

CORONADO

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Commemorating the First Major Exploration of Europeans Into the American Southwest (1540-42)

Within 50 years of Columbus' discovery of America, the Coronado Expedition made the first extensive European penetration into northwestern Mexico, the American Southwest, and the western plains. Although deemed a failure at the time—for they found no riches—the expedition brought back knowledge of vast lands and many peoples to the north, and paved the way for later Spanish colonization and settlement.

Spain in America—1540

Spain had a rich colonial empire in the New World. From southern Mexico to Peru, gold poured into her coffers, and large areas were opened for settlement. The northern frontier lay a few hundred miles north of Mexico City; beyond was unknown land.

This was the picture in 1536 when Cabeza de Vaca and three tattered companions, sole survivors of the shipwrecked Narváez expedition to Florida, arrived in Mexico City after 8 years of wandering through the Southeast, Texas, and northern Mexico. They brought tales of a land to the north of Mexico where there were large cities, with

streets of goldsmiths' shops, houses of many stories, and doorways studded with emeralds and turquoises. Was this another Peru?

The Seven Golden Cities of Cibola

Mendoza, the Spanish Viceroy, was interested, but cautious. In 1539, he sent Fray Marcos de Niza, accompanied by some guides and Estevan, the Negro who had been with Cabeza de Vaca, to check on the story. Fray Marcos returned within the year with glowing reports of the Seven Golden Cities of Cibola which he described as being larger than Mexico City. What Fray Marcos saw—and only from a distance—was the Zuni Indian pueblo of Hawikuh, near what is now Gallup, N. Mex. Estevan, scouting ahead of the party, had been killed by the Indians, and the friar dared not approach too close.

Francisco Vasquez de Coronado

Viceroy Mendoza was convinced. He promptly started preparations for an expedition to Cibola, and chose his friend, Francisco Vasquez de Coronado, to command it.

The National Park System, of which this area is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the scenic, scientific, and historic heritage of the United States for the benefit and enjoyment of its people.

Coronado, the 30-year-old younger son of an aristocrat, who was born in Salamanca, Spain, had come to the New World in 1535 to seek his fortune. Through his friendship with the viceroy and his able execution of several important missions, he soon attained a position of prominence. He served a term on the Mexico City council and in 1538 was appointed governor of the frontier province of New Galicia.

In January 1540, Coronado was commissioned commander of the expedition and captain-general of the lands he was to conquer.

The Expedition

Quickly organized, the expedition passed in review before the viceroy and left Compostela in Mexico on February 23, 1540, with 300 Spanish soldiers, 4 priests, and 800 Mexican Indian allies.

The pace was too slow for Coronado. From Culiacan (shown on the map in this leaflet), he set out with an advance party of 100 Spaniards, the priests, and some Indians, leaving the main army to follow at its slower pace. His small force, weary and weak from hunger, reached the fabled Cibola on July 7, 1540.

It was a bitter disappointment. Instead of a golden city, they saw only a rock-masonry pueblo building crowded with Indians who were ready to fight. The Spaniards attacked, drove the Indians back, and soon forced them to abandon the village. Well-stocked with precious food, the pueblo of Hawikuh was Coronado's headquarters until November 1540.

Fray Marcos de Niza, whose tales had raised so many futile hopes of fortune, was extremely unpopular. He was sent back to Mexico City.

Exploration

While at Hawikuh, Coronado sent his captains out to explore. Don Pedro de Tovar

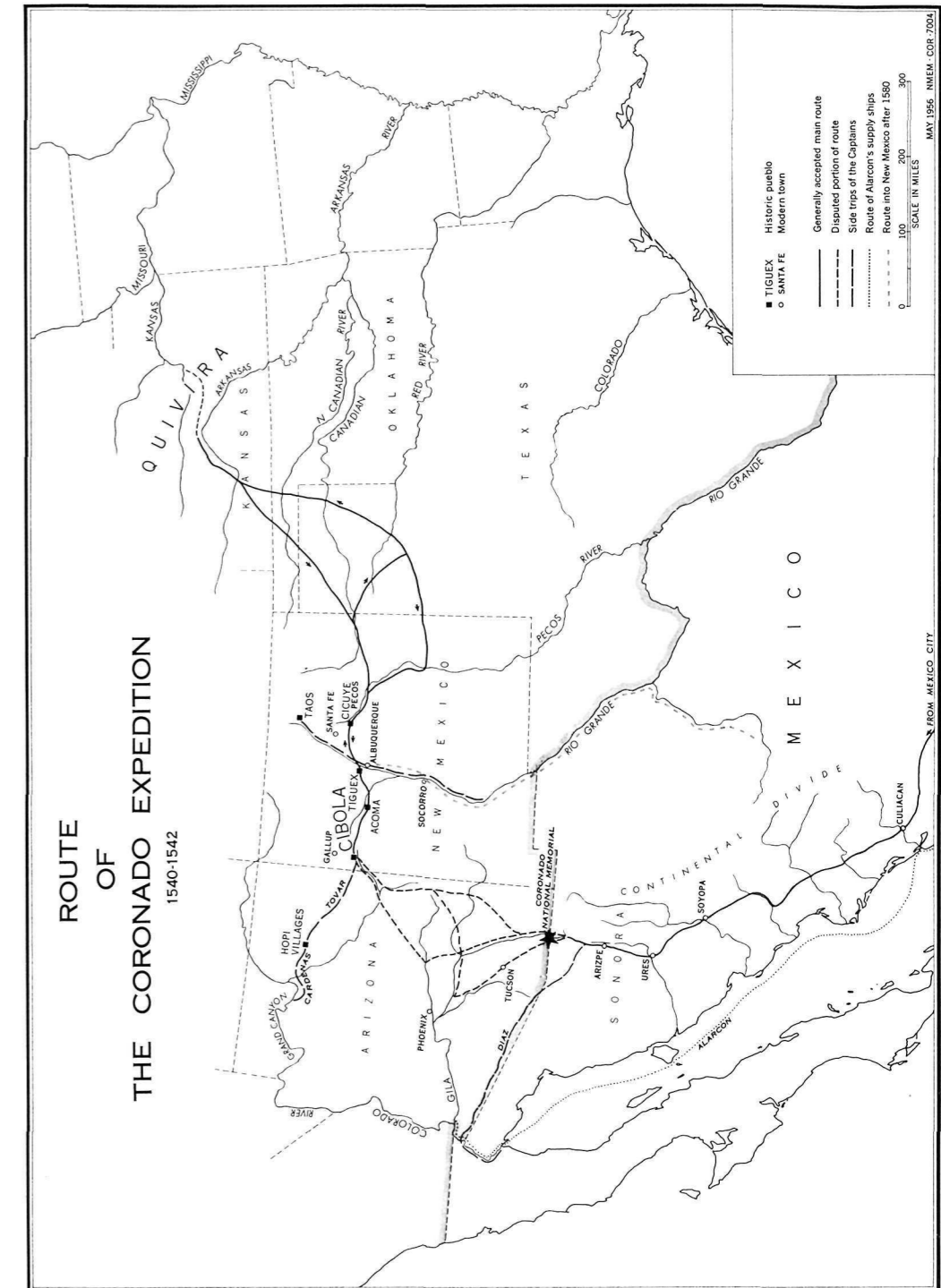
discovered the Hopi villages in northeastern Arizona, and Lopez de Cardenas, acting on information Tovar had picked up, discovered the Grand Canyon of the Colorado.

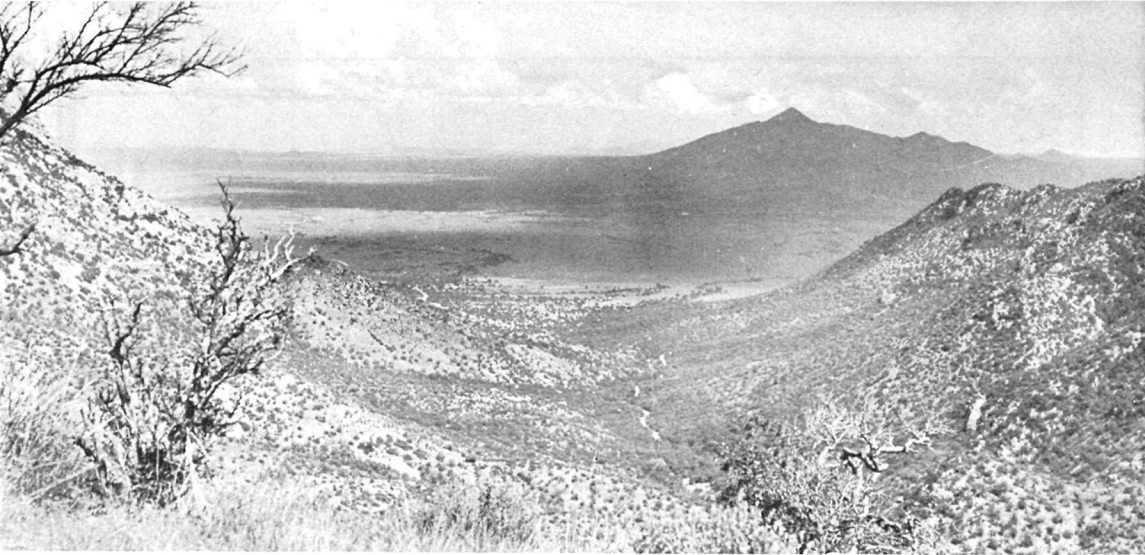
Meantime, Coronado had visitors from the pueblo of Cicuye (Pecos Pueblo in eastern New Mexico). They brought hides of a strange "humpbacked cow" (buffalo) and invited Coronado to visit their pueblo. He sent Alvarado with 20 men to explore the new region. Traveling east past Acoma and the Tiguex pueblos they reached Cicuye on the upper Pecos River. Here they met a Plains Indian, nicknamed The Turk "because he looked like one," who guided them out into the buffalo country of what is now the Texas Panhandle. The Turk, a master storyteller, astounded them with tales of an unbelievably rich land to the east, called Quivira. The buffalo were forgotten, and Alvarado took The Turk back to Coronado's winter quarters at Tiguex on the Rio Grande.

The Turk's stories renewed the army's hopes, but nothing could be done until spring. The Tiguex Indians, at first friendly, became openly hostile during the winter because of Spanish breaches of hospitality and friendship. In the battles that followed, the Spaniards massacred the inhabitants of one pueblo and forced the Indians to abandon several others.

Quivira

On April 23, 1541, the entire army set out for Quivira, guided by The Turk. After wandering aimlessly in the plains for more than 40 days, Coronado sent most of the army back to Tiguex. Though suspicious of The Turk, because his tales were contradicted by other Indians they met, he continued with 30 men. Finally Coronado reached Quivira—and became completely disillusioned. The towns of straw houses they saw there were probably those of the Wichita Indians in what is now Kansas.





Looking down Montezuma Canyon into the San Pedro Canyon

The Turk finally confessed that the story of Quivira was a plot hatched by the Pueblo Indians to lure the army out into the plains in hopes that they would die of starvation. Thereupon, he was strangled on the spot, and Coronado returned to Tiguex in the autumn of 1541.

Return to Mexico

The winter of 1541-42 was an uneasy time. The high hopes for fame and fortune were gone. Word was received of the massacre of the supply garrison left at Corazones in northern Mexico. In addition, Coronado was severely injured in a fall from his horse.

These circumstances led to the decision to return to Mexico City. Upon their arrival in midsummer, Coronado was poorer by far than when he had started for the fabled Golden Cities of Cibola.

Results of the Expedition

The immediate effects of the Coronado Expedition were few, but hardships and disillusionment were not in vain. Vast new lands had been explored, and knowledge gained about the geography of the land mass north of Mexico. These lands had a far greater potential value than the gold and silver Coronado sought.

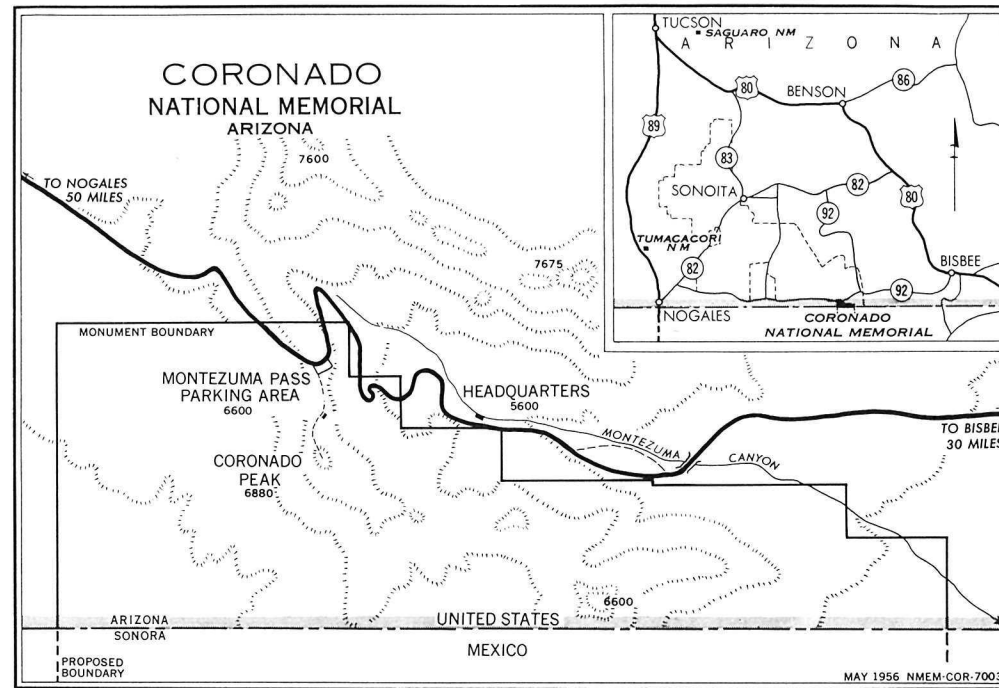
The next Spanish expedition into the Southwest came 40 years later and by a different route, through Chihuahua and up the Rio Grande into what is now New Mexico. This route was followed by others until the 1690's, when Jesuit priests pushed northward by a roughly parallel route through Sonora, which approximates that taken by Coronado.

The Spanish introduced cattle and horses as well as European crops to the Southwest in addition to their religion and manner of living. Close relations with the Indians modified the Spanish culture to the extent that it took on a flavor of its own, which is still evident throughout the Southwest.

About Your Visit

From the parking area at Montezuma Pass, a foot trail leads to Coronado Peak where you are afforded a sweeping view of the country through which the Coronado Expedition marched. The memorial area is near Coronado's point of entry into the United States.

Exhibits along this trail provide additional information on the Coronado Expedition and the interesting natural features of the area. A park ranger is on duty daily from 8 a. m.



to 5 p. m. to give you information and assistance.

Help Us Protect This Area

The memorial is closed to hunting. Firearms are not permitted in the area unless packed to prevent use. You are asked to refrain from defacing the natural features and vegetation in any way, and to take every precaution against fire in these grasslands.

How To Reach the Memorial

Coronado National Memorial is located about 30 miles west of Bisbee, Ariz., which is the nearest place for meals and overnight accommodations. The Montezuma Canyon

road, which leads into the memorial, joins State Route 92 about 20 miles west of Bisbee. It is about 6 miles from this junction to the memorial headquarters.

Administration

Coronado National Memorial, which was established by Presidential proclamation in November 1952, contains 2,745 acres. It is administered by the National Park Service of the United States Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Star Route, Hereford, Ariz., is in immediate charge.



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
Fred A. Seaton, Secretary
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE • Conrad L. Wirth, Director



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