

**THE JOURNEY OF ALVAR NUÑEZ  
CABEZA DE VACA AND HIS  
COMPANIONS FROM FLORIDA  
TO THE PACIFIC, 1528-1536**

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The Journey of Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca and His Companions from Florida to the Pacific,  
1528-1536 by Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca & Fanny Bandelier

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THE JOURNEY OF  
**Alvar Nuñez Cabeza  
de Vaca**

AND HIS COMPANIONS  
from Florida to the Pacific  
1528-1536

TRANSLATED FROM HIS OWN NARRATIVE  
BY FANNY BANDELIER

together with the Report of  
Father Marcos of Nizza and a  
Letter from the Viceroy Mendoza

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

*Ad. F. Bandelier*

WITH MAP

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**La relacion que dio Alvar nu-**  
**ñez cabeza de vasa de lo acaescido en las Indias**  
**en la armada donde yua por gouernador: p<sup>a</sup>**  
**philo de narbacz desde el año de veynte**  
**y siete hasta el año de treynta y seys**  
**que boluio a Sevilla con tres**  
**de su compañía. &**

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## INTRODUCTION

**T**HIS volume offers the original narrative of the first white man to cross North America. The remarkable journey of Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, Andrés Dorantes, Alonso del Castillo Maldonado, and the Moor Estévanico, from Florida to Northwestern Mexico (Sonora and Sinaloa), near the Pacific coast, antedates the expeditions of Coronado and De Soto, whose histories have already been published in *The Trail-Makers*. Nevertheless, it is proper to publish his narrative later. Compared with either of them, the journey of Cabeza de Vaca and his companions is an episode, important, but an incident brought about by a disastrous failure. This history describes the only—and comparatively meagre—results of the expedition undertaken by Pámfilo de Narvaez in 1527, and an outcome which had nothing more to do with Narvaez and his ill-conducted scheme.

## INTRODUCTION

Yet it is certain that the appearance of Cabeza de Vaca and his fellow-sufferers at Culiacan, and their statements, directed the attention of the Spanish authorities at the young city of Mexico to the North more than the reports about the Seven Cities and the raids which Nuño de Guzman had made in that direction. Nevertheless, the importance of the story of Cabeza de Vaca must not be overestimated. A perusal of the narrative shows that the forlorn wanderers were *not*—as it has long been admitted—the “discoverers of New Mexico.” They never saw, nor do they claim to have seen, any of the so-called “Pueblos.” They only *heard* of them, in a more or less confused manner. On the other hand, more precise than their information on this point is what they said about the plains, their Indians; and it seems above all doubt that the first knowledge of the American Bison, or Buffalo, is due to their descriptions.

On the minds of the Spanish occupants of Mexico, especially on what may be called the floating population (proportionately large at the time, as everywhere in newly

## INTRODUCTION

occupied countries), the impression of the feat performed by the travellers and the tale of their unequalled sufferings produced a much greater effect than on the authorities. The people saw in their reports an outline for a possible advance into the unknown beyond. The picture of the country traversed was, in the main, not enticing, but the allusion to permanent settlements beyond the unprepossessing plains was looked upon as full of promise. The outcome was a moderate "excitement" among the adventurous and the idle, and this excitement was ably taken advantage of by the Viceroy of New Spain, Don Antonio de Mendoza.

This high functionary, as sagacious as he was cautious, regarded the real merits of Cabeza de Vaca (who is the representative figure in the whole episode) with reserve. On February 11th (old style), 1537, he wrote to the Empress recommending Cabeza de Vaca and Dorantes (the letter mentions Dorantes, but it was Castillo who went to Spain with Cabeza de Vaca) to the benevolence of the monarch, in consideration of "what they have done in it [this country]