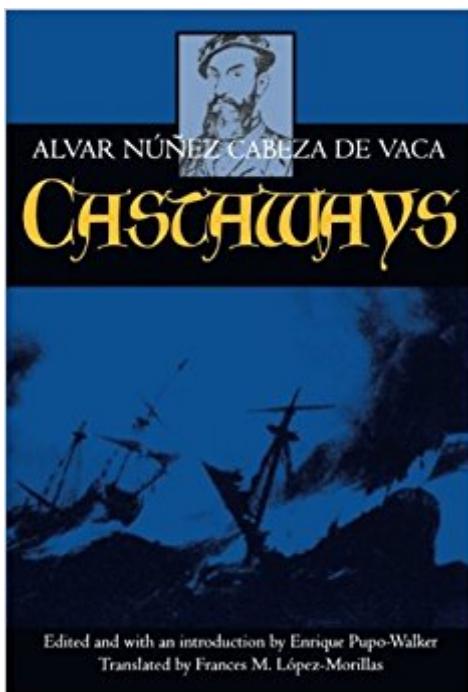


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# Castaways: The Narrative Of Alvar NÃºÃ±ez Cabeza De Vaca



## Synopsis

This enthralling story of survival is the first major narrative of the exploration of North America by Europeans (1528-36). The author of *Castaways* (*Naufragios*), Alvar N<sup>º</sup>ez Cabeza de Vaca, was a fortune-seeking nobleman and the treasurer of an expedition to claim for Spain a vast area that includes today's Florida, Louisiana, and Texas. A shipwreck forced him and a handful of men to make the long westward journey on foot to meet up with Hern<sup>an</sup> Cort<sup>es</sup>. In order to survive, Cabeza de Vaca joined native peoples along the way, learning their languages and practices and serving them as a slave and later as a physician. When after eight years he finally reached the West, he was not recognized by his compatriots. In his writing Cabeza de Vaca displays great interest in the cultures of the native peoples he encountered on his odyssey. As he forged intimate bonds with some of them, sharing their brutal living conditions and curing their sick, he found himself on a voyage of self-discovery that was to make his reunion with his fellow Spaniards less joyful than expected. Cabeza de Vaca's gripping narrative is a trove of ethnographic information, with descriptions and interpretations of native cultures that make it a powerful precursor to modern anthropology. Frances M. L<sup>pez</sup>-Morillas's translation beautifully captures the sixteenth-century original. Based as it is on Enrique Pupo-Walker's definitive critical edition, it promises to become the authoritative English translation.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Even if your collection has one of the earlier translations of this basic southwestern document, you'll want to add this one."--"Books of the Southwest

Text: English (translation) Original Language: Spanish --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Cabeza de Vaca provides interesting information about the cultures of the native Americans he encountered on his journey. However, to follow his journey requires extensive use of the end notes and appendices which is cumbersome with the Kindle edition because there aren't functioning links in the text. When taken as a whole, the text along with the many scholarly notes provide an interesting look into 16th century America.

a little disappointing first person account from 16th century and translation so maybe all one can expect

This is a tale that everyone should read. It gives an excellent glimpse into America hundred of years ago at what it took to survive.

book just as described

I had to read this for a college class. I was pleasantly surprised at the narrative and thoroughly enjoyed the history lesson it contained. I am a native of the desert southwest and I found the descriptions of the land and its resources fascinating. But most important the lesson of the indigenous peoples and the relationships that were established. I was astonished at the miraculous tale of survival. It was interesting to note that when the indigenous people lacked faith in God they were often hungry, mean, and aggressive and when they had faith in God or the "Great Spirit" they had plenty of food, resources, and were kind and helpful. Very interesting read. Enjoy.

To read so much live detail about the way of life of the original inhabitants of parts of Texas and the Southwest is to have one's very conceptions about these places changed. It's an amazing, short read and the editor helps with notes in critical places. I think this is basic reading for anyone even part-way interested in the history of Texas and neighboring states. Cabeza de Vaca's account covers hair-raising events which occurred in the 1530s right here on Galveston Island, so it gives a longer sense of post-Columbian history than one usually gets as a lay reader of Texas and Southwest history. I too don't know why more folks aren't talking about this book. I'm buying copies

to give away.

Cabeza de Vaca's first hand narrative of his experiences in the New World is one of the most gripping true life adventure stories that you can find. The story is almost five hundred years old. It begins with his selection as treasurer for a Spanish invasion force of six hundred that was intended to conquer Florida (then thought to be an island), seize the natives' gold and add their bodies to the Spanish crown while their souls would be dedicated to the Christian God. Everything went wrong. A hurricane hit. The expeditionary force was separated from their ships and ended up marooned on the Florida Gulf Coast, surrounded by hostile, deadly Indians. Eventually, the survivors slaughtered their horses for food, then melted down their armor to make nails and built boats in the hope of finding their way to Mexico. Many more men were lost before they made their way to what is now known as Galveston. The survivors experienced starvation, the cowardice of their leader, slavery and even cannibalism. Out of six hundred conquistadores, only four men survived. Those four men walked across the rest of Texas, wandering almost aimlessly in a search for the Spanish colony of Mexico. By the time they finally arrived in Mexico, after years of privation, they were no longer the same self-sure conquerors who had sailed from Spain. They had developed a following of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Indians who hailed them as "Children of the Sun". Cabeza de Vaca, who had emerged as their leader, fit the description of an Old Testament prophet. His hair had not seen a comb or scissors for several years, while his feet had not seen shoes for almost as long. Here's an extended quote from Chapter 19: "A few days after these four Spaniards had departed there came a time of cold and storms so severe that ... five Christians who were encamped on the beach came to such straits that they ate one another until only one was left, who survived because there was no one left to eat him.... The Indians were so indignant about this, and there was so much outrage among them, that undoubtedly if they had seen this when it began to happen they would have killed the men, and all of us would have been in dire peril: in a word, within a very short time only fifteen of the eighty men from both parties who had reached the island were left alive; and after the death of these men, a stomach ailment afflicted the Indians of the land from which half of them died, and they believed it was we who were killing them; and as they were wholly convinced of this, they agreed among themselves to kill those of us who were left." How's that for action? It's true that the narrative style itself is archaic and stilted at times. But this translation emphasizes simple modern English and cuts through a lot of the difficulty of reading a story that's half a millennium old. I've read the story of Cabeza de Vaca two or three times over the years. In it, I see an almost mirror image many of the other explorers like De Soto or Cortez: a man who learned

to view the New World in a different way, and who became a different man by the experience. His story has action, sure: hurricanes, starvation, slavery, faith healing, a stupid, greedy leader, and a cast of thousands. But at the heart of this journey is the journey of one man's heart.

I have learned to dispise the Spanish colonizers for their actions in the New World. I have read enough of their sharpening their swords and practicing on the Native Americans and slaying the men, women and children of native settlements if they didn't convert to Christianity or produce enough gold. So this is a new perspective. This is a story of the Spanish colonizers failing and suffering through unimaginable hardship in a challenging hostile wilderness along the coast that is now, 500 years later, our destination of choice for retirement. This is a nearly fantastic book, only nearly so because it is true (unless De Vaca embellished his story). If you are intrigued with pre-settlement America and the cultures of Native Americans you will appreciate this read in addition to the survival story. This is a look at Florida and Texas in a different era. This is a story about the ambitions of Spain and the privations men could endure for their religion and their country. Even the style of the writing adds to the true insight into the time and perspective on their outlook on the new world. The chapter titles such as "Of What Befell Lope de Oviedo with Some Indians" and "How We Departed After Eating the Dogs" give you the idea of how the book is structured in addition to how they suffered. In many historical accounts the Spanish are said to have believed that the New World was the dominion of the devil and all its' people, lands, forests and creatures were works of the devil. It is in accounts like this that you can start to gain some perspective on this and understand their reasoning and belief despite how wrong it is today.

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