

**ON THE 400TH ANNIVERSARY OF JAMESTOWN,
NOVA UNVEILS NEVER-BEFORE-SEEN ARTIFACTS FROM THE
NEWLY DISCOVERED SITE WHERE THE REAL
POCAHONTAS BECAME AN AMERICAN LEGEND**



NOVA presents *POCAHONTAS REVEALED*

Tuesday, May 8, 2007 at 8 PM ET/PT on PBS

www.pbs.org/nova/pocahontas



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125 Western Avenue
Boston, MA 02134

617.300.2000

www.pbs.org/nova

Boston, MA — 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 colony at Jamestown, VA, NOVA investigates the Pocahontas story and reveals an entirely new version of the epic events that helped found our nation.

At the center of this dramatic reevaluation is the discovery of Werowocomoco, the site of Pocahontas' village, 17 miles from Jamestown. Long sought by archaeologists, Werowocomoco is the very 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 by archaeologists from the College of William and Mary. Last summer, the dig yielded thrilling traces of what is likely to be Powhatan's long house, where John Smith had his fateful encounter with Powhatan and Pocahontas.

But 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 reenact the clash with the English colonists and recreate 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 that NOVA presents in ***Pocahontas Revealed***, premiering during Jamestown's Anniversary week, Tuesday, May 8, 2007 at 8pm ET/PT on PBS (check local listings).

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The history book version of these events begins on May 13, 1607, when three English sailing vessels dropped anchor beside a small island in the 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 in Virginia 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?

Some of the most exciting revisions to the story have come from a dozen years of digging at Jamestown itself. Long thought to have washed away into the river, the remains of the colonists' fort were revealed in 1994. The dig has since yielded more than a million artifacts, making it one of America's richest and most significant excavations and overturning many myths about the colonists. For instance, relations with the Indians were at first more than friendly: the evidence suggests that Indian women were actually living inside the fort, presumably co-habiting with Smith's comrades. NOVA finds an equally surprising clue to why good relations fell apart so quickly by burrowing into centuries-old Virginia trees. The record of tree rings indicates that both colonists and Indians had to endure the worst drought in 700 years. Parched conditions meant that the Indians had no surplus corn to trade with the colonists, a situation which soon led to open conflict.

But the heart of NOVA's story is the discovery of Werowocomoco, which began with the sharp eyes of Virginia landowner Lynn Ripley and her curiosity in finding broken pottery and worked stone scattered all over her newly acquired farmland. Over the last four years of digging at the site, the College of William and Mary's team has unearthed fascinating clues about the fragile relations between colonists and the Indians at the time when John Smith met Pocahontas. NOVA's cameras are on the scene as the archaeologists unearth the first traces of what was almost certainly Powhatan's longhouse. It was here that the captive Smith was threatened with execution until the chief's daughter rushed in and, in Smith's words, took his "*head in her arms and laid her own upon his to save him from death.*"

Pocahontas' popularizers—from the Disney cartoon to Terrence Malick's recent movie *The New World*—have embroidered on Smith's account and depicted this event as a courageous act of love. But the Werowocomoco excavations are encouraging historians and anthropologists to consider a more provocative explanation. Just as John Smith hoped to take advantage of the Indians to exploit his colonizing goals, so Powhatan may have hoped he could exploit the newcomers to consolidate his hold over the many communities subject to his chiefdom. One way Powhatan exerted dominance was by adopting subject rulers into his vast family. (He is said to have had over 100 wives!) What John Smith experienced on that fateful day may have been a *mock* execution typical of Indian adoption ceremonies. According to this theory, Powhatan adopted John Smith as Pocahontas' brother—and Pocahontas, who was then between the ages of 10 and 14, was simply playing out her sisterly role in the ritual.

As contemporary Virginia Indians help NOVA reenact 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 nearly three times her age from another culture 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 recreates Pocahontas' bittersweet final encounter with John Smith in England, shortly before her death.

On the 400th anniversary of Jamestown, science, scholarship and Native American insights are transforming the story of Pocahontas and her powerful impact on our nation's beginnings in NOVA's ***Pocahontas Revealed***.

Now in its 34th year of broadcasting, NOVA is produced for PBS by the WGBH Science Unit at WGBH Boston. The director of the WGBH Science Unit and senior executive producer of NOVA is Paula S. Apsell. Funding for NOVA is provided by David H. Koch, the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and public television viewers.

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Senior executive producer Paula S. Apsell

Written and produced by Matthew Rocky Collins

Produced and directed by Kirk Wolfinger and Lisa Quijano Wolfinger

Edited by Jed Rauscher

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Pressrooms

pressroom.wgbh.org/nova

pbs.org/pressroom

Press contacts for NOVA

Eileen Campion

Dera, Roslan & Campion

(212) 966-4600

eileen@drcpublicrelations.com

Yumi Huh

WGBH Boston

(617) 300-4287

yumi_huh@wgbh.org

Photography contact for NOVA

Lindsay de la Rigaudiere

WGBH Boston

(617) 300-4258

lindsay_delarigaudiere@wgbh.org