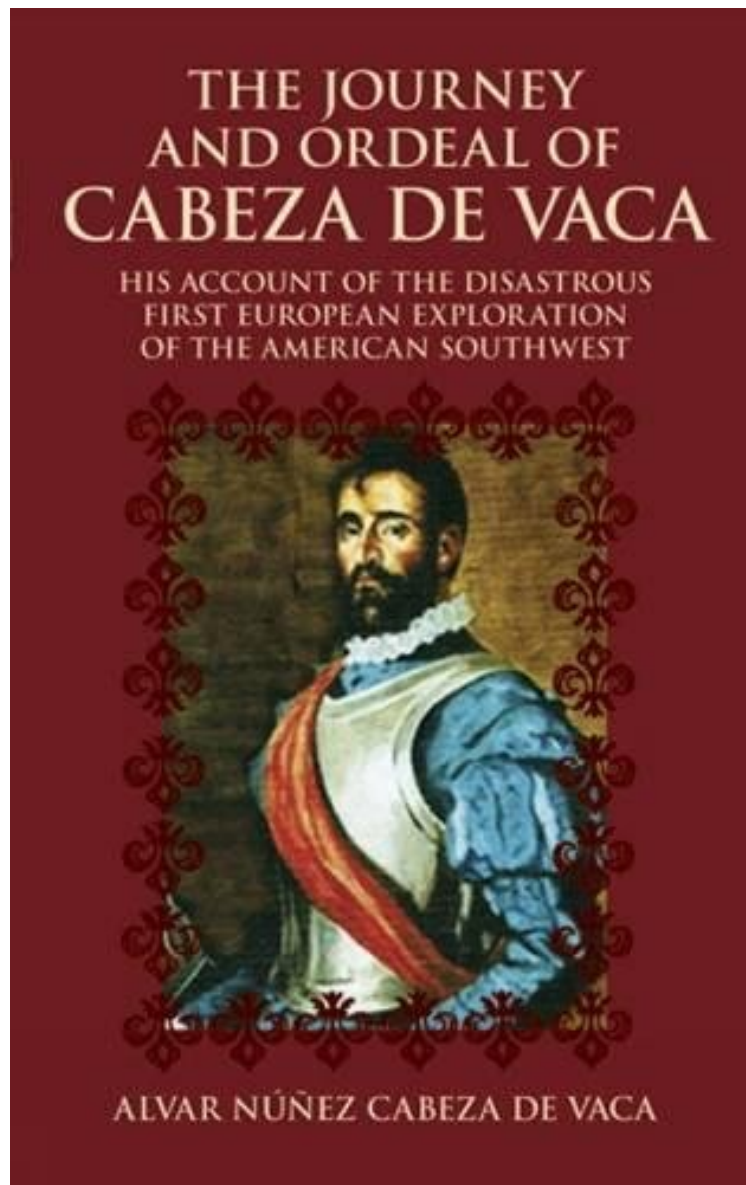


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## The Journey and Ordeal of Cabeza de Vaca: His Account of the Disastrous First European Exploration of the American Southwest

*Alvar Nez Cabeza de Vaca*

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Alvar Nez Cabeza de Vaca : The Journey and Ordeal of Cabeza de Vaca: His Account of the Disastrous First European Exploration of the American Southwest

before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *The Journey and Ordeal of Cabeza de Vaca: His Account of the Disastrous First European Exploration of the American Southwest*:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Beyond Imagination  
By Ron Braithwaite  
De la Vaca's account is incredibly valuable for multiple reasons. It is an adventure story par excellence. It is also the earliest, first-hand account of many native cultures long gone. Not only was De la Vaca, and his three companions, more tough than whip leather, they were also fortunate. They outlasted the other 300 Spaniards who started with the Narvaez expedition and later--escaping the Indians of Florida on wooden rafts--wash up on the Texas' coast. Most of the survivors are done to death by starvation, dehydration, disease and duplicitous natives. A few survive by making themselves useful as slaves. Constantly whittled down, four Spaniards [actually three Spaniards and a Moorish slave], survive by leaving the coast to seek help from more friendly natives in the interior. Along the way, they gain the reputation as being great 'healers', descended from the native equivalent of Heaven. This misunderstanding, no doubt, saved their lives. They are able to pass from tribe to tribe with relative impunity. They are venerated as Gods and, from the native point of view, they are capable of healing the dying and, at one point, cause a dead man to 'rise from the dead.' Violent tribes, from which the Comanche and Apache are descended, love them and honor them. They give the Spaniards everything they have. Great throngs of tribesmen follow our Spaniards around, hoping for a blessing. Finally, after seven or eight years and following circuitous routes [de la Vaca had only the vaguest idea about southwest geography], our heroes make it to lands being ravaged by Spanish slavers. De la Vaca, who has by this time come to respect the natives, is appalled. At the same time, because his own situation is still precarious, he is circumspect. He tries to help and warn the natives as much as he can but finally leaves them for Mexico City and, later, Spain. Arguably, one of the most lasting impressions de la Vaca leaves us with is the incredible poverty of most of the tribes he encountered. Yes, some of the tribes of western New Mexico, Arizona and northern Mexico were relatively prosperous with cultivated corn and squash and trade goods from the south. Most of the Texas' tribes he encountered, though, seem to be starving much of the time. Many actually die of starvation as did many of the initial Spanish survivors. The Texas' natives seem to lead a migratory, hand-to-mouth existence, traveling between the coast, the nut-bearing trees near the coast and even to the far west during the season of ripening prickly pear fruit. The people mostly go naked and experience incredible torments during the winter from cold and, during the summer, from mosquitos. To protect themselves from mosquitos at night they surround themselves with smokey fires. Women and slaves are responsible for keeping the fires lit all night long. I think we can count our blessings.  
0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars  
By Luisa Perfect  
0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. This is one of three books I have on Cabeza ...  
By Bill Thompson  
This is one of three books I have on Cabeza de Vaca. What I found with all three is the preface or introductions are really where the worth of the book lays. Worth getting.

Of the 300 Spanish explorers who set out to discover and conquer the wilderness of North America, only four returned after covering about 6,000 miles in the course of eight harrowing years. Cabeza de Vaca's incredible account of his 1528-1536 expedition of what is now the southern and southwestern United States and northern Mexico is unparalleled in the history of exploration. The first European to see and report sightings of the buffalo and the Mississippi River, he presents a narrative that crackles with excitement and suspense, from interactions with friendly and hostile Indians and observations on their culture, to passionate descriptions of the pristine beauty of the American wilderness.