Pinón Pines and the Route of Cabeza de Vaca

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The Relación de Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca recounts the adventures of the Spanish explorer and his three companions in Texas and northern Mexico between 1528 and 1536. This narrative and a second document, commonly known as the Joint Report, are considered the earliest written accounts of travel through that region and together have been described as "the first contribution to Texan history."1 Although many clues can be found in these works, the precise path taken by the Spaniards has been a subject of controversy for more than a century. The purpose of this paper is to focus on a region of pinón pines described in the narratives and to show how new botanical evidence, derived in part from recent field work, can be used to support one of the theories about Cabeza de Vaca's route.

In a 1987 historiographical survey, Donald E. Chipman described the route interpretations of more than two dozen modern historians and gave a critical analysis of how these routes had been constructed using the biologic, ethnographic, geologic, and physiographic data contained

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1 Cadwell Walton Raines, Bibliography of Texas (Austin: Gammel Book Co., 1896), xiv (quotation). Cabeza de Vaca's narrative was published in two editions, first as La relación que dio Alvar núñez cabeza de vaca... (Zamora, Spain: Augustin de paz y Juan Picardo, 1542), and then, with slight changes in the text, as La relación y comentarios del governador Alvar núñez cabeza de vaca... (Valladolid, Spain: Francisco Fernandez de Cordoua, 1555). The Joint Report, based on information from the participants and compiled by Gonzalo Fernández Oviedo y Valdés, is available in a modern edition by Basil C. Hedrick and Carroll L. Riley, The Journey of the Vaca Party (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University, 1974).