

## Other Voices: An adventure back in time

By **Emmett W. Hanger Jr.**

Thanks to U.S. Sen. Paul S. Sarbanes of Maryland, the Senate has before it a bipartisan bill that would create a national historic trail to mark the voyage of Capt. John Smith, who in 1608 with a crew of a dozen men, rowed and sailed an open boat on an exploration of the Chesapeake Bay. I hope Congress passes the bill.

Smith was searching for gold and silver and for the Northwest Passage, a fabled short route between Europe and the treasures of the Far East. He never found the passage - it doesn't exist - and he never found gold and silver. Yet he left us riches.

On his voyage, Smith explored a land abounding in natural resources and came face to face with a well-developed culture of people who had lived in the Chesapeake region for a millennium. Smith observed, he took notes, and he made a map. His detailed writings, the reports of his comrades, and his marvelous map remain vital sources for anthropologists and historians, and provide us a tour guide back to the time when our nation began to emerge.

Creating the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail would give us an opportunity to explore that time when the roots of our continuing American adventure were just beginning to grow. The trail would provide modern adventurers a path to

understand the rich culture of the Native Americans that Smith met, to grasp the tenuous toehold the English gained on American soil and how they planted the seeds of our democracy, and to revisit the steady expansion of commerce and trade that grew from Smith's beginning. This trail through the Chesapeake region offers education, recreation and tourism opportunities that would highlight the region's remarkable maritime history, unique watermen and their culture, diversity of people, historic settlements, and on-going efforts to restore and sustain the bay as the world's most productive estuary. It would help us explore who we are.

It would also be a first. The National Park Service administers 13 other national historic trails. Each, like the Lewis and Clark Trail, the Pony Express Trail or the Selma to Montgomery Trail, allows visitors to retrace routes of national historic significance. Each is well documented through maps or journals and each provides an opportunity for education and recreation. Yet, the Smith trail would be the first in the history-rich Chesapeake region and it would be the first primarily followed by water. Smith's voyage, after all, was by boat.

Support for the John Smith trail is bipartisan and widespread. Senators John Warner, R-Va., George Allen, R-Va., and Barbara Mikulski, D-Md., joined Sarbanes, D-Md., to introduce the bill. The governors of Virginia,

Maryland, Pennsylvania and Delaware, and the mayor of the District of Columbia and the legislatures of Virginia and Pennsylvania support the trail. More than 60 organizations, including civic and business groups, local, county and tribal governments, federal and state agencies, and non-profits, have endorsed the proposal.

They see the opportunity for new business in heritage tourism and recreation. They also see the opportunity for rich educational experiences along the trail.

In 2007 Jamestown will celebrate its 400th year. The settlement marked the first tenuous hold the English found on America. Smith, more than all others, helped Jamestown stick, and as its hold grew stronger, so did our system of

property rights, government and trade. Smith's voyage demonstrated his personal qualities of leadership, values we still think of as "American": independence, courage, ingenuity, perseverance and an appreciation of talent above rank.

It is difficult for us to imagine the world and time that Smith saw; near to impossible to see that moment the way Powhatan, the paramount chief of eastern Virginia's native people, saw it. Yet the journals from the time, the modern work of scholars, and the exciting possibilities for adventure on the John Smith trail may open our eyes in ways we never expected.

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