

Hurricanes Sixteenth Century Virginia Hurricanes

Dates before September 2, 1752 converted from the Julian to the Gregorian Calendar

The Spanish were becoming nervous about French activity in the New World, particularly along the Atlantic coast. This worried the Spanish because they used the Gulf Stream to move their plunder from old Mexico and Florida back to Spain. King Phillip II demanded the settlement of the coast in 1558, leading to the first explorations of the region around Virginia (Lewis & Loomie).

1564: The Native American population of the area told of a shipwreck during that year. A "christian shippe" was beaten by a storm; none aboard survived the ordeal. The natives made instruments from the nails and spikes off the vessel. (Chapman)

June 14, 1566 (Old Style): Four vessels of Angel Villafañe's fleet were passing offshore Hatteras. On the 14th, two small vessels perished, while Villafañe's caravel nearly foundered. The remaining two vessels eventually made their way to Havana (Lewis & Loomie).

One of the first attempts at English colonization in the Americas, Roanoke Island proved to be a unique challenge, as storm after storm pummeled the region. Most of the systems that struck this island most likely would have made in impact in the region now known as Virginia. To the left is an image of the island today, courtesy of Roanokeisland.com.

June 23-26, 1586: Sir Francis Drake arrived near Roanoke Island, only to be greeted by a storm. It was described as "extraordinary" and lasted three days. His fleet was in great danger during the tempest. The Primrose broke its 250-pound anchor. Hail the size of hen eggs pelted the colony. Waterspouts also threatened the mariners. The settlers evacuated back to England soon after the storm.

August 31, 1587: Admiral Drake encountered a hurricane at Roanoke Island during the following year. Strong northeast gales caused him and his crew to "cut his cables" and set out to sea. It took six days to regroup after this treacherous storm.

August 26, 1591: Roanoke Island was again struck by a severe storm. The winds blew out of the northeast, directly into the harbor. Waves crashed on a sandbar and currents in the area became quite dangerous.