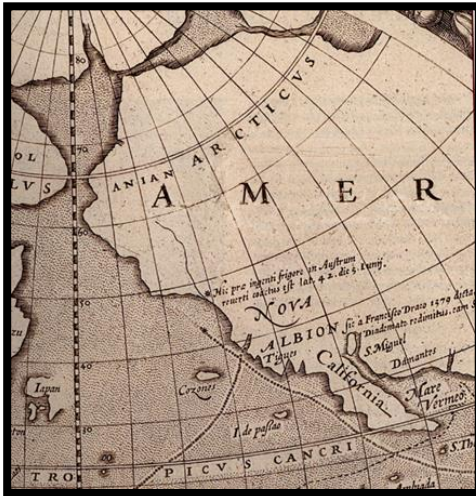


Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo



By Jody Payne
& LeAnn Leyden

We know very little about Juan Cabrillo as a child, not even where he was born! Some say Portugal; some say Spain. We do know he set off on his first expedition at age 10 or 11. He left Europe on a ship bound for Cuba. Its purpose was to stop another Spanish explorer, Cortes, from getting too much power, wealth, and land.



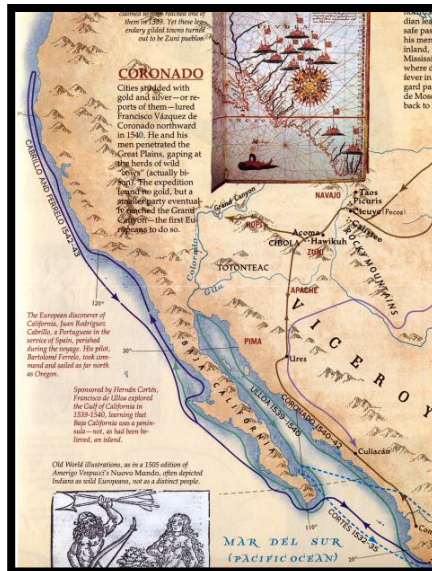
But as Cabrillo grew older and stronger, he decided he wanted to be on Cortes' side after all. He deserted his ship and joined Cortes in Mexico just in time to fight Aztecs. By age 21, Cabrillo was leading a regiment of crossbowmen.

Both the Spanish and Aztecs were very brave. Although the Spanish had better weapons, the Aztecs had far more warriors. But it wasn't tactics that gave victory to the Spanish. It was disease that conquered the mighty Aztecs. Smallpox and other European diseases killed so many Aztecs that it did not take very many Spanish to gain control.



The Spanish King was very pleased with all the Aztec gold, and he rewarded the explorers. Cabrillo received Guatemalan farmland, mines, shipyards, and all the slaves he needed to run them. For fifteen years, he was busy managing his business and getting richer and more influential.

Cabrillo caught the attention of the Governor of Guatemala who wanted to establish trade routes from Central America to Asia. He also wanted to gain riches rumored to be in the north, especially in the mythic or rumored Seven Cities of Cibola filled with gold, silver and jewels. With three ships, 200 men, and a two year planned voyage, Cabrillo set off from Navidad, Mexico on June 27th, 1542.



The Expedition

Cabrillo sailed north, up the coast of Baja (lower) California. After three months, he landed in San Diego Bay. He claimed the land for Spain, named it San Miguel, but the name didn't stick. It was the first time a European ship had landed in Alta California.

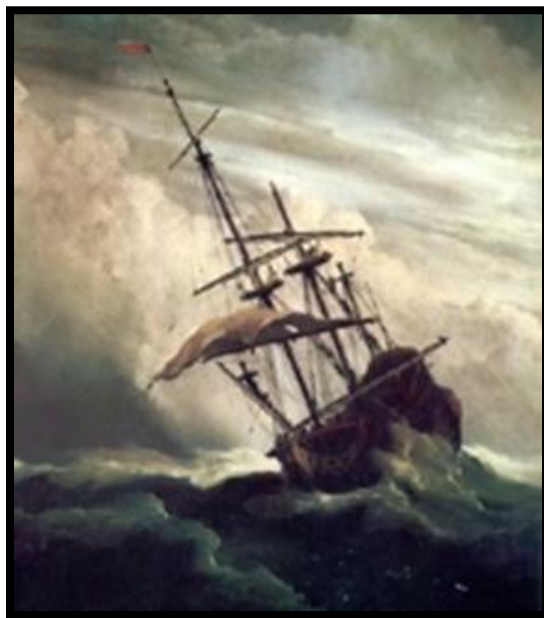
Next, it was on to San Clemente Island, Catalina Island, and the Channel Islands. He named Catalina after his ship, but that name didn't stick either! Cabrillo was not interested in fighting or conquering the local tribes (that would come much later). Instead he was friendly and sought knowledge.

Cabrillo continued his northward journey up the coast. In October, he broke his arm while anchored in the Channel Islands. This was the beginning of some very bad luck.



By November, he was again heading north, stopping at Monterey Bay and possibly Point Reyes. But he completely missed the entrance to San Francisco Ba. Actually, it was so hard to spot that no one would recognize it as a harbor entrance for another 200 years! The opening was only one mile wide (where the Golden Gate Bridge is today) and appeared to be a solid wall of hills from the ocean.

By late November, heavy storms forced Cabrillo to turn back south. They stopped again at the Channel Islands where Cabrillo slipped and fell while trying to rescue his men from a brawl with some local tribesmen. He shattered his shin bone which got infected and turned gangrene.

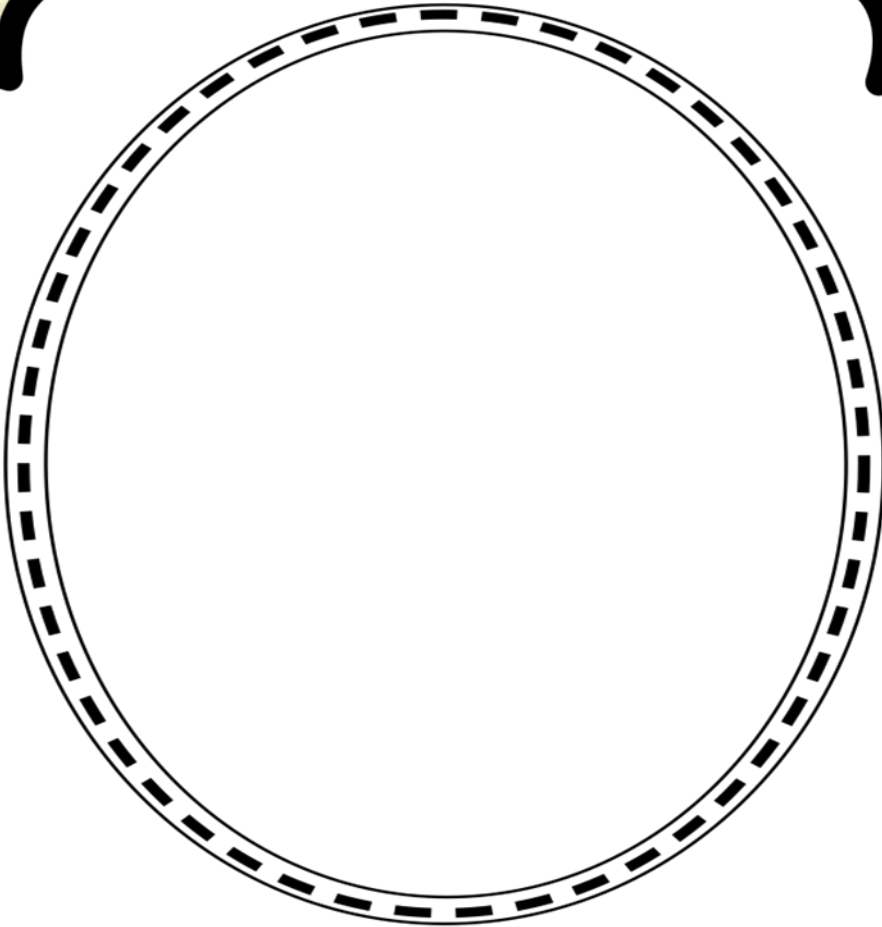


Cabrillo died from his injury on Jan. 3, 1543. As he was dying, Cabrillo urged his men to continue the expedition north again and try to find the Northwest passage and the Seven Cities of Cibola. The ships got separated but may have made it as far north as Oregon before turning back and returning to Mexico in April, 1543.

At the time, Cabrillo's expedition was considered a failure. But today we recognize Cabrillo for being the first explorer to leave a written record of the California coastline. He laid groundwork for future explorers to expand the empire by recording accurate information about the people and places he saw. Instead of myths, rumors, and exaggerations, Cabrillo brought facts and observations.



Cabrillo National Monument in Point Loma, California is a tribute to the legendary explorer Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo.



Explorer

Birth-Death

Country

Name _____

Explorer Name: _____

Goals _____

Accomplishments: _____

Interesting Facts:

One word that describes this explorer:
