

Colonial Virginia Module Early Jamestown

It certainly isn't the first place they come to. They come to Cape Charles and Cape Henry and they could've gone anywhere up the Chesapeake Bay or any of these other rivers. They go up the river in order to make sure it's a little bit safer from the Spanish. The Spanish are constantly patrolling the shore of the Atlantic.

Virginia doesn't really attract the Spanish. They're happy with their gold from South America and Mexico and the plantation economies in the Caribbean. But they don't really want the English to get wealthy and become greater competitors. The English know that and they go up the river far enough so they're not really exposed.

They're also on the river in case they need to retreat from Indians. Although they expect to be at peace with the Indians and to dominate the Indians, they also know that's not always going to be true. So they settle right on the water, but up from the coast.

It's deep enough there. It's not so far up that big ships can't dock there. Those ships will supply them with food, with tools, and with new settlers. They want to set up a kind of post from which ships will go back and forth to England carrying the wealth that the settlers will be gathering from the countryside.

At the very beginning, it was much less successful than they expected. They suffered immensely from diseases and also they suffered from hunger. There was a drought, so the Indians had less corn themselves than they had normally had to trade and give to the English settlers.

The other aspect was the English settlers were so unprepared to be farmers themselves. They expected both to get food from the Indians and to be able to just gather food from the forest or gather fish from the rivers. And they did do some of that, but it turned out it was a lot harder to live than they thought. So they really needed the support of the Indians.

There was this period historians call the "Starving Time." You can imagine being an investor in England and thinking this was not a good idea.

Part of the history behind this map is to represent the area as able to sustain life. It's been a successful settlement so far because we've been able to travel throughout and gather this information. Let's reassure the investors that there's promise here.