

Ponce de Leon and the Fountain of Youth

What Was Ponce de León Really Searching for?



Ponce de León

Juan Ponce de León was a Spanish explorer. He is best known for exploring the coasts of Florida in search of the Fountain of Youth. It was believed that if you drank the water from the Fountain of Youth, you would become young again or live forever.

As with many historical events, the story of what happened changes over time as people retell it. It seems that this was the case with Ponce de León's search for the Fountain of Youth. Both the fountain and his search for it are a myth. Historians can't find any evidence that Ponce de León was searching for the mythical fountain. They believe the story was made up after his death.

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So what was Ponce de León really searching for? The next best thing: power, fame, and fortune.

Ponce de León was born in 1460 in Spain. Historians believe that he got his start on Christopher Columbus's second trip to the West Indies in 1493.



Fast-Forward 10 Years

Ponce de León is a governor of the Island of Hispaniola (present-day Dominican Republic and Haiti). He hears rumors of gold on a nearby island (present-day Puerto Rico). Ponce de León gets permission from the King of Spain to explore the island. He sets sail in 1508. He takes 50 soldiers and one ship. There, he finds a settlement near present-day San Juan.

Ponce de León had great luck in Puerto Rico. He found lots of gold. He gave it to the King and Queen of Spain. The royal couple was so pleased, they made him governor of Puerto Rico.

The Spanish crown wanted more gold. They urged Ponce de León to explore more islands in search of more gold.

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The Myth Part of the Story

Ponce de León heard of a magical Fountain of Youth on nearby Bimini Island. He set sail for the island, but ended up on the coast of Florida instead. He landed in Charlotte Harbor near present-day St. Augustine. There he searched up and down the coast for the mythical fountain.

The True Part of the Story

Ponce de León landed on the east coast of Florida in March of 1513. He landed around the time of the Christian holiday, Easter. In Spain, Easter was known as the “feast of Flowers.” In honor of the holiday, Ponce de León named this new land Florida, which means “Flowery.”

Ponce de León stayed in Florida for several months. There is no evidence that he was searching for the mythical Fountain of Youth. He was most likely searching for more gold for the Spanish crown. He never found it. But the Spanish king was pleased and named Ponce de León governor of Bimini and Florida.

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A statue of Ponce de León in St. Augustine, Florida

In February 1521, Ponce de León returned to Florida to explore the western side of the peninsula. His expedition spent several months exploring. In July 1521, native warriors attacked the group. Ponce de León was injured in the fighting. Many believe he

was shot in the leg with a poison arrow. Shortly after, the expedition sailed to Cuba, where Ponce de León died later that month. He was 61 years old.