

# VASCO DE BALBOA



**V**asco de Balboa was born Spain in 1475. His father was not a wealthy man, so Balboa worked for a rich merchant in the coastal city of Moguer. Many ships heading for the New World left from there. Balboa often heard the stories the sailors told of their voyages. He wanted to join them.

When he was 18, Balboa sailed with Columbus on his second voyage to the New World. Later he settled on the island of *Hispaniola* (now Haiti/ Dominican Republic) He hoped to find gold there

When Balboa was 26 he joined a Spanish settlement expedition to South America. But because there were not enough men, food, or supplies, no settlement was ever started. Balboa returned to Hispaniola and raised pigs for a living. In 1506, he discovered an island near by and named it *Borinquen*. It was later renamed Puerto Rico. He became the island's governor, but Balboa wanted more wealth and power.

In 1510, Balboa joined another Spanish expedition to start a colony in South America. This settlement failed, too, because of the dangerous natives and lack of food. Balboa and the others moved westerly and landed where he had heard the natives were friendlier. There they established the city of Darien in what is now Panama. Balboa became the governor and explored further into Panama. He conquered some natives but made agreements with others.

In 1511, some native told him of a sea and riches on the other side of the Isthmus of Panama. Balboa and 90 Spaniards crossed the isthmus to search for the sea and riches. Along the way he fought and killed hundreds of natives. He even destroyed one native village. Three weeks later, the Indian guides told Balboa if he stood on a nearby mountain he would be able to see the sea. When he did so, he became the first European to see the Pacific Ocean He named it *Mar del Sur* (South Sea). Balboa and his men continued on and found gold and pearls. Balboa sent these treasures back to King Ferdinand. He hoped this would make him famous.

Once the King learned of Balboa's discoveries, he appointed him to serve under the new governor of Darien. But the new governor was jealous of Balboa. In 1518, he accused Balboa of treason and had him arrested. After a speedy trial Balboa was sentenced to death. In January 1519, Balboa and four of his friends were beheaded.