

*The following letter is the report which Giovanni da Verrazzano sent to King François I of France in the year 1524, in which he relates the discoveries he had made during his voyage of exploration of the Atlantic coast of North America from what is today South Carolina northward to Nova Scotia. The letter, the main source of documentation, concerning Giovanni da Verrazzano's travels, has come down to us in four versions. The one printed below is called the "Rasmusiana" published in 1553 by Giovan Battista Ramusio in his work "Delle Navigazioni et viaggi", and is the earliest of the four versions.*

*The description, laid out here, of a hospitable, richly forested and fertile land inhabited by handsome men and beautiful women, had much to do with the creation of a legend of the New World as a sort of earthly paradise. This sort of verbal picture helped to make the Americas the goal of the later phenomenon of large-scale immigration from Europe to the Americas.*

*In the letter, Giovanni da Verrazzano demonstrates a total lack of prejudice in judging the novelties he observes. The open-mindedness and sincerity he exercises in approaching the indigenous populations is obvious. He calls, for example, the tribal chiefs he encounters "kings" and their followers "gentlemen". In the light of the subsequent colonial history of the Americas, this is striking. Giovanni da Verrazzano was, it should be remembered, a product of the highly civilised culture of the Renaissance and the Humanistic thought reigning in the Florence of his time.*

*Letter of July, 1524, in which the Florentine navigator Giovanni da Verrazzano reports to the King Francois I his accomplishments during his voyage of exploration of the North American coast (from the South Carolina to Nova Scotia)*

Dieppe, July 8, 1524

Your Most Serene Highness,

Now that I have returned from my travels, I wish to relate all that we have discovered to Your Majesty.

We left the uninhabited Isle of Deserta (*Ilhas Deserias*), near the Island of Madera, on January 17, 1524. The crew of our ship, the *Dalfina*, was made up of fifty men. We had on board enough food and water, arms and other instruments of war, as well as naval munitions, to last for eight months on the high seas.

We set off on a westward course, with a light, gentle wind blowing behind us from the east. We travelled eight hundred leagues (*about 4800 kilometres*) in just twenty- four days.

On the twenty fourth of February, at about four o'clock in the afternoon, we were hit by a storm so violent that I believe no sailor has ever seen the like. Only by divine intervention and good fortune, and thanks also to the solidity and resistance of our glorious ship, were we able to withstand the blows of the waves and come through this misadventure safely.

We proceeded on our course to the west, with a slight deviation to the north. In another twenty-five days we travelled another four hundred leagues (*about 2400 kilometres*), at which point we found ourselves before a land never before seen by man, ancient or modern. We approached to within a distance of a quarter of a league (*one kilometre and a half*) from the land, and at that distance were able to determine that it must be inhabited as there were large bonfires burning on the shores. As we found no port or inlet to dock our ship in, we put down our anchor offshore, and sent a boat toward the beaches. We were able to see a large number of people, who had apparently come down to observe our approach, but they fled as soon as we arrived at the shores. We tried to reassure them with all manner of friendly gesture. A few of the braver finally came forth, and expressed great joy at seeing us. They expressed amazement at our way of dressing, our appearance and the colour of our skin. We disembarked at that point, and were able to learn something about these people, their lives and their culture, which I shall hereby report to Your Majesty. These men were naked, except for the small skirt-like garment they used to cover their genitals. This they fashioned from the pelts of small, marten-like animals, which hung from their waists to their knees from a belt made of grass interwoven with animal tails. For the rest, they were nude as well as bare-headed. Some, however, wore feather headdresses. The men and women are dark-skinned, not unlike Ethiopians, and have thick, black hair which they tie behind their necks. They are well-built, and of medium to above-average height when compared to us. They have broad chests and strong arms and legs, and on the whole, are very well proportioned. Their eyes are large and black, and have a quick and watchful look to them. Though they do not seem extraordinarily strong, they are swift and resistant runners. We were not able to discover more details of their lives, as we could only remain on land briefly, having left the ship with the rest of the crew aboard. The shore, covered with a fine sand, rises to a height of fifteen feet, and is about fifty paces wide. Beyond, from its height above the sandy shore, the earth stretches away in beautiful plains and great forests. The woods are in some places thick, in others sparse, and the trees are so colourful and beautiful to behold that they are difficult to describe in words.

These lands are teeming with animals (deer, hare, etc.). There are lakes and ponds and a variety of birds plentiful enough to satisfy any hunter's fondest dream. The air is pure and wholesome, neither

too hot nor too cold. The skies are clear and blue, and it seldom rains. We continued our journey following the coast which curved westward (*in an east to northeast direction*). We soon noted a great number of large bonfires and throngs of people on the shore. As it was necessary for us to replenish our supply of fresh water, we put down our anchors off-shore, there again being no port. But at that spot, the sea beat down on the shore in gigantic waves and it was impossible for the twenty-five men we had sent out in the boat to reach the land without great risk. The people on the beach had noticed what was happening, however, and rushed toward the approaching men