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*Primary Source Comprehension: Colonial Travel*

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**Grades: 3-5. SOL: 3.2 c. 3.3 b. 3.5. VS.4e, 4.4 d. 4.1 a-c. 5.4. 5.5.**

**Document Context:**

Roads in Colonial Virginia were not as good as they are today. Many were made of just dirt, clay, sand, or gravel, which made traveling difficult when it rained and snowed. A farmer's economic success depended on how close they lived to good roads and navigable waterways that allowed them to transport their crops to market.

When the weather was nice, traveling from Rippon Lodge to Dumfries (about 6 miles) by foot would take a person 2 hours. By riding a horse, it would take an hour and a half. If you had goods to take with you, a wagon pulled by an ox would be used. Traveling to Dumfries would take 3 or more hours this way. A carriage pulled by horses could make the trip in a little more than an hour.

According to our friends of the International Museum of the Horse, "Before the construction of improved roads in the American colonies, both people and goods moved by horseback, as carriages and wagons could not negotiate primitive paths. Even travel in towns was difficult.... It was customary for travelers in colonial times to buy a horse at the beginning of their journey and then sell it once they reached their destination. One real difficulty of colonial travel was the limited amount of goods which could be carried on a pack horse. At most, a pack horse could carry only 200 pounds over a long distance, and therefore, individuals moving from one place to another were seriously limited in what they could bring with them."

Another way to travel was by water-creeks, rivers, and oceans. Often the colonists could travel by ship or barge more quickly and go farther distances. Virginia's rivers were wide and deep enough for the colonial sailing ships. It was easy to carry passengers and cargo by ship from England or other colonies to the individual wharves of the plantations on the shoreline. There, the ships would unload the people and manufactured goods and load up with Virginia tobacco for the return journey to ports along the east coast, the Caribbean, or Europe.

The ships that sailed between Virginia ports and England, or to other East Coast ports (like Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Charleston in 1776), had no difficulty sailing up Tidewater Virginia rivers. The small ships had a shallow draft - they could sail all the way to the Fall Line without running aground. Large ships also carried small boats ("shallops") that could be rowed into the smallest coves and creeks.

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Boat travel was often the easiest and fastest way for moving freight and people. The one problem was cargo still needed to be taken to the shoreline of major river or port town in order to be shipped. That meant moving goods by road was still required.



Source: Theodore De Bry Copper Plate Engravings

Exercise:

1. John, and his father Richard, must head to Dumfries to sell some goods. They will travel by horse. They will then travel to Fredericksburg, which is an additional 24.3 miles away. If 6 miles to Dumfries by horse takes one and half hours, how long will it take for John and Richard to get to their final destination?
2. By land it would take John and his brother Thomas 116 miles to travel to Williamsburg from Dumfries. How many hours of travel would that be?
3. By river, it would take John and Thomas 118.65 nautical miles to travel from Dumfries to Jamestown and then another 7.58 miles from Jamestown to Williamsburg by land. How many hours is that is a boat travels 5.75 miles per hour?
4. BONUS:

Consider the modes of travel for them-what would be better? Why?

- a. What obstacles would they possibly encounter going either by river or by land? What could happen to their cargo? To themselves?
- b. How long would you estimate those difficulties might delay such a trip back then?
- c. Consider how much it might cost traveling with the various possibilities? Could everyone afford it?
- d. With advancement in technology and inventions, how did travel change 100 years later?

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