



COPYRIGHT © 1993 SPMA  
Southwest Parks and Monuments Association  
Tucson, Arizona 85701  
ISBN 0-911408-98-3  
Library of Congress Number 91-60459

Written by: Dan Murphy  
Editorial: Ron Foreman and Randolph Jorgen  
Design: Lawrence Ormsby and Carole Thickstun



## MEN FROM ACROSS THE SEA

The astonishing arrival of helmeted, mounted Europeans in New Mexico would change the Estancia Basin forever. But the New Mexico experience was only an ember blown from a bonfire raging almost worldwide. By the late fifteenth century European sailing and navigational technology had carried explorers and merchants in expanding waves throughout the known world. In 1492, the famous voyage of Christopher Columbus suddenly added two new continents to that world. Then began an era of exploration like nothing seen before or since.

Ships of Spain, France, Britain, Portugal, and the Netherlands explored new coastlines, seeking commerce or conquest. Often it was difficult to distinguish between the two. The vagaries of wind and wave brought the Spaniards first to the islands of the Caribbean, then to Central and South America. Once New Spain was well established in Mexico, exploration parties were sent in all directions.

The era of exploration reached something of a climax in the 1540s. At the time Coronado arrived at Hawikuh, an event that may have caused emigrants to flee to towns in the Estancia Basin, Spain had numerous other expeditions underway. Hernando de Soto was slogging through Florida and much of the Southeast, while Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo was pushing his tiny fleet up the California coast. Other Spanish expeditions were establishing the route to the Philippines, and continuing exploration of South America.

Coronado's journey north from New Spain to New Mexico was long, difficult, and dangerous. Unlike the conquistadores of Central and South America, he did not find the riches he was seeking. But he nonetheless accurately described the rugged, arid land he found, with scattered people speaking a babble of languages.

To the Indians, Coronado and his companions definitely were from another world. Their language and culture were completely alien, and they brought with them metal, horses, and writing—all of which the Indians had never seen. Throughout the latter half of the sixteenth century, the people of the Estancia Basin must have heard many incredible stories of encounters with Spaniards. But no such encounter occurred in the basin itself until 1598.

To the small band of Spanish pioneers who trudged north in the spring of 1598, the New Mexico desert must have seemed like the end of the Earth. They were led by Don Juan de Onate who, as adelantado, was entitled to advance the frontier. Behind them were weary weeks of sand and dry mountains, and it looked like more to come. With each rugged mile the fledgling colonists realized this effort would be hard, so far from the cultural hearth. The unknown circled all around, and the tracks back to New Spain were quickly erased by the afternoon winds.

From the early explorers Onate had learned something about the Indians of New Mexico. Unlike the nomadic tribes the Spaniards had met in the south, the Indians in New Mexico were farmers who lived in towns. Therefore the Spanish word for town, "Pueblo," came to stand for both the various groups and the towns they lived in.

Determined to know more about the Pueblo Indians he viewed as now under his control, Onate learned all he could from informants along the way. Soon after establishing a permanent camp near San Juan Pueblo, about forty miles north of present-day Santa Fe, he called the leaders of the Indian towns to a meeting. Chance encounters had taught a few Indians bits of Spanish, and various Indians spoke each other's languages, but still it must have been linguistic chaos.

Imagine Onate's problems as he tried to issue and translate the "Act of Obedience" in the stately language of European conquest: "... render obedience and vassalage to God and king, and in their stead, to the most reverend father commissary in spiritual matters, and to the governor in temporal matters and those relating to the government of their public affairs." The Pueblos watched and listened, fascinated and overwhelmed by the wealth and magic of these strangers. With their horses, firearms, and wondrous metal armor, the Spaniards must have had connections to some very powerful gods.

In October 1598, Onate finally saw the towns of the Estancia Basin for himself. Spanish bureaucrats were inveterate record keepers, so we even know the names of some Indians he met. "Ayquian" and "Aguim," their names inscribed phonetically in Spanish, made their marks on the Act of Obedience, on behalf of the Estancia Basin pueblo called Cuarac (Quarai). The date was October 12, 1598, 106 years to the day after Columbus' landfall. Five days later three other leaders signed for other nearby pueblos: Yolha for Cueloce (probably Las Humanas), Pocaetaqui (possibly for Pueblo Pardo, a small pueblo an hour's walk from Las Humanas), and Haye (perhaps for Tabira, another pueblo near Las Humanas).

Persuading the pueblo leaders to sign the Act of Obedience was not all that was required to make a colony, and Onate knew it. The Spanish crown hoped the New Mexico colony would

thrive, producing agricultural products and even mineral wealth, if it could be found. It was difficult. Many of the pueblos, including those of the Estancia Basin, were far from Oñate's primitive adobe-and-wood bastion at San Juan, and travel was both difficult and dangerous. How could he govern them, and develop the economy the crown expected?



*Fibrolite spiral-grooved axe from Las Humanas.*

For years Oñate struggled to keep the enterprise together. In 1600 warriors from the Estancia Basin pueblo of Abo attacked a small band of soldiers and killed two who may have been deserters from the colony, returning to Mexico. Oñate responded in force, sending Captain Vicente de Zaldívar with troops, who in turn were attacked near Quarai. The battle turned against the Pueblos, whose wood and stone weapons were no match in hand-to-hand combat with the soldiers who had metal blades. The Indians retreated into their stone houses with wooden roofs, which the Spaniards set ablaze. It was not a good beginning.

The arid land of New Mexico was hard to farm, and alternatives were few. Still, under the Spanish system colonists were not free to come and go. They were in desolate New Mexico at the selection or direction of the crown, and could not leave without permission. There was bitterness when things did not go well.

Oñate recommended that the colony be abandoned and, from a purely economic point of view, that probably would have been the wisest thing to do. Spain was a worldly empire, with very real debts and contracts, vast lands to administer and a huge government to run. New Mexico was a drain on the royal treasury.

But Spain also was thoroughly, devoutly Catholic, and the Pope had made Spain responsible for converting the natives in the New World. Spanish colonial authority in New Mexico was vested in both the civil government, with Oñate as governor, and the Franciscan Order of the Holy Catholic Church. The Franciscans strongly pressed the case for the colony as a Pueblo Indian evangelization effort, and their argument prevailed with the King of Spain. Oñate resigned, disillusioned and broken.

So New Mexico essentially became a missionary colony. The missions were the principal extension of both the Catholic church and Spanish civilization, and the church was entitled to the protection and cooperation of the state. But church and state aims were frequently in conflict, and New Mexico was far from any central authority. The Franciscans were the only religious order in the colony, and usually spoke with one voice. They firmly believed the church's authority should supersede the state's. Predictably, the governor usually saw things differently.



*Left ... Steel lance or buffalo-spear point.*

To get for the crown what they considered to be the crown's, the Spanish civil government depended primarily upon the *encomienda*, or tribute, system. An individual judged worthy by the crown was entitled, as *encomendero*, to collect an annual tribute from a village. For example, the *encomienda* might be paid with goods, such as grain or *mantas* (woven blankets), produced by the village. In return, the *encomendero* was responsible for protecting the village from Apache raiders.

Under a different system, the *repartimiento*, Pueblo Indians were obliged to render tribute with their service, rather than goods. It was illegal to require both goods and service as tribute, although the law frequently was ignored.

The Act of Obedience put the Indians in a dilemma. On a given day the priest might demand that they pull weeds in the mission fields, while the *encomendero* pressured them for the annual tribute. Meanwhile the village fields were neglected, with no one available to do the work.

The colony was too distant, and too small, for the bureaucracy to inhibit individual ambitions. In New Mexico, months or years away from review by higher authorities, conflicts between civil and religious leaders were not always settled amicably.

For example, in 1613 Governor Pedro de Peralta sent soldiers to collect the tribute from Taos on a holy day, in open defiance of the priest who demanded that they stay in Santa Fe. Enraged at this blasphemous conceit, Fray Isidro Ordóñez, *custos* of the church, declared himself the agent of the much feared Inquisition, arrested Governor Peralta, and imprisoned him in his own colony. This bitter battle between church and state over colonial authority would continue, setting the tone for subsequent events in the basin.

Sometimes odd things are preserved in the historical record. In 1612, a Mexico City silversmith named Miguel de Torres received a contract to make seven silver chalices for some new missions on the New Mexico frontier. Those chalices cost the Franciscans 56 pesos each, but the real price would be paid by the Indians. The arrival of the Spanish missions would cost the Indians of the Estancia basin their way of life. Eventually, Indians and Spaniards alike would abandon the Estancia Basin completely.

By 1618 the Spaniards had established missions at most of the pueblos along the Rio Grande, especially those near the new capital of Santa Fe. Although the Franciscans had yet to venture into the Estancia Basin, a five-day walk from Santa Fe, people living in the basin must have heard about strange building activity in the Rio Grande Valley from travelers who passed from pueblo to pueblo, trading stories along with their wares. These Spaniards knew how to build awesome rooms, and they worshipped in these vast spaces with wonderful pomp and ceremony.

Other rumors were disturbing. The Spaniards expected the Indians to help build and maintain these missions, and toil in the fields, kitchens, and classrooms that supported them. In return the Indians had access to the new religion, which they surely hoped would supplement their ancient deities in these unprecedented times. They also learned Spanish traditions of farming and ranching, the latter being entirely new to people who had never seen a cow.

The Spaniards called the Estancia Basin the "Salinas Province," after the salines from which the Indians collected salt to trade to other pueblos and Spaniards alike. The first Spaniard to actually take up permanent residence in the Salinas Province was a man of the cloth, Fray Alonso de Peinado, who had been in charge of the Franciscans in New Mexico in the early years and had founded the mission at Santo Domingo. Peinado had become fed up with incessant church-state infighting, so in 1618 he banished himself to distant Chilili, an Indian village north of Quarai, to convert the Indians there. Four years later, another priest, Fray Francisco Fonte, arrived at the thriving Indian town of Abo to build the basin's first mission there.