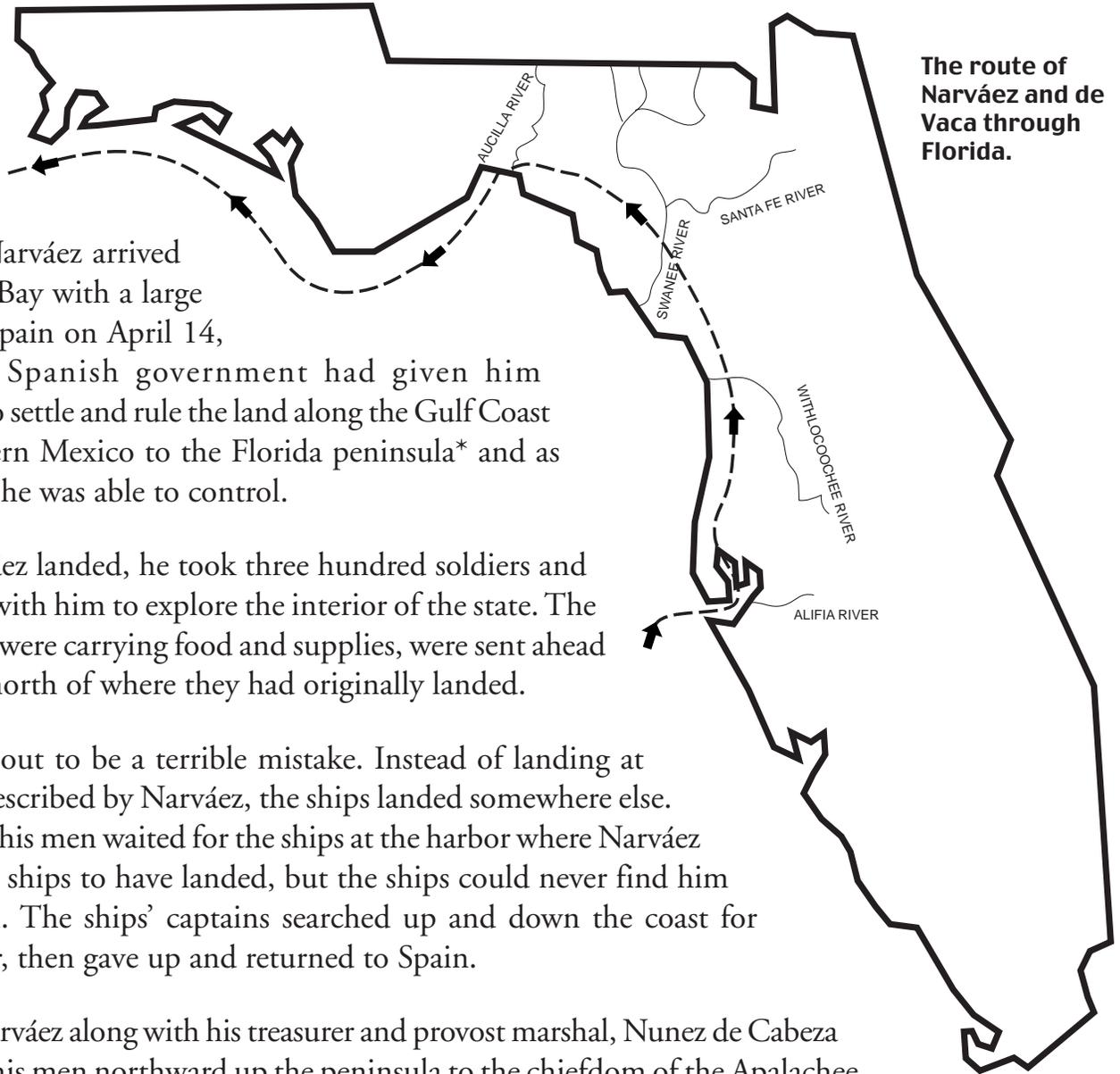


History | 1528-1535

The Misadventures of

Pánfilo de Narváez and Nunez de Cadeza de Vaca



Pánfilo de Narváez arrived near Tampa Bay with a large army from Spain on April 14, 1528. The Spanish government had given him permission to settle and rule the land along the Gulf Coast from Northern Mexico to the Florida peninsula* and as far inland as he was able to control.

When Narváez landed, he took three hundred soldiers and forty horses with him to explore the interior of the state. The ships, which were carrying food and supplies, were sent ahead to a harbor north of where they had originally landed.

This turned out to be a terrible mistake. Instead of landing at the harbor described by Narváez, the ships landed somewhere else. Narváez and his men waited for the ships at the harbor where Narváez intended the ships to have landed, but the ships could never find him and his men. The ships' captains searched up and down the coast for almost a year, then gave up and returned to Spain.

Stranded, Narváez along with his treasurer and provost marshal, Nunez de Cabeza de Vaca, led his men northward up the peninsula to the chiefdom of the Apalachee. This would have been near present-day Tallahassee. The Spaniards met hostility and violence in the Apalachee territory. This was not surprising since along their route the Spaniards had seized an Apalachee village, stolen maize and other crops, and even held a chief hostage.

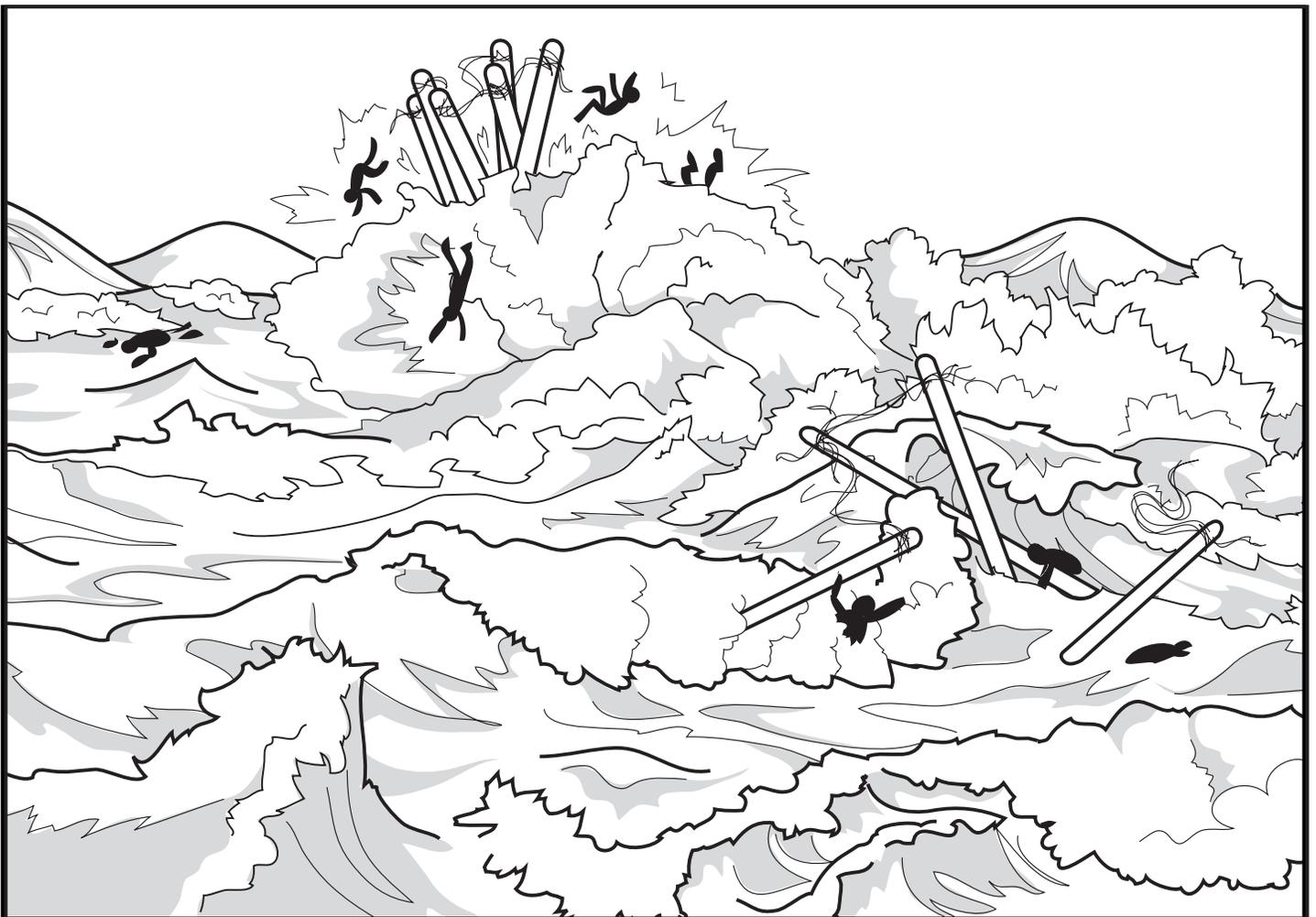
After about a month, Narváez and the Spaniards gave up their hope of ever finding the ships and receiving their supplies. They were getting low on rations and many of the men were weak from illnesses.

* A peninsula is a piece of land surrounded by water on three sides.

Narváez led his men to a bay on the Gulf (assumed to be present day St. Marks). There they built five barges. The barges were made using pine trees and the pitch from longleaf pine mixed with palmetto fiber to fill in the cracks. The men sewed their shirts together to make sails.

In September 1528, Narváez and approximately two hundred and forty men set sail towards a Spanish Settlement in Mexico on their fragile barges. Unfortunately, a violent storm caused the barges to capsize and many men lost their lives. Fewer than one hundred men finally made it to an island off the coast of Texas. Narváez did not survive, and by spring, de Vaca and the few men who were still alive set off to walk to Mexico City. Seven years later, four of them, including de Vaca, eventually arrived there.

Cabeza de Vaca shared this information of Narváez's journey with the Spanish Viceroy. This story was read by Hernando De Soto, who was about to make his first journey to Florida.



Narváez and most of his men drowned when their barges were caught in a violent storm off the coast of Texas.