

# **FOUR SHORT STORIES OF SPANISH LARGE SHIPS LANDING ON THE WEST COAST OF FLORIDA AND THE DE VACA RESCUE AFTER TEN YEARS**

The first: A pilot named Diego Miruelo in 1516 lands briefly in the Pensacola area to trade – no soldiers.

The second: A Spanish captain whose name was Francisco Hernandez de Cordoba in 1517 had aboard a small fighting force and landed briefly on the west coast of Florida. He was immediately repulsed by the Indians from whom he quickly sailed away with casualties.

The third: Alonso Alvares Pineda in 1518 who landed in the area of the Calusa. The Indians' response was so fierce he immediately sailed away.

The fourth: Panfilo de Narvaez in the year 1526 had a voyage of exploration, met with hostile Indians, and it was a complete failure.

The last story is about one of Narvaez. The survivor's name was Nunez Cabeza de Vaca. The time span was 1527 to 1537. This is probably the most extraordinary story to come out of the Spanish intrusion into La Florida.

By  
Ed Winn  
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## **THE VOYAGE OF DIEGO MIRUELO 1516**

A pilot named Diego Miruelo went on a trading cruise from Cuba and sailed north on the Florida west coast to presumably Pensacola Bay in the year 1516. Early maps bore the Miruelo for Pensacola Bay. Because he had no soldiers and was not after slaves, he found friendly treatment by the local Indians and successfully traded his goods for silver and gold. This had to be salvaged from Spanish galleons and traded to the area Indians.

Shortly after Columbus discovered America in 1492, Spanish ships began regular slave raids in the Caribbean and Cuba in particular. In only two years, Spain had devastated the native population of Cuba. The Spanish slavers and soldiers were ruthless in their savage treatment of the Indians of the Caribbean. Cuban traders and Indians who fled Cuba spread the word to the Florida Indians what to expect from the Spanish soldiers.

So what happened to de Cordoba and his soldiers only one year later was the Florida natives natural response to the expedition. Hostility!

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This information taken from the book "The European Discovery Of America" by Samuel E. Morison - 1974

## **FRANCISCO HERNANDEZ DE CORDOBA**

### **1517**

A Spanish captain whose name was Cordoba led a small expedition of two ships and a bergantine carrying 110 soldiers. He was authorized by A. D. Diego Velasque, the independent Governor of Cuba who had conquered the pearl of the Antilles in 1511. The main objective was to capture Indian slaves to replenish the already depleted labor force of Cuba. Cuba had been ravished, and most of the native Cubans were now dead, mostly by the white mans' diseases so that capture of new slaves was a priority.

Cordoba sailed from Havana on February 8<sup>th</sup>, 1517. They reached Cabo Catoche, Yucatan twenty-one days later. When they landed they were faced by a group of fierce natives and a brief fight was fought. (By now Indian traders from Central America must have spread word about the cruel Spanish and their slave raids.) A fortnight later they reached the site of Campeche and found only hostilities. Leaving Campeche they arrived six days later at a place called Patochan (now called Champoton.) The Spanish soldiers found themselves embroiled in a real battle. Over fifty Spaniards were killed and five more drowned. Cordoba himself was wounded by twelve arrows. Their course was then set for La Florida, and four days later they reached the coast of Florida and found the same hostile reception from the Florida Indians in 1517. This time Alaminos was wounded, and the wounded expedition of Cordoba limped back to the Florida Keys and on to Havana.

The account that Cordoba and his survivors gave of the wealth of Yucatan, the stone temples, and the gold objects, so excited the greed of D. Diego Valasquez that next year, 1518, he organized a fleet of three ships and a bergantina to pursue discover further along the Mexican coast.

## **THE VOYAGE OF ALONSO ALVAREZ PINEDA 1518**

Anton de Alaminos, Spain's number one pilot for the Caribbean, could not rest until he had penetrated the Mexique Bay and satisfied himself that there was no passage thence to Balboa's Mar del Sur. As Don Diego Valasquez, governor of Cuba, did not care to venture a third voyage, Alaminos approached Don Francisco de Garay. This hidalgo had come to the Indies with Columbus in 1493, cast covetous eyes on Jamaica, and was named by D. Diego Colon his lieutenant for the government of that beautiful island. Although he had already grown rich by exploiting the natives at Nueva Sevilla, this gentleman eagerly embraced the opportunity to acquire more gold and glory. Having plenty of money and being on good terms with Bishop Fonseca, Garay easily obtained permission to equip a fleet of three or four vessels at his own expense, as well as an appointment as "Adelantado and Governor of the Provinces bordering on the River of SS. Pedro and Paulo in Mexico.

Under the command of Alonso Alvarez de Pineda, they put to sea toward the end of 1518, with Alaminos as chief pilot. Their first landing took place somewhere on the lower west coast of Florida, where the natives gave them the same treatment they had handed out to Ponce de Leon. Pineda had enough force to land, but wisely retired and sailed west around the Gulf as far as the Rio Panuco, where Cortes would presently found the town of Tampico. En route they sailed by the mouth of the Mississippi, noted the vast volume of water pouring into the Gulf, and managed to sail upstream for some twenty miles. Thus, Pineda was the original European discoverer of the Father of Waters. He named it after the Holy Spirit because the season was Pentecost.

Pineda and company had to fight their way around the shores of the future Texas, and at a place called Chila, near the mouth of the Panuco, they were heavily defeated. Many, including Pineda himself, were killed, flayed, and eaten, and their skins hung in Aztec temples as trophies. The natives even managed to burn all Pineda's fleet except one lucky ship commanded by Diego de Camargo. She arrived at Vera Cruz in very bad shape, all her crew "ill and very yellow and with swollen bellies." Painfully and slowly those wretched survivors were carried to Segura de la Frontera where Cortes happened to be, and were "treated with much consideration" by the great conquistador.

## **THE EXPEDITION OF NARVAEZ AND THE VOYAGE OF MISFORTUNE - 1526**

In December of the year 1526 Panfilo de Narvaez was granted by the King of Spain title to all the lands between Rio de Las Palmas and the Cape of Florida. Panfilo Narvaez began his sea voyage in 1527 which became known as the voyage of misfortunes. His original expedition flotilla consisted of five ships carrying six hundred people and all the needed materials to build a fort and start a colony. The flotilla departed San Lucar de Barramedia on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of June. Narvaez had given himself the resounding and impressive title Governor of Florida, Rio de Las Palmas and the River Espiritu Santo (the Mississippi River).

The Narvaez expedition as described started with five loaded ships. They sailed to Santo Domingo and stayed for forty-five days acquiring another ship and more horses, but one hundred forty of his men jumped ship. It would be some years before those one hundred forty men knew how lucky they were!

More horses were picked up in Trinidad and Cuba where the Captain General sent two ships from Cabo de Cruz. With Narvaez' great luck, a hurricane blew up while they were in Trinidad, and both ships were lost with fifty men and twenty horses on board. The survivors who were on shore stayed until Narvaez arrived on November 5th, 1527 with the other four ships. Now they had all in order and started again around February 22<sup>nd</sup> with their final flotilla – four ships, a bergantine, four hundred doomed men and eighty doomed horses. They soon entered a series of storms which took them to the west coast of Florida. No one knows for sure quite where – may have been St. Clements Point near the site of present-day St. Petersburg. Soon after Narvaez' army started to move northward, he was assailed by a local Indian Chief (Cacique).

The battle was short, and Narvaez caught the head Chief. Narvaez made a costly mistake of cutting off the Chief's nose, and threw his mother to the fierce dogs to be torn apart and eaten alive. Dogs trained to catch and kill people must have been a common thing with the Spanish explorers.

Narvaez' army found their journey through Florida miserable having to wade through swamps and cross rivers, as there was no marked trail to follow. When Narvaez reached north Florida, probably around Tallahassee, he found a plentiful supply of maize and other foods that they stole from each village they passed through. They also took women and children as slaves. Narvaez and his men were tired, and the decision was made to stay at their camping area for twenty-five days.

Narvaez again made the mistake of capturing and enslaving an Apalachee Chief. This enraged the mighty Apalachee warriors who were fearless, and great prestige was heaped on the warriors who killed their enemies. The Apalachee warriors used clubs, but their bows and arrows were their greatest weapons. Narvaez soon learned about these

warriors, with their long bows – six feet long and so strong to bend no Spaniard could bend one. They fired these arrows very rapidly and with great accuracy. They soon found to avoid hitting the soldiers' armament, and put arrows into the soldiers' joints where they were not protected by the armor. The Spanish soldiers had a hard time hitting the fast moving Indians with their crossbows or arquebus.

It was an easy decision for Narvaez to leave the Apalachee territory, and so after marching for nine days they reached a place they called Flute on the Gulf near what is now the St. Marks area. Along the whole trip the Indians never let up on their harassment with constant attacks. Narvaez by now had had more than enough. There was not enough gold to have to pay such a high price to get it. When Narvaez got near the Gulf he sent a small group of his soldiers to search the coast for his ships. Narvaez' luck had not changed. There were no ships to be seen.

Cabeza de Vaca discovered much later that Narvaez' four ships were mistakenly sent to Panuco, Mexico. One of the four was destroyed, another was lost in the surf. It seemed that Narvaez' planning was completely incorrect. Narvaez just did not know where he was. Had Narvaez' ship headed back to St. Marks Bay in September of 1528, he would have found the ships, and his men and saved over two hundred lives. Narvaez' bad luck continues.

In an extraordinary story, Narvaez' men, having given up all hope of finding their ships, began building boats to carry them across the Gulf and back to Mexico. How these inept people built boats is short of a miracle. Somehow between the 4<sup>th</sup> of September and the 20<sup>th</sup> of September of 1528, they had built five boats each thirty-three feet long. When they were ready to load up, they killed and ate their last horse. They had stolen a large quantity of maize by force. There is no record of how many Indians died trying to save their crops and supplies. Two days later two hundred forty five people loaded up - each boat carrying forty-seven or forty-eight men. The undersized and overloaded boats, when launched, had their gunwales (sides of the boat) less than one foot above the water. A small wave could sink them.

Somehow, after thirty days, they managed to reach Pensacola Bay for their first real shelter. Again the native Indians, who undoubtedly had heard of the Spanish invaders who killed so many of their kind, attacked the camp by night and wounded many. At early light the soldiers destroyed the Indians' canoes.

There were still five boats, and they fought off the attack at Mobile Bay, and on the last day of October, 1528, they crossed the mouth of the Mississippi River. It looked like Narvaez' luck had changed, but alas, it had not. In fact death was near, and one by one the boats disappeared. The now famous Cabeza de Vaca's craft capsized near a shore on the eighth of November. He and five of his crew survived. These were the only survivors of the fateful expedition of Narvaez. It was to be eight years later before de Vaca would see Mexico and his people. (Please read the unbelievable story of de Vaca in detail. What a story he has to tell!) They again had tried to conquer the Gulf waters and failed.

A special note: the boat with Narvaez pulled to shore but was not moored properly. He floated out to sea and was never heard from again. The Spanish were the first people to bring horses to Florida with Narvaez in 1526. Narvaez, in 1528 and de Soto in 1539-43. We do not know if any of the horses that escaped survived. The Florida Indians were terrified of the horses and probably killed the ones left by the Spanish for food. You have to wonder what the Indians thought when they came face to face with Narvaez. He had red hair and only one eye. Whatever historians say about Narvaez, it is established that Panfilo de Narvaez was the first non-Indian to explore in the United States.

## **NARVAEZ AND DE VACA**

The sad saga of Narvaez in 1526 and de Vaca in 1528 appear in this small book. Both stories reflect the hardships Spanish soldiers faced when they invaded wild La Florida and fought Florida's Indians who were fierce, brave fighters – experts with their long bows. The relation of Nunez Cabeza de Vaca is one of the most interesting stories of the Spanish period in Florida.

The Spanish invaders brought much of their hardship upon themselves by their cruel and inhuman treatment of Florida's first people.

By  
Ed Winn  
Printed by Winn's Books



## **RELATION OF NUNEZ CABEZA DE VACA 1528**

Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca and three of his companions were the sole survivors of a Spanish expeditionary force which landed in Florida's Tampa Bay in the year 1528 just fifteen years after Ponce de Leon in 1513 claimed Florida for Spain. They were the first Europeans to cross the North American continent from shore to shore. They very well may have been the first people of any kind to cross this continent.

Cabeza de Vaca began this trip as the treasurer of an expedition of five Spanish ships and approximately 600 men. When the ships were off-loaded in Tampa Bay only three hundred men disembarked. The other 300 stayed with the ships. It was not too long after that the 5 ships lost contact with the landing party. As de Vaca and the 300 men marched northward, they took whatever they could find from the natives. In a very short time the Spanish intruders were amazed at the Indians being so hostile, and they could not find enough food for 300 men. Eventually de Vaca's party had dwindled to just a few people, so five small boats were made to escape the hostile Indians. The survivors reached the Texas coast, and after landing they started west across Texas reaching a Spanish settlement in western Mexico eight years after the beginning of their journey.

Just think of de Vaca and his three companions making this trip under impossible odds. They watched 300 of their group die from starvation, fevers and constant ambush by the various tribes as they moved west. De Vaca was taken prisoner and remained so for six years wandering around in circles. It was here that de Vaca was reduced to complete poverty – naked and hungry most of the time. In spite of the circumstances, he began to administer to the sick natives – often curing them of their sicknesses. It is probably due to this healing effort that he became thought of as a God-like healer, and so the natives followed him as he moved westward. It was said that at one point 2,000 natives followed him. It was due to this healing ability that his life was spared.

One of the most interesting aspects of the book was de Vaca's vivid description of how the various natives lived and their bizarre habits, many just impossible to believe. This book is well worth reading. It is entitled "Relation Of Nunez Cabeza de Vaca" – first published in Spanish in 1542.

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## **THE RELATION OF ALVAR NUNEZ CABEZA DE VACA**

The remarkable story of Alvar Nunez De Vaca's survival was first published in Spanish in the year 1542. He and his three companions were all the people who survived the expedition of Panfilo de Narvaez which included six hundred people and eighty horses. (Please read the story first about "The Expedition of Narvaez and the Voyage of Misfortunes"). You will be better able to appreciate the miracle of survival of Alvar Nunez and his three companions who hold the distinction of not only being the sole survivors of the Narvaez expedition, but they also hold the distinction of being the first Europeans to cross the North American continent from shore to shore. It was an absolute miracle that they survived.

Alvar Nunez de Vaca went along with the expedition in the position of the treasurer. He sailed with the Narvaez expedition in 1527 with an expedition of five ships to hold the six hundred men. When the expedition landed near Tampa Bay some three hundred men of the party went ashore to begin their search of wealth in the interior. The ships and the other three hundred men went to follow along the coast. Hostile Indians and the shortage of food forced Narvaez' expeditionary force to "flee to the sea". Narvaez and five crude and undersized boats which his men constructed from anything they could locate - launched and followed the west coast with their dreams of landing in Spanish Mexico. One by one the boats were lost. Near Matagorda Bay on the Texas coast Alvar Nunez and a few companions went ashore to begin their unbelievable adventure which were years of incredible hardships - eight long years of hardships- from 1527 to 1536. So begins the personal story of Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca from his book "Relations of Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca" published in 1542. Nunez begins with leaving the port of San Lucar de Barrameda on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of June 1525. His expedition sailed with 5 ships, some six hundred or more men. Nunez was an officer of high rank having the title of Treasurer and High Sheriff.

They arrived on the island of Santo Domingo where he tarried for 45 days staying busy with procuring material and horses. Unfortunately these days allowed one hundred forty men to jump ship and join the people of Santo Domingo. (How fortunate they were). After a number of other stops (covered in Narvaez' story) on Tuesday the 12<sup>th</sup> of April, Florida appeared, and the ships followed on a northerly course along the south coast of Florida.

Several days later the ships anchored near the shore on the mouth of a bay at the head of which he saw some houses or habitations of Indians. The following day de Vaca and forty men plus six cavalry (horsemen) began a short exploration of the surrounding land - heading in a northerly direction, returning to their camp the next day. The party's brigantine was sent northward to sail along the Florida coast in search of a good harbor. As de Vaca returned to his exploration they were able to capture four Indians. (No

mention if they used large dogs). The four Indians were asked to find them some maize, and they did, but the maize was not yet formed. In the village they discovered many wooden cases of which they had no knowledge, and because each box contained a dead man, bodies covered with paint and deer skins, the cases and bodies were then all burned. A small amount of gold was found, and when they asked where the gold came from, the Indians very wisely sent them to the province of the Apalachee where lived the fiercest of the Florida Indians. (The warriors used six-foot bows for their arrows). The small detachment headed north toward the land of "gold." Upon returning to the ships de Vaca urged they go with the ships to a safe place, but his wisdom was not heard. So de Vaca agreed anyway to join the land advancing group. On May 1<sup>st</sup>, each man was outfitted, and the adventure began with three hundred men and forty horses. When they came to a river they passed through it with great difficulty by swimming or on hastily built rafts. Arriving on the other side of the river they saw their first large group of Indians. Some two hundred were gathered on the far bank. Hostilities began, and five or six Indians were caught to be used as needed. The Indians then took them to their houses about three miles away where they found their first maize ready to be eaten. On the third day a meeting was called, and they agreed to look for the sea. After a very poor journey – many feet cut on the oyster shells – no deep water could be found. So the explorers again began their quest for the Apalachees. On the 7th day of June they were approached by a Cacique (Indian Chief). The Chief was being carried on the back of another Indians. Behind him came a great many people. When the Spanish told the Chief they came to see the people of Apalachee, the Indians offered to go with them to engage their old enemies.

The first man to die on the expedition drowned along with his horse when trying the cross another swift river – (probably the Withlacooche). It was not long before the friendly Indians became menacing, and most ran and hid. The Governor then caught three or four Indians and forced them to be guides in their northward journey. For what seemed like forever, the expedition arrived at the land of the Apalachee. The desire for gold grew stronger, and so did their hunger as maize was in short supply.

When de Vaca came upon the village of Apalachee, the Governor ordered him along with nine cavalry and fifty infantrymen to enter the town. The men had fled leaving only the women and children. It must have been too much for the warriors to stand, so little by little they appeared shooting arrows at the intruders. They managed to kill a horse and then disappeared. So the Spanish conquerers began to do what they did best which was stealing first the maize, then their deer skins and whatever else they desired. The warriors came in peace asking for the release of their women and children. It was done, but the Governor's refused to release the Cacique. The warriors returned the next day and attacked the Spaniards with such force that they set fires to the houses. The natives attacked frequently in the days to come.

The Spanish found the area to be rich in maize and all sorts of wild game especially three kinds of deer. The Spaniards remained in the town for twenty-five days. On three occasions incursions were made in the nearby areas. The Indians they questioned said the Spaniards had to travel a distance to a town called Aute which was near to the sea and

the area have more maize, beans and stores of other kinds of foods. The Spaniards began their trip to Aute with the Indians constantly attacking their column and doing some damage. (No mention is made as to how many Indians were killed by the Spanish). The Spanish, in utter amazement, saw the Indians shoot their arrows through small trees. De Vaca describes the Indians of the area as being well proportioned, very comely and of great activity and strength. The Apalachee warriors were a force to be reckoned with.

De Vaca added that the natives go naked and are large of body and appear at a distance like giants. Remember, the Spanish soldiers were probably a head shorter and less in weight than the Indians. De Vaca again described the warriors' use of their six-foot bows. He claimed they could shoot an arrow at two hundred paces and miss nothing. The Indian attack continued for another nine days until they approached the Indian village of Aute. The Indians wisely had fled. They burned their village, but large supplies of food were left behind. After a two-day rest, de Vaca was with ten men on horseback and fifty on foot set out to find the sea. Instead they found the saltwater rivers that flowed into the Gulf. The sea was, it seemed, some distance away. De Vaca returned to the Governor with the sad news that the sea was still some distance away. De Vaca had returned with that sad news to find the Governor and many others sick. They had also been attacked again.

The expedition left Aute the next day in sad condition to find its way to the sea and to escape the Apalachee. The soldiers on horseback began to plan a mutiny. They wanted to abandon the sick. A third of the party was now sick, but the conflict was resolved. The only salvation now was to reach the sea and build boats, and leave this wretched country. Imagine a band of military people with absolutely no experience or knowledge about building boats to tackle such a task. It is a remarkable story as to how they did it — using iron from their armament, making their own tools and forge. From August 4<sup>th</sup> to September 20<sup>th</sup> they built and completed five boats. During the building period the Apalachee Indians attacked the camp twice killing ten men within sight of the camp.

Before the boats could be launched more than forty men died of hunger and disease. By the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September, only one horse remained. The rest had been eaten. When the boats were launched, they rode less than one foot above water. One boat held Alvarez and forty-nine men. Each boat was about equally distributed with the survivors so far of the Alvarez expedition. It took almost eight days of passing through shallow water before the boats found an island near the sea (Gulf). Here they found food abandoned by terrified Indians. The expedition began again moving along the Gulf coast with no water to drink. For thirty days they continued near the coast. A heavy storm stopped them for six days, and no water for the past five days. But they continued on their same journey with no water, and water splashing into their boats. It seemed a special gift of God that they made land and found shelter and calm. Many canoes of Indians arrived. De Vaca says they followed the Indians to their village which was on an island. They were led to their houses where they were given fresh water from clay pitchers. The Indians gave them cooked fish, and the Spanish in turn gave them a small amount of their maize.

In the middle of the night, the Indians fell upon the Governor and De Vaca, and the Governor was struck in the face. In a rapid retreat, the Governor was put into a boat for protection along with others leaving fifty soldiers to hold off the attacking Indians. Three times during the night they came, and with such force they drove the soldiers further back. No one escaped injury, so great was the Indian attack. The next day the boats continued on the course for three days taking along two Indian hostages they captured. A bad move, as it turned out, because a great number of Indians appeared with their Chiefs, and the flotilla forced the boats to return to the sea. The wet boats and exhausted expeditioners continued to travel the shore, but there seemed to be large populations of Indians, so they were afraid to go ashore. They continued on in darkness. When day came, the boats lost sight of one another, but finally two boats came in sight – one with the Governor. The Governor sensing the gravity of the situation told the boat captains to do what they thought best. De Vaca's boat headed on a course that took it to shore in a heavy surf near dawn. All members of the boat, most whom were very ill, crawled up on the land. They soon made a fire. The day of their landing was the 6<sup>th</sup> day of November. A great surprise presented itself – a force of one hundred bow-men (warriors) confronted the Spanish.

The tired and sick men approached the Indians with gifts, and a sort of peace was made. In return the Indians sent their women back with food. The refreshed Spaniards now returned to their boat that had become filled with water and sand. They cleaned it out and climbed aboard heading back through the breakers. They had removed their clothing, and shortly after received a wave which wet them all. They were now naked, wet and very cold. The next wave capsized the boat, and the survivors crawled ashore as best they could. When the Indians returned, they felt great sorrow for the boatmen and expressed themselves loudly. De Vaca then asked the Indians to take them to their village. The Indians built fires along the way to help the freezing boatmen. They were housed and fed and treated almost royally. Then the Indians brought the other members of two boats captained by Alonzo del Castillo and Andres Dorantez. The desperate Spaniards had no choice but to spend the winter at their new location. Four members of the stranded men agreed to find their way to Panunco and bring back help.

The harsh weather and lack of food began to take a toll, and their people began to die. Five Spaniards became so desperately hungry they began to eat their dead. Finally of eighty men who arrived in the two instances only fifteen remained alive.

The native Indians around the Spaniards began to be sick themselves blaming the Spaniards for their sickness (probably justifiably so).

The fifteen men managed to live with the Indians, half starved until April when they feasted on blackberries among the same Indians on the island. The superstitious Indians decided to make the Spaniards physicians. (It was this belief that enabled de Vaca and his three companions to be the only survivors of the expedition). The Spaniards began to try to heal the sick Indians by blessing the sick and using the other methods the Indians insisted on. The Spaniards must have been successful, because the Indians fed them and presented them with gifts.

A different group of Indians had Alonzo del Castillo and spoke a different language than that of those de Vaca lived among.

After Dorantez and Castillo returned to the island they brought together fourteen Christians. They went together following along the coast. De Vaca was too ill to accompany this group, so he had to stay behind with the Indians. He was obliged to live among them for one year. The Indians nearly worked de Vaca to death. His hands were torn in shreds from gathering canes. His only thought and hope was to flee his "captors" and join the other Indian tribe who were close. He began by trading for the Indians, and his treatment improved. He began to travel into the interior as far as he pleased, and his life became enjoyable again. He no longer had to work as a slave.

Six years passed – de Vaca now looking like the Indians and completely naked. His reason for remaining six years was he could take with him Lope de Oviedo from the island and his companion Alaviz. Removing Alaviz from the island was difficult. Crossing the water they met some Indians on the other side who told them that a distance from them were three men like them and that they were badly treated. The other members of their group had been killed. De Vaca's companions, discouraged, returned to the island, and de Vaca was left alone.

De Vaca was told by the Indians that two Christians would come to a certain place, and when de Vaca met Andres Dorantez there was a happy reunion. Having come to the place where Castillo was he was fearful to leave his known surroundings. It took de Vaca six months more before he could escape with the others, and so again de Vaca became a slave to the Indians who also held Dorantez as a slave. De Vaca heard from the two Christian captives that when they left the island of Malhado they found the boat the comptroller and the Friars sailed away in bottom up on the seashore. One by one the Spaniards had met their death. A survivor, Figueroa, told the story about Narvaez went to sleep in his boat by the shore, but the boat floated away, and Narvaez was never heard from again. Others who went along the coast began to die one by one from cold and hunger as did the other members of the ill-fated expedition.

De Vaca recounts that after six months had passed he visited the other Christians to plan how they could escape. While still among their Indian captors, they found out that the boat carrying Penelosa and Tellez arrived at the shore. They were very feeble, and all were destroyed by the Indians.

Now begins the remarkable story of Cabeza de Vaca and his three associates' escape from the Indians who detained them. (There is a question of the date de Vaca began his escape. The year may have been 1532 or even 1535).

The second day after their escape, de Vaca and his three companions traveled in great haste else their captors overtake them. One of the four was a Negro, and after seeing a strange fleeing Indian the Negro caught up to him to reassure him they meant him no harm, and the Indian led them to his village. That same night some Indians came to

Castillo thinking of him as a physician, and told him of the great pain in their heads. Castillo made the sign of the cross over them and commended them to God. Instantly they said their pain left them. The report of Castillo's performances spread, and many other Indians came to him that night claiming sickness and each asking Castillo to heal them.

These Indian tribes that the four now traveled with lived on prickly pears. With winter approached de Vaca and company decided to pass the winter season with the present Indians. As word spread to others more Indians came and brought others. Castillo continued to bless them and commend them to God. He bestowed it so mercifully that when morning came they left healed with no sign of their disorders. These miracle cures gave deVaca increased faith in God to deliver them to their own country and people.

De Vaca and his companions began to move forward with the new tribes of Indians they passed through. They continued with their healing through prayers to God. When a group of Indians asked Castillo to save a dying man, he refused, and de Vaca attended the "dead" man. It was then de Vaca's turn to be adored by the Indians as a miracle maker. The Indians began to shower them with gifts which they really had no use for and therefore returned. The following morning after the man who appeared dead rose from his mat, ate, and talked with his family. The Indians had to be in a state of complete awe and wonderment. De Vaca and his people were so well treated, and remained with the tribe known as Avavares for a period of eight months during which time they continued to treat the sick Indians. They remained naked working for their keep as they traveled.

Many times their travels took them through areas of little food where the natives could barely stay alive. At one point de Vaca asked to dress new skins so he could scrape off the extra scraps to eat. They elected to move forward, but not until after eating the dogs. The extra nourishment seemed to help them along their way on their continuing journey. Their fame as healers moved ahead of them, and at each place they stopped, they were asked to cure the sick.

De Vaca goes into great detail about the habits, social views and traits from tribe to tribe. (It makes de Vaca's book a marvel of interesting facts and observations – a most interesting read).

As de Vaca and his friends continued their homeward journey some villages brought their children forward so that the Spaniards could touch their hands. At one point a large group of women followed them and became their guides. They came to a village of at least one hundred inhabitants. The people rushed out to pick them up and carry them into the village. They received the same welcome at the next village where they were fed venison and saw to the ill. Each village they came to brought out their sick to be cured, and they were. As they progressed on their trek more and more people followed them. When they came to a village where many people were blind, the group began to see mountains in the distance and set their course for them. De Vaca wrote that they chose this course because "transversing the country we should learn any particular of it so that

should God our Lord be pleased to take any of us thence and lead us to the Christians, we might carry that information and news of it”.

The next day they resumed their trip with several Indian guides. Women went along to carry their water. De Vaca chose to follow a river through the mountains and began to travel alone. As they approached new villages they were warmly welcomed. They began traveling a ridge, and when they entered a village they were showered with gifts. It is here that de Vaca found a man suffering from an arrow wound. De Vaca used a probe to remove the arrow head with the point of a knife and closed the wound with stitches. The next day the Indian was up and about being cured.

Again they began their trek with a great many followers. The followers supplied them with much game. De Vaca says they “crossed a great river”. It is assumed the Indians furnished them canoes, but no mention is made of this. They then passed over some great plains, and still the Indians came to assist them and guided them to another village. Fifty leagues of desert, over rough mountains, no food – they suffered with hunger.

After de Vaca’s group forded a large river, he told the Indians he desired to go where the sun sets. The natives were reluctant and said they would surely die, because there was no food in that direction. De Vaca insisted. At this point many Indians became ill, and eight men died. The Indians thought the Spanish had caused their deaths. They remained among these people for fifteen days. Ahead, the Indians had beans, pumpkins and maize. The food was brought to them.

The group proceeded towards the setting sun. The village they now stayed in was called the Cow Nation, because they slaughtered cattle in their neighborhood. These people were large in number, and lived along the river for over fifty leagues. De Vaca’s group again set out in search of maize.

De Vaca speaks of traversing all the country until coming out at a south sea and staying. On their seventeen day journey they crossed another river and traveled another seventeen days where they again found food. The village had houses made of earth and cane mats. From this village de Vaca’s group marched through more than a hundred leagues of country, finding people and food. Along the way the Indians lived in greatly improved housing and had better clothing.

De Vaca said “throughout all these countries the people who were at war immediately made friends”, and de Vaca taught them about the Christian religion. Village after village was visited each being a different experience for de Vaca.

De Vaca said when they arrived at a river they called Petutan to the river to which Diego de Guzman came that they heard of Christians. The natives thought the distance to be about eighty leagues. As they traveled through the region they saw traces of gold, lead, iron, copper and other metals. (The experience must have been the reason that de Vaca told de Soto that there was gold to be found). As de Soto planned his expedition de Vaca



notes the Indians "regard gold with indifference nor can they conceived of any use for them".

The end of de Vaca's incredible journey came to an end when he found four Spanish men on horseback. The horsemen could not believe their eyes as they saw de Vaca and his three companions in company with Indians. De Vaca asked to be taken to their commander, and he met Capt. Diego de Alcaraz. The Captain could hardly believe de Vaca's incredible story. De Vaca told the Captain he had left Castillo and Dorantez behind, and so the Negro returned with the soldiers to bring them into the town of the Christians named San Miguel within the government of the province called New Galicia. (To be more accurate Captain Lazavode Cebevos was with the three mounted men who de Vaca met).

And now the story ends as de Vaca finds his way home to be with his own people. The man - lost in a strange, hostile and unexplored land from 1527 to 1537. I don't know of another story that can top this one you have just read.