

marketing of major
Jamestown story



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Extreme Droughts Played Major Role In Tragedies at Jamestown, 'Lost Colony'

WILLIAMSBURG, VA— The worst droughts of the past 800 years likely played a major role in the mysterious disappearance of Roanoke Island's "Lost Colony" and in the "starving time" endured by colonists at Jamestown, researchers from the College of William and Mary and the University of Arkansas have concluded after studying growth rings of ancient trees in the Tidewater area. The findings were just published in the current issue of *Science* journal.

"If the English had tried to find a worse time to launch their settlements in the New World, they could not have done so," said Dennis B. Blanton, director of the William and Mary Center for Archaeological Research. "From 1587 to 1589, the most extreme drought in 800 years is implicated in the disappearance of the Lost Colony, and the Jamestown settlement was later plagued by the driest seven-year episode in 770 years. These droughts make the dry summer of 1997 pale in comparison."

The researchers' findings were based on an examination of ancient trees in the nation's southeastern Tidewater region. The project was funded by the National Park Service as part of the Jamestown Archaeological Assessment project, a cooperative project among the College of William and Mary, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and the National Park Service.

Soon after the Roanoke Island colony was established at the end of the 16th century, the settlers mysteriously disappeared, leaving only the enigmatic word "Croatoan" carved on a tree. More is known about the hardships at Jamestown, which was founded in 1607 but nearly failed during the period from 1609 to 1610 -- historically known as "the starving time"-- when the colony suffered "an appalling death rate." According to historians, 43 percent of the 350 colonists alive in June of 1610 were dead by the end of that summer.

Blanton, who has long been intrigued by the events at Jamestown, asked University of Arkansas climatologist David W. Stahle to undertake the tree-ring study after hearing of his work. Several years ago, a team of researchers from the tree-ring laboratory at Arkansas had conducted general climate studies along the East Coast

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