

# Coronado

Coronado  
National Memorial  
Arizona

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



Volunteers depart Mexico City in November 1539 to join the Coronado Expedition at Compostela.

Commemorating the first major exploration of the American Southwest by Europeans, Coronado National Memorial lies on the

U.S.-Mexican border within sight of the valley through which the Coronado Expedition first entered the present United States in

search of the fabled Cities of Cibola. The expedition's influence is still with us today.

## Coronado's Seven Cities

During the early decades of the 16th century, Spain established a rich colonial empire in the New World. From Mexico to Peru, gold poured into her treasury and new lands were opened for settlement. The northern frontier lay only a few hundred kilometers north of Mexico City; beyond was unknown land. Tales of riches in unknown lands had fired the Spanish imagination ever since Spain's discovery of the "New World". They lured Hernando Cortez to Mexico in 1519, Parfilo de Narvaez to Florida in 1528, and Francisco Pizarro to Peru in 1531. Many expeditions ended in failure, but there were enough successful ones to keep alive the dream that great wealth lay within the grasp of anyone with the opportunity to seize it.

Signature of Francisco Vasquez de Coronado  
Courtesy The New York Public Library

Such was the situation in 1536 when Cabeza de Vaca and three tattered companions, sole survivors of the shipwrecked Narvaez Expedition, arrived in Mexico City after eight years of wandering through what is now the American Southwest. Everyone listened intently as they told of a strange land to the north with "large cities, with streets lined with goldsmith shops, houses of many stories, and doorways studded with emeralds and turquoise!" Antonio de Mendoza, Viceroy of New Spain (Mexico), was anxious to explore this new land if the stories were true. In 1539 he sent Fray Marcos de Niza, accompanied by some guides and Estévan, a Negro who had been with Cabeza de Vaca, to find out. Fray Marcos returned within a year with a glowing report of the "Seven Cities of Cibola." Estévan, however, had been killed by the Indians.

Though Fray Marcos' report was garbled and exaggerated, Viceroy Mendoza was convinced of its overall accuracy. He promptly began planning an official expedition and chose his friend, Francisco Vásquez de Coronado, to lead it. The 30-year-old Coronado had come to Mexico in 1535. Through his friendship with the viceroy and past successful missions, he had risen to prominence as a member of the Mexico City council and, since 1538, as governor of the frontier province of New Galicia. On January 6, 1540, Mendoza commissioned him expedition commander and captain-general of all the lands he might discover and claim for king and country. The viceroy, however, counseled Coronado that the quest was to be a missionary undertaking, not one of conquest.

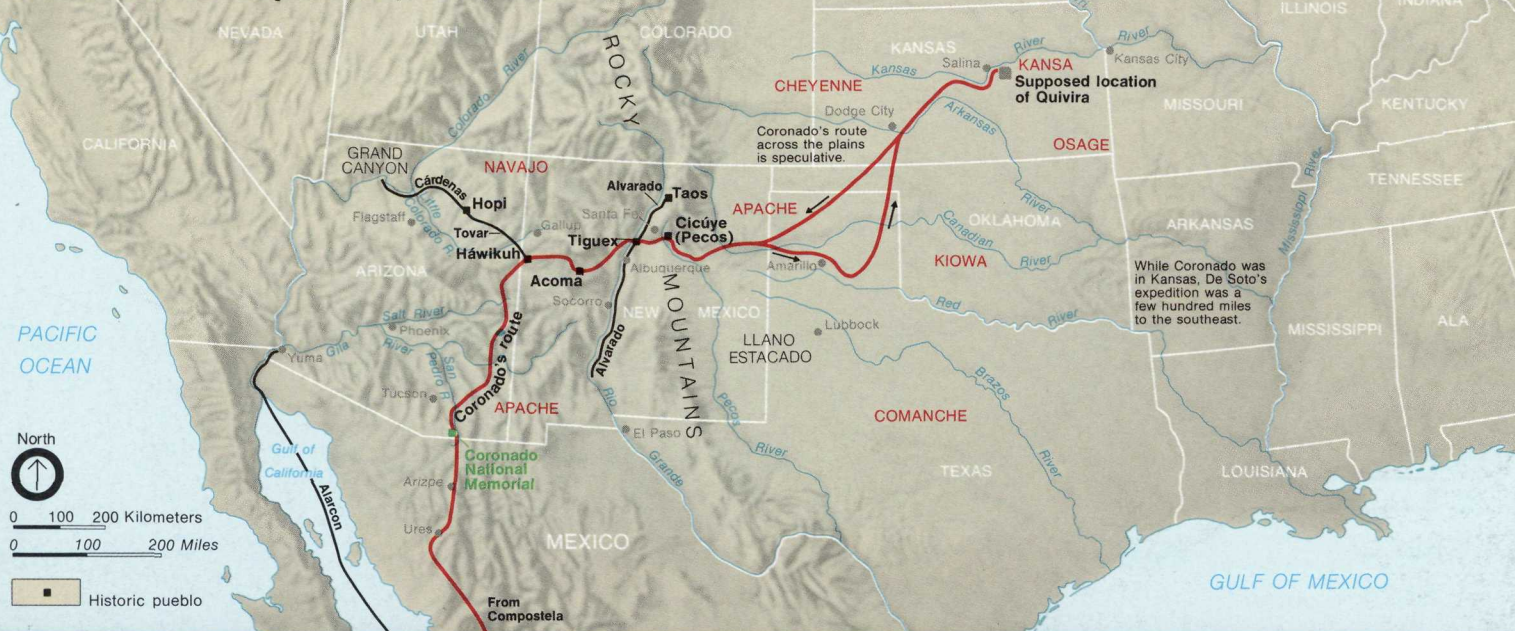
Quickly organized, the expedition left Compostela, on Mexico's west coast, on February 23, 1540, with 336 Spanish soldiers, four priests (including Fray Marcos), several hundred Mexican-Indian

allies, and 1,500 stock animals. (Supplies were sent north by ship under Capt. Hernando de Alarcon.) After reaching Culiacán, Coronado and 100 soldiers marched ahead of the slower-moving main army and, on July 7, 1540, arrived at Háwikuh, the first of the fabled Cities of Cibola. But instead of a golden city, they saw only a rock-masonry pueblo crowded with Indians who were ready to fight. The Spaniards attacked and forced the Indians to abandon the village. The pueblo, well-stocked with precious food, became Coronado's headquarters until November 1540. Fray Marcos, whose tales had raised so many hopes of fortune, was sent back to Mexico City amidst a rising tide of resentment.

While at Háwikuh, Coronado sent his captains out to explore. Don Pedro de Tovar discovered the Hopi Indian villages in northeastern Arizona, and Garcia López de Cardenas discovered the Grand Canyon of the Colorado. A third captain, Hernando de Alvarado, and 20 men traveled eastward past Acoma and Tiguex (*ta-goo*) pueblos to Cicyue (Pecos) pueblo on the upper Pecos River. Here they met a Plains Indian, nicknamed The Turk "because he looked like one," who astounded them with tales of an unbelievably rich land to the east, called Quivira. The Turk's stories renewed hopes of finding great wealth, but further exploration would have to wait until spring. The army wintered at Tiguex, where the Indians, at first friendly, grew openly hostile because of Spanish violations of hospitality and friendship. Battles followed, and the Spaniards killed the inhabitants of one pueblo and forced the Indians to abandon several others.

On April 23, 1541, the entire army set out for Quivira, guided by The Turk. After 40 days of travel, Coronado sent most of his men back to Tiguex and continued on with 30 others. At Quivira they were once again disillusioned. The villages were only grass houses. The Turk, who finally confessed that the story of Quivira was a plot hatched by the Pueblo Indians to lure the army out onto the plains in hopes that the men would die of starvation, was executed. Coronado, his dreams of fame and fortune shattered, led his men back to Mexico City in the spring of 1542. Although discredited, he resumed his position as governor of New Galicia. Both he and his captains were subsequently called to account for their actions during the quest, and it was four years before he succeeded in clearing his name. Ten years after his return home, at the age of 42, he died in relative obscurity. He could not know, however, that his courage had set the stage for the larger-than-life saga of the great American West. The horses he left behind helped give the American Indian the means to dominate plain and mountain. The Indians' religions changed subtly to incorporate the teachings of the priests who accompanied him. And he brought back knowledge of the land and people to the north which opened a way for later Spanish explorers and missionaries to colonize the Southwest, developing the distinctive Hispanic-American culture we know today.

## The Coronado Expedition, 1540-42



Coronado National Memorial is situated in oak woodlands on the Mexican border at the southern end of the Huachuca (*wha-choo-ka*) Mountains, in southeastern Arizona. It is a historic area in a natural setting, comprising 2,013 hectares (4,976 acres). The Memorial is 92.5 kilometers (50 miles) south of I-10 and 37 kilometers (20 miles) south of Sierra Vista, Ariz., off Ariz. 92. The Montezuma Canyon Road, which leads into the Memorial, joins Ariz. 92 about 40 kilometers (25 miles) west of Bisbee. It is 8 kilometers (5 miles) from this junction to the visitor center/museum, elevation 1,615 meters (5,300 feet). West of the visitor center the road is paved for only 1.6 kilometers (1 mile) and then becomes a mountainous gravel road to Montezuma Pass. From there it continues west across the San Rafael

Valley and over the Patagonia Mountains to Nogales—a slow but scenic drive.

A picnic area near the visitor center is open from dawn to dusk. Though camping is not allowed in the Memorial, there is open camping available in Coronado National Forest to the west and north. There is also a campground at Parker Canyon Lake, 33 kilometers (18 miles) west among the Canelo Hills.

Coronado National Memorial is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address, is R.R. 1, Box 126, Hereford, AZ 85615, is in charge.

## Along The Memorial's Trails

### Plants, Birds, and Scenery



One of several varieties of Cholla.

The Memorial preserves an assemblage of plants and animals native to the southwestern United States. Among the more interesting plants that you can see is the Schotts yucca, or mountain yucca, a member of the lily family. From April to August, it puts forth a central stalk with clusters of white blossoms. Indians used the plant in many ways. For food they used the buds, flowers, and young flower stalks (eaten raw or boiled); for needle and thread, the sharp point of the leaf and the long fibers; for rope, matting, sandals, and baskets, the tough leaf fibers. Another, *Sacahuista* (*sah-cah-WEES-tah*), or "bear-grass," is not a grass but another member of the lily family. Its blossoms appear in May and June.

Of the many species of cholla (*CHO-yah*) cactus, the most common one found here is the cane cholla. Its deep-red blossoms appear in May and June, and the bright, lemon-yellow fruit develops in July and remains on the plant until it ripens in March or April of the following year.

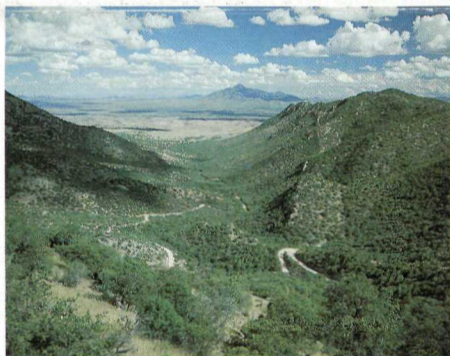
Among the mammals you may see as you walk the trails are the coati—a long-tailed raccoon-like creature that does not venture far north of the interna-

tional boundary—peccary, white-tailed deer, and the bobcat.

The Memorial is well-known for its variety of birds, with many different species for each season of the year. Over 140 different species have been seen, including about 50 resident birds. Some that you may add to your list of sightings include the Elegant (Coppery-tailed) Trogon, (rare in the United States), Black-chinned Sparrow, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Rufous-winged Sparrow, Gray-breasted (Mexican) Jay, Painted Redstart (summer), White-winged Dove (summer), the Rose-breasted Grosbeak (spring), Golden Eagle, and the Montezuma (Harlequin or Mearns) Quail. The visitor center has a special alcove for bird-watchers to take pictures through a 4-meter (14-foot) window wall.

At many places along the trails, you raise your eyes to the southern and eastern horizons and see the country through which Coronado led his company of explorers. The plants and animals that you see here today were probably as strange to them as they may be to you—as strange, perhaps, as the unknown land that awaited them.

### Montezuma Pass



Montezuma Canyon, looking east toward San Jose Peak.

This is one of the outstanding features of the Memorial. Its elevation of 2,005 meters (6,575 feet) allows a sweeping view to the west over the San Rafael Valley to the Patagonia Mountains and the Santa Rita Mountains. On clear days, Baboquivari Peak, elevation 2,353 meters (7,720 feet), can be seen 130 kilometers (80 miles) away on the Papago Indian Reservation. The road leading to the pass is not recommended for extra-long vehicles or camp trailers because of steep grades and switchbacks.

The pass also serves as a parking area for hikers using the Memorial's trails and the connecting U.S. Forest Service trails in the Huachuca Mountains. The Joe's Canyon Trail can be started from either the visitor center or Montezuma Pass. It is 5 kilometers (3 miles) long and provides spectacular vistas of Montezuma Canyon and Sonora, Mexico. The Coronado Peak Trail begins at Montezuma Pass. Markers along this 7-kilometer (.4-mile) trail

quote from the journals of the Coronado Expedition. At the peak, where the Mexican border is less than a kilometer south, are a shelter and benches for enjoying a panoramic view of Sonora, Mexico. To the east, outlined by cottonwood trees, is the San Pedro River and the route the Coronado Expedition traveled to and from the "Cities of Cibola."

Northerly from Montezuma Pass, the Miller Peak trail connects with many other trails in the Huachuca Mountains and passes through an area that once saw much turn-of-the-century mining activity. Miller Peak, elevation 2,885 meters (9,466 feet), is the highest peak in the Huachucas. It is 10 kilometers (6 miles) from Montezuma Pass.

Both the Joe's Canyon Trail and the Coronado Peak Trail are part of the National Trails System and classed as National Recreational Trails.

## Safety, Regulations, and Weather

We want your visit to be a safe one and urge you to watch out for uneven ground, unexpected steps, low-hanging branches, and unknown plants and insects. Please be alert for your safety and that of your children. Hunting is not permitted within the Memorial, nor are firearms unless packed to pre-

vent their use. Please do not deface the natural features and vegetation and be careful with fire.

Summers are warm, with temperatures usually in the upper 30s Celsius (90s Fahrenheit). Humidity is low. Winter temperatures are usually below freezing,

with highs between 4 and 16° C. (40 and 60°F.). The rainy season falls between late June and early September. Severe thunderstorms often accompany the rains. Precipitation, including light snow in winter, varies between 38 and 50 centimeters (15 and 20 inches) per year.

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