



Early Explorers, Plants, and Primary Sources

Early explorers left accounts, or detailed descriptions, of their interactions with American Indian groups during their travels. Read the excerpts from their travels and answer the following questions in the table.

Part 1

The Gentleman of Elvas (Elvas is a town in Portugal) was a Portuguese nobleman who accompanied Hernando de Soto on his 1539-1543 exploration of La Florida. They followed a route from the present-day Florida through the interior Southeast. The expedition spent more than a year traveling through what is now Arkansas. The following two accounts are from his accounts as translated in *The De Soto Chronicles: The Expedition of Hernando de Soto to North American in 1539-1543* (Clayton et al. 1993).

[**Account 1**] On approaching Casqui, believed to be the archeological site today preserved as Parkin Archeological State Park, Elvas writes:

“That land is more high, dry, and level than the land of the river behind it which they [the Spaniards] had thus far seen. In the open field were many walnut trees with soft nuts shaped like acorns; and in the houses were found many which the Indians had stored away... There were many mulberry trees and plum trees having red plums like those of Spain, and others gray, differing, but much better, and all the trees verdant all year as if set out in gardens and in a clear grove” (Vol. I, p. 114).

1. When reading primary sources, it is important to know who wrote the account and why. List the author of Account 1 and why they wrote the account in the column: **Who Wrote the Account?**
2. Primary sources can tell archeologists about the time period in which the document was written. Record the date the account was written in the table under **Date**.
3. Some primary sources provide information about specific places. Record the place the author is talking about in the table under **Location**.
4. While examining primary sources, archeologists also take note of their first observations of the people and the places described. What strikes you as interesting about the people and places described in the account? List your observations in the **People and Place** column.
5. Read through the account carefully. List of all of the plants in the **Plants** column.
6. From this first account, what can you infer about life in Arkansas during the de Soto Expedition? List two inferences in the table under **Inferences**.
7. Complete the steps for Account 2.

[**Account 2**] On arriving at Coligoa, possibly along the White River in north central Arkansas along the eastern Ozark escarpment:

“The town of Coligoa was situated at the foot of a mountain in a field of a river... It was a fertile land and so abundant in maize that the old was thrown out in order to store the new. There was also a great quantity of beans and pumpkins, the beans being larger and better than those of Spain; and the pumpkins likewise. When roasted the latter have almost the taste of chestnuts” (Vol. I, p. 123).



Account #	Who Wrote the Account?	Date(s)	Location	People and Place	Plants	Inferences
1						
2						
3						

8. Read Part 2 and complete the steps for Account 3.

Part 2

Henri Joutel was one of only a half-dozen survivors of La Salle's fateful attempt to establish a French colony along the Gulf Coast (located in present-day Texas). He led a group of survivors across Texas and into Arkansas, visiting many Caddo Indian villages before arriving, on July 24, 1687, at the Quapaw village of Osotuoy. The following account is from Joulet's account in *The La Salle Expedition to Texas* (Foster 1998).

[Account 3]:

"A short time before arriving at their fields [surrounding the village], or clearings as they were called there, we encountered several bands and troops of Indians who, having heard of our arrival, came to meet us ... They led us to a hut in the middle of their field where they had corn, beans, watermelon, pumpkins, and other things in abundance" (p. 263).

"On arriving at the hut, we found a crowd of people gathered, men as well as women and girls, who were waiting for us ... At length, as soon as we were seated, the women brought us a large number of watermelons which they grow in quantities in this region... This melon is well named "water melon." The pulp is, so to speak, only water. ... The Indians also gave us a kind of bread that they prepare in a particular way: they mix with it beans which they leave whole and wrap the bread in corn shucks which they then boil." (pp. 263-264).

"The chief of the village came to invite us to eat... "After the chief's speech and several other speeches were over, he had food served to us: smoked meat, several kinds of cornbread, watermelons, pumpkins, and other similar things according to what was available to them. After this, they offered us tobacco to smoke" (p. 269).

"They [Quapaws] also have several kinds of good fruit including very good peaches. Although the peaches were not quite ripe, they boiled them to eat. They also have a large number of plum trees; in France I have seen many places where the plums were not as good. Their nuts, several kinds, are very good. There is, among others, one kind that is smaller; it is shaped almost like an acorn with a rather tender shell. The others are good as well, but their shells are much harder. They have besides a fruit that they call piaquiminia [probably a persimmon] which resembles the French medlar in shape, but it is much better, with a very pretty color and more delicate. They make a kind of bread with it that is similar to gingerbread in appearance, but it does not taste the same. They have a great many mulberry trees whose fruit are very good in season, as well as grapes and many other sorts of fruit in quite some abundance whose names are unknown to me" (pp. 270-171).

"The soil there is very good, and very fine corn grows there, producing two or three crops a year, at least two. Indeed, I noticed fields where they had harvested corn that year and had already replanted. In other fields, they had it at all stages of growth, as well as beans and other kinds of vegetables" (p. 276).



9. Based on the data in your table, what do these accounts tell you about Indian hunting, plant collecting, or agricultural practices in the 16th and 17th centuries?

10. Compare your lists of plants from the earlier 16th century and later 17th century accounts. How are they similar?

11. How are the lists of plants from the earlier 16th century and later 17th century accounts different?

12. From the 16th and 17th century accounts, create a menu for a typical Native American meal during early colonization.

