

During the 1500s the Spanish set out to explore new lands with three major goals in mind. They wished to spread Christianity to new places, to find gold and riches, and to win glory for themselves and their country. The Seven Cities of Gold, or Seven Cities of Cibola, are legendary cities that were rumored to exist somewhere in North America. The legend was born in 1536. For the next six years, Spanish explorers roamed the continent searching for these golden cities filled with riches.

One of these explorers, Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, shipwrecked off the coast of Florida in 1528. For the next eight years, he wandered throughout Texas and northern Mexico. When he finally returned to Mexico City, he told tales of a fabulous and group of seven cities. The cities, he said, were called “Cibola.”



This illustration shows Spanish explorer Francisco Vásquez de Coronado (1510–1554) leading an expedition to find the Seven Cities of Cibola.

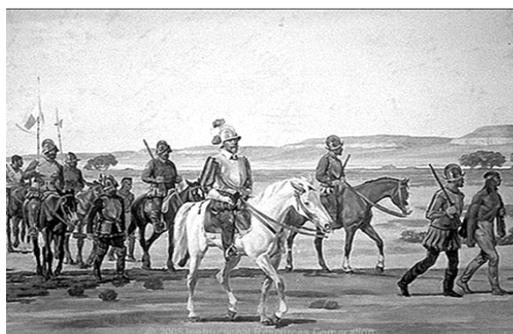
The story spread like wildfire. Many who heard of it desperately wanted to find the Seven Cities of Cibola. One of these people was the leader of New Spain, which is present-day Mexico. His name was Antonio de Mendoza. In 1539 he sent an expedition out to search for Cibola. The expedition was led by Marcos de Niza, a priest, and Estéban, an enslaved African who had been shipwrecked with Cabeza de Vaca. Estéban was killed on the trip, but Marcos de Niza returned to Mexico City within a year. He, too, claimed to have seen the cities, though only at a distance.

The news inspired Mendoza to plan yet another expedition to find the seven cities. This time, the trip would be led by Francisco Vásquez de Coronado. Mendoza appointed Coronado leader of the expedition and captain-general of all the lands he could claim for Spain.

In February 1540 Coronado led a group of 300 Spaniards and hundreds of others, as well as 1,500 horses and other animals. The priest Marcos de Niza accompanied him as well. It was a huge expedition, and the men were no doubt full of energy and excitement at the thought of being the first Europeans to see the Seven Cities of Cibola. The group spent four months marching north and east. Their long, difficult journey finally brought them within sight of a settlement in the distance. Their hopes rose, only to plummet upon drawing

within sight of the city. It was not a city of gold at all, but only one of adobe, or brick, buildings. The city was called Hawikuh, and it was a Zuni Native American settlement. Coronado quickly discovered that the Zuni had no gold. Sorely disappointed, he drove the Zuni from their town and set up camp there for the next several months. Marcos de Niza was sent back to Mexico City, no doubt feeling the pain of failure.

Coronado spent the following months planning his next move. While at Hawikuh, he sent some of his men out to explore the region. It was during one of those expeditions that the Grand Canyon was first seen by a European. Another of Coronado's captains marched to what is now modern-day Santa Fe, New Mexico. There, he encountered a Plains Native American who renewed the captain's hopes of finding the fabled seven cities with tales of such a place to the east, called Quivira.



Coronado lost a great deal of money on the failed expedition, as did those who had supported the journey.

Coronado and his men had to wait until spring to seek out Quivira. They left the Zuni village in April 1541. Once again, they believed the wealth of their dreams was within reach. This time, the expedition traveled across the Great Plains all the way to Kansas. The Spaniards were amazed at the size of the immense "sea of grass." They spent months traveling across this seemingly endless grassland, using a compass to keep their bearings. Upon reaching Quivira, however, they realized to their anger and dismay that they had been tricked. There was no gold anywhere. In fact, the buildings of Quivira were nothing more than grass huts. Coronado finally admitted defeat and turned his weary team back toward Mexico City. His journey had taken him through parts of Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Kansas.

Today, our imaginations can still be captivated by the thought of a city of gold that exists in some secret place. The idea has reemerged throughout the centuries in popular culture. Cartoons, movies, novels, and video games have been based on the theme of seven cities of gold. One example is the 2007 movie *National Treasure: Book of Secrets*. In this film, actor Nicholas Cage plays a character who discovers that Cibola, the Native American city of gold, actually lies beneath Mount Rushmore in South Dakota. Perhaps Coronado and his men simply did not travel far enough north in their quest 470 years ago!

After reading the passage, answer the following questions:

- 1. The Seven Cities of Gold were also known as**
 - A. Cibola.**
 - B. Florida.**
 - C. Coronado.**
 - D. Mexico City.**

- 2. After four months of searching, Coronado and his team found**
 - A. a Zuni Indian village.**
 - B. Santa Fe, New Mexico.**
 - C. the Seven Cities of Gold.**
 - D. Mount Rushmore.**

- 3. What did Coronado and his men find at Quivira?**
 - A. gold**
 - B. grass huts**
 - C. silver**
 - D. rock formations**

- 4. In their search for gold, Coronado and his men came across different groups of Native Americans. How did Coronado treat the Zuni? How do you think he and his men treated other Native American groups once they realized these groups had no gold? Use details from the passage to explain your answer.**