and crew continued up river to today's Elkridge placing a cross there, naming the spot Bland's Content and then coming back down stream to map the river with remarkable accuracy.

They found no natives during this time, apparently this part of the Chesapeake western shore was a buffer zone between the Patuxent tribes to the south and the powerful, warlike Massawomeck and Susquehannock people to the north.

By now the crew had been living in the Discovery Barge for 2 weeks, they were tired of rowing, their food had spoiled, and they saw no end to the waterway they were exploring. As Smith directed them north into the Gunpowder River they begged him to return to Jamestown. The Captain responded with a stirring speech " you cannot say but that I have shared with you the worst which has passed. Worst then is passed is not likely to happen and there is as much danger to return as to proceed, regain therefore your old spirits. But two or three days we expected wind and weather" he said, meaning that they suffered through wind and weather and several crew members fell sick so the captain reluctantly turned the Discovery Barge south. Two days later, however, the crew would indeed regain their old spirits when they reached the mouth of the Potomac. But that is a story for another buoy placed there. We note however, that Smith and his 2nd crew passed this point at this buoy again on July 29th headed for the Susquehanna on the 2nd voyage up the bay and on August 8th on their way back down to the Patuxent River.