

Excerpt from the Journal of Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca

(1529-1536)

Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca was a Spanish bureaucrat shipwrecked with a small group of survivors in the area of Galveston Island, Texas. He wrote of his travels and experiences in the New World. He reported that he and his fellow Spaniards were able by their slim knowledge of medicine to effect dramatic cures of sick Indians, and that as a result he and his colleagues were awarded great respect, even adoration by the locals. This led some Indians, he said, to convert to Christianity and to follow him in his travels across the Southwest. He was rescued and returned to Spain, where he wrote his *Relación*, by a Spanish slaving party unexpectedly encountered near the coast of modern-day Mexico. His journey from shipwreck back to Spain occurred during 1529-1536.

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“On the night we arrived there some Indians came to Castillo complaining that their heads felt very sore and begging him for relief. As soon as he had made the sign of the cross over them and recommended them to God, at that very moment the Indians said that all their pain was gone. They went back to their abodes and brought us many tunas and a piece of venison, something we did not know any more what it was, and as the news spread that same night there came many other sick people for him to cure...They celebrated our coming for three days, at the end of which we asked them about the land further on, the people and the food that there might be obtained...Early the next day many Indians came and brought five people who were paralyzed and very ill, and they came for Castillo to cure them. Every one of the patients offered him his bow and arrow...and by sunset he made the sign of the cross over each of the sick, recommending them to God, our Lord, and we all prayed to Him, as well as we could to restore them to health. And He, seeing there was no other way of getting those people to help us so that we might be saved a miserable existence, had mercy upon us, and in the morning, all woke up well and hearty and went away in such good health as if they never had had any ailment whatever. This caused them great admiration and moved us to thanks to Our Lord and to great faith in His goodness and the hope that He would save us, guiding us to where we could serve him.”

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Source: *The Journey of Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca and His Companions from Florida to the Pacific, 1528-1536*; tr. *From His Own Narrative by Fanny Banelier, together with the report of Father Marcos of Nizza and a letter from the Viceroy Mendoza*; ed. *With an Introduction by Ad. F. Banelier, 1922. 100-105.*

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