



Coronado National Memorial commemorates the first major European exploration of the American South-

west. It lies within sight of the San Pedro River Valley through which the Coronado Expedition first entered the

present-day United States in search of the fabled Cities of Cibola. The painting shows volunteers departing Mexico

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

NPS/NEVIN KEMPTHORNE

Coronado's Seven Cities

Early in the 16th century, Spain established a rich colonial empire in the Americas. From Mexico, Peru, and lands in between, gold poured into Spain's treasury, and new lands were opened for settlement. The frontier lay a few hundred miles north of Mexico City; beyond was land unknown to the Spanish. Tales of riches in these lands had fired Spanish imaginations ever since the Spaniards arrived in the Americas. These stories lured Hernando Cortés to Mexico in 1519, Panfilo de Narváez to Florida in 1528, and Francisco Pizarro to Peru in 1531. Many expeditions failed, but a few successes kept alive the dream that great wealth lay within grasp.

Signature of Francisco Vázquez de Coronado
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Such was the situation in 1536 when Cabeza de Vaca and three companions, sole survivors of the shipwrecked Narváez Expedition, arrived in Mexico City after eight years of wandering through what is now Texas and northern Mexico. They told stories of a land 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 to determine if the stories were true. In 1539 he sent Fray Marcos de Niza, some guides, and Estévan, a Moor who had been with Cabeza de Vaca, to find out. Fray Marcos returned within a year with reports of the "Seven Cities of Cibola." Estévan had been killed by Indians.

Although Fray Marcos's report was garbled and exaggerated, Mendoza was convinced of its accuracy. He planned an expedition and chose Francisco Vázquez de Coronado to lead it. Coronado had come to Mexico in 1535. Through his friendship with the viceroy and successful missions, he had gained prominence in the Mexico City council and, since 1538, as governor of the frontier province of New Galicia. On January 6, 1540, Mendoza commissioned Coronado as expedition commander and captain-general of all lands he might discover and claim for king and country. The viceroy counseled Coronado that this was to be a missionary undertaking, not one of conquest. The expedition left Compostela, on Mexico's west coast, on February 23, 1540, with some 350 Spaniards, several priests, including Fray Marcos, more than a thousand native allies, and many servants and slaves. Supplies were sent north by ship under Capt. Hernando de Alarcón, but Alarcón failed

to find Coronado, and the supplies never reached the expedition. After arriving at Culiacán, Coronado and 100 soldiers marched ahead of the slower main army and, on July 7, 1540, arrived at Háwikuh, the first of the fabled Cities of Cibola. Instead of a golden city, they found a rock-masonry pueblo crowded with American Indians. After brief unsuccessful negotiations, the Spaniards attacked and forced the Indians to abandon the village. The pueblo, well-stocked with food, became Coronado's headquarters until November 1540. Fray Marcos, whose tales had raised their 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 traveled to the Hopi Indian villages in northeastern Arizona, and García López de Cárdenas reached the Grand Canyon of the Colorado. Hernando de Alvarado and 20 men journeyed east past Acoma and Tiguex pueblos to Cicuyé (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 a rich land to the east, called Quivira. The Turk's stories renewed their hopes of finding wealth, but exploration had to wait until spring. The army wintered at Tiguex, where the Indians, at first friendly, grew 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 army set out for Quivira, guided by The Turk. After 40 days Coronado sent most of the men back to Tiguex and continued on with 30 others. At Quivira they were again disillusioned—the villages were grass houses. The Turk, who confessed that the story of Quivira was a plot by the Pueblo Indians to lure the men onto the plains in hopes they would die of starvation, was killed. Coronado, his dreams of fame and fortune shattered, led his men back to Mexico City in the spring of 1542. The priests remained in the northern territory, hoping to convert the Indians to Christianity. Although discredited, Coronado resumed his position as governor of New Galicia. He and his captains were called to account for their actions, and it was four years before he cleared his name. Ten years after his return home, at age 42, Coronado died in relative obscurity. His actions had, however, brought back knowledge of the northern land and its people. This opened a way for explorers and missionaries to colonize the Southwest and to help develop the distinctive culture we know today.

The Coronado Expedition, 1540–42



Exploring Coronado

Along The Memorial's Trails



Cane cholla is one of the varieties of cacti that grow in the park. It blooms in early summer.

Plants and Animals

The memorial preserves a wide array of plant and animal life native to the southwestern United States. The natural environment is typical of the so-called "sky island" mountains that rise from southeastern Arizona's arid valleys. Vegetation in lower elevations includes desert grasses and shrubs, with honey mesquite and desert willow along ephemeral drainages. Forests of oak, Mexican pinyon pine, and alligator juniper dominate the upper canyon, with Arizona sycamore and walnut along drainages.

Other common plants include manzanita with its distinctive red bark, agave (century plant), sacahuista (beargrass), Schott's yucca, and sotol (desert spoon). Among the cacti species are pincushion and rainbow cacti, and prickly pear. Many of these plants serve as

important food sources for the wildlife that feed on manzanita berries, pine nuts, prickly pear pads, hearts of the agave, and yucca seeds.

Among the more commonly seen mammals are white-tailed deer, peccary or javelina (a pig-like animal), coyote, coatimundi (with its long tail), and gray fox. Also found in the park, but much more elusive, are bobcat, black bear, and mountain lion.

Coronado National Memorial is well known for its wide variety of birds, with different species being sighted each season of the year. More than 140 species have been recorded, including about 50 resident birds. Among those often seen in the memorial are acorn woodpecker, Mexican jay, spotted towhee, rufous-crowned sparrow, painted redstart, white-winged dove, Montezuma quail, and many species of hummingbirds.

Weather and Regulations

When hiking always carry plenty of water and protect yourself from the sun. Summers are hot, with daytime temperatures in the 90s°F and low humidity. Winter temperatures often fall below freezing at night, with highs 40–60°F. The summer rainy season is between late June and early September. The rain is often accompanied by severe thunder and lightning storms that can cause flash floods. Precipitation, including snow, averages about 20 inches a year.

All plants and animals in the memorial are protected by federal law; do not gather, disturb, or destroy them. Hunting, possession of firearms, and wood gathering are not permitted. Pets are not allowed on trails. Fires are permitted only in the picnic area grills.

Montezuma Pass/Hiking Trails

Montezuma Pass, at an elevation of 6,575 feet, offers sweeping views of the San Pedro River Valley to the east and San Rafael Valley to the west. Caution: Vehicles longer than 24 feet are prohibited on the road leading to the pass due to steep grades and tight switchbacks. The top of 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 (wha-choo-ka) Mountains. The Yaqui Ridge Trail is the southern terminus of the 790-mile Arizona Trail that traverses the state from Mexico to Utah. At scenic vistas found along the trails, you can look toward the horizon and see the countryside through which explorer Francisco Vázquez de Coronado led his company of soldiers and missionaries.



Montezuma Canyon, looking eastward toward San Jose Peak in Mexico.

About Your Visit

Coronado National Memorial is in southeastern Arizona along the U.S.-Mexican border, at the southern end of the Huachuca Mountains. It is a cultural area in a natural setting composed of 4,750 acres of oak woodlands.

To reach the memorial, take Ariz. 90 off I-10 and drive about 25 miles south to Sierra Vista. At Sierra Vista take Ariz. 92 and drive about 16 miles to S. Coronado Memorial Drive (joins Ariz. 92 about 20 miles west of Bisbee). This road leads into the memorial and is

paved for another mile west of the visitor center. It then becomes a mountainous dirt-and-gravel road leading to the top of Montezuma Pass. A dirt road continues west across the San Rafael Valley and over the Patagonia Mountains to Nogales, a slow but scenic drive.

The visitor center, elevation 5,230 feet, has a picnic area (open dawn to dusk) and a nature trail. Camping is not allowed in the memorial, but there is camping in the Coronado National Forest to the west and north. Parker Canyon Lake, 18 miles west in the

Canelo Hills, also has a campground.

Coronado National Memorial is one of more than 380 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities, visit www.nps.gov.

More Information
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