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## Archaeologists to Search for Lost 1565 French Fleet of Jean Ribault

*This July and August, archaeologists will search for a fleet of 16<sup>th</sup> century French ships that were lost in a hurricane, resulting in the establishment of a Spanish colony in St. Augustine, Fla. in 1565.*

**ST. AUGUSTINE, FLA.** – Later this July, researchers from the St. Augustine Lighthouse & Museum will embark on a six-week search for the lost French fleet of Jean Ribault, which sank off the Florida coast in 1565. If discovered, these ships would arguably represent the most important shipwreck sites ever discovered in U.S. waters.

“If these ships hadn’t gone down in a hurricane, the entire history of the First Coast, and that of our country, would be dramatically different,” said Chuck Meide, director of the museum’s Lighthouse Archaeological Maritime Program and the principal investigator on this expedition. “The loss of these ships and subsequent massacre of French survivors by Spanish forces is what led to the founding of St. Augustine by Spain 450 years ago.”

Under the direction of France’s King Charles IX, Ribault led a fleet of seven ships, including his 32-gun flagship, *Trinité*, to the New World in 1565. One thousand French colonists, sailors, and troops came with him to bolster the French colony at Fort Caroline, near the mouth of the St. Johns River. At the same time, Spanish explorer Pedro Menéndez de Avilés arrived in Florida intent on destroying the French enterprise. In a preemptive strike to keep Menendez from establishing a colony in St. Augustine, Ribault sailed his four largest ships southwards, only to be struck by a hurricane which scattered and wrecked his fleet. With the loss of these ships, Fort Caroline was taken, Ribault and his men were put to the sword at Matanzas Inlet, and Spain established the first permanent settlement in the United States.

Though the French fleet has never been found, artifacts from survivor camps near the Canaveral National Seashore have given archaeologists an indication of where to search. This expedition will be the first geophysical survey ever conducted to search for these ships in the marine environment. If found these ships would be the oldest French vessels ever discovered in the United States, or anywhere else in the New World.

“This is a really exciting project for our museum and our state and federal partners,” said Kathy A. Fleming, executive director of the St. Augustine Lighthouse & Museum. “We have done extensive research and exhibits on a number of area shipwrecks, but this one really tells the origin story of St. Augustine.”

This expedition is funded and supported by partnerships between the St. Augustine Lighthouse & Museum, the Lighthouse Archaeological Maritime Program (LAMP), the National Park Service, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the State of Florida, the Institute of Maritime History, and the Center for Historical Archaeology.

All partners involved in this historic project have leveraged their joint resources including expertise, equipment and funding to make the expedition possible. This project has been financed in part with historic preservation grant assistance provided by the Bureau of Historic Preservation, Division of Historical Resources, Florida Department of State, assisted by the Florida Historical Commission and a grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Office of Ocean Exploration and Research (NOAA OER). The search has been tapped as one of NOAA OER's signature expeditions for 2014.

The National Park Service's Southeast Archaeological Center (SEAC) and Submerged Resources Center (SRC) are providing additional resources and support to the LAMP team and will be actively participating in the research. The search will be conducted from a research vessel provided by the Institute of Maritime History, and will use historical research undertaken in the French archives by the co-principal investigator on the expedition, Dr. John de Bry of the Center for Historical Archaeology in Melbourne, Fla.

To safeguard these archaeological sites, which are protected from molestation or looting by law, the specific locations of discovered shipwrecks and/or artifacts will not be disclosed via media or other means. Very few artifacts will be removed from any shipwreck sites discovered, and then only temporarily for documentation before being returned to their original location on or under the seafloor.

Results of the survey and search will be released after the expedition concludes in August. Information and updates will be available on the St. Augustine Lighthouse & Museum blog located at <http://staugustinelighthouse.org>.

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