

The Bandera PROPHEET

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Today in Texas History

By Bandera Spirits of Texas

On this day in 1541, the Spanish explorer Francisco Vázquez de Coronado, in a letter to the king of Spain, became the first man to describe the vast Llano Estacado. The Llano Estacado (Staked Plains), the southern extension of the High Plains of North America, is a high mesa lying south of the Canadian River in northwest Texas and northeast New Mexico.

Coronado had been appointed in 1540 to lead an expedition to the Seven Cities of Cíbola, wondrous tales of which had been brought to Mexico by Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca. Coronado found no gold at Cíbola, in western New Mexico, but he was led on by stories of Quivira, a region far to the east.

It was during his search for Quivira that Coronado came upon the Llano Estacado, which he described thus: "I reached some plains so vast, that I did not find their limit anywhere I went, although I traveled over them for more than 300 leagues ... with no more land marks than if we had been swallowed up by the sea [T]here was not a stone, nor bit of rising ground, nor a tree, nor a shrub, nor anything to go by."

Future explorers echoed his impressions of the region, and development did not begin until the 1870s, though it proceeded rapidly thereafter.

Indeed, the Llano witnessed the most rapid development of any section of the state, progressing from an economy based on unfenced public grazing land to a modern industrial economy within half a century.

The region's population in 1880 was only 1,081; a century later it was more than 900,000.