



Nota De Soto

■ SUMMER 2026 ■

Who Are We?

Friends of De Soto National Memorial, Inc. was founded in 2008 with the purpose of supporting the National Park Service's De Soto National Memorial. We are a private non-profit corporation organized under the laws of the State of Florida.

Our purpose and mission statement:
"To initiate, promote, and support the educational, historical, interpretive, and scientific activities of the De Soto National Memorial."

Board of Directors: Clay Bush, Ann Marie Shields, Kel Roth, Matt Woodside

Be a Member... Be a Friend!

Through your membership or direct donation, you can personally impact the status of De Soto National Memorial. Thank you for your support!

If you are interested in a more active volunteering role or joining the Friends of De Soto National Memorial board, please contact us at info@friendsofdesotomemorial.org.

P.O. Box 14422,
Bradenton, FL 34280-4422

info@friendsofdesotomemorial.org
www.FriendsofDeSotoMemorial.org

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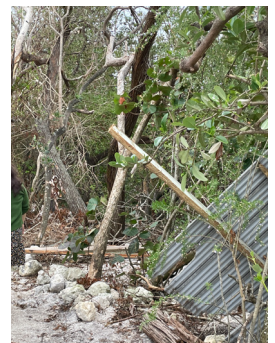


Thank You Bradenton Kiwanis!

A huge thank you to the Bradenton Kiwanis for their grant of \$4999.00 to assist the Park in reformatting and revitalizing its award winning Junior Ranger book. The Bradenton Kiwanis funding will make the Junior Ranger book more printer friendly and more aligned with the next generation of Park supporters. De Soto National Memorial's Junior Ranger book won the top Interpretive Media Publication in 2010 from the National Association of Interpretation for design and content. The Junior Ranger book provides artwork, stories and activities for kids, of all ages, as a way to engage and inform its readers about the Hernando de Soto expedition. Upon completion of activities, the new Junior Rangers take an oath, then receive a badge and a certificate proclaiming them De Soto National Memorial Junior Rangers.

State of the Park

Progress continues on the renovations and clean up from hurricane damage sustained by the Park in the fall of 2024. While walking the trails you may see marker flags that signal the sawyer teams to use their saws to cut the downed trees into manageable sizes for removal. The sawyer teams will complete their work in early July, just in time for a tremendous boost in storm debris cleanup from the Leadership Group of the National Parks Conservation Association. This group will converge on De Soto National Memorial from all parts of the state to engage in direct Park assistance on July 18. They will spend the day hauling tree parts out of the mangroves, along with other debris that was washed in by the flood waters, to reduce the risk they pose to wildlife. There is much to be done and the Park is thrilled that they have chosen De Soto as their community focus this summer. Local volunteers are welcome and encouraged to join! Contact Ranger Hollis Hatfield for more information at Hollis_Hatfield@nps.gov.



Whelks of De Soto National Memorial



If you have ever gone swimming in the sea grass beds off De Soto, then you have probably noticed just how many mollusks (the soft-bodied invertebrates who create and live inside the seashells) call our Park home. Often times, we hear visitors refer to any large marine shell as a “conch.” Although, this is sometimes the case, half the time they are misidentifying a whelk. Although they may look similar, these animals have very different life history traits. Conchs are herbivores, feeding on algae, seagrass, and decaying matter. Whelks on the other hand are carnivorous predators. They primarily prey on other mollusks. They have the unique ability to drill small holes into the protective shells to suck out the “meat.” If you have ever stumbled upon a shell with a perfectly drilled hole, then it is safe to assume that the animal who used to live there was eaten by a whelk.

Whelk egg cases are often referred to as “mermaid necklaces,”

due to their appearance. Their egg case is a long, spiral-shaped casing that can reach up to 33 inches in length. The strand contains up to 200 small pouches, each containing up to 99 eggs.

In Southwest Florida, we have lightening and pear whelks. Lightening whelk shells have important historical significance as they were often used by the native people in our area and traded throughout the southeast. Lightening whelks are unique because their shells are left-handed (shell opens to the left); the native people saw this as a spiritual metaphor.

Whelks play a vital role in the food chain, both as a predator species and as prey (often eaten by sea urchins, sea turtles, and crabs). If you are lucky enough to see a live whelk, leave it undisturbed in its natural habitat. Handling the animal can cause stress or injury. Even empty whelk shells are important for sea grass ecosystems, they can provide shelter for hermit crabs, small fish, and invertebrates. They also help stabilize beaches, contribute to sand formation, and release important calcium into to ecosystem as they breakdown.

Even a seemingly harmless activity such as “shelling,” alters the environment. The best things we can do, as a visitor to a natural space, is follow “leave-no-trace” practices.





Archaeologists *Really* Dig Ancient History

If you've ever visited De Soto National Memorial and immersed yourself in its interpretive signs and brochures, it will come as no surprise to learn that Indigenous communities shaped the landscape long before Hernando de Soto's arrival in 1539. However, you may find yourself wondering, "how do we learn more about the people that lived here prior to the written records of the Spanish expedition?" The answer lies in the study of archaeology! Archaeologists interpret the tangible evidence that humans leave behind in order to draw conclusions about how they may have interacted with the world around them. (No dinosaurs here... the paleontologists handle those!) When possible, archaeologists incorporate written historical records into their background research to better inform how they approach site excavation, but sometimes these records don't exist. When a site's history is unrecorded, either as a result of poor documentation or simply being too old, archaeologists rely solely on the artifacts, ecofacts, and features they encounter to begin painting the picture of a site's occupation. Together, these components make up a site's material culture.

An artifact is any component of a site's material culture that has been modified by humans and can be physically picked up and moved. In the context of the oldest sites surrounding the De Soto National Memorial, which in some cases were occupied more than 2,000 years before de Soto, Indigenous peoples left behind artifacts such as tools made from shell, carved animal bone, and ceramic sherds (this is not a typo! sherd is the correct term for a piece of broken pottery!). These artifacts help archaeologists understand cultural trends, advancements in technology, and even trade patterns.

An ecofact is an organic or otherwise natural object that was not modified by humans, but still contributes to the archaeological understanding of the site. One of the most common examples of ecofacts found in coastal Florida sites are the shells left behind after thousands of years of shellfish meals. These trash piles, or shell middens, formed the physical foundation for many coastal villages, including the one that stretched along the park's coastline, and often contain other ecofacts such as unmodified animal bones and plant seeds. Prior to its near-complete destruction for use as road fill by the 1960s, the midden located within what is now the park was reported as having stood 20 feet tall!

Lastly, a feature is a part of an archaeological site that can't simply be picked up and carried away. Digging post holes to support structures leaves stained soil features behind, long after the wooden posts rot away. A fire pit could leave behind burnt bone or charcoal which would be considered ecofacts individually, but within the context of the site, the pit itself is the feature that can't be moved! Features must be carefully documented via measurement, photography, and mapping before being excavated, and sometimes soil samples from features are even bagged and sent to the lab for additional testing.

Next time you take a stroll through the park's picturesque mangrove forest, take a second to think about the archaeological evidence you would leave behind. What kind of artifacts, ecofacts, or features would define you and your surrounding community?





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FRIENDS OF DE SOTO
NATIONAL MEMORIAL, INC.

Things to do:

Walk The Nature Trails

The nature trail winds along the shoreline and through several Florida ecosystems, including a mangrove forest like the one De Soto's men would have encountered when they landed. Trails include interpretive signage and waysides that tell the story of the De Soto expedition and the natural history of the area. Bicycling is allowed in the parking lot, but not on the trails.

Picnic Area

A picnic area located adjacent to the parking lot is available for visitors on a first come, first served basis. Large groups and schools should call ahead to reserve seating. Grills and alcohol are not allowed in the park.

Fishing

Fishing with a rod and reel is allowed in the park with a valid Florida drivers license and a valid State of Florida fishing license. Fisherman are not allowed to stand on rip rap or to clear brush from any area in order to gain access to the water. For questions of licensure and eligibility, please visit www.myfwc.com/license.

Boating

The cove is a popular temporary anchorage for small pleasure boats. Canoes and kayaks may be launched and carried to the water by hand. They can be launched from the park beaches provided that vegetation, terrain, and wildlife are not disturbed. Loud motors and the creation of excessive wave action is prohibited.

See more details and upcoming park events at www.nps.gov/deso or www.recreation.gov.

Board Members Needed

Are you looking for a way to make a difference in your community? The Friends of De Soto National Memorial Board of Directors is looking for new Board members with fresh ideas. Our Board is multi-faceted, multi-generational and forward thinking. Consider volunteering your time to really make a difference.

Contact Board President Ann Marie Shields at amshieldsdeso@gmail.com or speak with any Park Ranger.



De Soto National Memorial
8300 DeSoto Memorial Highway
Bradenton, FL 34209

941-792-0458
www.nps.gov/deso

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Become a member!

Yes, I would like to support my National Park by becoming a member of the Friends of De Soto National Memorial, Inc.

Memberships are tax deductible. (Check one.)

☐ Individual.....\$25.00
☐ Family.....\$40.00
☐ Business.....\$75.00
☐ Senior (65+).....\$20.00
☐ Sponsor.....\$100.00 + \$_____

My check for \$_____, (membership plus an additional donation if desired) made out to "Friends of De Soto NM" is enclosed. Please send membership materials to the name and address below:

Name:_____

Address:_____

Phone:_____

Email:_____

I would like to help! (Check all that apply.)

☐ Fundraising/Special Event Committee
☐ Volunteer at DeSoto National Memorial

How did you hear about us?

Detach and mail to:

Friends of De Soto National Memorial
P.O. Box 14422, Bradenton, FL, 34280-4422

Or join online at:

www.friendsofdesotomemorial.org

Thank you!

The Friends of De Soto National Memorial, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) organization.



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