

Adventures on the American Frontier

EXPLORERS in a NEW WORLD

Revised Edition



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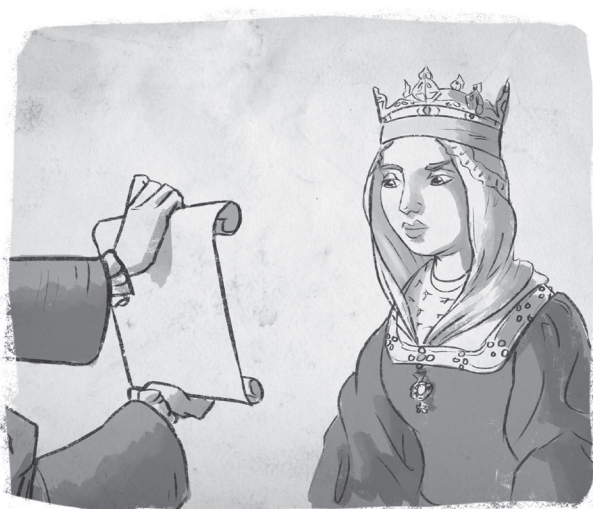
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Westward to a New World

Christopher Columbus was disappointed.

“I can sail west to China and the East Indies,” he had told the Queen of Spain. “If I find any unknown islands, I’ll claim them for Spain. Then, when I’ve marked the way to the rich islands of the Indies and to the great cities of China, Spanish trading ships can go back and forth easily.”

He showed the queen a map of how he believed the world to be. It had on it one large continent of Europe, Asia, and Africa together, with one ocean.



“The Earth is round, like a ball,” he told the queen. “Ships going in any direction can sail around it and get back

to land. But to go north is to go into the cold lands and icy seas.”

Columbus put his finger on the map and traced a route from Spain southward along the African coast. “Not long ago, a ship went from Portugal south around the tip of Africa, but it’s a very long journey. Now see how easy it should be to sail west to China.” His finger went across the small mapped ocean, coming quickly to the shores that all of the European countries wanted to reach.

Marco Polo had found the way to China across the land nearly two hundred years before, but the journey was long, and enemies had begun blocking the way. Everyone wondered if there was a better way. Columbus believed that he could find it simply by sailing west.

The queen agreed and set about raising money to buy ships. In 1492, Columbus sailed westward as planned. When he landed on an island southeast of North America, he thought he was on one of the islands he expected to find near China. He called the people he saw *Indians* because he believed the island to be one of the islands called the Indies. The islands he found later became known as the West Indies.

For ten years, Columbus tried to find the East Indies and China. He was sure that they could not be far away. He died in 1506, forever disappointed that he had not found the way through all of those islands to China. He’d had no idea how large North and South America were.

Columbus had not heard about the journeys of the men of northern Europe, the Norsemen. They could have told him that there was a large body of land north of where his

ships had sailed. In their small open boats, the Norsemen had traveled westward many years earlier. They had found Iceland and Greenland and then had gone west to Newfoundland, near the mouth of the St. Lawrence River in what is now Canada.

After Columbus made his famous journeys, more Spanish ships sailed west. They nosed into bays and river mouths along the shores of Central America, the northern part of South America, and the part of North America that is now Mexico. The explorers finally decided that all of that land was part of a “new world” that no one had known about. But they were not pleased to have found it, for it was in their way. It blocked their sea path to China. As the ships explored the rivers, it was the men’s hope that those rivers would be passageways through the land. Then their ships could sail on to China.

The explorers talked to the native people as best they could in sign language until they learned to understand a little of one another’s languages. “Yes, there are great rivers,” the Native Americans told them. “They reach far toward the setting sun. Stories have come to us of a great sea into which the sun falls each night.”

The explorers, since they could not find their way through the land, thought that perhaps there might be something worth finding in the New World. To them that meant gold and jewels, spices and silks. The Native Americans seemed to understand when they asked about gold. They said, “In the land of the setting sun, there are great cities. There they have gold.”



The Spaniards' imaginations built cities whose streets were paved with gold and where wealth was theirs for the taking. From then on, they looked for two things: the way to China, and the golden cities.

There were many who came to the New World. There was Amerigo Vespucci, who talked so much of what he found that the land was named for him: America. There was also Ponce de León, who had been one of Columbus's men. Ponce de León became a governor of the island of Puerto Rico. The Native Americans there talked of a rich land across the sea to the north. "There is gold there, and something better," they told de León. "There is a river whose waters make an old man young again."

De León's mirror told him that a "Fountain of Youth" would do more for him than any amount of gold. He paid for

ships himself and sailed north. The land he found, on Palm Sunday in April, 1513, had blooming trees and wildflowers. He named it Florida in honor of Easter, or *Pascua Florida*, which in Spanish means the Feast of Flowers.

De León searched but found no gold and no Fountain of Youth, so he headed back to Puerto Rico. When he returned in 1521, strong winds and stormy seas tossed his ships about. Before he could land, unfriendly Native Americans fought from the shore until de León lay dead on board his ship.

In the meantime, other men were exploring other parts of the New World. England had sent John Cabot, who landed far north of the Spanish findings, at Newfoundland, where the Norsemen had been. Spanish ships had traveled up the west coast of Florida, around the Gulf of Mexico, and all the way down to South America. Vasco Núñez de Balboa had crossed the narrow neck of land that is now called the Isthmus of Panama. On a September day in 1513, he had seen the great Pacific Ocean. Others had gone to Peru in northwestern South America. There they found the rich cities of the Incas.

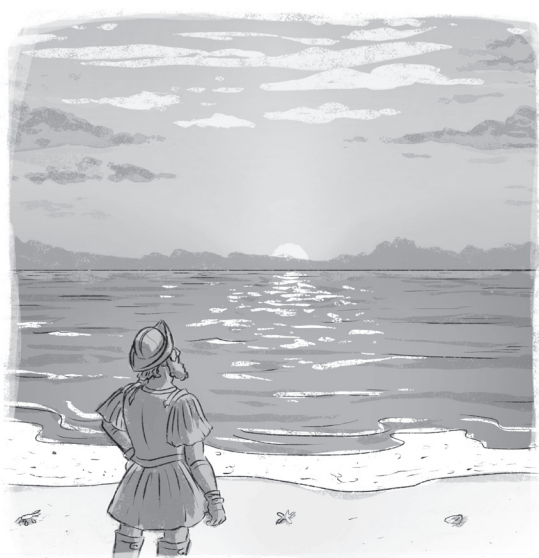
About the same time that Ponce de León was killed, Ferdinand Magellan reached the Philippines, just southwest of China, by sailing west and south around the tip of South America. He was killed there, but not before he named the Pacific Ocean. His ships were the first to go all the way around the world, and they brought back with them the news of the true size of the Earth.

That same year, a Spaniard named Hernán Cortés was riding his great horse into the cities of the Aztecs in Mexico. The Aztecs had never seen horses before, and the

big Spanish horses frightened them. At first they thought the horse and rider were one great monster. And when the guns the Spanish carried struck them down from far away, they were terrified. Cortés and his men moved on and took all of Mexico.

Except for Ponce de León's trip to Florida, no attention had been paid to the land that was to become the United States of America. No one had any idea how large that great mass of land was.

Then, in 1528, some Spaniards were shipwrecked off what is now the coast of Texas. They were made slaves by the Native Americans. One of the Spaniards, Cabeza de Vaca, was allowed to go free in order to go on trips to get things the Native Americans wanted. He became a trader, bringing seashells to Native Americans who lived far from the sea and taking back hides, flint, and red dye to the Native Americans who lived near the ocean.



Little by little, de Vaca worked his way westward. Nine years after the shipwreck, he reached the Gulf of California. He was the first white man to have crossed North America.

De Vaca finally escaped to Mexico. He told stories of what he had seen, and then he went back to Spain and told his stories there as well. In both places, listeners were sure that there was a land north of Mexico called Cibola, and in Cibola there were seven cities of gold.

The Search for the Seven Cities of Gold

A tall North African man, dressed in the skins and feathers of a Native American, and a small Spaniard, in the brown robe of a monk, stood before the governor of part of New Spain, which is now Mexico.

The governor, Francisco Vázquez de Coronado, had an eager look in his eyes as he spoke. “De Vaca spoke of great cities that sparkled from afar from the gold in their walls. Did you, too, see those cities, Estevan?”



The African nodded. “I did. I was with de Vaca when he saw them.”

“I, too, saw them from afar,” said the monk, Friar Marcos. He and Estevan had been among the shipwrecked men who had wandered in the valley of the Rio Grande with de Vaca.

Coronado was pleased. "They must be the Seven Cities of Cibola," he said. Every Spaniard had heard of the wonderful cities, but no one knew exactly where Cibola was or who had first told of its seven cities. Coronado pictured the cities as having walls and streets of gold, set with rubies and emeralds and sapphires. Inside the buildings, there would be chests of riches waiting for him and his men to take.

His fist struck the table. He would go, and these two would go with him to show the way! But to do that, he must have the help of Pedro de Mendoza, the man who had taken Cortés's place as ruler of New Spain.

"You two will take another journey," he said. "I must have more reports for Mendoza."

A worried look crossed Friar Marcos's face. "Sir, there are great dangers—"

"Yes, I'll send soldiers with you," Coronado interrupted. He seemed not to understand the dangers that the friar and Estevan would face.

So Estevan and Friar Marcos, with a few Native American guides and some soldiers, were soon on their way to Cibola, which was supposed to be to the north of New Spain. It was the year 1539.

When they reached a place in what is now southern Arizona, Friar Marcos called the men together. "From here there are many ways we could go," he said. "We should split up. Some of us should go one way, and some another. I'll stay here to wait for your reports. If you find a city, send a messenger back with a wooden cross. Send a small cross if

the place is small. If you have good news, send a cross as long as your two hands.”

The men set out in small groups. Estevan led the way for one of the groups. He enjoyed going into the Native American villages. He dressed himself in skins decorated with feathers. Around his neck he wore a string of turquoise stones that had been given to him by Native Americans he had visited. Whenever he drew near a village, he always sent a messenger ahead with a sacred rattle, made from a gourd, that he had gotten from Native Americans farther north. The rattle was to say that a great medicine man was coming. The Native Americans would bow down before him and offer him gifts. But Estevan did not know that the Pueblo people of the south feared the sacred rattle of the northern tribes and did not trust anyone who had one.

Estevan and the few men with him reached the edge of a cliff. They looked down into an open valley. There, sparkling in the sunshine, was a city whose walls were the yellow of the gold for which the Spaniards hungered.

“One of the Seven Cities!” Estevan cried.

Surely those buildings, reaching high into the air, had walls of golden bricks. The gates to the city were golden, too. The blue specks on the doors must be sapphires.

“Go now!” he said to one of the Native American guides. He gave the man the rattle to take to the city to announce his arrival. Then he called out, “Wood for a cross!”

The Native American who carried a sack of wood sticks took out two that would make a cross as long as his two hands.

Estevan looked at the sticks. “Bigger!” he insisted. “This is a city like none we have ever seen!”

So the Native American made a cross of the longest sticks he could find. Then he started on his way back to Friar Marcos.

Estevan hurried to the city and stepped inside the gates. The other men, still high on the hillside, watched as he entered. They saw him hold out his hands for the gifts he expected. But instead of bowing and holding out gifts, the Native Americans seized him and took him inside a building. The men watched and waited. Estevan did not come out.



The men scrambled back up the cliff and hurried away. They stopped to catch their breath only when they had gone all the way back to Friar Marcos. The friar's eyes grew wide with fear as he listened to the tale they told. But he dared not go back to Coronado without having seen the city with his own eyes.

Friar Marcos made his way cautiously as far as the cliff's edge. He looked down and saw the great city for himself. He did not know that the hot, dry air added glitter and color to what he saw. Perhaps he really believed that the city in which Estevan had disappeared was built of gold and sapphires. The adobe walls of the pueblo were of yellow clay with straw and bits of sparkly mica in them. The blue color came from chunks of turquoise in the doors. Even the yellow corn, piled high, may have looked like gold.

After one look, Friar Marcos turned quickly and headed back to New Spain as soon as his men had gathered. The report he gave Coronado and Mendoza set their eyes afire. Soon Coronado, with a large band of soldiers and Friar Marcos to lead the way, was off to conquer the Seven Cities of Cibola.

Mendoza thought their supplies should be carried by ship, traveling up the Gulf of California. No one knew just how far north the cities were, and they thought that the ship could probably get close to them. Three months after Coronado and his three hundred men in shining armor set out, three ships set sail. They were under the command of a man named Hernando de Alarcón.

Alarcón found the mouth of the Colorado River at the north end of the gulf. No ship had ever gone into the river before, and Alarcón found that the river's current was too strong for his sailing ships. For fifteen days, the crew struggled along the banks, pulling the ships with ropes. At last they reached the place where Yuma, Arizona, is now, where the Gila River joins the Colorado. Native Americans were camped there.