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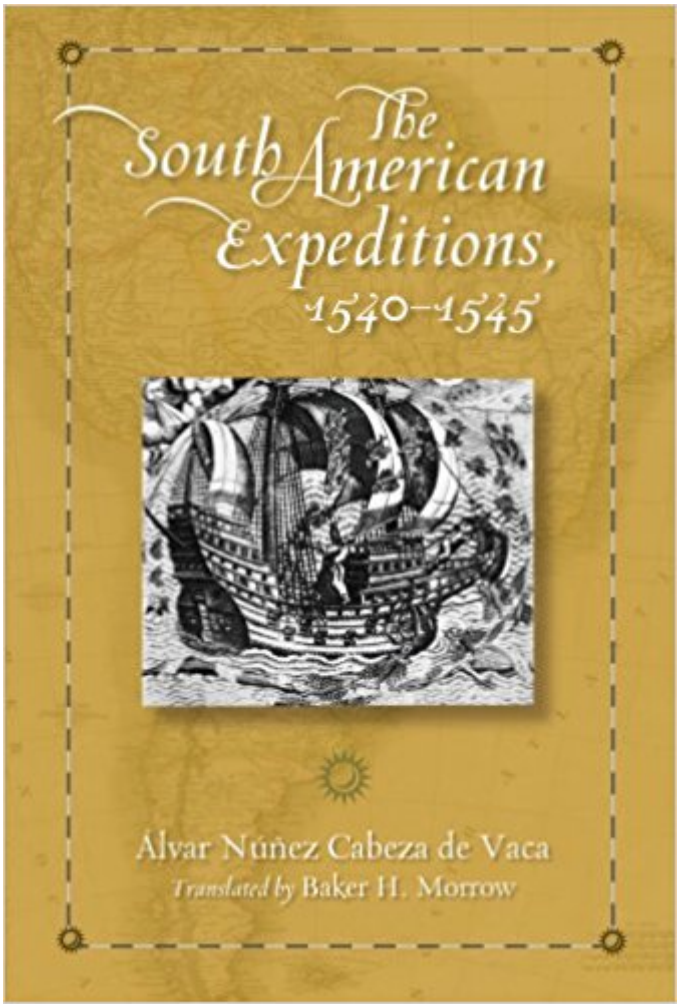

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Synopsis

First published in 1555, Cabeza de Vaca's narrative of his South American expeditions is a detailed account of his five years as governor of Spain's province of the Rio de la Plata in South America. Cabeza de Vaca was already a celebrated explorer by the time he went to La Plata, known for his great trek across North America in the 1520s and 1530s and for the RelaciÃƒÂ n he wrote about that journey. His tales of his river and forest explorations in South America show that he had lost none of his early curiosity and drive. He was the great secular champion of the native peoples of the New World and the only Spaniard to explore the coasts and interiors of two continents.This book is one of the great first-person accounts of the Spanish conquest of the Americas in the sixteenth century. Morrow's new translation makes Cabeza de Vaca's adventures available to a wide English-speaking audience for the first time.

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Customer Reviews

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Baker H. Morrow, FASLA, is a landscape architect in Albuquerque and an associate professor at the University of New Mexico. He is the founding director of the master's program in landscape architecture at the University of New Mexico.

Few readers famiiar with Cabeza de Vaca's remarkable account of his life as a castaway in Florida and a shaman in New Mexico are aware of his equally-striking South American experiences. Unfortunately, this "chronicle" is less an eyewitness account of his troubled tenure as colonial governor of Paraguay than it is a paraphrase of his observations (and complaints) as taken down by his secretary. The translation is passable, but someone familiar with the 16th century venacular would probably have found more nuances in this testimony than are readily obvious here. Also, those who are looking for a well-grounded interpretation of the man and his times will definitely be disappointed at this supposedly-modern University of New Mexico Press version, which provides a limited analysis only marginally better than what the Hakluyt Society produced a century ago. Until something better appears, readers should probably stick to the Spanish edition (Madrid: Taurus, 1969), and, more generally, to the works of Enrique de Gandia..

The South American Expeditions, 1540-1545by Alvar NÃƒÂºÃƒÂ ez Cabeza de Vaca ; Translator, Baker MorrowThe South American Expeditions, 1540-1545 is the second narrative of personal adventures and tribulations written by Alvar Cabeza de Baca. Cabeza de Baca was a contemporary Cortez and the age of the conquistadors. His first adventure occurred six years after Cortez had conquered Mexico with 600 men, when Cabeza de Baca joined the Navarez expedition as the Purser Officer. This expedition, also believed to have numbered 600 men, hungered for fame and fortune in Florida. Instead, the expedition's fleet was destroyed by a storm after landing, and then led by Navarez's ineptitude into catastrophe and failure. Cabeza de Vaca and three others made an eight year trek across the continent, finally walking down the west coast of Mexico to Mexzico city. In an age in which Spain was celebrating the conquest of new lands and the confiscation of great treasures, these four men were living a saga of survival, resourcefulness, remarkable adaptability, and iron wills. Cabeza de Baca wrote the story to great acclaim in Spain. His narrative is fascinating and teaches more about the indigenous peoples and natural environment of the southern swath of North America than any other account I have read. Sadly, while the narrative of his first adventure is compelling, I have yet to see a translation that does this first saga justice.But hey, there is more! Although Cabeza de Baca was widely and immediately recognized for the publication of his first saga in Spain, it was not enough. He did not rest upon his laurels, rather he petitioned the King commission him to lead an expedition. When the King finally complied, it led to the events journaled in this just published translation of The South American Expeditions, 1540-1545.No longer a shipwrecked destitute traveler as in his first adventure, Cabeza de Baca is now the Governor, the leader of the Expedition, a man with a mission: first he must relieve the failed colony at Buenas

Aires and then save the besieged populace of AsunciÃƒÂ n, then he must explore, and true to the times, find silver and gold. You have to read the book to see how all this panned out.The point of view of Cabeza de Baca is simply not what we are accustomed to reading narratives of the time, the first adventure manifests a Cabeza de Baca with a sensitivity and recognition of the humanity of indigenous peoples that causes him to identify and describe people and their customs in this latter South American saga, too, in a fashion that is oddly politically correct by a 21st century standard. For example, what kind of self-respecting Conquistador would require his Spaniards to pay native people for supplies or riches??!! This is a curious and interesting man. The Expedition's outcome derives substantially from the fact that Cabeza de Baca was so different from his contemporaries. Perhaps the man formed by his first expedition in North America reveals in his South American expedition an early recorded saga of having "gone native" in other cultures only to become inadvertently become incomprehensible to one's own culture? Or, maybe he was just born that way?Baker Morrow's translation is clear and engagingly readable. Cabeza de Vaca was not literati; rather he was a literate but lightly educated writer often using the vernacular. Morrow preserves Cabeza de Vaca's voice and point of view in part be revealing his style. 430 years after the events of the South American Expeditions, 1540-1545, Morrow has brought the story and the very human man, Cabeza de Baca, vividly back to life.

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