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Brief and True Account  
of the Exploration  
of New Mexico, 1583

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BRIEF AND TRUE ACCOUNT OF THE EXPLORATION  
OF NEW MEXICO, 1583<sup>1</sup>

*Brief and true Account of the Exploration of New Mexico, which we Nine<sup>2</sup> Companions explored, when we went from Santa Bálbola in company with three Religious of the Order of Saint Francis.*

WE, the said nine companions, set out from Santa Bálbola to undertake our journey, our sole object being to serve God our Lord and his Majesty, by establishing the Holy Gospel wherever we might find a suitable place and wherever the Divine Majesty might guide us. We left on the 5th of June,<sup>3</sup> 1581, and travelled thirty-one days<sup>4</sup> from the time when we departed from Santa Bálbola through a country of naked barbarian people. They are very poor and have nothing to eat except roots and prickly pears. Continuing our journey from here, we left this people and travelled nineteen<sup>5</sup> days with great hardship and disappointments, and without being able to see any people or any living thing. At the end of that time, on the eve of the feast of the Assumption of Our Lady,<sup>6</sup> our Lord was pleased to show us a naked Indian. We asked him by signs where maize could be found, and he replied that one day's journey from there we should find it in plenty. This information was obtained by showing him two or three kernels of maize. He said there was a great quantity, and told us that the natives were dressed

<sup>1</sup> Pacheco and Cárdenas, *Col. Doc. Inéd.*, XV. 146-150.

<sup>2</sup> This is one of the evidences that there were eight men besides the leader, Francisco Sánchez Chamuscado. See p. 142, note 4.

<sup>3</sup> The other documents give June 6 as the date of leaving Valle de San Gregorio. Some secondary authorities have failed to note the full evidence of the documents on this point.

<sup>4</sup> This passage is our source for the time spent in reaching the Rio Grande.

<sup>5</sup> Bustamante and Gallegos say twenty. See p. 145.

<sup>6</sup> Nuestra Señora de Agosto, day of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, August 15.

in clothing the color of our shirts, and that they had houses. All this was by gestures and by signs which he made upon the ground.

This pleased us greatly, for already we were in need of provisions, and we kept the Indian for three days, so that he might take us where he said. He did so and we found all to be true as he had stated, for on August 21<sup>1</sup> we discovered a pueblo of forty-five houses of two and three stories.<sup>2</sup> We also found great fields of maize, beans, and gourds, whereat we gave thanks to our Lord for having provided us with supplies. We all entered into the said pueblo, well equipped, ready for war in case it should be necessary. That, however, was not our intention, for we were guided only by peace and love, and by a desire to bring the natives to the fold of our holy Catholic faith. In our midst we took three religious, bearing crosses in their hands and around their necks. Thus we entered into the pueblo, but we found no one there,<sup>3</sup> for they had not dared to wait for us, not knowing what we were, as our entrance was made upon armored horses. Seeing this, we immediately left the pueblo, travelling through fields of maize for about half a league, when we discovered five more pueblos. In the open we pitched our camp and agreed not to go on until we had won over those natives and made friends of them. At the end of two days a cacique came with three Indians to see who we were, and by signs we saluted one another. They came near to us and we gave them iron hawk's bells, playing cards, and other trinkets, and thus made them friends. They went and summoned the rest of the people, who came in great numbers to see us, saying to each other that we were children of the Sun. They gave us maize, beans, gourds, cotton *mantas* (blankets), and tanned cowhides. We remained four days in their midst, and in that space of time we learned from them, through signs, that beyond as well as to the sides there were great numbers of pueblos.

<sup>1</sup> Bancroft calls attention to the discrepancy here in dates (*Arizona and New Mexico*, p. 77, note 4).

<sup>2</sup> See 7, p. 145, above.

<sup>3</sup> Note a discrepancy between this and Bustamante's account of the reception. See p. 146.

From there we travelled up stream for fifty leagues,<sup>1</sup> and along the river and to the sides, within the distance of about a day's journey, we discovered, saw, and passed sixty-one pueblos, all peopled with clothed natives. These pueblos are in good sites and on good and level land. The houses are close together and the plazas and streets all well arranged. They have turkeys, which they raise. It seemed to us all that the sixty-one pueblos which we saw and visited must contain more than one hundred and thirty thousand natives, all of whom wore clothes.

In the said province there were more than as many more pueblos, equal to the largest, which we did not see, as we dared not go to them. Much cotton is raised there. Father Fray Bernaldino Beltran, of the Order of St. Francis, who went in after us, recently, ten months ago, with Antonio Despejo<sup>2</sup> and fifteen soldiers, brought the news that he had discovered five pueblos in the said province containing<sup>3</sup> more than fifty thousand souls. They gave them two thousand cotton *mantas*. Soon afterwards they discovered eleven more pueblos, of many people, as they report. They informed them of a very large lake,<sup>4</sup> with many settlements and people, where the people travel in canoes, carrying in the prows large balls of brass color. They report that Antonio Despejo with eight companions is going in search of this lake. Of all this Father Fray Bernaldino Beltran will give complete and detailed information.

We, the said nine companions and the three fathers, discovered also, about thirty leagues to one side of said pueblos, an immense number of humpbacked cows, which have on their shoulders humps a cubit high. These cows are found over a continuous space of more than two hundred leagues in length;<sup>5</sup> the width we do not know. They are not very wild

<sup>1</sup> This seems to be an estimate of the whole distance travelled up the river within the settled district.

<sup>2</sup> Antonio de Espejo. Beltrán went with Espejo but returned before him. Espejo had not yet returned when this relation was written. See *post*, p. 192.

<sup>3</sup> Moqui. See p. 186.

<sup>4</sup> The Laguna de Oro. See pp. 130, 184, 186.

<sup>5</sup> This information must have come from the Coronado expedition, or from reports given by the natives of New Mexico, for Chamuscado's men did not see two hundred leagues of buffalo plains.

cattle, and they run but little. Their meat is better than that of this country, and the cattle are larger than those of this country.

We also discovered in the said country eleven<sup>1</sup> mine prospects, all having great veins of silver. From three of them ore was brought to this city and given to his Excellency. He sent it to the assayer of the mint to be assayed; he assayed them and found one of the samples to be half silver; another contained twenty marks per quintal, and the third five marks. For all this I refer you to the assayer for verification, for I repeat only what he stated.

We also discovered in the said settlement a very rich saline containing a great quantity of granulated salt of good quality. Of it a sample was brought to his Excellency. The saline measures five leagues around.<sup>2</sup>

After stating the above I will add that we are ready and equipped, if his Majesty will give us permission, to go and settle and save so many souls which the devil holds captive, by teaching and instructing them *berbo ad berbo*,<sup>3</sup> as we say here.

There are reports of much more wherein God our Lord may be served and the royal crown increased, as regards both vassals and royal fifths, for after the Spaniards have once entered into the said land, besides the mines which we have already discovered they will seek and discover many more, for the land abounds in them, as also in forests, pastures, and water. It is a land whose climate is a little cold, although not excessively so. Its temperature is like that of Castile. And if it is not settled soon those souls who are there will be in danger, and the royal crown of his Majesty will suffer great injury, as is patent.—PHELIPE DE ESCALANTE. HERNANDO BARRANDO. By order of the Illustrious Archbishop of Mexico, I ordered this account copied from the original, with which it agrees, Mexico, October 26, 1583.<sup>4</sup> JOAN DE ARANDA. There is a rubric.

<sup>1</sup> Bustamante and Gallegos say five. See p. 150.

<sup>2</sup> Bustamante and Gallegos say five leagues in extent. See p. 149.

<sup>3</sup> Word for word.

<sup>4</sup> The date of the declaration fell between the return of Beltrán and this date given here.