

**ORIGINAL NARRATIVES OF EARLY AMERICAN  
HISTORY**

REPRODUCED UNDER THE AUSPICES OF  
THE AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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Northmen, Columbus, and Cabot

***ORIGINAL***  
***NARRATIVES OF EARLY***  
***AMERICAN HISTORY —***  
**— SPANISH**  
**EXPLORERS IN**  
**THE SOUTHERN UNITED**  
**STATES**

1528-1543 ——— THE NARRATIVE OF ALVAR  
NUÑEZ CABEÇA DE VACA EDITED  
BY FREDERICK W. HODGE OF THE BUREAU OF  
AMERICAN ETHNOLOGY

THE NARRATIVE OF THE EXPEDITION  
OF HERNANDO DE SOTO BY THE  
GENTLEMAN OF ELVAS EDITED  
BY THEODORE H. LEWIS HONORARY MEMBER  
OF THE MISSISSIPPI HISTORICAL SOCIETY

THE NARRATIVE OF THE EXPEDITION  
OF CORONADO, BY PEDRO DE  
CASTAÑEDA EDITED BY FREDERICK W.  
HODGE

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## NOTE

Although, in the narrative of the Gentleman of Elvas, the translation by Buckingham Smith has been followed, some corrections have been made in the text, and pains have been taken to set right, in accordance with the Portuguese original at the Lenox Library, the native proper names, on whose interpretation in the Indian languages the identification of localities in many cases depends. If variations from page to page in the spelling of some such names are observed by the reader, they may be assumed to exist in the original.

The three narratives printed in this book are but a small selection from among many scores; for the narratives of Spanish explorers in the southern United States constitute an extensive literature. But if interest and historical importance are both taken into account, it is believed that these three hold an undisputed preëminence among such "relations."

J. F. J.

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## **SPANISH EXPLORERS IN THE SOUTHERN UNITED STATES**

# THE NARRATIVE OF ALVAR NUÑEZ CABEZA DE VACA

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## INTRODUCTION

In some respects the journey of Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca and his three companions overland from coast to coast during the eight years from 1528 to 1536 is the most remarkable in the record of American exploration, and as a narrative of suffering and privation the relation here presented perhaps has no equal in the annals of the northern continent.

The author of the narrative was a native of Jeréz de la Frontera, in the province of Cadiz, in southern Spain, but the date of his birth is not known. His father was Francisco de Vera, son of Pedro de Vera, conqueror of the Grand Canary in 1483; his mother, Teresa Cabeza de Vaca, who also was born in Jeréz. Why Alvar Nuñez assumed the matronymic is not known, unless it was with a sense of pride that he desired to perpetuate the name that had been bestowed by the King of Navarre on his maternal ancestor, a shepherd named Martin Alhaja, for guiding the army through a pass that he marked with the skull of a cow (*cabeza de vaca*, literally "cow's head"), thus leading the Spanish army to success in the battle of Las Navas de

Tolosa, in July, 1212, which led up to the final conquest of the Moors in Spain.

Having returned to Spain after many years of service in the New World for the Crown, Pámfilo de Narvaez petitioned for a grant; and in consequence the right to conquer and colonize the country between the Rio de las Palmas, in eastern Mexico, and Florida was accorded him. The expedition, consisting of six hundred colonists and soldiers, set sail in five vessels from San Lucar de Barrameda, June 17, 1527, and after various vicissitudes, including the wreck of two ships and the

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loss of sixty men in a hurricane on the southern coast of Cuba, was finally driven northward by storm, and landed, in April, 1528, at St. Clements Point, near the entrance to Tampa Bay, on the west coast of Florida. Despite the protest of Cabeza de Vaca, who had been appointed treasurer of Rio de las Palmas by the King, Narvaez ordered his ships to skirt the coast in an endeavor to find Pánuco, while the expedition, now reduced to three hundred men by desertions in Santo Domingo, death in the Cuban storm, and the return of those in charge of the ships, started inland in a generally northern course. The fleet searched for the expedition for a year and then sailed to Mexico.

Among the members of the force, in addition to Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, were Andrés Dorantes de Carrança, son of Pablo, a native of Béjar del Castañar, in Estremadura, who had received a commission as captain of



infantry on the recommendation of Don Alvaro de Zúñiga, Duke of Béjar; Captain Alonzo del Castillo Maldonado, of Salamanca, the son of Doctor Castillo and Aldonza Maldonado; and Estévan, or Estévanico, a blackamoor of Asemmur, or Azamor, on the west coast of Morocco, the slave of Dorantes. With the exception of those who returned with the ships, these four men were the only ones of the entire expedition who ever again entered a civilized community.

Pursuing a generally northerly course, harassed by Indians, and beset with hunger, illness, and treachery in their ranks, Narvaez's party finally reached the head of Appalachee Bay, in the country of the Indians after whom this arm of the Gulf of Mexico takes its name. Looking now to the sea as his only means of escape; Narvaez the incompetent, with neither the proper materials nor the mechanics, set about to build boats to conduct his men out of their trap—craft that were expected to weather such tropical storms as they had already so poorly buffeted with their stouter ships. Every

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object of metal that the expedition afforded, even to stirrups and spurs, was requisitioned for the manufacture of nails and necessary tools; a rude forge was constructed, with bellows of wood and deer-skins; the native palm supplied tow and covering; the horses were killed and their hides used for water-bottles, while their flesh served the Spaniards for food as the work went on; even the shirts from the very backs of the men were fashioned into sails. Picturing the character of the five boats, laden almost to the gunwales with nearly fifty men each, besides such

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