

SPANISH EXPLORATIONS

The earliest explorers to America were Spanish and they first settled the Caribbean Islands, Florida and Mexico. Thus, when Spain wanted to explore Texas and other parts of America, they did not have to come all the way from Spain.

The first adventure into Texas was the ill fated expedition of 250 Spaniards lead by Pánfilo de Narváez. It left Pensacola, Florida, and landed near Galveston Island in 1528. In just a few months almost all of the men had died! Some drowned, others died of hunger, exposure or snake bite. Still others succumbed to Indian attacks or to homicides inflicted by their fellow Spaniards, followed by incidences of cannibalism. After being held by Indians, Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and three remaining explorers escaped their captors and fled to Mexico. Cabeza de Vaca and his companions finally made it to Mexico City in July 1536. These 4 men traveled an estimated 2,500, miles which earned de Vaca the title “The Great Pedestrian.” They told and retold their stories to eager audiences, but they greatly exaggerated the truth about rich lands.

Soon expeditions set off to find El Dorado, where the streets were supposedly paved with gold. Between 1540 and 1542 Francisco Vasquez de Coronado traveled across parts of New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas. Coronado and his party did not find any riches, but they did explore a large area and saw so many Buffalo that it was “impossible to number them.”

The Spanish lost interest in Texas for the next 143 years and only came back to run out the French. From 1716 to 1821 priests, soldiers and civilians came to establish a Spanish presence in east Texas. Perhaps the most important expedition for Spain was led by the Marquis de Aguayo, who brought the cattle industry to Texas.

Discussion – Explorers: Can you imagine being an explorer in the 15th and 16th centuries? You would be leaving your home and sailing in a small ship across the ocean where few had been. You would have only simple and inaccurate maps, little food and water and you would hope you could find your way home.

Why did explorers take such great risks? They were motivated by adventure, treasures, religion or claiming land for your country. Who are today’s explorers? (Astronauts and deep sea adventurers)