



Adventures in the Unknown Interior of America

Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca , Cyclone Covey (Translator)

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Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca was the first European to cross the North American continent. This remarkable book is his odyssey, first written in 1542 as an official report to the king of Spain under the title La Relacion.

Adventures in the Unknown Interior of America Details

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From Reader Review Adventures in the Unknown Interior of America for online ebook

Yann says

Deux excellents témoignages, rares, de Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, un conquistador espagnol qui va se retrouver un première fois perdu en Floride et va errer pendant 10 ans parmi les natifs, de 1527 à 1536, tour a tour esclave, colporteur puis guérisseur miraculeux. Cet exemple montre très admirablement tout l'avantage qu'on peut trouver à abuser la crédulité des hommes pour sauver sa vie, sa liberté et convertir ses persécuteurs en serviteurs dévoués.

Le narrateur finit par retrouver des chrétiens au Mexique, et à regagner l'Espagne. Pas refroidit pour autant, il repart quelques années plus tard en Argentine en qualité de gouverneur, pour explorer le pays et administrer la colonie. Sa maniéré de traiter les natifs avec une relative douceur lui attire des inimitiés de la part de ses collègues, et il doit souffrir une rébellion de leur part. Il est alors exilé à Oran, en Afrique du nord, pendant quelques années, avant de pouvoir regagner sa patrie.

Michelle Boyer says

de Vaca may not be the best source... since he likes himself a lot...

As a travel narrative, *Cabeza de Vaca's Adventures in the Unknown Interior of America* has quite a lot of action, adventure, and dramatic death sequences, all of which clearly fascinated readers upon his return to Spain. It is no doubt notable that only three of the original group survived, traveling over 6,000 miles in an eight-year period (145). The interactions between Cabeza de Vaca and the different Indigenous groups that he encountered along his travels is dynamic, as some treated the Spanish as friends and others viewed them as foes upon first contact. What fascinated me throughout the narrative were examples where Cabeza de Vaca took on the role of ethnographer. At times, he leaned closer to merely recording events—which were likely embellished a bit, but seemed to be believable and realistic at their core. However, there are later examples where Cabeza de Vaca is reflecting upon the customs of Indigenous groups, or is describing “strange” activities of the groups, and in some cases I feel as if the representations he is giving are either (1) factually inaccurate, (2) misinformed, (3) dramatized for readership, or (4) coming from his Christianized views and are enforcing Christian ideas, not any ideas put forth by the Indigenous group he is discussing. It was also very blatant that Cabeza de Vaca was, throughout his narrative, enforcing the concepts of Manifest Destiny and the Doctrine of Discovery throughout his travels, which is especially notable in his writings on the non-Christian Indian masses he was meeting.

The narrative began as an accounting of details. It seemed that Cabeza de Vaca was writing in terms of “first this happened, then this happened, next this happened,” and this was, for me as a reader, still interesting as he was listing these things. I was mostly interested in how quickly members of the Spanish expedition were perishing. When you think of colonial conquests from the perspective of American Indian studies, one often assumes that the Indigenous populations were the ones being killed or infected with illness that died rapidly quick. However, relatively soon Cabeza de Vaca and his men encounter ship wrecks, are starving, and to Indian bowmen (46). It is notable that Cabeza de Vaca mentions the “power and precision of the Indian archery” because many colonizers assumed that Indigenous populations had no knowledge of warfare. Yet part of my overall concern when it comes to de Vaca reporting information about the Indigenous populations was the language barrier the Spanish encountered. In one instance, de Vaca writes that that Indians “told us

by sings that they would return at sunrise and bring food, having none then” (56). I find statements like these problematic because how exactly were communications being directed from both parties involved? In this quoted instance, the Indigenous population does come back with food, so perhaps de Vaca correctly analyzed the ‘conversation’ the parties had. Yet in other instances, de Vaca will mention that there are Indian groups that were hostile, but I must question how he knew they were hostile simply by the way they were acting (Those groups that were not killing the Spanish, but were avoided because of such ‘gestures’—what were the gestures? I feel like de Vaca does not elaborate enough to answer my questions but does draw conclusions without having enough information).

There were areas where Cabeza de Vaca was writing, almost ethnographically, about Indigenous peoples—but in some areas he was inaccurate or portrayed things wrong. This bothers me from my AIS perspective because de Vaca leaves the realm of travel author to try and record things about Indigenous peoples—though this was not what he was trained to do. In one example he discusses marriage traditions of an Indigenous group (62), but this tradition is not unilaterally accepted even within the culture he was discussing. I think this culturally specific information was misinformed, which is problematic because this was reported back to Spain, and this the Spanish crown had incorrect ideas about Native peoples. While I think passages about prickly pear collection and usage are great (70), and correct, the culturally specific details are wrong in certain areas. Or, at other times, are consequently confused by de Vaca. In one instance, Cabeza de Vaca writes, “All the Indians of this region are ignorant of time, either by the sun or moon; nor do they reckon by the month or year” (91). Immediately, I wanted to reflect that is opinion is wrong—while it is true they did not have European calendar months, the Indigenous populations all relied on time to be kept by seasons, flora, fauna, etc. But even de Vaca then goes on to add, “They understand the seasons in terms of the ripening of fruits, the dying of fish, and the position of stars, in which dating they are adept” (91). Perhaps I am less forgiving, but de Vaca says they are unaware of time, then shows that they are! This just seems like he was confused as how time can exist on different levels of understanding.

The language of Manifest Destiny, and even the papal bull known as the *Romanus Pontifex*, is littered throughout this document. Part of these documents asserted that non-Christian entities could be colonized because they had no claim to the land—and you can see where Cabeza de Vaca continues to list Indigenous peoples are being non-Christians, savages, barbarians, etc. But what I found most infuriating was he writings about promising the Indigenous peoples what Christian colonizers would and would not do. In this passage, de Vaca writes, “...Christians would accept them as brothers and treat them kindly—we would command them to give no offence and take no territory from them but be their true friends” (131). This was never true, as the colonizers were always planning on controlling these new lands. But if Indigenous peoples believed this, they clearly did not hear about the following sentence: “If the Indians chose otherwise, the Christians would treat them hard and carry them away to strange lands as slaves” (131). This seems more like the Spanish colonization period I am familiar with. Indigenous peoples really were only given the choice of assimilate or be slaves/killed. This, unfortunately, was not really a choice.

Cabeza de Vaca produced a good travel narrative in terms of excitement, adventure, narrowly escaping death, finding new Indigenous peoples, and so on. I think it was actually quite a fun read because I was interested to see how many more people could possibly die, get sick, drown when the boats capsize, etc. However, I would caution that any ethnographic information from this narrative be carefully analyzed further before taken as truth (the entire work should probably be taken with a grain of salt, but the Indigenous ethnographic areas are complex challenges).

Note: This review was submitted to the University of Arizona for my ENGL 596F course on Travel Narratives with Dr. Cooper

Abe Something says

I didn't like the inclusion of in-text notes from the editor. I have to say that first in case you're considering reading de Vaca's narrative. There are other editions, this isn't the one to buy if you're looking to enjoy the original author's uninterrupted text.

Now, as for de Vaca's narrative it is enjoyable on many levels (it's a travel narrative, a loosely anthropological survey, a testament to Christianity, and a morality tale spun for the King) and reminded me of Marco Polo's travel narratives. Both got to great lengths to document the 'far-out' ways of the strange 'other' that they encounter. Both also have a tendency to liven up the narrative with what can only be half-truths and lies. At one point de Vaca sees a burning bush! I believe there is a reversal of fortune at this point and things begin to go his way.

There is great celebration of Spanish Christendom in the text and it often leads de Vaca, perhaps one the few 'true believers' in the text, to safety.

I recommend this book to anyone looking to take a some time dangerous walk through North America with the eyes of someone seeing for the first time. It's natural, wild, and unpredictable.

(SPOILER)

What I did not expect was that toward the end of the text, after having lived amongst the natives for so long that de Vaca would turn on his own kind. Having quested throughout the entire text looking for other Christians, de Vaca is appalled when he does find them. They are starving on account of their abhorrent attitudes toward the natives. At this point in the text de Vaca all but stops the text and addresses the king directly to say "we cannot enter this land without the spirit of collaboration. Murdering our way across the New World is only going to make us outsiders in a world that is willing to take us in." Well, we all know that this sentiment was not heeded and the Natives were slaughtered.

Marti says

While much of this story is true, the author (whose name literally means Cow's Head) seems to have embellished to the point where he portrays himself as almost a Christ like faith healer among the Native Americans of 1527 (he had a reason to want to make himself look good to the King of Spain). It's still pretty amazing that he survived this disastrous expedition at all. He seems to have spent 10 years wandering the southern U.S. from the Florida Panhandle to what is Modern Day California or Mexico (where he was finally rescued by a different group of Spaniards). It's not a typical Conquistador saga of conquest, but more like Robinson Crusoe meets Heart of Darkness.

However, as an anthropological study it is not reliable as the tribe names and descriptions of their customs are largely inaccurate. Also, in the original Spanish the author simply was not a very good writer, and the translation tries to emulate that while eliminating most of the run-on sentences etc. "The Conquest of New Spain," another eyewitness account by Bernal Diaz was a much more engaging narrative, but this is still kind of fascinating.

Invadozer Misothorax Circular-thallus Popewaffensquat says

Having seen the movie with the same title a few times I found out this amazing book and slammed my head between the pages like a maniac. I, expecting a pagan psychotic ranting El Topo type, read that the Spaniard Cabeza explores the North American continent addled and spun with thoughts stuck in the Catholic religion. In the movie he's made into a witch doctor. In the book he's made into a witch doctor. However, he does everything in God's name with the sign of the cross over the sick and heals them. He gets into it cuz he's a catholic tool of the church. It becomes his bankroll later. He is forced into this doctor role by Indians-and it pays off for the most part...

His buddies from Spain are separated from the main group of conquering Spaniards. They are dragging around this crazy armor against the Indians and fighting them and hunger at the same time. In Florida (and lower US) you have to haul water and wood everywhere which will tire you out and cut your shoulders due to the weight. It's a nightmare staying alive. In parts of the book when he is reduced to a naked bearded slave he has barely a meal and eats the same thing up to a month at a time. Corn lunch. Month.

It's amazing how all the cards get stacked against this tough bugger (and his few pals) and the end results of 8 years on the continent just being a bum looking for other Spaniards. His little faith healing stint makes the Indians drop jaws and weapons and eventually all the folks around are bringing him everything they own so he's eating ok by the end of the book. Even the non-sick types want to get touched by the hairy catholic.

The styles and customs of the different Indians are too diverse for me to go into but here's a few:

Some tribes sit and cry when they meet each other for a long time and sometimes without saying a word just leave each other. Another tribe(s?) lets the kids suck tit until 12 because the water is so scarce and undernourishment is such a rampant thing for the lads. Making fires of green wood mosquitoes are kept away from the tribes making anyone breathing nauseous. Mosquitoes stay away tho'!

The best thing is that Cabeza de Vaca means "Head of the Cow" and was heir from a well to do family who's grandpa marked an unguarded pass in a war with a cow skull, making a victory thru the pass for the Spanish army. Cabeza was a treasurer for the King of Spain sent to basically help loot the new continent. Stripping himself of

everything he nakedly went around America and remade his brain into a sympathetic pro Indian and said that all they needed was a direction to Christianity out of the barbaric state they were in. Crazy? It united the Indians and kept some from being outright slain, but the Catholic church got paid along the way. The gold is probably still in the Vatican collecting interest...

This book is fantastic!!!

Mateo R. says

Los *Naufragios*, o la *Relación*, de Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, fue impresa en 1542 y narra una de las infortunadas expediciones a la Florida, la desdichada aventura que a lo largo de diez años llevó a Núñez por lo que hoy es el sur de Estados Unidos.

Se trató de la expedición de Pánfilo de Narváez en 1527, que, en palabras de comentaristas de la época, fue ejemplar en cuanto a insensatez, imprudencia y mala dirección.

Como parte del discurso de la historia de su siglo, los *Naufragios* coordina la información y la ficción, lo documental y pragmático con las inserciones creativas. Trinidad Barrera afirma que el texto es relación, historia y literatura (ficción). Núñez no fue a Florida con el propósito de escribir, ni siquiera informar, ya que su cargo era el de tesorero y alguacil mayor. Solo debido al fracaso de la expedición surge la necesidad de escribir y publicar. En el Prohemio se dirige al emperador con los elogios de rigor a su poder y guiado por el servicio a su persona, para luego argumentar que a veces esa voluntad de servir se ve disminuida por las mudanzas de la fortuna o el juicio de Dios. Es decir, se trata de un exordio para disculparse por el resultado de la empresa mientras busca ganarse el favor del emperador a través de los tópicos de la humildad y la fórmula de devoción. Intentará cumplir su servicio al emperador al menos a través del testimonio de lo visto y lo vivido.

Este punto es el que lo conecta con las relaciones de su siglo: en el texto hay numerosas referencias puntuales sobre el terreno, su calidad, las gentes, pueblos o tribus, lenguas, nombres de lugares, sitios que poseían riquezas, etc.

Pero los *Naufragios* no es simplemente una relación de servicios enviada al rey. En primer lugar, trasciende a un mero informe a la Corona por no responder a un pedido oficial. Además, en la narración se intercala lo informativo con las peripecias del viaje. Según Trinidad Barrera, este es un contrapunto que agiliza la lectura y rompe la monotonía que implicaba la mera descripción o narración de sucesos fabulosos.

La primera edición llevaba por título *La Relación que dio Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca de lo acaecido en las Indias en la armada donde iba por gobernador Pánfilo de Narváez desde el año de 1527 hasta el año de 1536 que volvió a Sevilla con tres de su compañía*.

Barrera afirma que el vocablo relación apunta tanto a los informes propios del siglo XVI como a los romances de sucesos. El texto de Núñez asume el informe de sucesos pero insiste en la *narratio* y en la *veritas*: la verdad estaba garantizada por el testimonio directo que servía para relacionar al destinatario del discurso con la persona presencial de los hechos. También van de la mano en este texto vida (narración personal autobiográfica) y escritura (relación de servicios, noticias verdaderas).

Bajo la aparente llaneza y el propósito documental se demuestra una intencionalidad artística. Núñez es un

relator que se preocupa por la disposición del material y las motivaciones y dudas que experimenta al redactar su obra. Esta forma de proceder impone al texto un carácter reflexivo.

La organización del relato está dada por una cronología lineal de los hechos donde se mezcla el testimonio personal y la intención política. El relator se empeña en describir y justificar sus hazañas para configurarse a sí mismo e insertarse en la historia a través de la escritura.

Lo que empieza siendo un relato-informe al emperador se desliza paulatinamente hacia estratos imaginativos y hacia la denuncia (de algunas formas de evangelización de los indígenas). La descripción de la naturaleza lleva a veces adjetivos como "maravilloso" y en ocasiones se vuelve desproporcionada y fabulosa.

En cuanto a los indígenas, Núñez combina dos visiones típicas de la época: la de la inocente América (la "inocencia de los bárbaros frente a la barbarie de los civilizados") pero también la de tribus de hombres belicosos, mentirosos o ladrones. En este texto los indígenas son, a veces, gente sin razón, y otras, seres humanos capaces de las mayores muestras de altruismo. Uno de mis contrastes favoritos del libro es un punto en el que los originarios, tantas veces acusados de caníbales desde la cosmovisión occidental, se horrorizan ante la antropofagia cometida por los naufragos españoles.

Núñez convive íntimamente con diversos pueblos. Los examina desde el punto de vista moral y físico y los describe con precisión, si bien obedeciendo al típico criterio de "extrañeza" del cronista indiano, lo que lo lleva a resaltar las costumbres que le resultan más extrañas. También se vuelve hiperbólico por momentos, poniendo en tela de juicio su objetividad.

Describe a los seminolas, los sioux o dakotas y otros pueblos de la zona de Apalache. La sección de la isla de Malhado es un documento antropológico de las tribus criks, cuya característica más sobresaliente es su bondad. También describe a los mareames e iguaces.

Se sorprende de la utilización de tabaco mezclado de algún alucinógeno, de la existencia de nativos homosexuales, de la caza de la liebre, etc.

En líneas generales Núñez es partidario de la postura lascasiana con los indígenas, lo que no quita su convicción de conquistador: paz si se someten y guerra si se rebelan.

En la última parte del relato, la óptica del autor-protagonista se duplica al dar también testimonio de cómo los indios ven a los españoles. A medida que aumenta la fama del grupo como físicos (médicos), van recibiendo mejor trato, hasta el punto de que los siguen como auténticos redentores, lo que Núñez aprovecha para evangelizarlos en el cristianismo.

Las inserciones creativas de los Naufragios se dan de forma diversa. En un nivel general, hay un esfuerzo del relator por seleccionar entre los datos de su memoria aquellos que dan mayor potencialidad expresiva a lo narrador. La ineptitud del piloto refuerza las calamidades sufridas, las tormentas los azotan pero una de ellas les salva la vida, el destino de las naves perdidas se va revelando paulatinamente, así como los sucesivos encuentros y desencuentros de los supervivientes Núñez, Dorantes, Castillo y Estebanico.

A veces introduce descripciones maravillosas en boca de otros expedicionarios. Contribuye a difundir el mito de las siete ciudades. El aire de peligro, de aventuras, de hambre y sed y frío, de presagios y hasta profecías, remite a distintos tópicos literarios o a posibles influencias de las novelas bizantinas. Las andanzas de milagrero y la aparente protección del cielo podrían tener connotaciones bíblicas

Trinidad Barrera estructura el texto en cuatro partes casi simétricas:

* *Capítulos 1 al 10: Formación de la expedición. Dispersión de las naves.* Destaca la mala planificación de la comitiva y los cruces de Núñez (preocupado por la honra) y Pánfilo de Narváez (codicioso del oro y abandonador de sus hombres).

* *Capítulos 11 al 19: Pérdida del rumbo. Cautiverio. Reencuentro (aventuras terrestres)*. La segunda y tercera parte son las más novelescas. Núñez se va cubriendo de cualidades heroicas ante las penalidades mientras los otros españoles caen en la desesperación y la antropofagia. Su ingenio y pragmatismo lo llevan a ejercer los oficios de mercader y curandero o médico, con una curiosa mezcla de prácticas indígenas y oraciones cristianas. Pasa 6 años en una isla.

* *Capítulos 20 al 31: Huida del cautiverio. Rastros de civilización (aventuras terrestres)*. Su asimilación al ambiente nunca es total, siempre mantiene el deseo de regresar al mundo cristiano.

* *Capítulos 32 al 38: Noticias de cristianos. Regreso a la civilización (aventuras terrestres y marítimas)*. El primer encuentro es desastroso: se encuentra con un comportamiento corrupto e inhumano de los españoles hacia los indígenas. Núñez se manifiesta como colonizador, conquistador, evangelizador y denunciante del comportamiento de los españoles con América. Apunta métodos de colonización y posibilidades de explotación de las tierras que atraviesa.

En cuanto al estilo, por ser una relación no cae en referencias de naturaleza culta. Sus digresiones no son para que apreciemos conocimientos eruditos sino hacia lo documental, lo visto y lo vivido. Generalmente los capítulos se refieren a secuencias determinadas o están separados por un pasaje temporal.

Hay saltos temporales variables, oscilando entre unos meses y seis años. Los primeros 19 capítulos cubren un período de ocho años.

No es un ejemplo de perfección estilística. Predomina el período largo, la polisíndeton, la parataxis y la casi total ausencia del estilo directo. Se produciría monotonía si no fuese por su interesante y variado contenido. Su estilo se guía por la prosa natural y sin artificios retóricos ni afectación recargada del lenguaje cortesano de los siglos anteriores.

Se usa seguido el recurso de la comparación u oposición de elementos americanos con sus contrapartes del Viejo Mundo. La prosa está salpicada de americanismos.

Baal Of says

The volume I've read is not actually in the goodreads database, so I'm marking this one as the closest to what I've read. It's hard to put a rating on this, since it is a narrative of events, not intended to be literary. The writing is mundane, but it provides interesting insight into this failed expedition. Cabeza de Vaca invokes thanks to god about every 3 to 4 pages, presumably for sparing him from death, even though hundreds around him die, and he suffers starvation, disease, and numerous other hardships. He constantly speaks about Christians vs everyone else, and I was struck how often those Christians were involved in slavery, murder, and general exploitation of the non-Christians. Also interesting was how the modern concept held by some people that hunter-gatherers had so much free time due to the abundance of food and game is completely destroyed by the abject poverty and near-starvation that the vast majority of these tribes lived. I can't say I enjoyed this book, but it was worth reading.

Mike says

Considering the number of years Cabeza de Vaca wandered, the narrative seemed brief. For me, the most interesting part was his description of how the natives of the Gulf Coast lived day-to-day in search of any type of food or rainwater, relying on each other for trading and protection. I didn't realize how rare it was to eat meat, considering deer hunts happened only two or three times a year because of the difficulty of the

hunt. It's a fascinating account of a native nomadic lifestyle, with the seasons and weather dictating how, where, and to what extent the people ate. If anything, this narrative dispels any romantic notion of "living off the land." Life was harsh, painful, and dangerous--at least for those on the Gulf Coast.

The second half of the narrative, on the other hand, was basically The Life of Brian! Cabeza de Vaca and the other survivors could have lived like nomadic Christ-figures for their entire lives if they had chosen to do so.

By the end of the chronicle, we can't help but wonder how the New World may have developed differently if the Spanish had come in peace to live and trade, rather than to pillage, kill, destroy, conquer, and convert.

Michelle Burgard says

I found this book to be especially interesting. I am taking a class on this time period right now and I loved the first-hand account you get. There is so much detail and excitement that you can read in Cabeza de Vaca's "voice". Its beautiful

Lark Benobi says

Breathtaking, amazing. Cabeza de Vaca's first person account allowed me to glimpse what it was like for Europeans to encounter a hurricane for the first time, for example, or to realize how utterly helpless the Spaniards were, how lost, when they were first exploring new territory. I've watched Nicolás Echevarría's extraordinary film and have also read three biographies now of Cabeza de Vaca's experiences, but reading the man's own words moved me in a completely different way. I was worried the text would feel obscure but it's completely riveting, a life and death story told in a straightforward style:

One of the mounted men, Juan Velásquez, a native of Cuéllar, impatiently rode into the river. The violent current swept him from his saddle. He grabbed the reins but drowned with the horse. The subjects of that chief--whose name turned out to be Dulchanchellin--found the body of the beast and told us where in the stream below we likely would find the body of Cuéllar. They went to look for it. This death hit us hard, for until now not a man had been lost. The horse, meanwhile, furnished a supper for many that night.

Cyclone Covey's translation includes in-text notes, offset in square brackets, that are unobtrusive and extremely informative.

JerryBoBerry says

If you've ever wondered what American Indians were like before they were influenced by European settlers, this is the book you should read.

He spent years travelling all around the southern and midwest of America, being the first white man many tribes ever encountered. It describes his life as a slave for some tribes. How he became a medicine man. Even trading between tribes as he traveled around.

All around this is an excellent source of history.

Rachel Ninnette says

Why, oh why was I forced to read this?

Katie says

I surrender to this boring book of no worth.

Today I had to sit my comp lit exam and I wrote about this book based on analysis I did not personally retrieve from this book because it was so devastatingly dull and useless that I couldn't bear to read beyond page 18. Maybe one day..probably not though.

Dawn Michelle says

O. M. G.

There is 4+ hours that I will never get back.

1. It was boring.

2. It made me angry most of the time

*To quote my friend Joy [who read this with me] as this was her [and mine] takeaway of this book:

" a) Indians are bad

b) Christians are good

c) We were hungry [when we weren't stealing from the Indians that were bad]"

"It is important for us to have this primary document from a Spanish conquistador. If we are tempted to minimize the absolutely ruthless entitlement with which they overran the natives, we can come back to Cabeza de Vaca's own words." [Joy Walsh]

3. I almost sprained my eyes from rolling them so hard.

4. Heaven help the Indian that didn't want to be converted by de Vaca and his entourage. They were then considered evil and must be robbed AND killed and their women and children taken from them.

5. Heaven help the Indian that actually FOUGHT back against this assault to them and their lands and personal belongings. I swear I was ready to find this dude's descendants and beat the crap out of THEM because I cannot smack de Vaca himself for being a colossal jackass and a totally entitled jerk.

This was a tough book to read in the sense that those who came here clearly had no problem running over those who were already here and were also quick to thank God for all their success in stealing and pillaging and killing. It is so disturbing to read an actual account [no matter how boring] of someone who did this. And was proud of how kind they were to those who didn't oppose them. I spent a lot of this book just being totally and completely angry.

**NOTE: Please please please stay far far far away from the LibroVox Recording of this book. The narrator is just hideous and I will admit to drifting off at times while she was droning on [because the book itself

wasn't boring enough]. It really was horrible. You will be much better off just reading the account.

Benjamin Chandler says

A pretty fascinating book, the true recollections of the Cabeza de Vaca, a Spanish explorer whose 1527 expedition goes horribly wrong, and he ends up living with native peoples and traveling by foot from the shores of Texas to the Pacific Ocean and down to Mexico City. He spends much time discussing the strange customs of the Indians he encounters and describes how he set himself up as a trader between tribes and became something of a faith healer in the process.

Most interesting was the fact that the man begins his journey abusing and stealing from Native Americans, but, after living with them for almost a decade, learning their languages and customs, adopting their lifestyles, fashions (or lack thereof), and cuisine, he becomes quite sympathetic to them and, when finally found by other Spaniards, pointedly makes his opinion known that the Indians should be left alone by the Spaniards, not enslaved or slaughtered. When he finds out that his requests are ignored, he mourns.

The book was a special surprise because I had no knowledge of this man's adventures until I'd recently been researching "true Crusoe" stories for an abandoned lesson plan. It's a short read, especially considering it covers 10 years of the man's life, and the lists of Indian tribes start to blur after a while, but I enjoyed it well enough.
