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St. Pete stakes claim as site for Navarez landing

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Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



ST. PETE STAKES CLAIM AS SITE FOR NARVAEZ LANDING

By HAMPTON DUNN

ST. PETERSBURG -- Others may be confused about where the Spanish explorer Panfilo de Narvaez landed in Florida one sunny April day in 1528, but the history-minded folks here have staked out a claim as the site for this memorable event.

A spindly signboard announces to motorists passing by the area known as the "Jungle" on Park Street North that the conquistador set foot at that Indian mound. Other historians contend he debarked in the Clearwater Harbor, also in Pinellas County.

Encyclopaedia Britannica contradicts itself on Narvaez' site of landing: In one volume it says he landed "probably near the present site of Tampa." In another volume it says Narvaez landed "near Pensacola bay in April 1528" and struck inland reaching "Apalache" on June 27, then retreated to the coast, near St. Marks.

The Narvaez party was the first large group of Europeans to enter the U.S. There were 600 soldiers, 60 horses and packs of dogs to chase Indians. They came in five big ships after a rough voyage. Enroute 140 men had deserted at Santa Domingo, another 60 were lost in a hurricane.

This adventurer landed just 15 years after Ponce de Leon had touched the state. This means that Pinellas County was discovered just 36 years after Columbus discovered America, 11 years before Hernando deSoto landed at Tampa Bay, and 35 years before the founding of St. Augustine.

Narvaez and most of his party subsequently died when their ship was destroyed in a Gulf storm enroute to Mexico. Only four persons survived, including Cabeza de Vaca, the expedition's high sheriff who kept a narrative of the party's experiences.

