

LETTER WRITTEN BY DON JUAN DE OÑATE
FROM NEW MEXICO, 1599

*Copy of a letter written by Don Juan de Oñate from New Mexico to the Viceroy, the Count of Monterey, on the second day of March, 1599.*¹

FROM Rio de Nombre de Dios² I last wrote to you, Illustrious Sir, giving you an account of my departure, and of the discovery of a wagon road to the Rio del Norte,³ and of my certain hopes of the successful outcome of my journey, which hopes God has been pleased to grant, may He be forever praised; for greatly to His advantage and that of his royal Majesty, they have acquired a possession so good that none other of his Majesty in these Indies excels it, judging it solely by what I have seen, by things told of in reliable reports, and by things almost a matter of experience, from having been seen by people in my camp and known by me at present.

This does not include the vastness of the settlements or the riches of the West which the natives praise, or the certainty of pearls promised by the South Sea from the many shells containing them possessed by these Indians, or the many settlements called the seven caves,⁴ which the Indians report at the head of this river, which is the Rio del Norte; but includes only the provinces which I have seen and traversed, the people of this eastern country, the Apaches, the nation of the Cocoyes,⁵ and many others which are daily being dis-

¹ Pacheco and Cárdenas, *Col. Doc. Inéd.*, XVI. 302-315.

² Nombre de Dios was reached March 12, 1598, and was left on the 14th. See Ytinerario, entries for those days, pp. 234-235.

³ The reference is to the exploration made by Vicente de Zaldívar. See Ytinerario, p. 234; Villagrà, *Historia*, cantos XI.-XII.

⁴ This may be a survival of the older tradition regarding the Seven Caves existing somewhere to the northward of Mexico. The text is evidently corrupt at this point. It reads, "ni las muchas poblazones que el nacimiento destes indios, que es el del Rio del Norte, llamada las siete quebas."

⁵ Cicuyé, or Pecos.

covered in this district and neighborhood, as I shall specify in this letter. I wish to begin by giving your Lordship an account of it, because it is the first since I left New Spain.

I departed, Illustrious Sir, from Rio de Nombre de Dios on the sixteenth¹ of March, with the great multitude of wagons, women, and children, which your Lordship very well knows, freed from all my opponents, but with a multitude of evil predictions conforming to their desires and not to the goodness of God. His Majesty was pleased to accede to my desires, and to take pity on my great hardships, afflictions, and expenses, bringing me to these provinces of New Mexico with all his Majesty's army enjoying perfect health.

Although I reached these provinces on the twenty-eighth day of May (going ahead with as many as sixty soldiers to pacify the land and free it from traitors, if in it there should be any, seizing Humaña and his followers,² to obtain full information, by seeing with my own eyes, regarding the location and nature of the land, and regarding the nature and customs of the people, so as to order what might be best for the army, which I left about twenty-two leagues from the first pueblos,³ after having crossed the Rio del Norte, at which river I took possession,⁴ in the name of his Majesty, of all these kingdoms and pueblos⁵ which I discovered before departing from it with scouts), the army did not overtake me at the place where I established it and where I now have it established, in this province of the Teguas, until the nineteenth⁶ day of August of the past year. During that time I travelled through settlements sixty-one leagues in extent toward the north, and thirty-five in width from east to west. All this district is filled with pueblos, large and small, very continuous and close together.

¹ See note 2, p. 212.

² It was not yet known that Humaña had been slaughtered by the Indians of the plains.

³ He refers here to reaching the first pueblos above El Paso, having left the caravan at El Sepulcro de Robledo. See Ytinerario, pp. 247-250; Villagrà, *Historia*, canto XV.

⁴ April 30, 1598. See Ytinerario, p. 242; Villagrà, *Historia*, canto XIII., where the formal act of possession is printed.

⁵ The text reads *pueblo*, but *pueblos* seems required to convey the sense.

⁶ The Ytinerario in two places says they reached San Juan on the 18th.