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THE PowhatANS AND OTHER WOODLAND INDIANS AS TRAVELERS

The Indians of the Eastern Woodlands were cosmopolitan people, and the Powhatans, or Virginia Algonquians,1 were no exception. Indian people of both sexes often traveled not only around their own territories but also into the territories of others; moreover, they heard accounts of peoples living yet farther away.

The Europeans who invaded North America paid little attention to Indian movements, unless they found those movements threatening in some way. Explorers' questions to Indian people usually seem to have been, "What's out there?" rather than "What have you yourself seen?" Consequently the historical documents that have come down to us often give the impression that most Indians remained within their own home areas, except in times of war, and that they only heard—somehow—about more distant regions. That impression is misleading. Native people did in fact travel about a great deal on a variety of errands.

The aim in this chapter, therefore, is to correct the misunderstanding of the Eastern Woodlands in general and the Powhatans in particular. First we see what the historical record tells us directly of Indian visits to or knowledge of distant peoples. Then follows a reconstruction of what it was like to travel with Native Americans: traveling companions, equipment taken, routes, means of transport, lodging, and food. Next comes a list of the aboriginal commodities that Woodland Indians are known to have traded, which tells us still more about where they journeyed. A discussion of warfare as it affected Woodland Indian communications follows. Last, there is a summary of the ways in which the Powhatans and other Woodland peoples can justly be inferred to have been cosmopolites.
Knowledge of Other Peoples

Some of the earliest questions the English asked the Powhatans in Virginia, and other Europeans asked Indians wherever they met them, concerned what lands lay beyond the horizon. The foreigners were asking because they hoped to find a northwest passage to the Orient, not because they wanted to know about Indian cosmology. Thus most of the questions concerned lands to the westward, and that created a bias in the historical record against documenting Indian knowledge of lands in other directions.

English accounts about the Powhatans' knowledge are a case in point. Explorers found in 1607–8 that the Virginia Algonquians knew what peoples dwelt in the piedmont of what is now Virginia and North Carolina, though for tactical reasons they were very cautious about giving out information on their Siouan-speaking enemies in the Virginia piedmont. They also knew what peoples lived along the northern waterways of the Chesapeake region; there was enough contact with the Algonquian-speakers at the head of the Chesapeake Bay that one person among the Tockwoghs could speak 'the language of Powhatan.' The Powhatans further knew that their Iroquoian enemies, the Massawomecks, came from a mountainous area to the northwest. Significantly, the English recorded the Powhatans being attacked by Massawomecks, but they never mentioned Powhatans traveling across the mountains to attack the Massawomecks. Given the warlike and vengeful character of the Powhatans, it is likely that they returned the Massawomecks' raids with interest. Europeans often got the impression of put-upon local Indian people harassed by distant enemies (for that was frequently the Indians' view of themselves) at the same time that they often found out those same local people were avid travelers. The Europeans and the scholars who read them failed to make the connection.

The English were intent on a passage to the Orient, so any Powhatan knowledge of the North Carolina coastal plain other than the Algonquian-speaking Chowanoces and Iroquoian-speaking Notoways and Meherrins went almost unrecorded. It is a pity that John Smith did not himself go southward with the search parties looking for survivors of the Lost Colony, for then he might have written something about that region in his Map of Virginia. The Chesapeake, a related but hostile group eventually exterminated by Powhatan, were known to be allies of the Chowanoces and Pamlico Sound people in the mid-1580s. The surviving documents indicate clearly that Englishmen wrote down what they wanted to hear about the West, rather than exactly what Indian informants told them. Waters beyond the mountains were a sea, not lakes or a large river, and mentions of salt referred to salty waters, not to Indian salt-gathering operations. On one occasion, when John Smith reiterated his story, this time to Powhatan himself, about wanting to avenge an Englishman killed beyond the mountains on a salt sea, Powhatan said flatly, 'For any salt water beyond the mountains, the Relations you have had from my people were false,' and he began to draw a map on the ground by way of correction.

Not surprisingly, the Powhatan chieftains south of the James River knew at first hand about peoples living to their south and southwest and had heard of people living farther away. Warraskoyacks, Quiyoughcoyanocks, Wyanoocks, and Appamattucks were all enlisted by Englishmen at one time or another as guides for those countries. The chief of Weyanock traveled regularly as an ambassador for Powhatan to the "Anoegs" (possibly Tuscaroras) to the southwest, bringing back "their Commodityes...[and] Presents to Powhatan." Later in the century the Weyanocks considered themselves middlemen between the Tuscaroras and the English. Sometime before 1650 the chief of Powhatan town, at the falls of the James, fell out with the Chowanoces, and the paramount chief Opechancanough fought with other people in the vicinity.

It was not until a little later in the colony's history that longer-distance knowledge was recorded for the Virginia natives, and then it concerned the Patawomecks, who had easier access to the much-used trails (including the Great Indian Wapash) that ran up the Valley of Virginia. An English lieutenant saw "a China Boxe" made of palmetto and lined with taffeta, which its chiefly Patawomeck owner said had been given him by mountain people living far to the southwest. They in turn had gotten it from more distant people a total of thirty days' journey from Patawomeck and only four days' journey from "the Sea," on a river into which "Ships come." The ships were probably Spanish, and the "river" may have been Mobile Bay. Apparently no one thought to ask whether the mountain people came to the Patawomecks or some Patawomecks went to the mountain people.

The knowledge of other mid-Atlantic Indians was similarly far-flung and ill recorded. A Manahoac man from the Virginia piedmont gave John Smith an account similar to those Smith had already heard from the Powhatans: Powhatans on one side, Massawomecks on the other. The North Carolina Algonquians of the 1580s knew their coastal plain in detail from having paddled along its waterways; their knowledge of the southern Chesapeake region was more vague, although a chief who was supposedly rich in pearls from that region had visited the Chowanoces in 1584. They held somewhat con-
flicting opinions about what lay at the head of the Roanoke River, though their accounts convinced their English listeners that a sea was there. The Iroquoian-speaking "Mangoés" (Nortoways, Meherrins, or even possibly Tuscaroras) were in regular contact (alternatingly peaceful and hostile) with the coastal Carolina peoples, and they were said to know more about what lay to the west. When the English first met Tuscaroras in 1650, the latter offered to show them the lands farther inland; regrettably, the English declined. There were people among the Maryland Algonquian-speakers (Piscataways and others) who had actually been to Massawomeck towns, as either visitors or prisoners of war. Henry Fleet interviewed some of them in 1632 to get the names of Massawomeck towns.  

Regular contacts among Indian people produced liaisons and marriages in the mid-Atlantic region and elsewhere. Edward Bland's Appamattuck guide in 1650 had a "Sweetheart" among Indians far to the south. In Maryland a Patuxent man married a Wicomico woman across the Chesapeake Bay and went to live with her people, where an explorer met him in 1635. And by 1700 the people of the Carolina piedmont made regular provision for casual liaisons with visiting traders, Indian and European alike. Europeans exploring the coast north of Virginia found the extent of Indian knowledge of their neighbors to be about the same as in the mid-Atlantic, and it was divulged to foreigners with the same amount of caution. Thus the Europeans got the impression of victims being harassed by distant enemies, at the same time that they discovered that the "victims" were in fact well traveled. The Europeans—and usually we—failed to make the connection. The people native to the lower Delaware Bay knew what the Delaware River was like up near its head, though they said they had not been there; instead their fathers had formerly hunted there before their enemies the Minquas (Mohawks) had started coming down regularly to harass them. It is probable, of course, that they had more than once gone upriver to take revenge on the Mohawks. On the other hand, a chief living near the Delaware's falls had been far upriver, but it was the Hudson River, not the Delaware, that he was talking about. And not surprisingly, it was a Mahican from the Hudson who told in detail about what lay at the head of the Delaware River. John Lawson spoke for more than the Carolina Indians when he said that "you must be very much in their Favor, otherwise they will never make these Discoveries to you; especially, if it be in their own Quarters." It was the Mohicans who mentioned the large lake to be found in the interior.

The Powhatans and other Woodland peoples engaged annually in an early-winter communal hunt. During this hunt they ranged many miles from home and came to know large stretches of country. The Powhatans probably traveled only 100 or so miles at the most, for enemy people held the piedmont where the hunting was better. The Alabamas were known to go up to 100 leagues (250 miles) on such trips, staying out from late October until March. That distance in turn was patrty to people, such as those from tribes in the Deep South, whose men on short hunts at other seasons "frequently walk[ed] twenty-five or thirty miles through rough and smooth grounds, and fasting, before they return[ed] back to camp, loaded."  

Once Europeans began seriously exploring North America's interior, they discovered that Indian people had a whole network of established contacts covering thousands of square miles. These contacts existed in prehistoric times, as archaeology has long proved, but the contacts were intensified and sometimes altered under the pressure of foreign (i.e., European) invasion. For instance, when the explorers Thomas Baits and Robert Failiam penetrated deep into the Appalachians in 1671, they met a "Mohotam" from much farther west. This man had already heard about the strangers coming (the "mocasinn telegraph" is a wondrous thing) and had journeyed to the Tutelo town near the Blue Ridge specifically to inquire about them. Gabriel Arthur traveled for about five months in 1673–74 with "Tomohitans," whose living was "to forage robb and spoyle other nations" (they sound like a renegade splinter group). These people covered a tremendous amount of territory by water and on foot in just a few months. While Arthur was with them, they visited Port Royal in South Carolina, Mobile Bay in Alabama, and a Shawnee village in Ohio, altogether covering a distance of about 2,200 miles.

As European traders made themselves increasingly felt, Indian trading, warring, and refuge activities expanded. The Tuscaroras became traders in rum across several hundred miles by 1700. The Creeks of the late eighteenth century thought little of walking "hundreds of miles" on a peace-making mission, or of literally running two or three hundred miles after a fleeing enemy, or of tracking a murderer, adulterer, or enemy across a thousand miles of rough country in order to quench their "over-boiling, revengeful" hearts when they believed they had been wronged. The Iroquois' warring with increasingly distant tribes in the seventeenth century is well known; their activities eventually reached the Mississippi. Iroquois warriors RAIDed their enemies the Cherokees and the Siouan-speakers in what is now North Carolina, and the latter ran up the Great Indian Warpath to New York to pay them back. The Cherokee were warred with the Missassaugas in the Great Lakes region and with people they met on the way. The Illinois and the Chickasaws were back and forth along the waterways between what are
now the states of Mississippi and Illinois; an Illinois warrior assured Father Hennepin that he had been “everywhere in his periagua [canoe].” His people were at war with both the Iroquois and the eastern Sioux (in modern Minnesota). Henry Grace was captured at the eastern end of Lake Erie by Iroquois fur traders who then took him on a circuit through the Great Lakes, down the Mississippi to French settlements in Arkansas, cross-country to the Choctaws, on past the Chickasaws to the Cherokees, and finally up to Quebec, where he was ransomed; the trip took about two years.19

The prodigious distances these people covered echo those traversed for the luxury trade during the mound-building Hopewell culture’s heyday, and they indicate that even without the impetus of very highly desired trade goods such as firearms, furs, and rum, the aboriginal Indians were avid travelers.20 Well may Father Hennepin have written, “The warriors undertake journeys of three or four hundred leagues, as though it was only to go from Paris to Orleans.” Understandably, then, “the Indians of Canada [and, I would add, the eastern United States] have had at all times an intercourse with one another, sometimes as allies, sometimes as enemies.”21

Woodland Indians were ceremonious people. Therefore the departure of an expedition, even when it consisted of strangers who had only recently arrived, was apt to be marked with formality. The first English expedition up the James River found it a long, drawn-out process to leave the hospitable Arohaateeks. Formal leave-taking among the Carolina Siouans was accompanied by scratching the shoulders of the travelers, “which is look’d upon as a very great Compliment among them.” Lenape travelers publicly announced when they would return, considering it a binding promise thereafter. Robert Fallam felt that the firing of guns when his party left Hanahasky was a “more than usual” valediction.22 In the case of war parties, where danger was sure to be involved, departure was highly ritualized. Although the version practiced by the Powhatans and their neighbors to the southwest was poorly recorded, it clearly included sober deliberations by elders and chiefs while the warriors themselves worked up their enthusiasm by dancing. Other, better-recorded Woodland warriors danced, fasted, and made a ceremonial exit from their towns.23

The families left behind returned to their work, being accustomed to relatives’ long absences. Creek Indian men helped their women with the planting, before leaving, but the women of other nations expected no such help. And there were always other men, part of the wide network that Indian people called “family,” who remained home to defend and hunt for the women, children, and elders who had not gone traveling.24

Traveling Companions and Equipment

Woodland Indians’ travel away from their towns can be roughly grouped into four categories: foraging trips, trading expeditions, diplomatic missions, and warring ventures. The personnel and the goods carried along on these travels varied considerably.

Foraging trips could be for part of a day or, in the case of the winter hunts, for several months. Among the Powhatans, whose diet relied only part-time on corn and beans, short foraging trips were frequent and probably single-sex affairs. Both men and women harvested wild foods along the waterways—fish and shellfish by men, reeds and edible tubers by women—so that only a two-canoe family could have sent both sexes out on the creeks and rivers at the same time. On land, stalking animals (men) and gathering berries, greens, nuts, and firewood (women) were activities that excluded each other. Men, at least, might stay our overnight during ordinary hunts, judging by the appearance of “hunting houses” fairly near to Indian towns in the English records. During the winter communal hunt, on the other hand, whole families were involved together. Women acted as burden bearers, as the hunting party moved day by day, and they kept house on a reduced scale in the nightly camps and also processed the carcasses brought in.25

Other Woodland peoples might or might not have women on their winter hunts. The Creeks, apparently, did not. The Carolina Siouans, the Chickasaws, and the Alabamas did.26 Hunters who did not cook along cooked their own game, but they might also take with them parched cornmeal (rock-ahoniny in Virginia and Carolina Algonquian). Corn kernels were “first boiled, then parched in hot ashes, sifted, pounded and made into flour,” which being dry was lightweight for carrying in large quantities for long distances (several quarts still made for light travel). The cornmeal was reconstituted when needed, usually at the ratio of a handful (or half a cup) of meal to a pint of water, which was then drunk. When sugar became available by trade in the Contact period, it was added to the brew, either by the female preparer or on the trail by the male consumer.27 Other hunters carried bread made of chinaroot (actually roots of several Smilax species, especially tan-noides). This root was pounded, washed, and then sieved through a coarse cloth. The fine sediment, which went through with the water and was rather gelatinous, was allowed to subside, after which it was gathered up and baked into cakes for use as trail food.28

On trading expeditions it was not uncommon to find women and even children. Henry Fleet’s first meeting with the dreaded Massawomecks in the
1620s involved a trading party that included four men and one woman. In 1700 John Lawson met a “war-captain” on his way to the South Carolina coast; with him were “a Man-Slave ... who was loaded with European Goods, his Wife and Daughter being in Company.” During the long trip that Henry Grace unwillingly took, the Indian contingent consisted of ten men and two women; it was Grace, being a captive, rather than the women who did the really dirty work. Before the era of packhorses, women were often burden bearers as well as camp cooks. The reason was not that women were considered drudges, but rather that men needed to have their hands free to seize their weapons if game animals or human enemies suddenly appeared.

Edible provisions were normally packed along on trading trips, including parched cornmeal for times when the provisions ran out and nothing else was available. Friendly departures from Indian towns along the route often included gifts of parched cornmeal for the travelers. In the Creek country travelers took this meal and no other edible provisions, even when they had plenty of other foods at home. After European contact it was also normal to take along some or all of the following nonedibles: “a blanket, a kerchief, an axe, a gun, powder, and lead, dressed skins to make Indian shoes, which often last only 3 days.” The precontact inventory would have had a deerskin mantle, traditional weaponry, and a ceramic pot instead of the trade goods mentioned.

Diplomatic missions usually traveled under peaceful auspices and had to be prepared for ceremonial occasions. Thus when John Bartram met a Shawnee delegation in 1743, their party included a woman “which they brought to wait upon them [and who] kindled a fire to light their pipes.” Two of the Indian guides that John Lawson hired in the Carolinas brought their wives along. On the other hand, the fast-ranging and fast-moving “Tomahawks” seem to have traveled without women. The goods packed along on diplomatic trips were much the same as for trading expeditions but also included gifts for dignitaries, such as wampum strings or belts (in the Northeast) to validate messages and discourse.

War parties were nearly always all-male affairs, although the Iroquois occasionally took along “young women and young boys.” The size of the party ranged from a handful to fifty or more. The Creeks went out in parties of up to sixty but came home in scattered handfuls for safety’s sake. Huron and Iroquois warriors moved in large groups when in a hurry and in small groups, hunting for food, when not pursued; but they always rendezvoused as agreed, however dispersed they had been. Their parties were also accompanied by “jugglers” who explained omens that were encountered along the way. War parties generally traveled light. Thus men carried their weapons, knives, leather for new moccasins, a blanket, a bag of parched cornmeal, and, after European contact, “two or three horse-ropes, or halter.” Warriors expected to forage for other foods as they went, and in the case of the Creeks, the men were not allowed by their leader to eat very much in any case. The Hurons, Iroquois, and Abnakis also carried sledges for baggage and for wounded men. They and the Creeks both carried religious paraphernalia with them to ensure the men’s safety.

Routes Taken and Means of Transport

Europeans were astonished at the excellence of Indian woodsmanship and orientation. Some people today seem to have compasses built into their heads; the Indian guides the explorers met must have been superlatively examples of that phenomenon. Even ordinary people knew their territories extremely well and in great detail. Powhatan Indians learned their region so thoroughly by “their continual ranging, and travel” that it was “a marvel they can so directly pass these deserts [wildernesses], some 3 or 4 days journey without habitation.” Pierre de Charlevoix traveled with Indian guides through eastern Canada and concluded that “it suffices them to have been once in a place to have an exact idea of it, which is never effaced; let a forest be ever so vast and impenetrable, yet they cross it” without wandering out of the way, if they have made their observations right at setting out.” John Lawson hired several guides in his journey through the Carolinas, after which he opined that “they are expert Travelers. . . . They will find the Head of any River, though it is five or six miles from it, and they never were there, in their lives before; and as often prov’d, by their appointing to meet on the Head of such a River, where perhaps, none of them ever was before, but where they shall rendezvous exactly at the prefixed time.” The Lenape took pride in always setting dates for their return from long or short trips and then arriving back home precisely on schedule. The Creeks and Chickasaws did likewise and would send out a party to find people who were only one day late. However, Indian woodsmanship was exaggerated by fiction writers such as James Fenimore Cooper. People going foraging within their own well-known territories did indeed go through pathless wilderness. But people heading for some destination on business “had the same reason for keeping to the beaten path that motorists have for preferring paved highways to plowed fields.”

The routes used by Indian travelers were both illuminated and made more
newly by the custom of leaving markings on trees as one passed by. Some
times the marks merely reassured one of being on the right path; at other
times they represented news of recent campaigns or threats of bodily harm
to pursuing enemies.

Waterways where possible, overland where necessary—that summarizes
Indian people's preferences in routes to travel throughout the Eastern Wood-
lands. Paths could and did lead in all directions, including along waterways. But
canoes could hold baggage as well as people, and not much more effort
was required to propel them than if they held only people. It is not surprising,
therefore, that many early accounts of Indian travel include mention of long
stretches covered by water.

Waterways were central to the Powhatans and other riverine Algonquian-
speakers, since they supplied food as well as transportation. Dugout canoes
(fig. 1.1), though laborious to make without steel tools, were almost as
valuable and as necessary to their owners as automobiles are to us today.
They were probably made of cypress, as they were in the Carolinas, and
being up to fifty feet long, they could carry up to forty people. Although
they were heavy and trough-shaped, with expert paddling they could be pro-
elled faster than English rowboats or even large English craft in any but the
most favorable wind. In the skirmish on the Potomac River in which Henry
Spelman was killed in 1633, the English pinnace was taken, but "the shipp"
was too fast for the warriors in canoes. Both sexes of Indians in both the
North Carolina coastal region and the Creek country were proficient in can-
oeing; the same was probably true for the Powhatans, whose women for-
aged along the waterways as much as the men did.

In the continent's interior, waterways provided the routes with fewest ob-
stacles to cross, thanks to water's seeking its own level. The favored ways
through the eastern Appalachians lay along the few rivers, such as the James,
the Potomac, and the Delaware, that cut straight through them. Only when
people were in a hurry, as Fallam and his Saponi guide were in 1671, did
they take a more direct road up and down the mountain slopes—and then
they were following established paths. Ordinarily Indian people considered
it worth the extra mileage to go by river, especially if there were disabled
people in the party.

It was possible to go very long distances and stay almost entirely on the
waterways (fig. 1.2). For instance, Augustine Herrman recorded that a major
route from the Ohio River to Maryland went up the Ohio, up its tributary
the Allegheny, up its tributary the Conemaugh in turn, across a short portage,
down the Juniata, and down its parent stream the Susquehanna. The Cher-
oksee and other mountain people were able to raid enemies on the Ohio
River by paddling down the French Broad, the Little Tennessee, and finally
the Tennessee River (sometimes known as the Cherokee River), and then up
the Ohio itself. The only hindrance to encounter, other than rapids, was
strong downriver currents (especially in the spring), and that only applied if
one were heading upstream.

The most common canoes in the Eastern Woodlands were dugouts, made
from a wide variety of trees. Only in the north, where the paper birch grew,
could birchbark canoes be made; these were lighter and therefore faster than
solution was to hide the canoe. A really ingenious ploy, favored by the Creeks, was to make the canoe out of an especially rotten-looking log, with the bark left on, and then overturn and hide it near the landing place.14

Where streams were too rapid for easy ascent, they were likely to be used for descent only, with trails supplementing them for travel in the opposite direction. The James River was used that way by the "Tomahitans" in 1674, when they journeyed down to Monocan Town and back in Gabriel Arthur's wake.15 Likewise, some Indian travelers needed only to descend certain rivers because they planned to return by another route. In all such cases, the watercraft used were usually temporary and quickly made. There are accounts of Indians making log rafts and bullockboats (hides stretched over a wooden framework), and the Creeks crossed streams they did not want to navigate by tying their goods up in skins and swimming across, pushing the buoyant packages ahead of them.16 But bark canoes appear in the records most often.

A canoe can be assembled rapidly (in about a day) from elm, cypress, or other bark. The method begins with finding a large tree and making a cut all around its circumference, both at the base and at a point fifteen to twenty feet up (that gives the length of the canoe). Slit along the length and detach the bark from the tree. Then cut a triangular piece out of each end, with the apex in the midline, so that when the bark is folded into a V-shaped hull the canoe will have a pointed prow and stern. Sew up the ends with sinew or young bark, propping the gunwales apart with sticks, and then waterproof the seams with deer fat. April is the best time of year for the operation, while the sap is up and the bark is more easily detachable. Canoes of hardwood bark were useful to Indian travelers, but they were still "awkward in the water and heavy on the portage."17

Footpaths were the alternative to waterways. Within the Virginia coastal plain, where the Powhatans lived, there were trails both along the rivers and across the necks between rivers, wherever there were pairs of Powhatan towns that needed connecting. The trails along the rivers were very likely set well back from the riverfront, with feeder paths to the waterfront towns, because they had to cross a myriad of tributary streams and estuaries, and it was easier to cross them higher up where they were narrow. When messages had to be transmitted fast upriver or across necks, then runners were probably used. The Powhatans also used trails, with fords over streams, to reach their trading partners to the south and southwest.18

Indian trails extended in a huge network across North America (fig. 1.3). For some journeys, as for those running northeast-southwest along the coastal plain or piedmont perpendicular to the navigable rivers, they were
the only way to travel. Some paths were truly arterial routes. The Catawba or Great Indian Warpath was one: “With the connections it had at each end, it extended from Canada to Florida and west into the Mississippi Valley.”

In its middle reaches, it ran down the Valley of Virginia, with connecting branches leading over the Blue Ridge toward the piedmont and thence to the coastal plain.

Many of the trails were probably very ancient, connecting places such as river valleys where people had lived for millennia. There is a common myth that Indian trails originally followed animal trails. Some did, but as Paul A. W. Wallace justly points out, animals’ destinations seldom coincide with those wanted by people, so people often made their own trails. Not only that, but because people’s needs in travel varied, there were often two or more

trails connecting important places. There might be an easy one leading through friendly towns for slow, sociable progress, and one or more harder ones for rapid transit that skirted settlements and went fairly directly to their ultimate destination. There were also varying routes which either sought out streams, for levelness of route and availability of drinking water, or avoided such crossings, for safety during times of much rain or high water. In higher elevations, all trails had unpleasantly damp spots during the spring thaw.

Thus it is no surprise that the English records mention multiple trails past or through strategic points. There were trails connecting all the Powhatan towns with one another, and it is likely that the major Powhatan towns (Powhatan and Appamatuck on the James, Pamunkey in the York River drainage, Rappahannock and later Portobacco on the Rappahannock, and Patowomeck on the Potomac) were focal points in a much larger network of trails. Englishmen did not record such points until about 1670, when they began serious exploration and regular trading. Their records show only two such strategic points: Bermuda Hundred on the Appomattox River (successor to Appamatuck), which was the jumping-off point for the Carolina Indian trade, and the area from just above the fall line on the Potomac River to Harpers Ferry, where there lay several major northeast-southwest Indian routes, one of them being the Great Indian Warpath. These routes had doubtless always been connected with all the important Powhatan towns by trails. And thus the Powhatans had always had access to overland routes leading all over the Eastern Woodlands.

The nature of the trails the Powhatans could have used has been reconstructed, notably by Wallace, William E. Myer, and Helen Hornbeck Tanner, from accounts left by early European travelers. Many of the trails were well-worn and easy to follow. Thus one gets the impression, when reading the early accounts, that when Europeans like Edward Bland and John Lawson hired Indians as guides, they wanted them less as pathfinders than as expert foragers on the way and interpreters upon arrival at the next Indian town. Bland, in particular, had a very knowledgeable Appamatuck Indian with him during his whole expedition, but he hired local guides in addition, apparently as a public relations ploy.

By and large, “dry, level and direct, give the key to Indian path making.” Paths met all three criteria as far as possible. Charlevoix remarked of Indian travelers that “nothing stops them, neither thickets, nor ditches, nor torrents, nor pools, nor rivers. They go always strait forwards in the directest line possible.” In reality, all paths involved compromise. In uneven country, a route along a stream might be more nearly level than one higher up, but in
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some seasons it was a good deal wetter and at all seasons it was likely to pass through denser vegetation. Nevertheless, Indian paths generally "went as straight as the topography would allow... keeping an eye on the distant terminus and allowing local feeders to take care of the side traffic." An occasional steep ascent was considered worth the savings in time. But generally trails used the landscape ingeniously, following river terraces for dryness in the valleys and crossing ridges through low gaps or, better yet, water gaps cut by rivers.66

A well-traveled road, which Europeans usually referred to as a "plain road,"67 was a multipurpose route, used for trade, diplomacy, war making (in its uninhabited stretches), and just plain visiting. An example was the Great Indian Warpath, which in its Pennsylvania stretches was ideal for non-warriors: "Along this route there were no high mountains to climb. If the traveler were in need of provisions or companionship, this was certainly the way for him to go. He would pass many settlements, a succession (during the eighteenth century) of Delaware, Shawnee, Mahican, and Nanticoke villages, besides a good scattering of individual Indian fields and cabins. Food and shelter were everywhere. It was a leisurely route."68

Such a much-used path was well cleared of brush and stones (easier on one's clothing), and it varied in width according to the terrain it passed through. The idea of Indians compulsively traveling in single file is a myth. In reality, they did so when they had to, as in mountainous or densely vegetated country where workable trails were only eighteen to twenty-four inches wide (fig. 1.4). Where the terrain allowed a wide swath of path, people traveled in sociable clumps. Less popular paths, which might be thus because of having very steep stretches, were less "plain" because of being more overgrown. Some were so seldom used that they were "difficult for those who were not acquainted with the woods to keep in it."69 It was possible for Indians to get lost, but the reason was usually not the petering out of the one and only trail. Either there were too many trails leading from a junction, or the whole countryside was temporarily flooded so that ordinary landmarks were not visible.68

The route of any trail would change slightly over time due to fallen trees in the way, especially after a storm. "The traditional Indian greeting extended to travelers, as reported by John Heckewelder, was metaphorically (with a string of wampum) to draw 'the thorns and briars out of their legs and feet,' and to heal 'the sores and bruises they had received by biting against logs.'70 John Lawson noted that the Indian practice was usually to go around such trees rather than climb over even a single one lying across the

Fig. 1.4. What a heavily used Indian trail used to look like. (Photo by Helen C. Rountree)
road. Thus "the path slowly adjusted itself, moving now to the right and now to the left. If a graph could be made of a trail, decade by decade, it would show a broad, blunted band, perhaps (as in the portage area between Presque Isle and French Creek) a mile or more in breadth." But when the important places in a region remained the same, as they did in the Tennessee mountains where major settlements were always in the river valleys, trails connecting such places would not only remain "plain," unless fallen logs caused a change, but they would actually "become worn down below the surface of the soil." Europeans followed these trails afterward, and still later they built them into highways and, in mountainous areas, added railroads as well.

When Indian people set out to walk along these trails or paddle along the waterways, they traveled fast by European standards. Woodland Indian people of both sexes were physically fit and very proud of being so. When they ran, their speed and endurance seemed almost miraculous. In either case, non-Indian travelers were often left gasping in their wake, with the sound of derisive laughter for company. John Lawson solved his problem with an Indian guide when he "saddled him with a good heavy Pack of some Part of our Cloaths and Bedding; by which Means we kept Pace with him." When another guide was laden only with all the party's clothes, "we had much ado to keep pace with him." The Indians whom Lawson saw, men and women alike, were able to stride along all day or alternatively to dance "for several Nights together, with the greatest Briskness imaginable, their Wind never failing them." That sort of endurance helps to explain how the "Tomahawks" could cover 2,100 miles on foot and by canoe in five months, with only short rest stops, and consider such efforts merely to be ordinary.

The safe return of an expedition, other than a war party, was often treated as an ordinary event as well. The English records say nothing of Powhatan practices on this score, but Europeans elsewhere were dumbfounded by Indian people's "lack" of emotion at such times, which was in reality a carefully controlled reserve dictated by etiquette. A Creek woman, for instance, greeted a returning husband after several months' absence with a flat, "So, you have got back again, I see," to which he merely replied, "Yes," before going into the house. However profitable his expedition had been, he would not discuss it until he went to the town square the next morning, where he told his cronies all about it "in a tedious, circumlocutory conversation of many hours"—also dictated by etiquette. When a successful warrior came home, on the other hand, emotion as well as ceremony was the order of the day. He often shouted out his arrival and was greeted by "a yelling multi-

eude," after which ceremonies of public triumph and thanksgiving took place.

Lodging and Food

People who traveled by canoe went ashore at night to eat and sleep. So accustomed were the Powhatans to travel this way that they could not at first believe that English ships could be sailed all night on the open ocean. The Indian priest who accompanied Pocahontas to England in 1616 added up the days it took to cross the Atlantic and got a figure that was double the English one—because he had counted the nights as additional days.

Indian travelers preferred to spend their nights with friends and relatives along the way, unless, that is, they were in a tearing hurry. Anyone pressed for time in the Indian world did well to avoid people altogether, since any meeting, even a casual one along the trail, required an exchange of civilities that took up time. Hospitality and sober, unhurried conversation were major values among Indian people.

When people met on the trail, if they were not enemies or pursuing urgent business, they promptly sat down together under a tree for a visit. They would not break immediately into volubility, either. They would sit awhile and share a pipe of tobacco, and then have "half an hour's grave discourse" about the news of the day. If one party had freshly killed game, they would send some of it along with the other party when they took their leave.

When people encountered a family encampment away from a town, hospitality was still the rule of the day. Any food the family and the visitors had would be shared, even if it was very little. Visitors had to accept what their hosts gave them, even if the hosts were in danger of going hungry themselves, for "it is incumbent on those who partake of a feast of this sort, to eat all that comes to their share or burn it." John Bartram and his companions were once impelled by their hostess to accept a meal newly cooked, "I heartily pityed the poor Squaw; for I believe she had dressed it for herself and several children; she also obliged us to accept a fine piece of venison to carry away." If the visitors camped with their hosts for the night, the next morning's present of food might be accompanied with "a familiar conversation for half an hour." When travelers arrived at a town, the rules of hospitality were even more lavish. The records of the Powhatan version concern diplomatically important visitors. The townspeople would form two lines, through which the new arrivals would walk, and salute them with shouts. Or else they would
bow their faces to the ground and scratch the earth with their nails as the newcomers passed. The chiefly host and the leading guest would then stroke each other by way of greeting. Then, when entertaining outdoors, the chief would lead the guests to a mat, seating himself or herself on one side, the guests opposite, and the councillors in attendance on a third side. If the reception was being held inside a chief’s house, the chief would be seated on an elaborately decorated “bed” along the end wall of the house, with wives (in the case of a male chief) and councillors ranged on mats in perpendicular rows in front, and visitors would be formally conducted down the length of the house to face the assemblage. Orators would then formally welcome the travelers at great length, with magniloquent language and emphatic gestures, after which a tremendous feast would be served. The visitors would be given much more than they could eat, with the understanding that they were to share it with the retinue they would undoubtedly have brought with them. “This is a general custom, that what they give, not to take again, but you must either eat it, give it away, or carry it with you.” After dinner, a pipe was smoked and the townspeople of both sexes danced; if the guest was staying overnight, then conversation was general, with real business being left for the next day. Dignitaries staying the night were finally conducted to a private house, where they were provided with beds and also with female bedfellows.

Hospitality at other Indian towns followed a similar course. Visitors were an excuse for a party, and “feasts served as the great bells of the country” to summon people from far and wide. The Nottoways and Meherrins set aside houses for visitors when they arrived and provided them with food. The Carolina Siouan-speakers erected large, thatched houses (ordinary ones were covered with bark) and expected their leaders to maintain these, play host to town meetings, and entertain visitors in them. Guests would be served with plenty of food as soon as they arrived, no conversation being expected until later. (Indeed, any stranger entering even a private house would sit down and remain silent until addressed by some member of the family, however long it might be.) Dignitaries were seated between the “king” and his councilmen, as among the Powhatans. After the meal, a pipe would be smoked and the men and women of the town would dance.

Among the Lenapes, guests would immediately be taken indoors and fed. It was considered bad manners—and unnecessary, too—to ask for food and drink. Any conversation could wait until after the guest’s hunger, real or otherwise, was appeased and he was ready to talk: “The people though earnestly desiring to know our commission, would not take the liberty to ask us.” If the newcomers were on official business, a pipe would be smoked together before eating. Any host not offering hospitality, or even a little bit of food to a stranger too polite to ask for it, was considered to be “an inhuman being.” Lenape warriors felt free to destroy the property of such a person. Iroquois practices were similar. Part of a longhouse would be cleared to receive any strangers, and there they would be given food, perhaps after an official greeting. Conversation that evening would be “on things of no Consequence,” with the important business being kept until the next morning, when everyone was fresh enough to be adept at the lengthy and florid oratory required.

Creek travelers stayed with relatives, however distant; and if they had none in a town, they slept in the public square and were fed as the town’s guests. Non-Indian travelers among the Creeks found that they could move safely about as long as they followed Creek rules of hospitality. Greetings even between acquaintances from friendly towns would be formal. A visitor, being then invited into the house, was promptly invited to sit down and, while being offered a pipe and plied with food, was asked “his residence, destination, and business.” A brief reply to each was all that was needed; however, if the visitor was a stranger, the discourse proceeded with due deliberation: “They accost each other with studied and manifest civility to which they reciprocally receive an answer equally ceremonious and apposite until an acquaintance takes place.” Afterward his host would take him to “the assembly,” the evening gathering of the settlement’s men at the town square, where he was introduced and invited to share in partaking tobacco and cassina drink.

Sexual hospitality on the part of a town’s women was fairly common in the Eastern Woodlands. The Powhatan case has already been mentioned, though there is no record of the marital status of the women involved. Their services brought no stigma upon them; in fact, married women generally were permitted to have affairs as long as their husbands consented. The Nottoways and Saponis followed similar practices regarding guests. Among the Carolina Siouan-speakers by 1700, traders who stayed a long time or who came regularly would be invited to take a wife, who would then act according to Indian laws of matrimony and kinship for as long as she and the trader maintained the connection (a common practice throughout the Woodlands). Married women among the Siouan-speakers were permitted to take temporary lovers during a husband’s absence. Any children born during the union were considered part of the mother’s family. There were also “trading girls,” set apart by a recognizable hairstyle, who acted as professional prostitutes
and avoided having children. They struck their own bargains with local Indian men, but when dealing with nonlocals they had to get their parents' permission and also admit their town's "king" as a paid go-between. The haggling for a night's entertainment was done publicly, in a perfectly businesslike manner, with the ensuing consummation taking place either away from other young people or perhaps in the midst of a houseful of older people who politely took no notice. Trading girls were often known to retire after several years, becoming respectable married women in their communities. The Hurons likewise had some women, married and single, who engaged in short-term relations with visiting men; any children resulting had full rights in their mothers' families.46

When no lodging was available with people along the way, Indian travelers camped out as best they might. Some hardy souls did not bother with shelter, like the two men accompanying Benjamin Hawkins, who slept soundly on the unprotected ground all night during a heavy rain. Others took shelter in unused houses along the way, especially in bad weather. Such houses were frequently available, at least in the framework stage: we hear of "old hunting houses" in Virginia and isolated "cabins" north of there.47

Often travelers used temporary bark shelters on posts. Along Tonawanda Creek, there were "a great many [such] cabins ... erected along the road from time to time, both by the white people and the Indians"; any passersby was free to use them. Their construction was simple. Four poles or forked sticks were set in the ground, the two in front being longer than the two in back (five feet high in front, three and a half feet in back), set so as to make a rectangular enclosure about nine feet by six, according to John Heckewelder. The roof was added by either of two methods. If the posts were forked sticks, poles were cut and laid across, connecting the fortes; then strips of bark of the appropriate length were placed front-to-back across the poles, with more strips of bark for a floor and sometimes branches for the sides in inclement weather. If the posts were simply poles, a single piece of bark was cut and laid across them. John Bartram found that a tree a foot in diameter, with cuts around the base and also seven feet up, yielded a piece of bark that was seven feet by three-plus feet. The bark was detached from the tree, after making a lengthwise slit, using a sapling hewn into a wedge of about two feet in length, cut on the spot. When people reoccupied deserted houses with bark floors, it was advisable to turn over the bark on the ground, to scare off snakes. There also might be a problem with fleas left by the previous occupant. If rain was beginning and time was short, people cut four poles, set them in the ground, and threw a blanket over them. One Nanticoke Indian

accompanying Bartram did this by using four saplings, with both ends thrust into the ground at intervals of two feet, making an impromptu barrel-vaulted frame whose cover would shed water.48

Each person on a trip was responsible for his or her own bedding; if by chance it became wet, that was the owner's hard luck. John Lawson found this out the hard way on a winter's day when a companion of his slipped on a single-pole Indian bridge and fell in. Lawson laughed so hard that he himself fell in. Both of them had to spend a horribly cold night in wet bedding. Of course their Indian guide had kept dry, since Indians in general, according to Lawson, were incredibly surefooted.49 Being physically fit was part of it, but wearing mocassins instead of leather boots must have helped.

Travelers expecting to go long distances always carried at least some lightweight provisions and the weaponry to supplement them. Of the chinamroot bread and parched cornmeal used by hunters and warriors, the latter was more commonly taken. People traveling fast might carry and eat no other food; those with more leisure used it only when nothing else was available.50

Indian men, being proficient hunters, expected to shoot their meat as they traveled. Usually they were successful, which is why Europeans were eager to hire them as "guides."51 At other times, though, the hunt brought in nothing. The party then had to live on what provisions they still had, forage for plant food, or go hungry until game became available again.52 Berries in season would serve; Gabriel Arthur supported himself for the last several hundred miles coming home by eating huckleberries. Otherwise, people in distress turned to the dogs that went with them, the leather of their clothing, "roots in the ground," or the "barks of trees."53 The roots were wild potatoes (wapatos, Sagittaria spp.) in some cases, and probably also groundnuts (Apios americana), which can be roasted for a turniplike taste or, if time is short, eaten raw (in which state they leave an unpleasant rubbery film on one's teeth). Tree bark, which most modern people think of as a food to eat only in pure desperation, is actually a nutritious alternative food, when the inner bark of the right trees—pines, maples, alders, birches, beech, oaks, poplars, lindens, willows, elms—is used. The twigs of mulberry trees and blackberry and raspberry bushes are edible. Several trees also produce sap that is sweet and drinkable: sycamore and all species of maple, birch, hickory, and walnut. A knowledgeable Indian person would not starve completely; the escaped war prisoners who suffered the worst privations, becoming mere skeletons before reaching safety (if they survived that long), were those who lacked knives.54

Indian people's endurance was so practiced that they could go for longer
periods than Europeans could with little or no food. Proud of their foraging capabilities, they ate up their supplies and then withheld periods of want, confident that the hungry time would not last. The Powhatans are known to have done that, and so were many other Indian peoples. The "queen" of Tuckahoe escaped from the Chickasaws and made her way home; she "was 17 days in the woods ... and ... was like to perish" before she reached home. One man, a "king" of some of the "southern Indians," decamped from Fort Christians in Virginia and made his way home, being on the trail for two weeks in March without provisions. A lack of food for a couple of days was nothing worth mentioning; hunters' activities would go on as usual. But during a prolonged hungry spell, Indian tempers did become frayed and they allowed themselves to be out of sorts, especially toward any prisoners they might have with them. Commodity to Trade

A wide variety of goods are known to have been traded among the Indians of the Eastern Woodlands, even after subtracting the European goods that so many of the records mention. Listing the goods that were transported gives a more vivid picture of the general directions of Indian contacts among themselves in peacetime. As a sample of the variety, among the peoples of the Deep South

the inland tribes could furnish mica, copper, pipe stone, flint for arrows, and angelica roots, while the coast tribes had sea shells, dry fish, *Ilex vomitoria*, and salt. This last commodity was also obtained from the trans-Mississippi tribes by those on the eastern side. When William Bartram was on the Suwanee River, Fla., he learned that the Indians of that region went trading and hunting in their cypress canoes all along the coast as far as the southern end of Florida and even to Havana. He himself encountered a party which had just returned from the latter place. He states that they carried thither in trade "deer skins, furs, dry fish, bees-wax, honey, bear's oil, and some other articles."*  

Angélica sylvestris (*atropurpurea*) was an up-country plant that Indians of the Deep South considered "a Luxury in Smoking and Chewing." The species *atropurpurea* is edible and has a celery-like taste. It occurs in rich river bottoms, such as the Ohio River in West Virginia; it is rare in Maryland and North Carolina and not found at all in Virginia. If it was the almost magically efficacious "hunting root" that John Clayton saw used in eastern Virginia, then it had to be imported. Antimony particles in an earthen ore were mined by the Iowataweeck Indians near the head of Aqua Creek, and then the silvery particles were extracted and sold all over the Powhatan area, if not farther afield. Buffalo hides were reported in the possession of the people of Roanoke Island in the 550s. However, since no buffalo are known to have existed in either Virginia or North Carolina, the hides, if buffalo they were, must have been traded in from a very long distance away. Copper, the coastal Indians always said, came from somewhere inland (for Virginia piedmont locations, see map 4.1), and they had to trade to get it. Because of the difficulty in obtaining it, as well as the rarity of ore pure enough for the cold-hammering the Indians used, copper was to Indian people as gold was to the Spanish. Its use was entirely ornamental (fig. 1.4) and mercenary; it was usually among the possessions of (or changing hands between) high-ranking persons. Deerskins were items of wealth and therefore were traded on a moderate scale before the English stepped up the trafficking in the seventeenth century. Many people offered European explorers deerskins for barter, and Powhatan himself collected deerskins as part of his tribute. Indian people who were really well dressed had robes made of many deerskins, only some of which they would have shot and tanned themselves.

Feathers, especially unusually colorful ones, may have been a trade item, though historical accounts rarely mention them. Feathers were most spectaculantly used in making mantles. Some of these in the Carolinas were executed with figures in various contrasting colors, using both feathers and bird skins such as petals from the heads of mallard drakes. Others were of one color like the satiny "deep purple" hip-length garment worn by a Quoyoughconknock chief's wife. That wife's mantle is an enigma: no purple bird occurs in Virginia. The only possible candidates are several varieties of ducks (mallard, American black duck, wood duck), which have an iridescent blue or violet patch (speculum) on their wings. (Wigeons, teals, and shovelers have a green patch, equally usable in leatherwork.) Each bird has only about ten such feathers, each one with purple only on one side of the guilt (the feathers overlap and make the speculum seem a solid color). One would have to accumulate—or trade for—thousands of speculum feathers to make a mantle for a grown woman.

Flint, really fine flint, was valuable to Indian people because it could be knapped into nearly razor-edged projectile points. It does not occur on the coastal plain of eastern North America except in rare outwash nodules; instead coastal people had to import it from certain places in the piedmont and, for the very best grade, farther west in Tennessee.
Fish and shellfish, when dried for storage, were sometimes traded to people with less abundant supplies of them. The sixteenth-century Indians of coastal South Carolina are known to have sold fish to interior people, and John Lawson recorded the Indians of his time catching and selling quantities of smaller, inferior shellfish called "blackmoors teeth" to "the remote Indians, where they are of great Value." These were probably the marginella shells that archaeologists find in inland Indian sites. The first English expedition to the James River falls encountered people transporting "baskets full of Dryed oysters" in a canoe.\textsuperscript{116}

\textit{Ixora vomitoria} (yaupon holly or cassina) is a low-growing tree whose leaves contain caffeine in considerable quantities. When strong tea made from the leaves is drunk rapidly in large amounts, nausea results. The leaves, pounded and parched and finally dried, were therefore in strong demand over a wide area for use as a frequent and rather ceremonial purge. The Powhatans used it in the springtime only. Yaupon is a southern sandbanks plant; found all along the Gulf coast, it occurs as a native no farther north on the Atlantic coast than Virginia Beach and the southern end of the Eastern Shore.\textsuperscript{137} Therefore, only truly coastal people, such as the Chesapeakes and Accomas in Virginia, had access to it, and anyone farther inland or farther north had to barter for it.

Medicinal roots and herbs probably were traded actively in Woodland Indian times, but Europeans rarely mentioned it. An exception is a record of the Ottawa, who dealt in those as well as other commodities. The only record of such trading by the Powhatans is the chief Opechancanough's sending in 1621 to the Eastern Shore for a deadly poisonous plant that grew particularly abundantly there; he wanted to feed it to his English enemies. The plant was probably \textit{Ceuta maculata} (poison hemlock), a plant which within Virginia only occurs plentifully on the Eastern Shore; a walnut-sized piece of the root can kill a cow.\textsuperscript{138}

Pearls from either oysters (\textit{Crassostrea virginica}) or freshwater mussels (\textit{Anodonta} \textit{spp.}) were uncommon, unusual with their pearl-like appearance—though often burnt in cooking before discovery—and therefore considered valuable. Any Indian people with salt or fresh waterways in their territories could find a few pearls. Powhatan chiefs collected pearls in tribute, and the paramount chief and his brothers were seen to have a great many. The Chowanoc's report of a visit by the chief from the lower Chesapeake region in 1684 specifically noted his many pearls. Gabriel Archer wrote that the Weyanocks' territory had "an abundance" of pearl mussels. The only really productive mussel, however, is \textit{Margaritifera margaritifera}, the eastern river pearl mussel. In its natural distribution it is a boreal species that occurs only in the Atlantic drainage but not south of Pennsylvania; the colder period of the Little Ice Age (A.D. 1450–1850) may have pushed its distribution somewhat farther southward.\textsuperscript{139} Pearls therefore remained a rare commodity, available only to powerful people, in the rest of the Eastern Woodlands.

Pigments which were rare and highly prized were eminently tradable. There were probably several such substances, based upon minerals, in eastern North America, though historical sources about them are vague. The Powhatans placed the greatest value on a powder made of red root they called "puccon," which seems to have been \textit{Lithospermum carolinense} (still called puccon). That species grows in only one county in Virginia—Sussex
County, in Nottoway Indian territory—and otherwise not at all in the states surrounding Virginia. It is a sandy pine barrens plant, and its next closest occurrence today is in the southernmost counties of the South Carolina coastal plain. Its rarity would indeed have made it valuable to the Powhatans. There is a sister species, *L. canescens* (hairy puccoon or Indian paint), which is found predominantly in the mountains of Virginia (with a few piedmont counties added) and West Virginia among the mid-Atlantic states. Its distance from the coastal plain may have made it valuable and therefore classifiable with *L. carolinense*. John Smith said specifically that the Powhatan "puccoon" was a dye on the skin. That may disqualify it from being the redroot pigment which Lawson said the Carolina Siouans collected in "the hilly country" and traced widely. That pigment did not dye the skin or hair, and it had the additional felicity of combating head lice.

Salt was not used by all Woodland peoples; the Powhatans seem not to have bothered with it. But some tribes whose territories lacked it wanted salt badly. The major sources were the South Carolina coast, where the Indians apparently made it from seawater, and various salt licks in New York and Kentucky and environs. Made into cakes, it was traded widely and known about at even greater distances. The Powhatans and some of their neighbors mentioned it to Englishmen and gave the latter the impression that there was a salt sea beyond the Blue Ridge.

Shells were highly valued all through the Woodlands either as large, whole shells for keepsakes or carving into gorgets, or else when made into beads (variously called peack and roamake) and put on strings (fig. 1.6) or woven into belts. The shells involved in peack (cylindrical beads) were always hard, thick marine ones, difficult to shape with any tools, and Powhatan wrote "over the Baye" for his. Those large enough for gorget-carving came from whelks, of which the channeled whelk, the knobbed whelk, the lightning whelk, and the snow whelk occur in Virginia waters (salty waters, either the ocean or the lower Chesapeake Bay). Shells used for peack were either whelks or hard clams, the latter being found in the lower, saltier-brackish reaches of rivers and estuaries. Roanoke (small disk-shaped beads strung together) was made from oysters, which are also saltwater species. The Cuscarawakes (Nanticoke) were said to have produced the most roamake in the Chesapeake region. Any people farther inland who wanted these shells had to trade for them, and they did so avidly. Among Indian people in the piedmont of the Deep South, a conch-shell bead the size of a man's forefinger sold for four deerskins. Shell beads that come from archaeological excavations are dull, often discolored objects; new beads, on the other hand, shine and glow—

![Fig. 1.6. Shell beads of various sizes and shapes found at the Mount Airy site, near Warsaw, Virginia. (Ben C. McCary collection, photo by Helen C. Roundtree)](image)

James Adair likened them to ivory. Yet it was shells from the ground that were used for the famous "Powhatan Mantle"; a recent restudy has shown them to be fossils.

*Stonite* or soapstone was a soft stone that was easily carved into bowls in prehistoric times and into beads or other ornaments then and later. There are many soapstone quarries in the piedmont of Virginia (see fig. 4.2) and elsewhere in the Eastern Woodlands. Some of the best deposits occurred in the Cherokee county.

Warfare as a Communications Mechanism

The Eastern Woodland peoples were chronically at war. Nearly all males, except some priests, were trained for it; none of these could envision a world without strife with their enemies. An Iroquois reply to a "ridiculous" Eu-
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european question sums it up: "They will answer you, that they cannot live without War, which they have ever been used to; and that if Peace be made with the Indians they now war withal, they must find out some others to wage War against; for, for them to live in Peace, is to live out of their Element, War, Conquest, and Murder, being what they delight in, and value themselves for."

For our purposes, we need only note that any improvements of weaponry on the part of enemies were keenly observed, before turning to an examination of the fate of prisoners taken on the warpath. These were all generally ill-treated on the trail. But once they arrived at their captors' town, their fates differed. Most men and some women were tortured to death, often after a period of living among their captors. The others — women, children, and a few men — were forcibly kept in the town and eventually resocialized and adopted into families. The coming of Europeans intensified Indian warfare. As the years wore on and one tribe or another became depleted of its warriors, more male captives would be kept alive and adopted, or else an uneasy peace was made.

Whatever their fate, prisoners usually had a chance to communicate in some way with the people holding them. Prisoners who were adopted became permanent parts of the community, adding their knowledge as well as their genes to those of their new relatives. Thus some of the Creek Indians' "most favorite songs and dances, they have from their enemy, the Chactaw." Thus also when a peace was made, however temporary, the two sides often already had blood relatives, fluent in both languages, among their former enemies. The practice of adopting war captives probably did as much as the trading relations to make the Eastern Woodlands a cosmopolitan place.

Summary

Woodland Indian people, probably including the Powhatans, engaged in travel and war on a far-flung scale. They were hardy people, accustomed to prolonged physical activity on the trail or in a canoe. When they wanted something badly, like a rare trade commodity or revenge upon a distant enemy, they could and did go long distances at astonishing speed to accomplish their wishes.

Their travel resulted, among other things, in genetic intermixing among peoples. Indian customs of hospitality encouraged sexual liaisons; ease of accepting congenial strangers promoted longer-term unions; and adoption of war captives more or less enforced them. We may therefore expect to see in the human biological record some patterns of interregional similarities as well as intraregional peculiarities.

Prolonged contact with people of different linguistic backgrounds resulted in multilingual people. Traders, male or female, who stayed and married into customers' communities were one example; adopted war captives were another. It was never difficult for European explorers to find someone in one town who spoke the language of the next town, even if the two languages were entirely different. People who regularly covered long distances would have become fluent in languages from three or more different linguistic families. The Algonquin-speaking Appamatuck guide hired by Edward Bland would have had easy access to learning Nortoway and Meherrin (Iroquoian) and several Siouan dialects, just by traveling 100 miles from his home.

Indian travels also resulted in the spread of goods and practical information like agricultural techniques. Archaeologists constantly map the distribution of preserved artifacts, with an eye to their origin; the Eastern Woodlands provide some fascinating patterns. And even perishable things can be shown to have diffused. For instance, wild tobacco (Nicotiana rustica) is not native to any area within or east of the Appalachians, and since the Indians stopped cultivating it, it has disappeared there. But when Europeans first came, all the Indians of the region grew it and used it for ceremonial purposes. The plant and the general idea of how to use it had come from elsewhere.

Extensive contacts among Indian people had less desirable effects, such as the spread of diseases. This was true before the Europeans came; after their arrival it became pathetically plain. A "new" germ could arrive on the coast, thanks to a brief European visit, and then spread inland through Indian channels alone. However, for the mid-Atlantic region, Thomas Hariot indicated that the communities hardest hit were those who actually met the foreigners face-to-face.

Last but not least, Woodland people's intertribal contacts passed along information about the strangers who were crossing the Atlantic and probing into Indian country. Though the historical record seldom contains details of what was related, we do know that word of actual arrivals in people's territory was often spread abroad, and that sometimes distant people also sent emissaries to inquire into rumors of such arrivals. When emissaries were lacking because of political barriers, then the rumors might be vague indeed. Thus the prophecy of Powhatan's priests about a people coming to attack him from the east (Strachey words it as "Chesapeake Bay") may have had its
origin in rumors wafting north from some of the Carolina Algonquians, allies of the Chesapeakes, with whom he was on hostile terms. And thus the Man- nahoaic account of people coming "from under the world" to turn theirs upside down. 124

TWO

DOUGLAS H. UBELAKER

HUMAN BIOLOGY OF VIRGINIA INDIANS

Although considerable information about the biology of Eastern Woodland Indians, and Powhatans in particular, has emerged in recent years, a comprehensive synthesis has until now remained elusive. Perhaps due to the lack of such an overview, biological perspective is generally lacking in anthropological reviews of the area. 1 The data available come from early ethnohistorical sources and from analyses of the human remains recovered from archaeological excavations (fig. 2.1). This chapter offers such an overview by examining the published evidence and what it reveals about the population dynamics of the area. For the benefit of nonanthropologists, some of the more technical terms will be defined when they are used.

Historical Evidence

Descriptions of Indians along the mid-Atlantic coast by early Europeans provide only general biological details. John Lawson offered observations on the physical type of the North Carolina Indians. He noted:

The Indians of North-Carolina are a well shaped clean-made People, of different Statuaries, as the Europeans are, yet chiefly inclin’d to be tall. They are a very straight People, and never bend forwards, or stoop in the Shoulders, unless much overpowr’d by old Age. Their Limbs are exceeding well shap’d. As for their Legs and Feet, they are generally the handsomest in the World. Their Bodies are a little flat, which is occasion’d, by being laced hard down to a Board, in their Infancy. This is all the Cradle they have, which I shall describe at large elsewhere. Their Eyes are black, or of a dark Hazle: The White is marbled with red Streaks, which is ever common to these People, unless when sprung