



Earliest inland European fort uncovered in North Carolina

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The location of the first European fort established in the interior of North America has been discovered, according to [Chris Rodning](#), associate professor of anthropology at Tulane. Fort San Juan, located in the foothills of the Appalachians in western North Carolina, was built in 1567 by a Spanish expedition 40 years before the establishment of Jamestown by English colonists.

Captain Juan Pardo and his soldiers built the fort and a Spanish settlement, Cuenca, at the Native American town of Joara, according to Rodning, co-director of the team excavating the site. Working with Rodning are archeologists [Robin Beck](#) from the University of Michigan and [David Moore](#), of Warren Wilson College in Asheville, North Carolina.

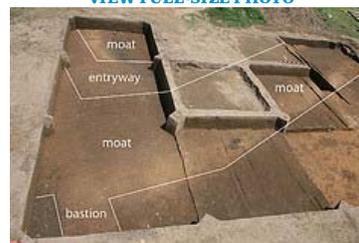
Pardo's mission was to blaze a trail to connect the Atlantic coast with New Spain (Mexico) and establish forts and settlements to confirm Spain's claim to La Florida, the present southeastern United States.

"At first there was a favorable relationship between the Native American community of Joara and the Spanish residents of Cuenca and Fort San Juan," says Rodning. But the relationship deteriorated disastrously, and less than 18 months later, in the spring of 1568, Native American warriors burned the fort and town and killed nearly all the soldiers. As a consequence the Spanish abandoned further attempts to colonize the region.

The archeological team has spent each summer from 2001 to the present excavating the Joara site. They have unearthed houses occupied by Spanish soldiers, but the location of the fort remained a mystery until a month ago when the researchers discovered evidence of a moat, a gravel-surfaced entryway and a corner bastion.

"The history of Fort San Juan is critical to understanding the course of Spanish colonialism in the Americas," says Rodning. "Native American people contributed significantly to that colonial history and they helped shape the colonial rivalry that developed between France, Spain and England."

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Fort San Juan moat, corner bastion, and entryway revealed. Photograph by University of Michigan News Service.

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