Francisco Pizarro Biography

Quick Facts:
- Occupation: Conquistador and Explorer
- Born: Around 1474 in Trujillo, Spain
- Died: June 26, 1541 in Lima, Peru
- Best known for: Conquering the Inca Empire

Where did Francisco Pizarro grow up?

Francisco Pizarro grew up in Trujillo, Spain. His father, Gonzalo Pizarro, was a colonel in the Spanish army and his mother, Francisca, was a poor woman living in Trujillo. Francisco grew up with little education and never learned how to read or write. Growing up was tough for Francisco. He was raised by his grandparents because his parents never got married. He worked as a pig herder for many years.

Leaving for the New World

Francisco was an ambitious man, however, and wanted to improve his lot in life. He heard stories of the riches of the New World and wanted to travel there and find his own fortune. He set sail for the New World and lived on the island of Hispaniola for several years as a colonist.

Joining an Expedition

Pizarro eventually became friends with explorer Vasco Nunez de Balboa. In 1513, he joined Balboa on his expeditions. He was even a member of Balboa's famous expedition that crossed the Isthmus of Panama to reach the Pacific Ocean. When Balboa was replaced as the local governor by Pedrarias Davila, Pizarro became friends with Davila. When Davila and Balboa became enemies, Pizarro turned on Balboa and arrested him. Balboa was executed and Pizarro was rewarded for his loyalty to the governor.

Expeditions to South America

Pizarro had heard rumors of a land in South America that was full of gold and other treasures. He wanted to explore the land. He made two initial expeditions into the land. The first expedition took place in 1524 and was a total failure. Several of his men died and Pizarro had to turn back without discovering anything of value. The second trip in 1526 went better as Pizarro reached the Tumbez people on the borders of the Inca Empire. He now knew for sure that the gold he had heard tales of was more than just rumors. However, he eventually had to turn back before reaching the Inca.

The Fight to Return to Peru

Pizarro now wanted to mount a third expedition. However, the local governor of Panama had lost confidence in Pizarro and refused to let him go. Very determined to mount another expedition, Pizarro travelled back to Spain to get the support of the king. Pizarro eventually received the support of the Spanish government for a third expedition. He was also named the governor of the territory.
Conquering the Inca

In 1532 Pizarro landed on the coast of South America. He established the first Spanish settlement in Peru called San Miguel de Piura. Meanwhile the Inca had just fought a civil war between two brothers, Atahualpa and Huascar. Their father the emperor had died and both wanted his throne. Atahualpa won the war, but the country was weakened from the internal battles. Many Inca were also sick from diseases brought by the Spanish such as smallpox.

Killing the Inca Emperor

Pizarro and his men set out to meet with Atahualpa. Atahualpa felt he had nothing to worry about. Pizarro only had a few hundred men while he had tens of thousands. However, Pizarro set a trap for Atahualpa and took him prisoner. He held him ransom for a room full of gold and silver. The Inca delivered the gold and silver, but Pizarro executed Atahualpa anyway.

Conquering Cuzco

Pizarro then marched to Cuzco and took over the city in 1533. He looted the city of its treasure. In 1535 he established the city of Lima as the new capital of Peru. He would rule as governor for the next ten years in Lima.

Interesting Facts about Francisco Pizarro

- He was the second cousin once removed of Hernan Cortez, the conquistador who conquered the Aztecs in Mexico.
- No one is quite sure exactly when Pizarro was born. It was likely between 1471 and 1476.
- Francisco was accompanied by his brothers Gonzalo, Hernando, and Juan throughout his campaign to conquer the Inca.
- When Pizarro captured the Inca Emperor his small force of less than 200 men managed to kill over 2,000 Inca and take 5,000 more as prisoners. He had the advantage of guns, cannons, horses, and iron weapons.

Read more at: http://www.ducksters.com/biography/explorers/francisco_pizarro.php