

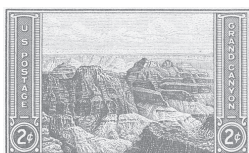
This Day in History... February 23, 1540

The Coronado Expedition

On February 23, 1540, Francisco Vazquez de Coronado embarked on a large expedition through the American Southwest in search of the Seven Cities of Gold. Though he didn't find the mythical cities, his was the first European expedition to see a number of sights in the area.

Francisco Vazquez de Coronado was born in Salamanca, Spain, in 1510, just as Spain was discovering and exploring the New World. In 1535, he first traveled to New Spain (present-day Mexico) with Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza. Three years later, he was appointed governor of New Galicia. In this position, he heard numerous stories from native Indians about the Seven Cities of Cibola, reportedly filled with gold. In 1539, he sent Friar Marcos de Niza to search for the city. De Niza returned and said that he hadn't entered the city, but saw it standing on a high hill and appeared large and full of riches.

Coronado set out from Compostela, Mexico on February 23, 1540. He led a large expedition of about 400 European soldiers, up to 2,000 Mexican Indians, four Franciscan friars, and a number of family members. They traveled north to Culiacan and then followed the coast to the Sinaloa River. After finding a pass through the Huachuca Mountains, they followed the San Pedro River to Chichilticalli. This was the settlement that de Niza had seen from a distance and claimed to be Cibola. Upon entering, they found it was a small village of Zuni pueblos.



Coronado's men were the first Europeans to reach the South Rim of the Grand Canyon.

In spite of this disappointment, Coronado continued his expedition. They traveled along the present-day Arizona-New Mexico border to the Little Colorado River and then the Zuni River. Coronado's starved expedition then reached the Zuni village of Hawikuh. When the Zuni's refused them entrance, fighting broke out, and the expedition then stayed there for several weeks. While recuperating from injuries there, Coronado sent some of his men out to find the Colorado River. Some of them did, and also became the first Europeans to see the Grand Canyon. They attempted to climb down the canyon to cross the river, but it was too deep, and they had to turn back.

Coronado's expedition then reached the Rio Grande, where they again fought with the natives in the Tigeux War. In early 1541, an Indian they called the Turk told Coronado about a rich settlement called Quivira (in present-day Kansas) to the east. Along the way, Coronado was astonished at the large number of bison and met a settlement of Apaches. He eventually reached Quivira, which was a large settlement, but not filled with riches as he'd hoped. He spent some time in the area asking about other possible wealthy cities but had no success. Coronado then decided to start the journey back to Mexico.

In all, Coronado's expedition had traveled through the future American states of New Mexico, Arizona, Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas. They were the first Europeans to see the Grand Canyon and the Colorado River, as well as other notable landmarks.

Coronado returned to Mexico empty-handed, disappointing the Spanish government. He lost the governorship, was investigated for his conduct as a leader, and was largely bankrupted from the expedition. He died from an infection on September 22, 1554. Several years after Coronado's death, people began to realize just what an impressive journey he had made and how valuable the territory he claimed could be.



This stamp features a reproduction of Gerald Cassidy's painting, Coronado and His Captains. The top right corner of the stamp features the Coronado coat of arms.



Coronado set up winter quarters along the Rio Grande.

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