

Cabeza de Vaca Meets the Coahuilteicans

Reading #1

Eating New and Unusual Foods

(From La Relación, Chapter 18)



Sometimes they kill some deer, and sometimes they catch fish. But this is so little and their hunger so great that they eat spiders, ant eggs, worms, lizards, salamanders, snakes and poisonous vipers. They eat dirt and wood and whatever they can get, as well as deer excrement and other things I will not talk about. My observations lead me to believe that they would eat stones if there were any in that land. They keep the bones of the fish, snakes, and other things they eat to grind them into a powder which they eat.

Cabeza de Vaca Meets the Coahuiltecan

Reading #2

Fighting the Mosquitoes

(From La Relación, Chapter 18)



We found throughout that land very many mosquitoes - three kinds of them. They are awful and annoying, and for most of the summer very troublesome. To protect ourselves from them, we would build many fires around the people, using rotten, damp firewood so that it would not burn well but produce a lot of smoke. But this protection caused another affliction, because all night long our eyes watered from the smoke in them. On top of this we had to withstand the great heat from the fires. We would go out to sleep on the coast, but if we could ever get to sleep, the Indians would awaken us with a beating to go and rekindle the fires.

Cabeza de Vaca Meets the Coahuiltecan

Reading #3

Trying to Stay Warm

(From La Relación, Chapter 21)



At night I did the following to protect myself against the cold: I would go to the thickets in the woods near the rivers and stop there before sunset. I would dig a hole in the ground and put in it a lot of firewood from the many trees. I also would gather a lot of dried wood that had fallen from the trees, and around the hole I would build four fires crosswise. I was careful to stoke the fires from time to time. I would make some long sheaves from the straw that was available around there, to cover myself in that hole and shelter myself from the night-time cold. One night a spark fell on the straw covering me while I was sleeping and began to burn strongly. Although I jumped out of the hole right away, my hair was singed from the danger in which I had been.

Cabeza de Vaca Meets the Coahuiltecan

Reading #4

Hunting and Housing

(From La Relación, Chapter 18)



They are so used to running that they can run from morning to night chasing deer without resting or becoming tired. This way they kill many of them, because they pursue them until the deer tire. Sometimes they take them alive. Their lodges are made of mats placed on four arches. They carry them on their backs and move every two or three days to search for food.

Cabeza de Vaca Meets the Coahuiltecan

Reading #5

Eating and Dancing

(From La Relación, Chapter 18)



The best season for them is when they eat prickly pears, because they are not hungry then and spend all their time dancing. They eat them night and day. During this entire season, they squeeze them, open them and set them out to dry. After they are dried they put them in baskets like figs, and keep them to eat on the way back.