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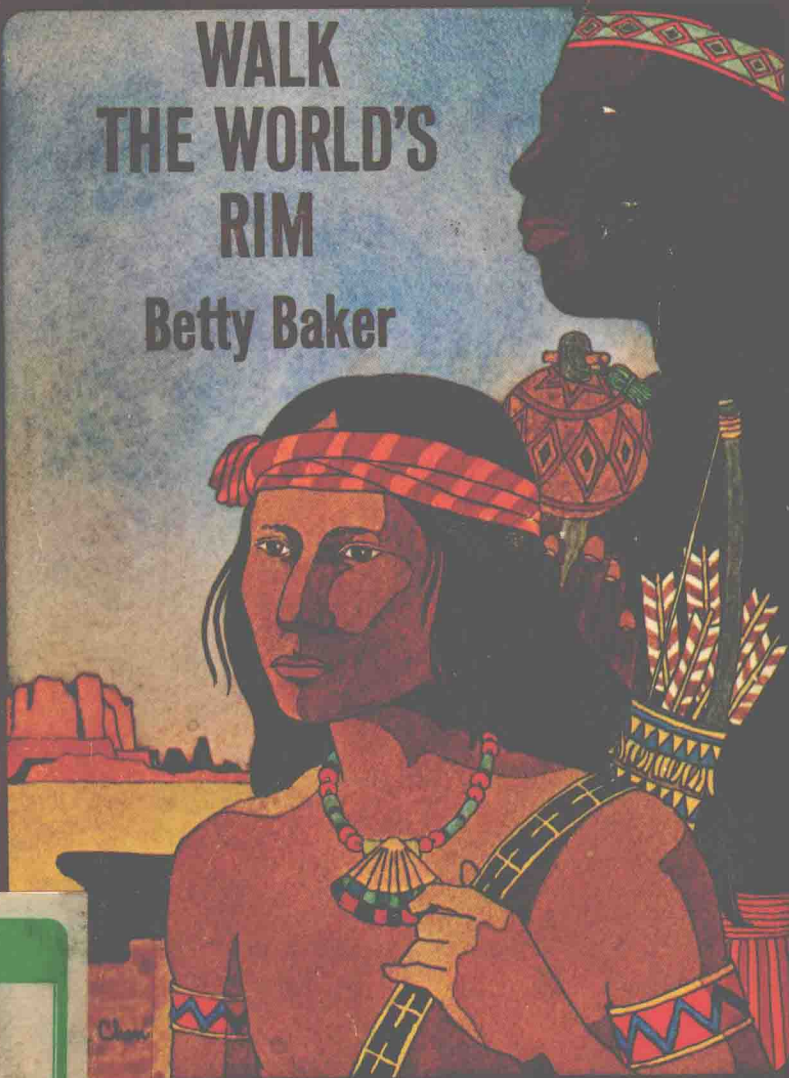
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# WALK THE WORLD'S RIM

Betty Baker



BETTY BAKER



# THE WORLD'S RIM

A HARPER TROPHY BOOK

Harper & Row, Publishers

New York, Evanston, San Francisco, London

WALK THE WORLD'S RIM

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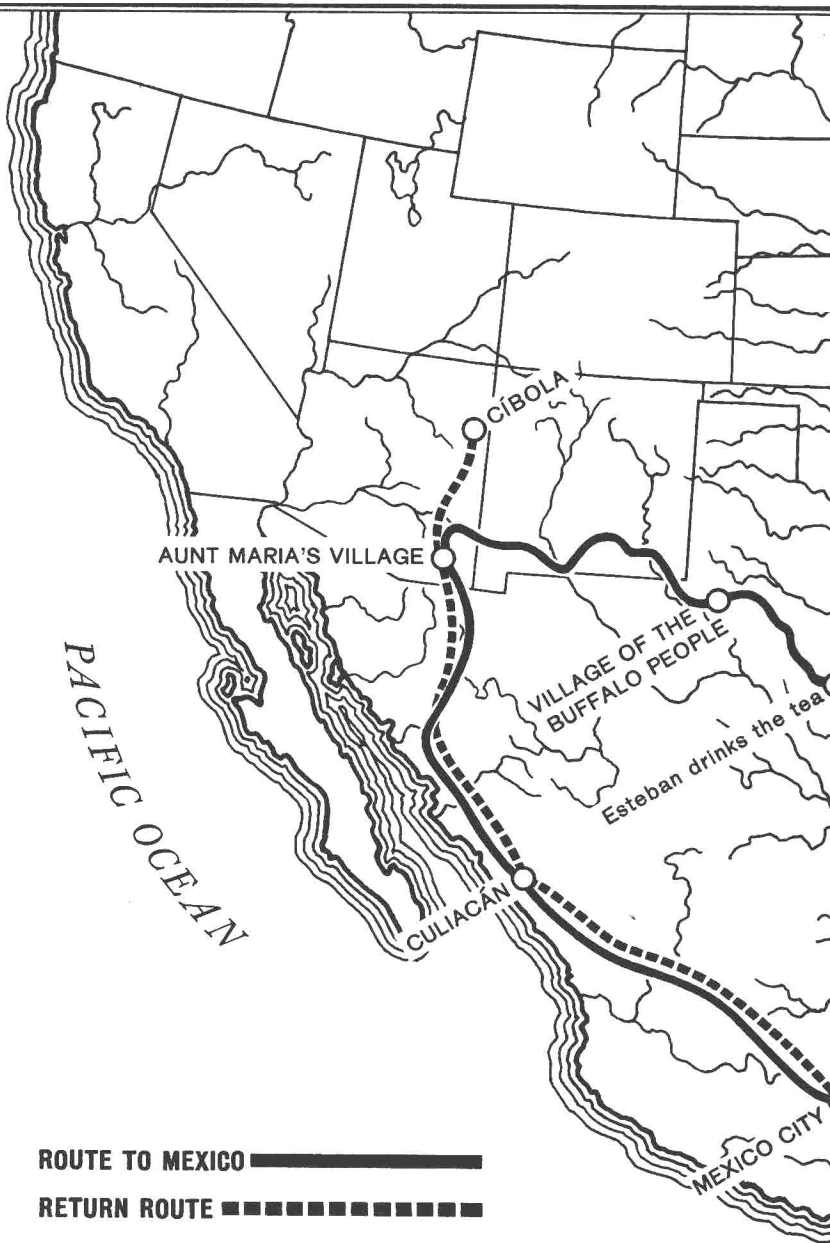
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In memory of Esteban  
and all others who have walked  
the world's rim

## **\* WALK THE WORLD'S RIM**





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## ✱ THE YEARS BEFORE

In the summer of 1527 five Spanish ships sailed from Cuba to explore Florida. The five Franciscan friars aboard hoped to convert the Indians to the word of God. The rest of the six hundred men dreamed of wealth. All but four of them found death.

The tragedy was the result of poor leadership. Against the advice of his best captains, Governor Pámfilo de Narváez led his soldiers inland, directing the ships to meet the army farther north. The soldiers never saw the ships again.

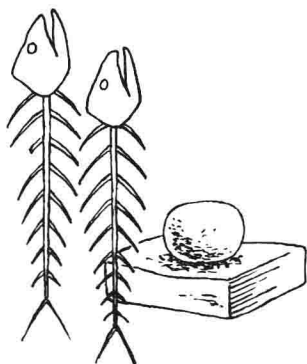
Beset by poisonous snakes, insects, treacherous swamps, and hostile Indians the Spaniards struggled north and west to what is now Pensacola. There, between Indian attacks, the men slaughtered their precious horses and used the hides to build crude boats. The barges pushed off for Mexico only to be separated by a storm at the mouth of the Mississippi River. A hurricane drove the three surviving barges ashore near what is now Galveston, Texas. In a futile attempt to launch the one salvaged barge, the men lost all their clothing, tools, weapons, and meager supplies.

Within a year sickness, starvation, and Indians diminished the survivors to four: Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, Alonso del Castillo Maldonado, Andrés Dorantes, and his Negro slave Esteban. Only four from more than six hundred men.

These four might not have lived either if they had not assumed the roles of medicine men. By blessings and prayers Castillo and de Vaca cured a great many Indians. Either the cures were miraculous, as the three Spaniards believed, or most of the illnesses were imaginary, brought on by fear of witches and spirits so that the patients easily imagined themselves "cured" by the Gods-From-the-Rising-Sun. Whatever the explanation, the more people they cured, the more closely the Spaniards were guarded. The Indians could not afford to let such valuable medicine men escape to another tribe.

For seven years the four men lived among the Gulf coast

Indians—primitive people on a near-starvation diet. Then late one summer they escaped and fled north into the unknown, unexplored interior of Texas. Without warm robes they could not survive the cold weather they knew was coming, so the Spaniards took refuge with the poor but friendly Avavare Indians.



## ONE \* IT GOES HUNGRY

The wind swept southward gathering cold and force over the arctic wastes. It roared through the canyons of the Rocky Mountains, started the buffalo herds drifting into its icy blast, and lashed the teepees of the Cheyenne. Then, its fury exhausted over the plains, the wind spent its last breath over the warm gulf where strange vessels sailed east and west. Familiar Indians or new-come Spaniards; teepee or caravel; it made no difference to the north wind. But to the Indian boy scuttling from a reed mat hut in the Texas

hills each bone-chilling gust and rough splinter of sleet seemed sent by demons to plague him alone.

Chakoh pulled the skimpy deerskin tighter over his hunched shoulders. He lifted his head briefly to find the pair of huts set apart from the rest of the village. The bitter wind cut his squinted eyes, but the tears sprang as much from the painful hunger in his belly as from the icy air. Chakoh could not remember any comfortable length of time in all his fourteen years when he had not been cold and hungry. Except in the summer when he was hungry and hot.

The four Men-From-the-Sun spoke of a new god. They healed the sick with prayers to him. Perhaps he could stop the wind from blowing and bring food to the Avavares. Chakoh would gladly dance to any god or demon who could do such things. Then, fearful that the Spirit-of-Misfortune had read his thoughts, Chakoh spat twice over his left shoulder to honor and appease the malicious god.

He swept aside the stiff hide over the doorway of the hut and crawled through the low opening. Two men crouched over the fire pit. One was weathered as brown as Chakoh, but the hair growing long and thick on his face was the color of grass when there'd been no rain for many hot suns. Chakoh had seen the skin protected by that beard. It was as white as the other man's skin was black.

The white man's blue eyes turned questioningly toward Chakoh.

"The wind has blown visitors to my father's hut." Chakoh's father was headman of the village. All visitors stopped there.

"They are ill?" It was more a statement than a question.

"Yes, Cabeza de Vaca. All the people have heard of your power to heal."

"I will go." The man closed his eyes and moved his lips silently. He touched fingertips to his forehead, chest, and each shoulder. Then he rose stiffly.

"Go with God," murmured the black man.

Chakoh waited until the door covering fell into place behind the Spaniard. Then he turned to the Negro and spoke in faulty Spanish.

"How goes it, Esteban?"

The big man grinned. "It goes hungry, to be sure. Sit and I will give you another Spanish lesson. The words will drown the rumblings of my belly."

Chakoh squatted beside the meager fire and laid a package on the dirt floor.

"Ay, yi! Food!" But Esteban's expectant grin faded as Chakoh unwrapped the dirty matting. "Fish bones."

"Hush!" Chakoh glanced fearfully at the hut door. "We're lucky to have them. I buried them long ago to keep them from being stolen."

"To be sure. We've already found it safer to eat meat raw. Try to cook it and someone steals it from the spit before your nose has filled with the smell."

Meat . . . Chakoh sighed at the thought of that rare food. Of any food. Half of his fish bones he'd given to his parents. It was all any of them would have that day. Perhaps for many days.

Esteban lifted one of the three fish skeletons gingerly between his huge fingers.

"And how do we eat this magnificent banquet?"

"We grind them between stones and lick the dust from our hands. It isn't much but it may keep us from starving."

"To be sure." Esteban sighed heavily.

As they ground and licked, Chakoh wondered how to ask about this god to which Cabeza de Vaca and the two Señors in the other hut spoke. These Men-From-the-Sun were so thin and so nearly naked that it hardly seemed possible their god could be any more powerful than the ones Chakoh's people already feared. But perhaps this god was only a healing god and there were others for hunting.

Chakoh glanced sideways at Esteban. Esteban was larger than the white men. Indeed, he was larger than any man Chakoh had ever seen, but his skin hung loosely on his massive frame. Like the three Señors, Esteban never complained, but he was the only one who finished his meals with a sigh as if regretting there wasn't more. Also, he was the only one who offered friendship. He spent most of his time hunting or talking with Chakoh or teaching him the



Spanish tongue. But one thing Esteban disliked speaking of. This god of the three Señors. Chakoh would have to save his questions until Cabeza de Vaca returned from treating the sick man in his father's hut. Meanwhile the boy searched for a topic to lure Esteban into telling one of his fantastic stories.

"You Men-From-the-Sun do not seem to mind hunger," he ventured at last.

"After seven years with the Indians southward you get used to not eating. Half those people die every year from starvation."

"It is the same here. The cactus fruit ripens, the fish swarm upriver, or someone kills a deer. For a short time there is enough, but then comes hunger, and what morsels you find are snatched from between your teeth." Chakoh banged the last fish bone violently with the small stone. "I have seen some eat the ground itself."

Esteban nodded. "And they died of it."

"You have traveled far. Is it the same everywhere?"

"Everywhere we've traveled from Florida to here."

"And this place to which you travel now, what about it?"

"Ah, when we get to Mexico it will be different. We'll receive the welcome of conquering generals. Ah, the fiestas with banquets twice a day."

Chakoh leaned forward eagerly. "Banquets of what?"

"All the fruits of the Viceroy's gardens, honey cakes that