



Nota De Soto

WINTER 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, Mary Hawk, 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

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We Shore Had Fun!



On Saturday, December 13th, visitors at De Soto National Memorial's Shore Party enjoyed historic weapon demonstrations, interactive displays, a family-friendly treasure hunt, and more! The Krewe of the Scarlett Fortuna, along with our Park Rangers, hosted the lively event full of fun and games for all ages.

Visitors learned all about the Golden Age of Piracy from the Scarlett Fortuna's BOOKaneers, volunteers from the nonprofit focused on teaching children the history of piracy, the importance of reading, and what it means to work together as a crew. At the Friends of De Soto booth, visitors learned how to read pirate flag iconography and made their very own pirate flags to take home! In addition to some smaller weapon firings, visitors also enjoyed firing demonstrations of DEUS IRAE, the Park's new bronze cannon! To refuel visitors after all the fun, Killik's Kitchen food truck offered Hawaiian, Asian, and BBQ inspired dishes on-site.

This swashbuckling celebration kicked off the Park's living history season, which begins January 9th and takes place from 10 AM to 3:30 PM every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday through April 18th, 2026. Join De Soto National Memorial's living history programs to learn more about De Soto's 1539 expedition, the Indigenous peoples, and 500 years of Florida history. Keep an eye on our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/DES01539 for details on upcoming events.

Living History Presentations

The cannon fires and muskets report across the Manatee River as Living History presentations return to De Soto National Memorial. Dressed in period clothing our park staff will bring Florida history to life with stories and demonstrations that tell the stories of people's triumphs and struggles from the past. Living history programs will be Friday through Sunday from 10:00- 3:00 from January 9 to April 18. There will be replica artifacts, period clothing and armor, and on Saturday's special Junior Ranger programs. Historic talks and demonstrations will be at 10:00, 12:00, and 2:00 pm.





Progress!

Work has begun! Progress is being made! The refurbishment and revitalization of De Soto National Memorial is underway! After the devastation of three hurricanes that hit the Park in the fall of 2024, there is much work to be done. The Park was closed for 3 months to allow for health and safety crews from the NPS to remove downed trees and evaluate the existing structures. Opened again in February of 2025 it seemed that our severely injured Park was not moving forward. But behind the scenes Superintendent Joe Brehm was coordinating with the NPS, and with our own Rangers, to begin the deep assessment of how and who would help the Park rebuild.



Crews will begin to repair the structural damage to the Visitor Center early in 2026. The inside, which sustained several inches of standing water, will be cleared and treated for the mold. The electricity, water and sewer connections will be reestablished. It is hoped that parts of the building may be useable by the summer.

New Signs!

In December 2025, the Park completed all new outdoor interpretive installations along the trails. These beautiful new signs, with depictions by the artist Hermann Trapmann, were carefully crafted to take on the challenges of interpreting what historians aptly call a “difficult history.” The Park’s interpretation of the expedition has also gone through a number of changes over the years. What started out as a celebration of the expedition has taken on a broader approach. The current understanding is based on deep research into the first-person accounts from three of the expedition’s survivors and includes the well documented brutality toward the Indigenous Peoples they encountered.

The newest interpretative signs provide an opportunity for visitors to learn about the expedition and encourage a conversation about the ways in which we present the telling of history. It also expands the story to include the area’s involvement in the history of Florida following De Soto’s landing, including fishing Ranchos and the Angola settlement. They enhance the visitor’s interpretation of the Park’s natural history, highlighting the diversity of the creatures and plants that truly are the Park’s main features beyond the human stories.

We invite you to visit or revisit the Park to experience this new enhancement. Share the word with your friends, neighbors and family to enjoy one of Manatee County’s, and indeed the National Park Services’, most important attractions.

Historical restoration of the Visitor Center, considered an historic landmark structure, will be returned to its original yellow color.



Work on Camp Uzita will include the rethatching of the chickee structures and restoration of electrical power. The palisade walls will be straightened and reinforced. While the work is underway, the traditional Living History presentations, usually held in the camp, will occur riverside at the top of the berm, cannon fire included!

The Park’s walking trails have already been enhanced with new wayside signs and trail enrichment. There is much yet to be done to stabilize the shoreline, which remains a long term project.

The Friends of De Soto National Memorial are playing a role in the research and funding of the Park’s restoration. Your financial support of the Friends group is the way YOU can help rebuild De Soto National Memorial. Let’s get to work!



Sending Some Love

A letter arrived at De Soto National Memorial from The Netherlands. Not the usual mail. Rangers were delighted to read that a couple from The Netherlands visited the Park during the 40 day government shutdown last fall. They loved the Park and its trails along the river. They are also big National Park fans and requested a De Soto Park stamp be sent to them to complete their memorable visit. Rangers were warmed by the kind words and request, sending not only the stamp, but also the Park’s brochure and other memorabilia. Park fans range near and far!

The mail brought another surprise for our Rangers in December. A box filled with sweet treats and warming soup mixes, toys and photos was sent by Park fans in New Jersey. The accompanying letter expressed their entire family’s appreciation for De Soto National Memorial, a frequent stop on their many visits to Florida. A care package from afar warmed the holiday season for our five Rangers.



The Gopher Tortoise



De Soto National Memorial is home to the Gopher Tortoise. Unlike some of the other turtle species you may see in our park, the gopher tortoise is terrestrial, meaning it lives on land, not in the water. The gopher tortoise is considered a “Keystone species,” which means that the survival of other

species in the ecosystem is dependent on the gopher tortoise. The gopher tortoise creates deep and expansive burrows, in some cases up to 40 ft long. Roughly 350 species utilize the gopher tortoise burrows for shelter and nesting including small and large mammals, ground nesting birds, reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates. The ecosystem is dependent on these burrows.

Sometimes even well intended actions can harm wildlife. The best thing you can do for a gopher tortoise is to give it space and admire it from a far. Last year we had an unfortunate situation when water and vegetation were left outside of a gopher tortoise burrow. This particular gopher tortoise resided in a very accessible part of our Park that was close to the road. Unfortunately, the surplus food began to attract other gopher tortoises to this site. Tortoises who typically lived in the deeper, more protected areas of our park, all created burrows close to the road. At one point there were four tortoises burrowing next to each other, uncommon for this solitary species. Two of these gopher tortoises were hit by cars. The best way we can benefit wildlife is to keep their habitat as natural as possible.

The gopher tortoise is listed as a threatened species in the state of Florida. Due to its protected status, it is illegal to touch, harass, possess, or manipulate a gopher tortoise or disturb its burrow. If you see any potential tortoise violations, please report them to FWC’s Wildlife Alert hotline at (888) 404-3922.

Citizen Science: If you are so lucky to stumble upon a gopher tortoise in the wild, you can help FWC monitor their prevalence throughout the state by reporting the sighting. With your help, FWC will be able to better document where gopher tortoises are living and be able to better protect them. Go to the “FWC Gopher Tortoise Sightings webapp” to learn more at myfwc.com/HSC/GopherTortoise

Meet Daniel!



Ranger Daniel Stephens is a seventh generation Floridian, born right here in Bradenton, FL. Daniel grew up with a love of history, and De Soto National Memorial was the first place he rode his bike. Ranger Dan, as he is known to Park visitors, has had a lifelong love for this National Park site. Daniel served four years in the United States Air Force and was primarily stationed at Tyndall AFB in Panama City Florida. After his service Daniel worked as a mental health orderly, a Paramedic, and a computer technician. Enrolling at the University of South Florida, he graduated with degrees in Anthropology and History. While working on an honors thesis, Daniel mapped the Indigenous mounds at the Park to measure erosion over time. He was singled out by then Superintendent Scott Pardue, and brought onboard as a Student Park Ranger. After graduation the position became permanent.

Ranger Dan’s first project was to write and develop 37 kiosks about the De Soto expedition that would be installed throughout the state of Florida. He was sent to the NPS Historic Weapons school where he received certifications in 16th, 18th, and 19th, century muskets and artillery. After several years Ranger Dan achieved the status of Historic Weapons Instructor for the NPS Historic Weapons Program. Since then, he has written the NPS manual for Human Powered Weaponry (Bows, atlatl, & crossbow). At the Park Ranger Dan oversees the Interpretation division and coaches his staff on Park programs, demonstrations and special events.

Ranger Dan can be seen giving living history talks, kayak programs, and community lectures at local schools, libraries and community groups. He has recently become the Park’s gateway community ambassador, meeting with local community, government and not-for-profits. Ranger Dan loves his job and the National Park Service. Make sure to say hi as you pass him on the trails or watch him fire the Park’s cannon, Deus Irae!



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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.

DE SOTO NATIONAL MEMORIAL PRESENTS
FOOD TRUCK SATURDAYS
JANUARY 17TH, FEBRUARY 14TH,
MARCH 14TH, APRIL 18TH
8300 DESOTO
MEMORIAL HWY
BRADENTON, FL 34209
11AM-2PM
FREE PARK PROGRAMMING
SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESS
Come support local food trucks while enjoying our free, family-
friendly Living History Programs.
www.nps.gov/deso Facebook: De Soto National Memorial 941-792-0458

Food Truck Saturdays

- January 17th
- February 14th
- March 14th
- April 18th

From 11am to 2pm

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.*

