

## Return to Roanoake

By: John White, 1590

1) The 15th of August towards evening we anchored at Hatorask, in 36 and one third degree, in five fathoms [a unit of length equal to six feet] of water, three leagues [a unit of length, about three miles] from the shore. Upon coming to anchor on this shore we saw a great smoke rise in the Roanoak Island near the place where I left our Colony in the year 1587, which put us in good hope that some of the colony were there expecting my return from England.

2) The 16th and next morning our 2 boats went ashore, & Captaine Cooke, & Captain Spicer, & their company [group of men] with me, with intent to pass to the place at Roanoak where our countrymen were left. Upon leaving the ship we commanded our Master gunner to make ready 2 Minions and a Falkon [types of cannons] well loaded, and to shoot them off with reasonable space between every shot, so that sound would be heard in the place where we hoped to find some of our people. This was accordingly performed, & our two boats left towards the shore...

3) But before we were half way between our ships and the shore we saw another great smoke to the Southwest of the Kindrikers hills: we therefore thought it would be a good idea to go to that second smoke first: but it was much further than we had thought, so that we were very sore and tired before we came to the smoke. But what upset [me] more was that when we came to the smoke, we found no man nor sign that any had been there lately, nor yet any fresh water in all this way to drink. Being thus wearied [tired] with this journey we returned to the harbor where we left our boats. In our absence they had brought their casks [container for liquids] ashore for fresh water, so we put off going to Roanoak until the next morning, and had some of those sailors dig in those sandy hills for fresh water, which we found very sufficient. That night we returned aboard with our boats and our whole company in safety.

4) The next morning being the 17th of August, our boats and company were prepared again to go up to Roanoak, but Captain Spicer had then sent his boat ashore for fresh water, so that it was ten of the clocke in the afternoon before we left the ships... The Admiral's boat was half way toward the shore, when Captaine Spicer left his ship. The Admiral's boat first passed the breach [where the waves crash against the shore], but not without some danger of sinking, for we had a wave brake into our boat which filled us half full of water, but by the will of God and careful steering of Captaine Cooke we came safe ashore, except for the fact that our furniture, victuals [food] match and powder were much wet and spoiled [ruined]. For at this time the wind blew northeast and directly into the harbor so great a gale [gust of wind], that the waves broke hard on the [sand] bar, and the tide was very forceful at the entrance.

5) By the time our Admiral's boat was hauled ashore, and most of our things taken out to dry, Captain Spicer came to the entrance of the breach with his mast standing up, and was half-way in. But then, because of the rash [reckless] and indiscreet [lacking good judgement] steering of Ralph Skinner, his Masters mate, a very dangerous wave hit their boat and almost tipped them over. Some of the men stayed in the boat, and some were hanging on it, but the next wave sent the boat ashore, where it hit so hard that some of them were forced to let go, hoping to wade ashore, but the sea still beat them down, so that they could neither stand nor swim, and the boat two or three times was turned upside down.

6) Captaine Spicer and Skinner hung on until they sunk, & were seen no more. But four that could swim a little kept themselves in deeper water and were saved by Captain Cooke's men, who as soon as he saw their tipping over, stripped himself [took off his clothes] and four others that could swim very well, & with all haste [hurry] possible rowed to them, & saved four. They were 11 in all, & 7 of the highest ranking were drowned, whose

names were Edward Spicer, Ralph Skinner, Edward Kelley, Thomas Beuis, Hance the Surgeon, Edward Kelborne, Robert Coleman. This mischance [unlucky event] did so much discomfort [upset] the sailors. that they were all of one mind not to go any further to seek the planters.

7) But in the end by the commandment & persuasion of me and Captaine Cooke, they prepared the boats: and seeing the Captaine and me so resolute [determined], they seemed much more willing. Our boats and all things fitted again, we left Hatorask, being the number of 19 persons in both boats: but before we could get to the place, where our planters were left, it was so exceedingly [extremely] dark, that we overshot the place a quarter of a mile: there we spied [saw] towards the North end of the island the light of a great fire through the woods, to the which we then rowed: when we came right up to it, we let fall our anchor near the shore, & sounded with a trumpet a call, & afterwards many familiar English tunes of Songs, and called to them friendly, but we had no answer.

8) Therefore we landed at day-break, and coming to the fire, we found the grass & sundry [many] rotten trees burning near the place. From there we went through the woods to that part of the Island directly next to Dasamongwepuk, & from there we returned by the waterfront, round about the Northpoint of the Island, until we came to the place where I left our colony in the year 1586. In all this way we saw in the sand the print of the savages' [Native Americans'] feet of 2 or 3 people trodden [imprinted] at night... We came upon a tree, and in the very trunk were curiously carved the letters "C R O":

9) We knew these letters signified the place where I should find the planters settled, according to a secret code agreed upon between them & me at my last departure [leaving] from them, which was that in no way should they fail to write or carve on the trees or door posts the name of the place where they should be settled; for at my leaving they were prepared to move from Roanoak 50 miles into the mainland. Therefore at my departure from them in 1587 I required of them, that if they should happen to be distressed [in danger] in any of those places, that then they should carve a cross over the letters or name, but we found no such sign of distress.

10) Having considered this, we passed toward the place where they were left in sundry [many] houses, but we found the houses taken down, and the place very strongly enclosed with a high palisade [defense structure] of great trees, with curtains and flankers [posts] very Fort-like, and one of the chief [main] trees or posts at the right side of the entrance had the bark taken off, and 5 feet from the ground in capital letters was engraved "CROATOAN" without any cross or sign of distress; this done, we entered into the palisade, where we found many bars of Iron, two pigges [containers] of Lead, four iron fowlers [guns for hunting], iron sacker-shot [shotgun pellets], and such like heavy things, thrown here and there, almost overgrown with grass and weeds. From there we went along by the water side, towards the point of the creek to see if we could find any of their boats, but we could perceive no sign of them....

11) At our return from the creek, some of our sailors met us and told us that they had found where [many] chests had been hidden, and long since dug up again and broken up, and much of the goods in them spoiled and scattered about, but nothing left of the things the savages knew any use of un-defaced [un-destroyed]. At that moment Captaine Cooke and I went to the place, which was in the end of an old trench [a shelter dug in the ground], made two years past by Captaine Amadas. There we found a few of the planters' chests that had been carefully hidden, three of which were my own, and around the place many of my things spoiled and broken, and my books torn from the covers, the frames of some of my pictures and maps rotten and spoiled with rain, and my armor almost eaten through with rust...

12) When we had seen in this place as much as we could, we returned to our boats, and departed from the shore towards our ships, with as much speed as we could: For the weather was becoming overcast, and it was very likely that a foul and stormy night would ensue. Therefore the same evening with much danger and labor, we got our selves aboard, by which time the wind and seas were so greatly risen, that we doubted our cables and anchors would scarcely hold until morning...