

CORONADO

on the
Turquoise Trail

KNIGHT OF PUEBLOS AND PLAINS



by Herbert E. Bolton

Frontispiece Drawing by Margaret Fearnside

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CHAPTER XII

HOPIS AND GRAND CANYON

Coronado meanwhile had lost no opportunity to make friendly inquiries regarding regions and peoples beyond the confines of Cíbola. He encouraged the natives to tell their neighbors about his arrival, and to invite them in his name to come and see him. They must inform their acquaintances that he, as representative of His Majesty, Carlos V, desired nothing but their friendship, and to learn of good lands wherein the Spaniards might settle. The Cíbolans complied with the gently phrased request and sent the general's message by runners to tribes with whom they had trade and other relations. What else they may have reported we cannot say, although we might venture a guess.

Some of the things Coronado heard as a result of these inquiries were far from encouraging. He was told that the Kingdom of Totontec, "which the father provincial had praised so highly, saying it was something marvelous," was "nothing but a hot lake," on whose shores there were five or six houses. The Indians had never even heard of Marata, another imaginary creation of the friar or of his informants, said Coronado. Acus, or Ácoma, the Cíbolans assured him, was only "a single small city," although in Fray Marcos's narrative it had been magnified into still another "kingdom." Certain of these discrepancies, of course, can be charged to misunderstanding, for much of the conversation of the Spaniards with the natives was conducted by signs.

More promising than any of these regions, though not excessively alluring, was Tusayán, another province of Seven Cities said by the Indians to be at a considerable distance northwest. Here again was the mystic number seven. They were the

villages now known as the Hopi towns. These pueblos, said Coronado's informants, greatly resembled those of Cíbola, except that the houses were smaller and built of mud instead of stone. The first pueblo was called Tuçano, as Coronado understood it, hence the name Tusayán, which came to be applied to the whole group of Hopi towns. Coronado was skeptical. "They could not tell me much about the others," he says, "nor do I believe they are telling me the truth, because they think that in any case I shall soon have to depart from among them and return home. But here is where they will soon discover they are mistaken." In this sentence Coronado comes nearer to braggadocio than anywhere else in all his known writings, for he was a modest and temperate man, though by no means timid.

To follow up this report of Tusayán, Coronado sent Captain Pedro de Tovar at the head of a troop of seventeen mounted Spaniards and three or four on foot. Don Pedro was the captain of cavalry whom Coronado had appointed chief ensign of the expedition. One of the best equipped men in the whole army, in the muster at Compostela he was able to report "thirteen horses, a coat of mail, some cuirasses, and some native accouterments and weapons." As already noted, he had some dogs that come prominently into our story. Fame now attended him.

In the historic band went Fray Juan Padilla, the zealous Franciscan friar "who in his youth had been a warrior," and who had been with Cortés in Tehuantepec. He knew his way around. Although Cíbola and Tusayán were not always on the best of terms, Coronado seems to have had no difficulty in finding guides and interpreters for the expedition. Thus equipped, on July 15, only a week after the capture of Háwikuh, Tovar set forth on his reconnoissance, which, it was expected, would require thirty days or more. His speed would be limited by the foot soldiers and the pack train, for the Indian guides could out-travel the horses.

When Coronado wrote to Mendoza nearly three weeks later, Tovar was still absent and nothing had been heard of his doings. "If I thought I could have any news from him within twelve or fifteen days," he writes, "I would not send this pack-

age to your Lordship before learning what he had found there. However, since he will be gone at least thirty days, and believing this information will be of little importance, and that the cold weather and the rains are approaching"—they would interfere with the travel of the couriers to Mexico—"I ought to do as your Lordship commanded me in your instructions, namely, that as soon as I arrived here I should advise you thereof, and this I will do by sending you the plain story of what I have seen, which is bad enough, as you may perceive." It was the story set forth in the preceding chapter.

Meanwhile Tovar went on his way to Tusayán, or Hopi Land, now one of the famous places in all the Southwest, and visited annually by thousands of globe trotters, tourists, artists, and scientists. He was led by Zuñi guides who presumably took him over the accustomed route by which the Hopis periodically came to the famous Zuñi salt lakes to supply their needs. The old trail led northwest past well known water holes, skirting the now famous "stone trees" of the Petrified Forest, through country today included in the Navajo Reservation. This route lies westward of the present highway to Hopi Land through Gallup, but converges with it near the ruins of the first town visited by Tovar.

The Hopis lived on four high and relatively inaccessible mesas, or plateaus, from which they descended to cultivate their fields and to obtain water, which the women carried on their heads in pottery jugs up the steep and dizzy cliffs. The seven Hopi towns inhabited at the time of Tovar's visit, named in order from east to west, were Kawaíokuh and Awátobi on Jeddito Mesa; Sikyátki and Kuchóptuleva (old Walpi) on a second mesa; old Shungópovi and old Mishógnovi on a third mesa, and Oraibe on a fourth. The social organization, town building, and daily life of the Hopis were similar to those of the Cíbola pueblos, with numerous distinguishing features and cultural traits, notable among them being the weird Snake Dance. Tovar and his men first reached Hopi Land at the easternmost pueblo, much as does the modern highway from Gallup.

"When they arrived there," says Castañeda, "they entered the land so secretly that they were not noticed by a single person, the reason for this being that between the two provinces there are neither towns nor country houses, nor do the people go outside of their pueblos any farther than to their fields." Especially was this true at this time, when they heard that Cibola had been conquered by ferocious men, "who were riding about on animals that devoured people." The Spaniards arrived at the first Hopi town after nightfall, and were able to conceal themselves below the high cliff on which the pueblo was perched, and to remain there listening to the natives talking in their houses. But in the morning they were discovered, so they prepared for battle in the plain below the mesa on whose precipitous edge the town was situated. Though taken by surprise, the plucky little natives, armed with bows, arrows, clubs, and shields, sallied forth in battle array to attack the visitors and the strange beasts they rode.

Tovar's interpreters now stepped forward to talk with the chiefs of the Hopi army, "because they were people of good intelligence," and Don Pedro made the customary requirement of obedience to God and the King. Unconvinced and undaunted, the chiefs ordered the Spaniards to depart at once, drew a line on the ground with sacred corn meal, and warned Tovar that he and his men would cross it at their peril! Thus at the outset the Hopis showed the stubbornness and independence for which they still are famous. Notwithstanding this bold challenge, in an effort toward appeasement some of the visitors crossed the line and tried to converse with the villagers, but all in vain. "Finally it came to such a pass," says Castañeda, that a native was so impudent that he struck one of the horses over the head with a club.

This was too much for Fray Juan, the fighting friar. Thinking that time was being wasted, he said to Captain Tovar, "To tell the truth, I don't know what we came for!" Thereupon the war cry was given. "*Santiago y á ellos!* St. James and at them!" The Spaniards made a sudden rush, felled several of the natives, and routed the rest, who fled into the town, "though some of

them were not given this opportunity," which would seem to mean they were either killed or captured. The Indians were convinced, "and such was the promptness with which they came forth from the pueblo with presents to sue for peace" that Tovar called off his men. The Hopis evidently considered discretion the better part of valor.

Dismounting in the plain below the mesa, Tovar now held a conference with the native head men, who had come out bearing presents. They said they came to render obedience in the name of the whole province; they wished to be friends with the Spaniards, and brought the gifts as a token of their sincerity. The presents consisted of some cotton cloth, "although not much," a few tanned skins of animals, some native birds, turkeys perhaps, and a plentiful supply of maize, flour, and piñon nuts. "Afterward they gave us some turquoises, but only a few." The news quickly spread, and before the day was over natives from other Hopi pueblos farther west came to render obedience, at the same time offering the freedom of their towns, and inviting the Spaniards to visit them to "buy, sell or barter." We are not specifically told whether or not Tovar accepted the invitation and made a tour of all the pueblos, but it is inferred that he did so.

Since Don Pedro had no authority to go beyond the confines of the province of Tusayán, he returned to Háwikuh and reported not only what he had seen, but what he had heard as well. He said the Hopi pueblos were ruled, like those of Cibola, by a Council of Ancients. "They have their governors and captains ranged in the order of seniority." But of all the things Tovar told Coronado, the most interesting was that while he was in Tusayán "notice was had of a great river, and that downstream several days there were some very tall people with large bodies."

Tovar arrived at Háwikuh on his return about the middle of August. If he toured the entire Hopi province his round trip would cover a distance of some two hundred and fifty miles. There are still seven Hopi towns on the mesas where the natives lived at the time of Tovar's visit, but not all of them are

on the old sites. The Hopis are now best known to the tourist for their pottery and for their weird and picturesque Snake Dance, but they have many other cultural assets.

The news of a river in the west had to be investigated, for might not this be the very stream that Ulloa had discovered the previous year in the service of Cortés, and that Alarcón had been sent by Mendoza to explore? Coronado therefore immediately equipped another expedition, placing it under command of Cárdenas, his right-hand man and a hard-fisted soldier who so often had demonstrated superior ability in Mexico. Perhaps it was the report of giants in the west that determined the choice of a leader. Hitherto our main reliance for the story of this Cárdenas expedition has been Castañeda's narrative and another called the *Relación del Suceso*. We now have a declaration made by Cárdenas himself which adds new information.

With twenty-five horsemen (Castañeda erroneously says twelve) the captain set forth on his errand on August 25, 1540. In his absence Francisco de Ovando, a most attractive captain of whom later we shall have a hair-raising story, filled the post of *maestre de campo* at Háwikuh. Cárdenas was instructed to take the same route which Tovar had followed, "for the purpose of going west beyond . . . Tuzán" to look for the stream whose shores were inhabited by giants, and was allowed eighty days for the round trip—that is, until November 14. Presumably he had the usual accompaniment of servants and guides, but he explicitly states that "he did not take any interpreter because he did not need one," since the Spaniards were well versed in the sign language of the Indians. By now they were veterans. In the party was young Pedro de Sotomayor, official historian of the Coronado expedition.

Retracing Tovar's trail to Tusayán, Cárdenas was well received there by the natives, given lodgings, furnished guides for the journey to the Great River, and liberally provided with supplies, "because they had to travel over uninhabited country before coming to the settlements, which the Indians said were at a distance of more than twenty days." The settlements re-

ferred to were apparently those of the Havasupais, who lived west of the Hopis and down Colorado River.

Thus equipped, Cárdenas went forward on the new leg of his journey, traveled twenty days, and arrived at a place fifty leagues from Tusayán and eighty from Cíbola. Here, says Castañeda, they came to the gorge of a river, "from whose brink it looked as if to the opposite side it must be more than three or four leagues by air line." Cárdenas and his men had discovered one of the most impressive scenic wonders in all nature—the Grand Canyon of Colorado River! The approximate region where the gorge was first reached by the explorers can be conjectured from the description given by Castañeda. The evidence indicates that it was in the vicinity of Grand View. The country was high, dry, "open to the north," and covered with low and twisted pines. It is at Grand View that vision sweeps north as far as Vermillion Cliffs and Lee's Ferry, some fifty miles away. The travelers from a southern clime found the temperature at the Canyon extremely severe at night, "so that although it was the warm season, no one could live on this barranca because of the cold." Modern equipment has overcome this drawback, as is evidenced by the fine settlement at Grand Canyon National Park.

Castañeda's next paragraph is one of the most precious passages in all the writings ever put on paper with respect to discovery in North America, for it records the first attempt of Europeans to descend into the most stupendous gash in the earth's surface anywhere in the world, and rivaled for depth only by Urique Canyon in western Mexico. Every reader who has seen Grand Canyon will wish to know the exact words of the chronicler; and everyone who has made his way on foot or on horseback from the brink to the bottom of the incomparable chasm will recognize the faithfulness of the all-too-brief account given by Cárdenas and his men.

"They spent three days trying to find a way down to the river, which from above appeared to be only a fathom wide, although, according to what the Indians said, it must be half a league across." They apparently meant it was that far from preci-

pice to precipice. "The descent was found to be impossible, for at the end of these three days Captain Melgosa, with Juan Galeras and another companion, they being the lightest and most agile, undertook to clamber down at a place that appeared to them the least difficult. They kept descending in sight of the men left above until they were lost to view. . . . At four o'clock in the afternoon they returned, without having been able to reach the bottom because of the great obstacles they encountered, for what from above had appeared to be easy, proved to be, on the contrary, rough and difficult. They said they had been only a third of the way down, but from the place they reached, the river looked very large; indeed, judging from what they saw, it must be as wide as the Indians had said. The men who remained above estimated that some small rocks jutting out from the wall of the canyon must be about as high as a man; but those who went down swore that when they reached them they were found to be taller than the highest tower of Seville." Now, to observers standing on the brink of the "divine abyss," a group of modern houses less than half-way down Bright Angel Trail appear to be about the size of beehives.

To our regret, but little is known of the personal history of these lithe daredevils who, first among Europeans, descended into the bowels of the earth at Grand Canyon. We do know that Juan Galeras was a native of Almendralejo, a Spanish town with an Arabic name. At the Compostela muster he had appeared with three horses, coat of mail, beaver, and native weapons. As we have seen, Captain Pablos de Melgosa, a native of Burgos, was not present at the Compostela rendezvous, not yet having arrived from Mexico, so he must have overtaken the caravan somewhere on the trail, for at Culiacán he was made captain of the infantry and went with Coronado in the Advance Guard. After returning to Mexico, Melgosa recrossed the Atlantic to his home in Spain, and was in Flanders when he gave testimony regarding the Coronado expedition. No doubt he could have told a marvelous tale of the gash in the earth into which he had descended, but he said nothing about it in his statement, which concerned other matters than scenery. He was

helping to get Cárdenas out of trouble. The third hero of this historic adventure remains nameless. It would be appropriate to erect a group statue in memory of all three at a suitable place on the brink of the stupendous and now famous gorge which they so gallantly pioneered.

Cárdenas and his men did not travel close to the canyon of the river any farther because they were in desperate need of water. Indeed, "as far as this place they had turned aside each day in the afternoon, going a league or two inland," that is, toward the south, away from the canyon, "to look for water." Thus, leaving the river at a distance, they continued westward from the place where Captain Melgosa led the descent into the mighty chasm. But they soon turned back, and with very good reason. For, "when they had traveled about four more days," writes Castañeda, "the guides said it was impossible to go any farther, because there was no water ahead in three days nor in four." To make this news emphatic the guides told Cárdenas that when the Hopis traveled through this region they brought women carrying water in gourds which they buried along the route for use on the return. Moreover, they said the Indians on foot went twice as fast as the Spaniards on horseback, for "the distance traveled by our men in two days they covered in one." Manifestly the explorers were not going rapidly, and did not get very far west. They may have reached the brink of Havasupai Canyon, whose depth and roughness would furnish a real impediment to further advance. If they had crossed it they surely would have recorded the difficult feat, as will be attested by all who have descended into it by the hair-raising old trail to the Havasupai village at the bottom.

So Cárdenas and his men turned about, little realizing that because of this jaunt they were destined to lasting fame. On the way back they saw a waterfall pouring over a rock, and from the guides they learned that "some clusters which hung like fine crystals" were salt. "They went thither and gathered large quantities of it" and distributed it among the men when they

returned to Háwikuh. Dr. Katharine Bartlett, who has made a careful study of the old trails in all this region, locates the salt deposit northwest of Cameron near the mouth of the Little Colorado River where it joins the larger stream. At Háwikuh, Cárdenas gave Coronado a written report of what they had seen, "since . . . Pedro de Sotomayor, who was chronicler of the army, had accompanied Don García López." As has been stated, Sotomayor's narrative, which would be priceless, unfortunately has never been found, but it may yet come to light. Here is a challenge to some young historian!

Cárdenas in a recently unearthed manuscript tells us that on this expedition he and his men went "almost a hundred leagues inland, without finding in all that distance any Indian settlements other than those which had already been discovered," that is, the Hopis. "They endured much thirst and hunger . . . and returned to Cibola, where they found Francisco Vázquez." On the wonders of the Grand Canyon Cárdenas makes no comment. In fact, at the time he made his declaration he was in jail in Spain, and was feeling sour about the whole matter of conquest in America. Castañeda concludes his precious account of the discovery of Tusayán, which he personally did not see, by laconically saying "the pueblos of that province were left in peace, for they never again visited them, nor did they learn of or make attempts to find other settlements in that direction." They were looking for gold, not scenery, and the east now beckoned.