

# POCAHONTAS • REVEALED •

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International

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## CONTACT

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For centuries, Americans have celebrated her as a romantic fairy-tale heroine, but who was the real Pocahontas? As the US marks the 400th anniversary of its first successful English colony at Jamestown, Virginia, NOVA investigates the Pocahontas story and reveals an entirely new version of the epic events that helped found the nation in *Pocahontas Revealed*.

At the center of this dramatic re-evaluation is the discovery of Werowocomoco, the site of Pocahontas' village, 17 miles from Jamestown. Long sought by archaeologists, Werowocomoco is the spot where, according to English colonist John Smith, a smitten Pocahontas saved him from execution by her father, the powerful Indian chief Powhatan. Ever since Werowocomoco was discovered four years ago, NOVA has had exclusive access to its excavation.

Did the young princess really save Smith from certain death? And has the English view of its earliest struggle to colonize the New World distorted the truth behind this epic confrontation of cultures? NOVA's search for answers involves sequences dramatized by Pocahontas' descendants—today's Virginia Indians—who vividly re-enact the clash with the English colonists and re-create the traditional ways of life of their ancestors at Werowocomoco four centuries ago. Together with the compelling new archaeological evidence, the result is a fresh and gripping new take on the Pocahontas story.

The history book version of these events begins on May 13, 1607, when three English sailing vessels dropped anchor beside a small island along present-day James River, Virginia. On board were 104 colonists who, in their struggle to gain a foothold at Jamestown, would soon confront disease, starvation and their greatest obstacle of all, the people who had lived there for millennia. This struggle has come to be symbolized by the exploits of the brash, swashbuckling John Smith, the powerful, venerable Powhatan and his bold, beautiful daughter Pocahontas. The adventure first recounted by Smith has since been recited and embroidered until it has gathered the status of an epic founding myth of the new nation. But just how much of the saga is true?

As contemporary Virginia Indians help NOVA re-enact Pocahontas' story, a fresh, dramatic portrait emerges of who she was—an unusually bright and brave young girl, nicknamed for her mischievous spirit, who befriended a man from another culture nearly three times her age and made a lasting impact on Jamestown. Not a princess in the European sense, Pocahontas was a favorite daughter who might well have taken a leadership role in Indian society if the colonists had not landed in her father's realm.

As things turned out, she helped bring about a momentary interlude of peace between the Indians and the Jamestown settlers. Then, as relations deteriorated, she was kidnapped by the colonists and married to John Rolfe, a pioneering tobacco farmer. In a final ironic twist, Pocahontas was brought to England to become a living advertisement for the Virginia Company and the "civilizing" it had imposed on the Virginia Indians. Bringing the tale full circle, NOVA re-creates Pocahontas' bittersweet final encounter with John Smith in England, shortly before her death.

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# NOVA

## CREDITS

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