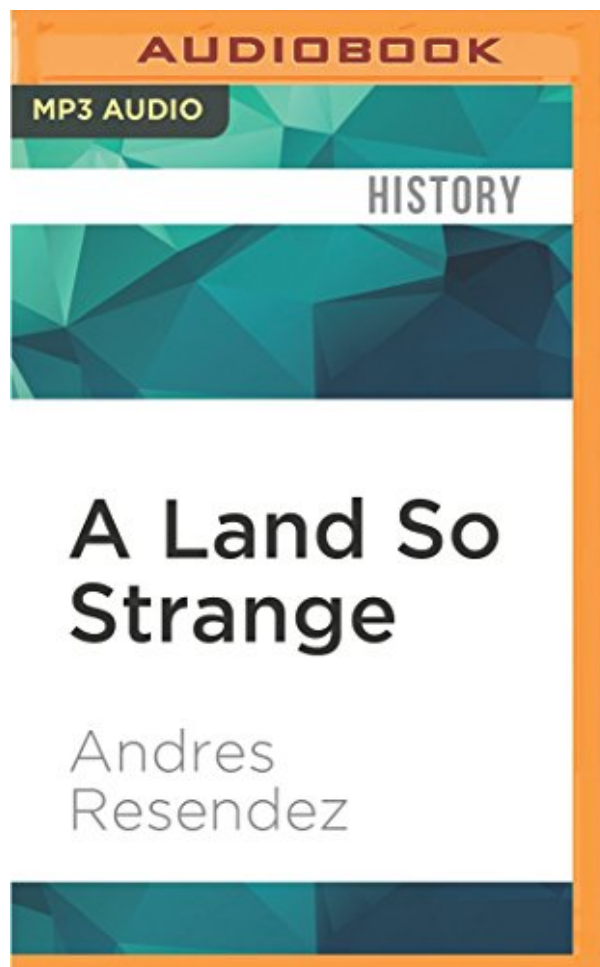


A LAND SO STRANGE: THE EPIC JOURNEY OF CABEZA DE VACA BY ANDRES RESENDEZ



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Andres
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From Publishers Weekly

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From Bookmarks Magazine

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Review

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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 300 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 10 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, Andres Resendez brings to life the vast, dynamic world of North America just a few years before European settlers would transform it forever.

The accompanying reference guide is included as a PDF on this disc.

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1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

More than just a survival story

By Richard A. Leveille

This book is Resendez’ 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 Nuno de Guzman'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 Aztlán, 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' book to get the full impact of this remarkable journey.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

The Best Book on Cabeza de Vaca

By Drew Youngblood

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!

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

What an absolutely fantastic story of exploration

By Santa Barbara, CA

What an absolutely fantastic story of exploration, greed, desperation, survival, resourcefulness, determination and all the other adjectives I left out that are appropriate. Just an incredible story and beautifully recounted by this author and read by this narrator. I intend to wait about a year and listen to it again. This is an even greater survival story than that of Hugh Glass whose story, as we all know, is presently on the big screen with Leonardo DiCaprio in "The Revenant." Truly an amazing story of survival.

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