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## In the Footsteps of Padres and Conquistadores

The Story of Three Centuries from Florida to California.

The stores of gold found in Mexico and Peru set the Old World on fire, but the Spanish alone organized those costly expeditions that explored vast domains for more riches while the Franciscan missionaries pushed their works to save Indian souls. A hundred years before the Pilgrims set foot on Plymouth Rock the Spanish were penetrating the country along the Old Spanish Trail. The story of their explorations and settlements from Florida to California is a romance that has not yet been clearly written, but as the highway that traverses this country is reconstructed for modern-day travel this story will be developed for the pleasure of the travelers that pass over it.

Four centuries of history, the longest period in American annals, are embraced in the Old Spanish Trail. From ocean to ocean it is rich with Spanish adventures and the wonders of the Old Mission construction.

Ponce de Leon landed in Florida in 1513 and was the first European to disembark on the United States mainland. De Narvaez reached Florida in 1528, eleven years before De Soto, and explored the Gulf country with 300 men to the country of the present Tallahassee. He failed to reconnect with his ships and a historic disaster ensued. In crudely constructed vessels a part of his followers reached the "Isle of Ill-Fate" believed to be Galveston Island, shipwrecked, naked and dying, and some lived as slaves to the Indians for six years. De Vaca, the royal treasurer, and three others escaped in 1534, crossed Texas and reached in 1536 the Spanish at Culiacan on the west coast of Mexico. That story of eight years of awful suffering and nakedness is a revelation of the cost of conquering a new land—and it marks the first Spanish Trail across the continent. De Vaca is thought to have been in the country of Sheffield, Fort Stockton and the Big Bend in Texas on the Old Spanish Trail, passing that way into Mexico.

De Soto landed at Tampa Bay in 1539 and with 1,000 men, 213 horses and a remarkable equipment, including

chains and collars for enslaving the Indians, he explored the southern country to the western bounds of Arkansas, then returned to the Mississippi River, where he died. Several hundred half-naked Spaniards reached the present Tampico four years after the proud landing at Tampa Bay. St. Augustine, settled in 1565, is the oldest city in the United States and the old Spanish atmosphere there is St. Augustine's charm.

Pensacola lays claim to being older than St. Augustine based on De Luna's expedition of colonists and priests, greater in ships and people than De Soto's, which landed at Pensacola Bay in 1559. The Indians however, by force and strategy, soon disrupted the enterprise and the colonists returned to Vera Cruz.

Parties were working northward from Mexico during the same period Florida was being penetrated. In 1582-83 the Espejo expedition reached the Texas country. Later the Spanish reached inland to Santa Fe, the second oldest city in the United States. A census in existence of 1605 shows a population of 1708. Cruzate colonized at Santa Fe and sought to build permanent works.

In 1683-84 Mendoza went north from Mexico through the Big Bend country of Texas; was at Comanche Springs (Fort Stockton), and penetrated to and established a Mission on the San Saba River, where later a silver mine and Spanish fort were located. This is 38 miles north of the Trail from Junction, Texas. Old aqueducts and other works still endure. The San Saba Trail developed from San Antonio through the Spanish Pass near Boerne to this fort. Others branched westward to El Paso and southward into Mexico. Those were the days of mule and pack-trains between San Antonio and Chihuahua, both then a part of New Spain and later of Mexico.

The first Isleta and seat of missions is on the Rio Grande near Albuquerque. The younger Ysleta on the Trail near El Paso is by some thought older than Santa Fe. Just across the international bridge from El Paso in Juarez, Mexico, is the mission of Our Lady of Guadalupe, erected early in the 16th century. Today in that ancient mission the Mexican descendants of the Spaniards and Indians who followed Coronado still bow knee to the Cross that led the hosts. That section was explored by Coronado as early as 1540. With 300 cavaliers of Old Spain, swordsmen, herds and equipment, and 800 Indians, he penetrated into Arizona and New Mexico hunting for the "Seven Cities of Cibolo" visioned as cities of gold. Then he sought for the Kingdom of the Gran Quivera thru Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas, another fabled land of gold and silver.

## THE HIGHWAY OF THE SOUTHERN BORDERLANDS

