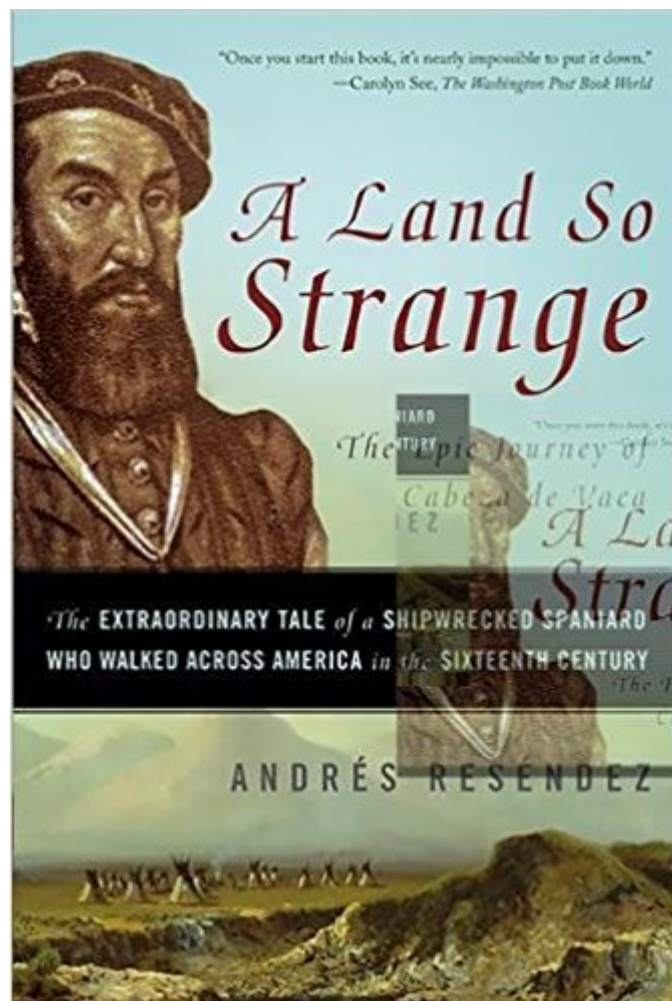


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# A Land So Strange: The Epic Journey Of Cabeza De Vaca



## Synopsis

In 1528, a mission set out from Spain to colonize Florida. But the expedition went horribly wrong: Delayed by a hurricane, knocked off course by a colossal error of navigation, and ultimately doomed by a disastrous decision to separate the men from their ships, the mission quickly became a desperate journey of survival. Of the three hundred men who had embarked on the journey, only four survived—three Spaniards and an African slave. This tiny band endured a horrific march through Florida, a harrowing raft passage across the Louisiana coast, and years of enslavement in the American Southwest. They journeyed for almost ten years in search of the Pacific Ocean that would guide them home, and they were forever changed by their experience. The men lived with a variety of nomadic Indians and learned several indigenous languages. They saw lands, peoples, plants, and animals that no outsider had ever seen before. In this enthralling tale of four castaways wandering in an unknown land, Andr  s Res  ndez brings to life the vast, dynamic world of North America just a few years before European settlers would transform it forever.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. In 1528, 300 conquistadores embarked on the ambitious mission of colonizing Florida. They all disappeared. Eight years later, a band of Spanish slave-traders were rounding up their fleeing human cargo in northwest Mexico when they espied a group of men who appeared to be natives approaching them. One was white. Just as astonishingly, a companion of his was African. Who were these strange figures? They, and two others, were the last survivors of the lost expedition. Their march across Florida, their voyage on spindly rafts across the Gulf of Mexico, their

captivity in Texas and their trek across the southwest to the Pacific coast form the backbone of Res  ndez's riveting account of the epic journey. The author, a history professor at the University of California   Davis, tells the tale from the Spanish, African and Indian points of view: Native Americans were just as amazed by the original visitors as the visitors were by them, and Res  ndez focuses on how the interlopers remade themselves as medicine men and made sense of social worlds other Europeans could not even begin to fathom. Told from an intriguing and original perspective, Res  ndez's narrative is a marvelous addition to the corpus of survival and adventure literature. 15 illus, 16 maps. (Nov.) Copyright    Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In *A Land So Strange*, University of California, Davis, history professor Andr  s Res  ndez relates this improbable tale with dynamic grace (Carolyn See of the *Washington Post* compares the book to *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* and *Moby-Dick*). The author combines sound research  including more than 70 pages of footnotes and resources for additional study  with a pulp writer's eye for the compelling detail. The author's tale makes sense of *La Relaci  n*, Cabeza de Vaca's own account of his ordeal written after his return to Spain. The *Dallas Morning News* also points out the author's deft interpretation of the text, which is "written in a literary style peculiar to 16th-century Spain and sensitive to the vagaries of the Inquisition." A must-read for anyone interested in the early history of European exploration in North America  or in real-life adventure, compellingly told. Copyright    2004 Phillips & Nelson Media, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This book is Res  ndez's gloss on what is, in my opinion, the most amazing survival story I know of, and I've read a lot of them! It's not just amazing because three shipwrecked Spaniards and a Moorish slave (Estevan) managed to make it from the Florida panhandle to the Gulf coast of Texas to the Pacific Coast of Mexico in a staggering eight year odyssey, but because of the unique way they did it, and the consequences for the Americas and the Spanish Empire. Cabeza de Vaca and his three companions were the only survivors of the disastrous Narvaez expedition, which left Spain with 5 ships, 600 men and a license to conquer Florida in 1527 and ended up castaway on the barrier islands of South Texas in 1528. They did not see another "Christian" (European) until they ran into the advance guard of the brutal N  n   de Guzm  n's conquering army near the Pacific coast of Mexico, in Sinaloa, in 1536. In the interim, they

went from being guests, then slaves of Indian tribes on the Texas coast, to faith healers and famous "Children of the Sun". It was a mutually beneficial, but rather bizarre, ritualistic exchange, of their services for goods, apparently orchestrated by their Indian hosts, that really what got them across the continent safe and sound. It went like this: after performing their healings in a village, its inhabitants would take them to the next village along their route where their hosts would trade them for everything owned by its occupants. They would heal the sick of this village, who would then take them on to the next one and repeat the process so that the miraculous strangers flowed northwest and goods flowed back to the southeast and everybody left happy. The repercussions of the four castaways' miraculous re-appearance were almost immediate. They recounted their tale to Viceroy Mendoza in Mexico City, including reports they had gotten from their Indian hosts of multi-storied dwellings with abundant crops and, possibly, metals and gems, located to the north of their route. This second-hand story, compounded with the Aztec's tale of a homeland called Aztlan, somewhere to the north or northwest of Mexico, accelerated Spain's push in that direction. Mendoza commissioned Fray Marcos de Niza to follow up on their tale, and gave him Estevan as his guide. Estevan and Fray Marcos' "discovery" of Cibola/Zuni, where Estevan was killed in 1539, and Marcos' wildly exaggerated description of the same, led almost immediately to the Vazquez de Coronado expedition of 1540, of which Mendoza was a heavy financial backer. All of this is quite ironic, given that the only "wealth" they actually saw with their own eyes on their journey consisted of a copper bell, 3 arrowheads made of "emerald" (more likely malachite) and some beads described variously as of silver, coral or pearls! Quite a transfiguration from these meager things into the magnificent "Seven Cities of Cibola"! Cabeza de Vaca began arguing for decent treatment of the Indians immediately upon being reunited with his countrymen in Sinaloa and continued to do so for the rest of his career. Conflicts with fellow colonists over just this issue ultimately landed him back in Spain in chains after a brief stint as governor of what is now Paraguay. I think he ranks up with Bernardo de las Casas as one of the most enlightened and humane Spaniards of the epoch. Resendez adds some interesting commentary on Cabeza de Vaca's chronicle, giving updated anthropological, ethnological and route information, plus background on the castaways, historical context and so forth, but by far the most powerful part of the book are the words of Cabeza de Vaca himself. In fact, the latter's "Naufragos" should really be read along with Resendez's book to get the full impact of this remarkable journey.

Cabeza de Vaca's story is one of the world's greatest adventure stories. Yet his own account, nearly 500 years removed from our own times, is hard for modern readers to make much sense of because we don't understand the context for his life and times. Andres Resendez has remedied that here with this brilliant, bold book that brings to life Cabeza de Vaca and his companions, and the Indians they encounter during their eight years in the New World. As others have well noted, this excellent book combines the latest in historical scholarship with a crisp, readable writing style, making for that most unlikely of books-- a scholarly page-turner!

This is an extremely interesting and well-written book. I was already familiar with Cabeza de Vaca's extraordinary travel story, having read before at least part of his own report, written for King Charles V (not an easy read, because of the XVI Century Spanish) but Res  ndez, besides making the history crystal clear, has fleshed it out with a lot of context, which makes it even more interesting and instructive. Some of the other characters, many of them quite interesting and extraordinarily daring people (including some incredible villains), are described even down to their physical appearance, character, and opinions contemporaries had of them. I learned a lot. If you read it as an adventure novel you could say the plot is incredible, but truth is stranger than fiction in this case. I tried to read this fascinating book slowly -difficult to do- because I did not want it to end. Highly recommended!

Cabeza de Vaca's journey is different from other accounts of his time because he didn't conquer and abuse the native americans. Instead he learned their languages and customs while living with them first as a guest, then as a slave, merchant and lastly as a "major pimp" during his 10 years in North America. Besides giving us a truly unique idea of how life was in North America in the 1500's (and shattering some of our Hollywood "noble savage" myths) Cabeza de Vaca's story is one of perseverance and survival against all odds. As much as I found his historical account fascinating I found the part about survival and not giving up inspiring for my personal life. After reading the original in medieval Spanish and understanding about 50% of it (due to different expressions and words that we don't use in modern Spanish, such as "traveling 2 bowshots," picking "tunas" off trees, and crossing "ancones."), Andre Resendez's book brought it all into historical context, and coherence. He did a wonderful job, this is a book that you cannot put down once you start it, SPECIALLY explaining the historical context of the expedition. Plus, it's a story that "no one" knows about, unlike Columbus, Cortez, Pizarro etc. Possibly it could have used a few more maps, or

perhaps a tab to reference back and forth while reading.

I had never read much about how Cabeza de Vaca happened to be in Florida. This books gives a great deal of background. There were so many plots, counter-plots, intrigues, backstabbing, and skullduggery going on. In school we learned about how he wandered around the South. History buffs learned about how he crossed Mexico. It wasn't until I lived in Brazil that I learned that the shipwreck and years of hobbling from one tribe to another from Florida to Mexico was only the first of his two great adventures; the second was his life in what is now Santa Catarina, Brazil, and the region to the West. A Land So Strange? A Story So Well Told.

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