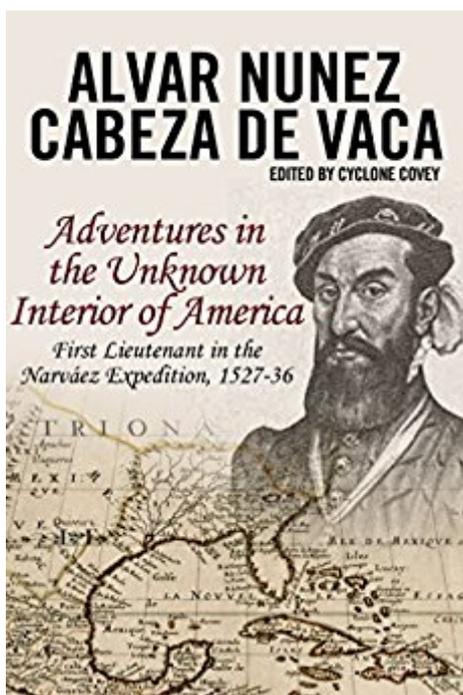


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Cabeza De Vaca's Adventures In The Unknown Interior Of America



Synopsis

Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca was one of the first Europeans to explore the vast lands of America. Setting off with expedition led by Pánfilo de Narváez in 1527, Cabeza de Vaca was one of only four to return alive. Over an eight-year period he and his companions travelled into the unexplored interior of what is now known as the Caribbean, the United States and Mexico. This book, first titled *La Relación* (The Relation) was first published in 1542, shortly followed by a second edition under the title, *Naufragios* (Shipwrecks), in 1555. They were the first written accounts of North and Central America that made it back to Europe. Cabeza de Vaca's journey led him to encounter Native Americans who had never laid eyes upon Europeans before, indeed he has been termed a proto-anthropologist for his accounts of their ways of life. During this time travelling through America Cabeza de Vaca became a wandering merchant and medicine man to the Native Americans, but always kept his eyes open to find his way back to Christian civilization. "Cabeza de Vaca was not only a physical trailblazer: he was also a literary pioneer, and he deserves the distinction of being called the Southwest's first writer." — William T. Pilkington

Cyclone Covey's wonderful translation allows the reader to fully engage with this brilliant seventeenth century account. Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca re-joined Spanish forces in Mexico City in 1536. He returned to Spain a year later published his account of the journey. In the 1540s he was governor of Rio de la Plata in what is now Argentina, but he was transported back to Spain and put on trial in 1545 for his contribution to the poor administration. He died in Seville before 1560.

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Customer Reviews

This is one of those wonderful books that come to us from the past which gives us a wonderful insight into our ancestors. They are not so different from us really. There are those who have fame and those that are evil. There are ancestors who are good and decent and those not very decent. This is a great book, generally easy to read, which tells us about Cabeza de Vaca's travels in his words. At one point he is a slave being traded from one tribe to the next. Then he becomes a great healer and he and his companions travel as free men. This book I highly recommend to you.

The first-hand account of the famous trek of the survivors of the disastrous Narvaez expedition over the 1528-36 period as they wandered across the southern USA. Not much about the interlude in Tampa other than expedition politics, then the voyage in make-shift barges along the coast. Minimal descriptions of the Florida and Alabama coasts with at most a few glimpses of native village life. The real adventure starts on Galveston Island where survivors are enslaved by the local natives. Life here is marginal even for the natives where they experience starvation between harvest of the roots of a local marsh plant, limited fish and shellfish, and forays onto the mainland to subsist on blackberries, prickly pear fruit and sometimes even foliage pads. Later excursions to pecan groves where de Vaca notes that good nut crops occur in alternate years. Some of the remaining Spaniards die from exposure and murder, while the author manages to set himself up as a medicine man. Almost all of this is strictly placebo where the natives believe that simple blessings from the unusual strangers will save them. A classic case of self-fulfilling prophecy. But note that the massive dying from European disease does not seem to have begun at that time. Interior natives have bows but arrow supplies seem limited. Moving into the Texas hill country the use of mesquite beans for food becomes important. Buffalo are sighted and buffalo robes are part of the native equipment. Location of water holes is an important part of travel in these dry lands. Encounters with natives who have corn, beans and squash but apparently only on the periphery of pueblo culture. Along the way de

Vaca notes that children are nursed up into their teens as a way of keeping hard times from influencing their growth, but wonder about the effect of nursing on subsequent births. Eventual contact with colonists in northwest Mexico reunites the four survivors with their fellow Spaniards. Overall, a little bit about the life of native people encountered, but relatively little detailed description of the country through which they traveled. So not much more than gleaned from modern secondary accounts available in the literature, even if the translator's annotations help a great deal about specific locations and timing of events.

Often too quickly glossed over in history courses, the accounts of the early Spanish explorers are gritty tales of courage, desperation, and savvy--for those who survived. This account is all the more interesting because of how Alvar Nunez C De V tracks the journey from the familiar Gulf coast of Florida where we now enjoy plenty and ease, around the panhandle past the Mississippi Delta, down the Texas coast and toward the reunion with his countrymen who seemed so far away. You can sense the degenerating energy of the expedition as they lose sea transportation, horses, food, and eventually even clothing. Incredible account.

The tale begins with the shipwrecking of 300 plus Spaniards who survive a hurricane, washing ashore on the gulf side of the Florida peninsula. Two years later, the 300 are reduced to four, with Cabeza de Vaca acting as a de facto leader, as much as one can possibly be under circumstances of extreme deprivation and acute hunger. For most of eight years, the four endure enslavements by the native Indian tribes as they stagger along in a westward direction - this part of the narration is a bit of a slog. But halfway through, the tale picks up as the Indians begin to regard the four as medicine men and healers. When Cabeza and his companions reach what is now Big Spring, Texas, their fate has reversed - they have now been almost deified by the native peoples. They meet up with Spaniards later on, and embark on the homeward quest back to Spain via Mexico City. Cabeza de Vaca's faith in God carries him and the other three through the most harrowing episodes during this eight year odyssey through the southwestern wilderness of 450 years ago. The man's courage must have also been a critical factor in his surviving to tell the tale. Cyclone Covey's translation of this, the original text called *La Relacion*, feels choppy and uneven; but, the text he had to work with apparently wasn't that fluidly written either. Maps of the journey would have been very helpful in this book; the text might become more accessible for the reader. But, all in all, this ultimate in nature hikes still remains one on the greatest adventures ever told.

Parataxis
The Cloud
Reckoner
Extracts: A Field Guide for Iconoclasts

Finally I encountered through this book actual explorers/Christians who did not participate in the genocide of the Indigenous peoples. They were very small in numbers, but they did indeed share the respect and love due to all peoples. Easy read and not many pages.

This is an first-hand account of an amazingly tough journey throughout the southern part of North America. The Indians there were so poor they were on the edge of starvation much of the time. Cabeza De Vaca lived through the hard times with them. When he and his companions tried their hand at healing sickness, they got a good response (probably a typical response to faith healing) and ended up with hundreds of native Americans following them from place to place. He doesn't spare criticism of the leaders of the expedition, who made bad decisions that resulted in almost everyone being killed early on. And he recommends kind treatment of the Indians, which didn't happen.

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