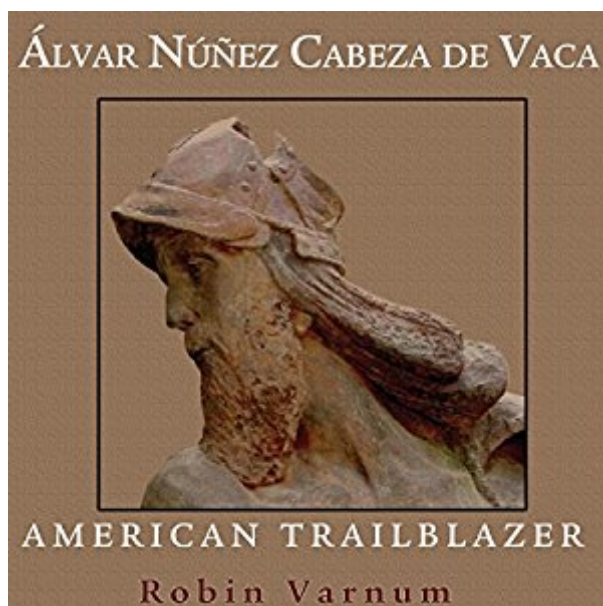


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# Alvar Nunez Cabeza De Vaca: American Trailblazer



## Synopsis

In November 1528, almost a century before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock, the remnants of a Spanish expedition reached the Gulf Coast of Texas. By July 1536, eight years later, Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca (c. 1490 - 1559) and three other survivors had walked 2,500 miles from Texas, across northern Mexico, to Sonora and ultimately to Mexico City. Cabeza de Vaca's account of this astonishing journey is now recognized as one of the great travel stories of all time and a touchstone of New World literature. But his career did not begin and end with his North American ordeal. Robin Varnum's biography, the first single-volume, cradle-to-grave account of the explorer's life in 80 years, tells the rest of the story. During Cabeza de Vaca's peregrinations through the American Southwest, he lived among and interacted with various Indian groups. When he and his non-Indian companions finally reconnected with Spaniards in northern Mexico, he was horrified to learn that his compatriots were enslaving Indians there. In Rio de La Plata he tried to keep his men from robbing the Indians, enslaving them, or exploiting them sexually - policies that caused grumbling among the troops. When Cabeza de Vaca's men mutinied, he was sent back to Spain in chains to stand trial before the Royal Council of the Indies.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca holds a curious place in history. His story is in two parts that are related, but could each stand on its own as a complete narrative. The first part is his participation in the ill-fated Narvaez expedition to Florida of 1528. Just about every horrible thing that could happen

did happen, including battles with Indians, attacks by wild beasts, shipwrecks, and hurricanes that saw him wash up naked on Galveston Island off the coast of Texas in November of 1528. He and three companions were all that was left of the 600 men who started the expedition in Spain. They were enslaved by Indians for a couple of years before they escaped and tried to work their way down to the Spanish settlements in Mexico. They spent nine years in the wilderness before being accidentally discovered near the Gulf of Coronado by a Spanish slave-capturing expedition, who returned him to civilization. He was profoundly changed by the experience, especially with regard to his attitude toward the indigenous peoples of the Americas. After returning to Spain, he received a commission to govern an outpost in South America. He vowed to be different from the other conquistadors by treating the Indians with kindness, consideration, and respect. Those Spaniards who were already there resisted his new methods of government because they had grown comfortable exploiting and terrorizing the local Indians. A mutiny ensued and Cabeza was shipped back in chains to Spain, where he was tried on false charges and found guilty. It took him years to finally be vindicated. Cabeza de Vaca's story is an important one, especially today when there are voices in authority who preach that all white men are evil and their coming to the New World was the equivalent of one continent raping another. His story needs to be told. I've read several books on Cabeza de Vaca, but this is the first one that tells both stories in one volume. Where this book really shines is in the rich context that author Robin Varnum provides for the events, so that even though actual evidence is scanty, she is able to bring the story to vivid life. Of course, she has to use phrases like "He no doubt..he must have surely..he probably..in all likelihood, he.. a lot and this can sometime get annoying. But she has no leaps in logic by doing so, so her scenario is at least plausible. She also seems to have a stronger anthropological background than the previous chroniclers of Cabeza de Vaca's tale. The book is basically well-written, although in a couple of instances she inserts some jarringly out-of-place phrases, such as "the mother of all swamps" in an otherwise scholarly presentation. At the end she once again drops the scholarly approach to insert very subjective comments in the first person, like "I like to imagine that Cabeza de Vaca was happy." But I suppose that's minor. I'm not sure that this is the best introduction to Cabeza de Vaca (BRUTAL JOURNEY or A LAND SO STRANGE might be better because they are basically adventure stories), but if you already have some familiarity with his story and want to see a fuller picture, this book will greatly deepen your knowledge and understanding. Four stars.

This book gives an extraordinarily detailed picture of Spanish colonial life and of relations with indigenous peoples in the Age of Discovery. The reader will be surprised by the legal and ecclesiastical framework in place to protect indigenous peoples, given the wholesale departure from this framework in practice by the conquistadors and their successors.

This account of an explorer of the Americas reveals unbelievable details of his life. Most people have never heard of Alvar Nunez "Cow's Head" but his name is not the most incredible thing you will learn if you read this book. Some things are beyond belief -- how he healed the sick and raised the dead (sound familiar?).

An excellent biography that tells of one the most astonishing adventures ever experienced by anyone! Well-written, with historical context and background wells-defined.

Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca

(Unabridged) \_\_\_\_\_ Author: Robin

VarnumDate:2015Narrator:Charles Henderson NormanProvider:University Press

AudiobooksRunning Time:12 h 43 minAudible Enhanced AudioIn November 1528, almost a century before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock, the remnants of a Spanish expedition reached the Gulf Coast of Texas. By July 1536, eight years later, Alvar N  ez Cabeza de Vaca (c. 1490 - 1559) and three other survivors had walked 2,500 miles from Texas, across northern Mexico, to Sonora and ultimately to Mexico City. Cabeza de Vaca's account of this astonishing journey is now recognized as one of the great travel stories of all time and a touchstone of New World literature. But his career did not begin and end with his North American ordeal. Robin Varnum's biography, the first single-volume, cradle-to-grave account of the explorer's life in 80 years, tells the rest of the story. During Cabeza de Vaca's peregrinations through the American Southwest, he lived among and interacted with various Indian groups. When he and his non-Indian companions finally reconnected with Spaniards in northern Mexico, he was horrified to learn that his compatriots were enslaving Indians there. In R  o de La Plata he tried to keep his men from robbing the Indians, enslaving them, or exploiting them sexually - policies that caused grumbling among the troops. When Cabeza de Vaca's men mutinied, he was sent back to Spain in chains to stand trial before the Royal Council of the Indies.While this is not, technically an academic work of history, at least not in this incarnation, it is a very excellent popular history of events not often covered in most American history courses. We usually think of settlements in the New World in terms of the British, French and

Dutch in North America, and although the Spanish settled in Florida and California (and other areas of the Southwest) we tend to think of them in terms, primarily of Central and South American exploration. However, this book is the story of an explorer who was the first European to see much of areas in the South and Southwest, and of his establishment of some settlements that predated Plymouth and even Jamestown. It is a story filled with adventure, hardships, and, ultimately diplomacy (between Spanish and Native Americans, between different groups of Native Americans, and ultimately between New World officials and the Monarchy of Spain. The author's presentation is colorful and interesting, and despite the length and denseness of this book, it makes for fascinating reading, if the reader, as do I, enjoys history. In some respects this is a very dramatic tale, and some of the heroes are extremely unlikely, since they were, at heart, bureaucrats who would have been far more comfortable in a Provincial office, reading reports rather than wandering, (often with no idea where they were, or how to get to their intended destinations) around in often extremely hostile territory. The main hero, from whose documentation much of this story is taken, found himself lost in completely unexplored territory, having to survive against sometimes overwhelming odds, and having to both protect his men and develop at least working cordial relations with various groups of Native Americans, of whose language, history, customs and beliefs he was entirely ignorant. That he did so and found his way back to his own people after 9 years of wandering was a real feat ..and then, he had to fight for his life, his freedom and his reputation. The writing is factual but colorful and accessible, and the narrator was professional, and completely comfortable with Spanish words and names, of which there were many. I, personally, found his reading speed a touch too fast, because this is a complex book, and can't really be skimmed successfully. This is the 3rd book I've read from University Audiobooks, and just as I enjoyed the first 2, I also enjoyed this. It is well written, well narrated, and obviously well researched, and I suspect, well documented, although the Audible book does not contain notes or bibliographies. Still, I give this book 4 out of 5 stars, and recommend it to anyone interested in history or sociology. I received a free copy of this book in exchange for this unbiased review from AudioBookBlast dot com.

This thesis appears to be an extremely well-researched biography delving into the experiences of this Spanish explorer of the Western Hemisphere in the early 1500's. There is detailing of his life in post-inquisition Spain, followed by detailing of his life among various indigenous peoples from Florida and Cuba to Central America to Texas and Mexico. He finds himself dependent upon them and learns many things about survival as well as their cultures. There is a great deal to be learned

here. As this piece is very detailed, it is best absorbed in lecture-length spans. Fortunately, the narrator makes it all palatable with clear speech and a pleasant voice. I was provided this audiobook at no charge by the author, publisher and/or narrator in exchange for an unbiased review via AudiobookBlast

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