

Groesbeck, Texas
April 23, 1958

Dear Dr. Stenzel:

I enclose a copy of my Cabeza de Vaca map, with explaining notes, and a copy of my route of Jean Cavellier, which corrects my somewhat general picture on the Cabeza map. Also, I have finally got translations of all the chronicles of the Coronado Expedition, and will have a very detail map out on it pretty soon and will send you a copy.

Jean Cavellier called all the Prairie Indians between the Brazos and Trinity, Nassonis and Naansis. The early Spaniards must have called them the Navasotas, naming that river after them, and we do know that there were no Indian villages on the Navasota River below where it enters the Tertiary Timberlands. That length is completely barren of campsite debris, because, I am sure, of the mosquitos Cabeza complained. That lower, Tertiary reach of its bottomland is little cleared and put in cultivation as yet. It is blackland silt and holds stagnant water pools like a jug.

Somewhere between 1687 and 1831 the Tehuacanas took over the lands of the Nassonis, or Navasotas.

Jean Cavellier brings out an interesting detail about the Delia village of the Naansis, by far the largest campsite in Limestone County as measured by flint and other rock debris. They dug wells into the Pecan Gap for water. Many farmers in that vicinity still do. They are very poor wells, about enough for a home and milk cows and work horses. Cavellier says that the Indians built houses over them. That, I guess, is because that since their wells were described by him as "shallow pools" with "palasades" around them to keep children from falling into them, and being in the Blacklands, heavy rains would not only have made the water muddy in open pools, but their banks would have become very slippery during the wet seasons.

I like little details like that, where they so perfectly fit the geology.

I know nothing of Hampton's History of Limestone County. Will inquire about it.

Sincerely yours,


Frank Bryan

IMPORTANT LANDMARKS ON THE ROUTE OF CEBEZA DE VACA
ACROSS TEXAS.

Important is the fact that geology fixes both the plant life and the way of life of all primitive people in any given region. Aristotle wrote: "Given an environment, a people will so adjust themselves to it, and live for so long under it as to become a race apart from all other people." He should have said, "Given a geological environment."

Cabeza de Vaca went down the Texas coast to his first big river at "1", the river of "nuts", pecans. He didn't cross it but went inland from there to the "Tuna" (Prickly pear) fields. Enroute there he traveled for 30 leagues through an uninhabited timberland where the mosquitoes were so terrible that he complained bitterly of them. That has to be up the Navasota River from "2" to "3". Because of the stagnant ponds of its black, waxy alluviums from the Blacklands, it is the worst mosquito infected river in all Texas. No primitive Indians left any campsite debris along that length of the Navasota.

His first prickly pears were on "handsome pastures", the patch prairies of the Midway. He left those pastures where there was a very sharp timber line, like where the fault-line timbered, Tertiary hills overlook the Cretaceous prairies in a line like that from Tehuacana Hill down along Honest Ridge, Horn Hill, Big Hill and Buffalo Mott, for he says, "Issuing from the Timber" he "entered on plains" where the Indians ate "mesquite beans." That between "4" and "5".

He traveled four days from village to village on those "plains" to his first big, wide river to cross. It was very "swift." That river has to be the Brazos, and it is only "very swift" at the Falls from which Falls County gets its name. "5"

From there he went up a thickly populated river bottom, from village to village, and where there were so many of them that it was "impossible" to remember them all. Then he saw his first mountains in the distance "6". There the Indians prized mica crystals (basal cleavage gypsum) and followed "the river upward with the women carrying water." That was where he crossed the outcrop of the Blaine Gypsum, where today the river water is too bitter for even cows to drink.

From that stream's head he followed along the "slope of the mountains for 30 leagues to "7" where he crossed through a mountain range 7-leagues across, and where the rocks were like "scoria" (slag) of iron, (rusty-red, gnarled Jurassic badlands.) to a beautiful river "8". Up it he traveled again along a river bottom through so many villages that he lost track of them. For the most part it ran "between mountains," into which the Indians went hunting and returned the "same day" with an abundance of "deer and fowl," along above "9", for that same day can only mean that he walked up the bed of the Yellowhouse Canyon and looking back called its walls mountains. At no other place in Texas could hunters have killed so much game in "mountains" and returned the same day "burdened" with killed deer, a round trip of surely not over 10-miles, and that for day after day.

Then he crossed his second large river "from the north", "10", the Pecos. To the west of it he traveled to "11" on 30 leagues of plains (that width to the west of Ft. Sumner, New Mexico) and 50 leagues of "very arid desert and rugged mountains" to a very "big" river, his 3rd to cross, the Rio Grande at "12".

From there he crossed a "plain" to "real houses" in a valley "between mountains."

We get a fix on those stone houses from the many chronicles of the Coronado Expedition, for he backtracked Cabrza's route to that place, the Province of Cibola, having his real guide, Friar Marcos, first piloted back to Cibola by the Negro slave, Stephen, who was a member of Cabeza's party.

So, having his beginning place fixed at Galveston Island and his first stone houses at Cibola, we see that he described accurately every single outstanding, geology-based landmark between the two places. I have ridden it and saw each landmark were he reported it to by. And plants, because each is peculiar to certain soils, can be called geological landmarks.

Frank Bryan