This excerpt of *La Relacion* by de Vaca is from the entire document which can be found at:

http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/resources/archives/one/cabeza.htm

We travelled together for four days, our daily ration being half a handful of raw maize. At the end of these four days a storm overtook us, in which the other barge was lost. God's great mercy preserved us from being drowned in that weather.

It being winter and the cold very great, and as we had been suffering so many days from hunger and from the injuries we received from the waves, that the next day people began to break down, so that when the sun set all those aboard of my barge had fallen in a heap and were so near dying that few remained conscious, and not five men kept on their feet.

When night came the skipper and I were the only ones able to manage the barge. Two hours after nightfall the skipper told me to steer the craft alone, since he felt that he would die that same night. Thereupon I stood at the helm, and after midnight went to see if the skipper was dead, but he said that, on the contrary, he felt better and would steer till daybreak. On that occasion I would have hailed death with delight rather than to see so many people around me in such a condition. After the skipper had taken the barge under his control I went to rest, very much without resting, for I thought of anything else but sleep.

Near daybreak I fancied to hear the sound of breakers, for as the coast was low, their noise was greater. Surprised at it, I called to the skipper, who said he thought we were near the shore. Sounding, we found seven fathoms, and he was of the opinion that we should keep off shore till dawn. So I took the oar and rowed along the coast, from which we were one league away, and turned the stern to seaward.

Close to shore a wave took us and hurled the barge a horse's length out of water. With the violent shock nearly all the people who lay in the boat like dead came to themselves, and, seeing we were close to land, began to crawl out on all fours. As they took to some rocks, we built a fire and toasted some of our maize. We found rain water, and with the warmth of the fire people revived and began to cheer up. The day we arrived there was the sixth of the month of November.

After the people had eaten I sent Lope de Oviedo, who was the strongest and heartiest of all, to go to some trees nearby and climb to the top of one, examine the surroundings and the country in which we were. He did so and found we were on an island, and that the ground was hollowed out, as if cattle had gone over it, from which it seemed to him that the land belonged to Christians, and so he told us. I sent him again to look and examine more closely if there were any worn trails, and not to go too far so as not to run into danger. He went, found a footpath, followed it for about one-half league, and saw several Indian huts which stood empty because the Indians had gone out into the field.

He took away a cooking pot, a little dag and a few ruffs and turned back, but as he seemed to delay I sent two other Christians to look for him and find out what had happened.

They met him nearby and saw that three Indians, with bows and arrows, were following and calling to him, while he did the same to them by signs. So he came to where we were, the Indians remaining behind, seated on the beach. Half an hour after a hundred Indian archers
joined them, and our fright was such that, whether tall or little, it made them appear giants to us. They stood still close to the first ones, near where we were.

We could not defend ourselves, as there were scarcely three of us who could stand on their feet. The inspector and I stepped forward and called them. They came, and we tried to quiet them the best we could and save ourselves, giving them beads and bells. Each one of them gave me an arrow in token of friendship, and by signs they gave us to understand that on the following morning they would come back with food, as then they had none.

The next day, at sunrise, which was the hour the Indians had given us to understand, they came as promised and brought us plenty of fish and some roots which they eat that taste like nuts, some bigger, some smaller, most of which are taken out of the water with much trouble.

In the evening they returned and brought us more fish and some of the same roots, and they brought their women and children to look at us. They thought themselves very rich with the little bells and beads we gave them, and thereafter visited us daily with the same things as before. As we saw ourselves provided with fish, roots, water and the other things we had asked for, we concluded to embark again and continue our voyage.

We lifted the barge out of the sand into which it had sunk (for which purpose we all had to take off our clothes) and had great work to set her afloat, as our condition was such that much lighter things would have given us trouble.

Then we embarked. Two crossbow shots from shore a wave swept over us, we all got wet, and being naked and the cold very great, the oars dropped out of our hands. The next wave overturned the barge. The inspector and two others clung to her to save themselves, but the contrary happened; they got underneath the barge and were drowned.

The shore being very rough, the sea took the others and thrust them, half dead, on the beach of the same island again, less the three that had perished underneath the barge.

The rest of us, as naked as we had been born, had lost everything, and while it was not worth much, to us it meant a great deal. It was in November, bitterly cold, and we in such a state that every bone could easily be counted, and we looked like death itself. Of myself I can say that since the month of May I had not tasted anything but toasted maize, and even sometimes had been obliged to eat it raw. Although the horses were killed during the time the barges were built, I never could eat of them, and not ten times did I taste fish. This I say in order to explain and that any one might guess how we were off. On top of all this, a north wind arose, so that we were nearer death than life. It pleased Our Lord that, searching for the remnants of our former fire, we found wood with which we built big fires and then with many tears begged Our Lord for mercy and forgiveness of our sins. Every one of us pitied not only himself, but all the others whom he saw in the same condition.

At sunset the Indians, thinking we had not left, came to bring us food, but when they saw us in such a different attire from before and so strange-looking, they were so frightened as to turn back. I went to call them, and in great fear they came. I then gave them to understand by signs how we had lost a barge and three of our men had been drowned, while before them there lay two of our men dead, with the others about to go the same way.
Upon seeing the disaster we had suffered, our misery and distress, the Indians sat down with us and all began to weep out of compassion for our misfortune, and for more than half an hour they wept so loud and so sincerely that it could be heard far away.

Verily, to see beings so devoid of reason, untutored, so like unto brutes, yet so deeply moved by pity for us, it increased my feelings and those of others in my company for our own misfortune. When the lament was over, I spoke to the Christians and asked them if they would like me to beg the Indians to take us to their homes. Some of the men, who had been to New Spain, answered that it would be unwise, as, once at their abode, they might sacrifice us to their idols.

Still, seeing there was no remedy and that in any other way death was surer and nearer, I did not mind what they said, but begged the Indians to take us to their dwellings, at which they showed great pleasure, telling us to tarry yet a little, but that they would do what we wished. Soon thirty of them loaded themselves with firewood and went to their lodges, which were far away, while we stayed with the others until it was almost dark. Then they took hold of us and carried us along hurriedly to where they lived.

Against the cold, and lest on the way some one of us might faint or die, they had provided four or five big fires on the road, at each one of which they warmed us. As soon as they saw we had regained a little warmth and strength they would carry us to the next fire with such haste that our feet barely touched the ground.

So we got to their dwellings, where we saw they had built a hut for us with many fires in it. About one hour after our arrival began to dance and to make a great celebration (which lasted the whole night), although there was neither pleasure, feast nor sleep in it for us, since we expected to be sacrificed. In the morning they again gave us fish and roots, and treated us so well that we became reassured, losing somewhat our apprehension of being butchered.

On the island I have spoken of they wanted to make medicine men of us without any examination or asking for our diplomas, because they cure diseases by breathing on the sick, and with that breath and their hands they drive the ailment away. So they summoned us to do the same in order to be at least of some use. We laughed, taking it for a jest, and said that we did not understand how to cure.

Thereupon they withheld our food to compel us to do what they wanted. Seeing our obstinacy, an Indian told me that I did not know what I said by claiming that what he knew was useless, because stones and things growing out in the field have their virtues, and he, with a heated stone, placing it on the stomach, could cure and take away pain, so that we, who were wiser men, surely had greater power and virtue.

At last we found ourselves in such stress as to have to do it, without risking any punishment. Their manner of curing is as follows: When one is ill they call in a medicine man, and after they are well again not only do they give him all they have, but even things they strive to obtain from their relatives. All the medicine man does is to make a few cuts where the pain is located and then suck the skin around the incisions. They cauterize with
fire, thinking it very effective, and I found it to be so by my own experience. Then they breathe on the spot where the pain is and believe that with this the disease goes away.

The way we treated the sick was to make over them the sign of the cross while breathing on them, recite a Pater noster and Ave Maria, and pray to God, Our Lord, as best we could to give them good health and inspire them to do us some favors. Thanks to His will and the mercy He had upon us, all those for whom we prayed, as soon as we crossed them, told the others that they were cured and felt well again. For this they gave us good cheer, and would rather be without food themselves so as to give it to us, and they gave us hides and other small things. So great was the lack of food then that I often remained without eating anything whatsoever for three days, and they were in the same plight, so that it seemed to me impossible for life to last, although I afterwards suffered still greater privations and much more distress, as I shall tell further on.