

JUAN PONCE DE LEÓN



Juan Ponce de León was born in Spain in 1460. He trained himself to be warrior so that he could take part in the daring adventures of the time. In the early 1490s he became a soldier fighting the Muslims in southern Spain. Ponce de León sailed with Columbus on his second voyage to the Americas. He did not return to Spain, but stayed in the New World.

Ponce de León heard of gold on the island of *Borinquen* (Puerto Rico). He conquered it and claimed it for Spain. He became the governor of the island and treated the natives brutally. As a result, he was removed from office in 1511. He was allowed to search for the island of *Bimini*. From the natives, he heard of a legendary spring that gave people eternal life and health—the Fountain of Youth. In 1513, he sailed northwest from Puerto Rico with three ships and 200 men in search of this fountain, and perhaps riches. He reached the east coast of Florida and claimed this land for Spain. He named it the land *Pascua de Florida* (feast of flowers). Then he headed south in the warm current now known as the *Gulf Stream*. He sailed back to Puerto Rico never finding Bimini, the fountain of youth, or riches. Once again he was brutal to the natives he encountered. Back in Puerto Rico he again fought with the natives who tried to overcome the Spanish rule of their island.

Ponce de León returned to Spain and was named a Captain General in 1514. He sailed again to Puerto Rico, still in search of Bimini. In 1521 with 200 men, he landed on the west coast of Florida. The Native American warriors living there attacked them. Ponce de León was wounded with a poisoned arrow. He died in Cuba from his wounds and was buried in Puerto Rico.