

HILLSBORO COMMUNITY LIBRARY NEWS

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.....JULY 2010

An Epic Travelogue

Imagine yourself in 1528, wandering lost for eight years, moving ever westward from Florida, covering 6,000 miles of the southern and southwestern United States never before witnessed by a European, and finally encountering once again your own countrymen on the west coast of Mexico. This month--the report of Alvar Cabeza de Vaca to the king of Spain describing his harrowing experiences across North America--a fascinating read.

Featured This Month:

Cabeza de Vaca's Adventures in the Unknown Interior of America --translated and edited by Cyclone Covey

Cabeza de Vaca was second in command of a fleet of four ships sent to explore the mainland north of Cuba. The fleet commander foolishly sent 300 men with 40 horses to explore inland along the western coast of Florida, resulting in their loss of contact with the ships. Eventually, having lost many men to disease and Indian fights and having eaten all the horses, they constructed barges to float along the Gulf coast in hopes of reaching the Spanish frontier in Tampico, Mexico. When the last barges were finally shipwrecked on Galveston Island, the few survivors traveled naked and by foot, initially as slaves to various native tribes in Texas.

Cabeza de Vaca used his moxie to become first a merchant, bartering goods between enemy tribes, and finally a healer of some renown on the journey through New Mexico and Mexico. Cabeza de Vaca and three others, the sole survivors, finally arrived in March 1536 at Culiac, the northernmost Spanish settlement on the Pacific coast.

The report is a valuable historical contribution that provides important anthropological information on the Native Americans and their cultural practices in Florida, the Southwest, and northwestern Mexico. But probably its greatest significance is the

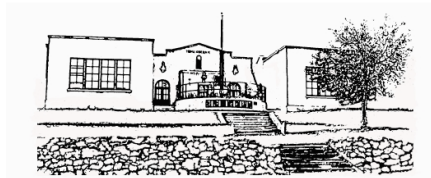


documentation of the transformations of a man under duress, beginning with the haughty attitude of a newly arriving Spaniard and winding up with profound admiration and respect for these fellow human beings.

This edition, originally published in 1961, is the first English translation to incorporate the detailed reconstruction of Cabeza de Vaca's track. Of particular interest to local readers is the presumed passage through New Mexico, entering from Texas along the Pecos River, going northwest from the Carlsbad area. Then across the Sacramento Mountains and down the Tularosa River, south along the eastern edge of the Tularosa Valley to near El Paso, then up along the Rio Grande to Rincon, where they crossed the river, then up Berrenda Creek (!) through the Mimbres Mountains, across the Burro Mountains to the Gila River near Red Rock and on into Arizona. Unfortunately for us, the New Mexico trek is described in only ten pages (108 -118), though indeed the entire report (excluding the useful editor's preface and an epilogue) covers only 115 pages.

Comments on the reconstructed track as well as much other information is inserted in the text in square brackets. These are very helpful but they also interrupt the flow of the narrative. One wonders if footnotes instead might allow the reader a better appreciation of the report's literary value, highly touted by a scholar of literature in the epilogue.

Introduction and review by Garland Bills



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In a Perfect World by Laura Kasischke

Video

The Over the Hill Gang Rides Again
White Zombie
American Heart
Forever Young
Stepmom
Tristan and Isolde
The Family Stone
Catch Me If You Can
The Sweet Hereafter

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Hero at Large by Janet Evanovich
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Non Fiction

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