

Spanish Exploration



Three Explorers This map shows the routes of de Soto, Ponce de León, and Coronado across North America. **SKILL Reading Maps** Which explorer crossed the Mississippi River?

Spanish helmet



Exploring North America

Main Idea Spanish explorers went to the southern parts of the present-day United States looking for gold.

Conquistadors also explored North America in their search for gold. The first conquistador to reach the land that is now the United States was **Juan Ponce de León** (pon seh deh leh OHN). In 1513, he led an expedition to present-day Florida. Ponce de León claimed Florida for Spain. He was looking for a “fountain of youth” that legend said could make old people young again. A legend is a story handed down from earlier times.

In 1539, Spain sent a conquistador named **Hernando de Soto** to conquer and settle Florida and the lands beyond.

De Soto went to present-day Georgia. From there, he traveled thousands of miles through the American Southeast. De Soto was the first European explorer to reach the Mississippi River.

Along the way, De Soto found many American Indians but no riches. The conquistadors fought and enslaved American Indians they met. Many Spanish died in battles as well. De Soto died in 1542, without starting any settlements in North America.

In 1540, a conquistador named **Francisco Vásquez de Coronado** led an expedition into North America. Coronado was looking for cities of gold that he had heard about in legends.

The Grand Canyon Coronado’s soldiers were the first Europeans to see the Grand Canyon in Arizona.



Cities of Gold

American Indians had told two earlier explorers named **Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca** (AHL vahr NOON yez ca BEH sa deh VAH ca) and **Estevanico** (es STEH vahn EE KO) of rich cities to the north. Coronado and other explorers thought these cities might be the cities of gold. During the search for them, Coronado’s soldiers traveled over 3,500 miles.

Spanish conquistadors faced many obstacles, including long distances, bad weather, and starvation as they explored the continent. They also learned much about the geography and peoples of North America.

REVIEW What did the Spanish hope to find in the lands north of Mexico?

Lesson Summary

- The Aztecs ruled a large empire in present-day Mexico. Hernán Cortés conquered the Aztecs in 1521.
- Spanish conquistadors explored much of the southern United States.

Why It Matters . . .

What the Spanish learned about the American Southwest helped future explorers for hundreds of years.

Lesson Review



- VOCABULARY** Write a paragraph about Hernán Cortés using **conquistador** and **expedition**.
 - READING SKILL** What did the explorers find that was **different** from what they were looking for?
 - MAIN IDEA: History** Why was Cortés able to defeat the powerful Aztec Empire?
 - MAIN IDEA: Geography** What areas of the present-day United States did Coronado and De Soto explore?
 - PEOPLE TO KNOW** Who was Moctezuma?
 - TIMELINE SKILL** How long after Cortés conquered the Aztecs did New Spain become a colony?
 - CRITICAL THINKING: Fact and Opinion** Write one fact about the Spanish conquest of the Americas. Then write an opinion about that fact.
- ECONOMICS ACTIVITY** Choose an explorer in the lesson. Think about his goals and the risks he took. Make a list of the risks.