

# MORMON TRAIL

*Voyage of Discovery*

THE STORY BEHIND THE SCENERY®





Gift of Maryellen Conner

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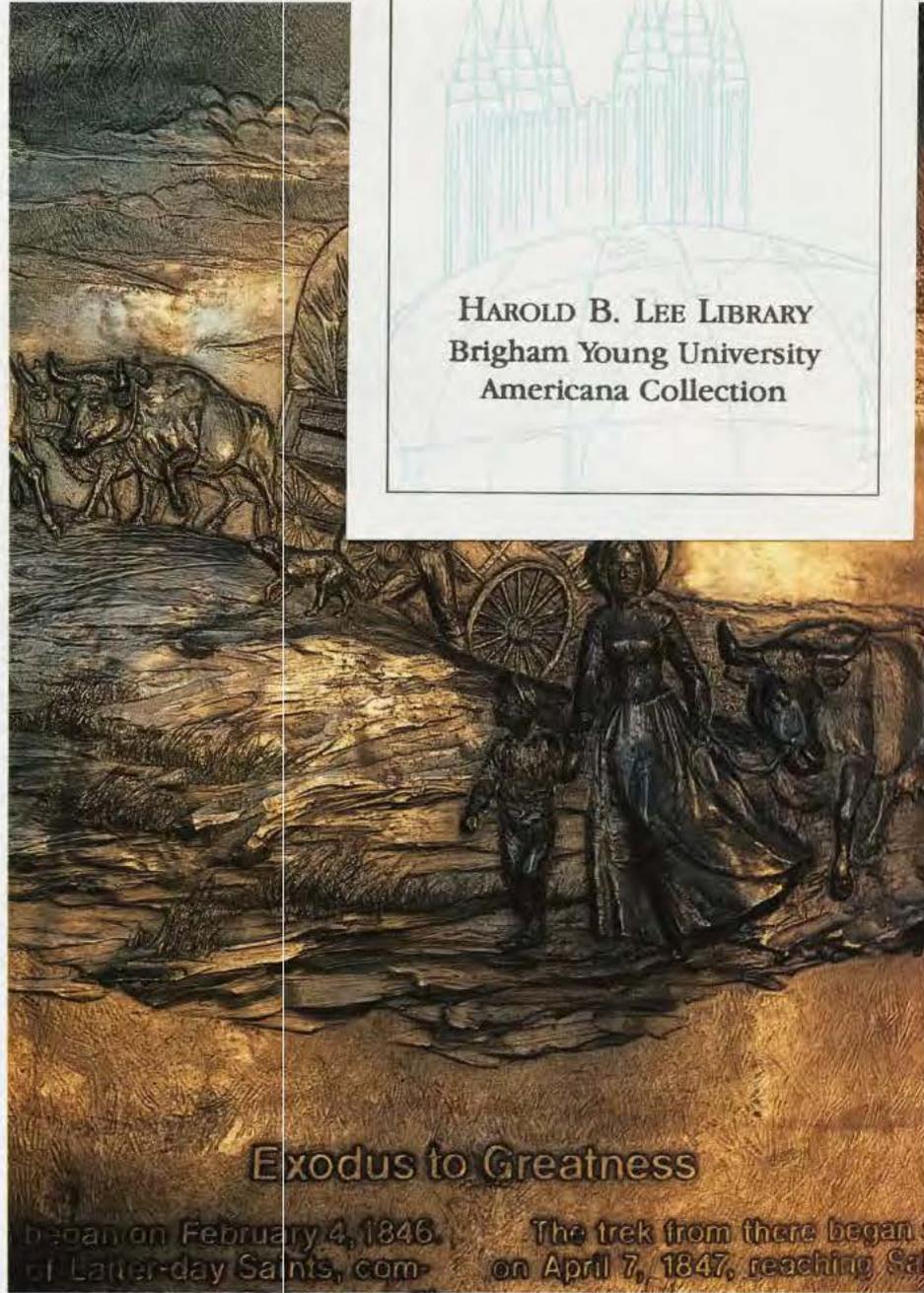
MORMON  
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VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY  
The Story Behind the Scenery®

text  
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by  
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GARY LADD, a well-known and respected scenic photographer, traveled the length of the Mormon Trail to present the pictorial story of this important milestone in American history. Gary's photography is also featured in two other "Voyage of Discovery" books: *Oregon Trail* and *John Wesley Powell*.

*Front cover: Wagon ruts and Sweetwater River at Independence Rock, Wyoming. Inside front cover: Reconstructed wagon displayed near the Winter Quarters Cemetery, Nebraska. Page 1: "Exodus to Greatness" marker, Nauvoo, Illinois.*

*Pages 4/5: Sunset on the Mississippi River from the foot of Nauvoo's Parley Street.*

Edited by Mary L. Van Camp. Book design by K. C. DenDooven.



# Mormon Trail

## VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY

**Z**ION! The thought of a permanent Zion was uppermost in the minds of the Mormons as they left Nauvoo, Illinois, in February 1846, for what they hoped would be a safe haven in the Rocky Mountains. The first wagons were ferried across the Mississippi River, or crossed in skiffs, but then the river froze and many were able to travel over on the ice. Despite the bitter cold, there was a sense of joy in this "Camp of Israel" to be able to suffer "for the truth's sake."

No birds sang, and not a blade of grass could be seen under the foot of snow that lay heaped against the wheels of the wagons and covered the tops of the tents in the Sugar Creek Camp in Iowa, seven miles west of Nauvoo. To some of those who huddled together during that cold, gray February, it was *deja vu*, for they had endured a similar scene seven years earlier as they departed Far West, Missouri, for Illinois. This new exodus was just one more test before they reached "the promised land."

These were the modern pilgrims, routed from their homes by intolerance and persecution. They weren't sure just where the Lord would lead, but they were following Brigham Young, and he was following the Lord. That was enough.

Joseph Smith had founded their church in 1830 in New York, and had led his followers from that state

to Ohio, and on to Missouri before they settled in Nauvoo in 1839. Smith's martyrdom in 1844 at Carthage, Illinois, had left the Saints spiritually and emotionally bereft until Brigham Young took command in August 1844. Persecution had been a part of the past, and would continue to be a part of the future, but in the Rocky Mountains their wish for religious freedom eventually would be fulfilled.

From its beginning in 1846 to the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 and beyond, the Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail, from Nauvoo, Illinois, to Salt Lake City, Utah, has captivated the fancy of Mormons and non-Mormons. It is one of the most written about trails in all history—hundreds of contemporary journals were kept and much has been written since.

It is a curious fact that the Mormons, who did not want to go West in the first place, were among the most successful to do so. They did not go West for land, gold, furs, a new identity, adventure, or health. They were driven "from civilization to sundown" for religious freedom.

Because of this unique motivation, the Mormons were not typical westering Americans. Their experiences, their daily routines, however, were similar to other emigrants on the Oregon and California trails. Placed within the proper historic perspective, some

*"I stopped my Carriage on the top of a rolling prairie And I had...A splendid view. I could [see] the Saints pouring out & gathering like clouds from the Hills & dales grove & prairie with there teams, wagons, flocks & Heard's by Hundreds & thousands as it were until it looked like the movements of A great Nation."*

—Wilford Woodruff, 1846.

70,000 Mormons were very much a part of the great westward movement of the 19th century when at least 300,000 people ventured across the wide Missouri.

Mormons were different in other ways. Trail discipline was stressed and enforced. They made many improvements on their Trail for others who would follow. They did not employ professional guides, and they went East as well as West on their Trail. Mormons were especially cohesive. They moved as villages on wheels—a whole culture, a faith, a people went West.

A little history is necessary to understand their story. Mormon history officially began April 6, 1830, when Prophet Joseph Smith organized the Church (formally known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) in Fayette, New York. A year later this small group moved to Kirtland, Ohio. By 1837-38, the faith was headquartered in Caldwell County, Missouri, and by the spring of 1839 the new center was in Nauvoo, Illinois. All this moving around had been caused by serious social, economic, political and, especially, religious differences that led to trouble and misunderstandings.

Mormons do not consider themselves Catholic or Protestant. They are not a breakaway from any other church, nor are they a reformed group. They believe they are the "only true church" of Jesus Christ "restored" in these latter days. They also believe that they are modern Children of Israel led by prophets who receive direct and continual revelation from God. Their theology teaches that they are a unique people, a Chosen People, a "peculiar people."

They call themselves Latter-day Saints to both distinguish themselves from and identify with the "Former-day Saints" of the New Testament, and to stress their differences from all other Christians today.

This belief in modern-day prophets explains why they were so disciplined, why they could accomplish what they did along their Trail. Mormons accept what they are told to do as God's will. The orthodox Mormon is first a Mormon and all else second.

The long-range beginning of their exodus was the murder of their Prophet, Joseph Smith, June 27, 1844, at Carthage, Illinois. For 19 months thereafter the Mormons strove to realize the dreams and hopes of their martyred Prophet. It became increasingly clear, however, that many Illinoisans wished to rid the state of the Latter-day Saints and so, eventually, The

Exodus took place.

Prior to leaving Illinois the Mormons prepared themselves by reading travel accounts and studying the best maps they could acquire. Their previous expulsions from Ohio and Missouri had given them a little experience in moving large numbers of people. The 1834 march of "Zion's Camp" from Ohio to go to the aid of their persecuted brothers and sisters in Missouri had also taught them some emigrating experiences, but mainly they had to pick up most of their Trail savvy the hard way—en route.

It is a common misconception that the Mormons blazed the Trail that bears their name. The Mormons were not looking for a place in the history books—they used the best available roads. Across Iowa they followed poor territorial roads and faint Indian paths. Across most of Nebraska they followed the earlier Oregon Trail north of the Platte River. Across most of Wyoming they were on the Oregon Trail proper, and west of Fort Bridger they picked up the indistinct track of the Donner-Reed party. Because of this some people question the validity of the Trail being called the Mormon Trail.

According to Wallace Stegner, however, "By the improvements they made in it, they earned the right to put their name on the trail they used." Finally, in July 1847, the Mormons entered the Valley of the Great Salt Lake.

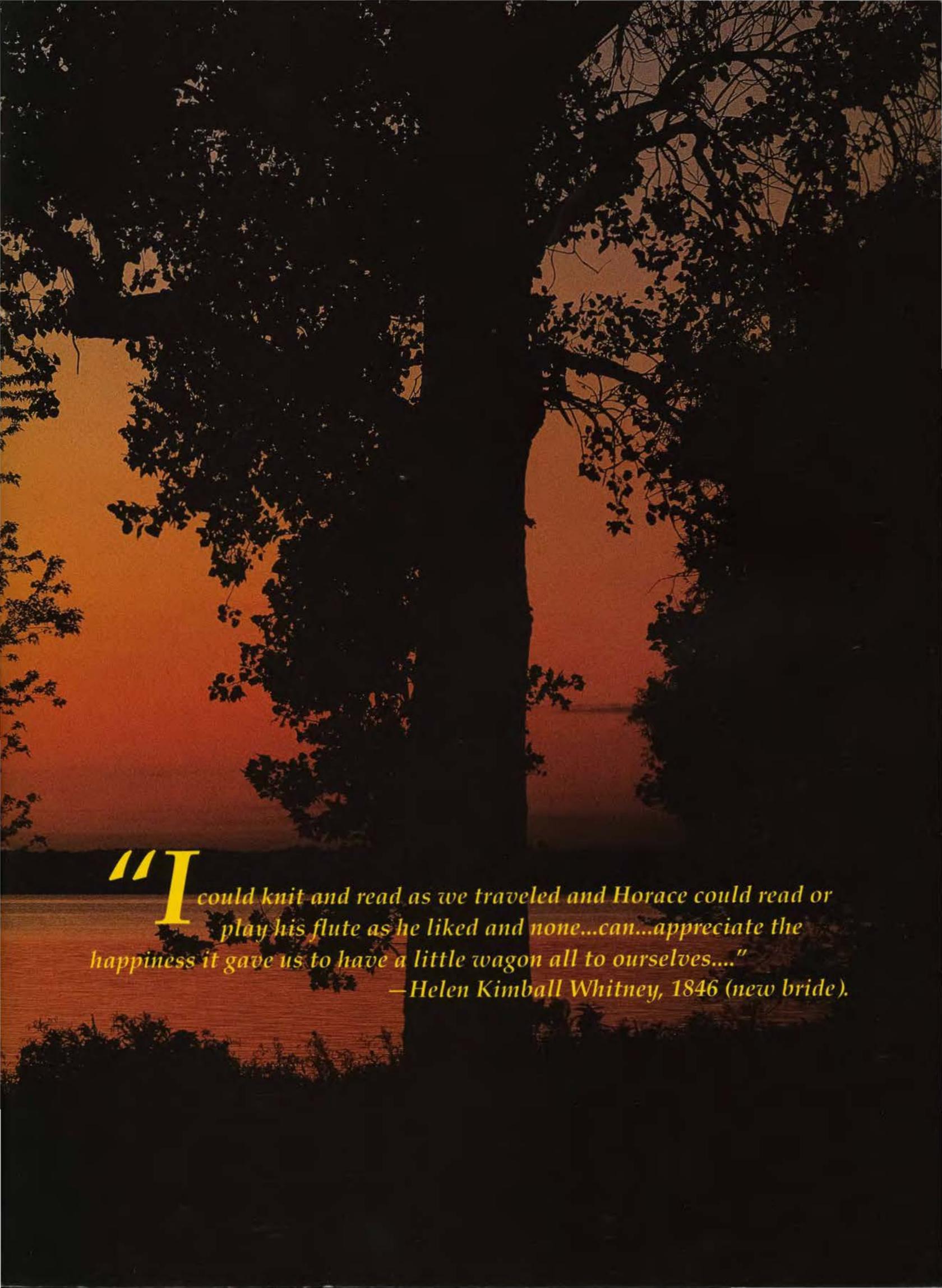
We must now return to the beginning—back to Sugar Creek, Iowa Territory during February 1846. The wagons streamed into camp as the wind blew, the snow swirled, the temperature fell, the animals strayed, and the children cried. Many got sick, exhausted, and weak from hunger. The cold hung around their camp like the ghost of Satan, and sometimes the tents groaned under the burden of the snow and collapsed. Soon, provisions for man and beast became scarce, and their suffering was intensified.

Then Pitt's Brass Band would start playing a favorite hymn, "The Spirit of God Like a Fire is Burning," and the camp would come alive with the spirit of gathering.

*"We'll sing and we'll shout/with the armies  
of heaven,  
Hosanna, Hosanna, to God and the Lamb."*

On March 1, 1846, about 500 wagons moved out of Sugar Creek . . . ZION, here we come!



A large, dark silhouette of a tree with many branches and leaves dominates the foreground. The background is a soft, warm orange and red sky, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. A calm body of water is visible in the distance, reflecting the light from the sky. The overall mood is peaceful and nostalgic.

*"I could knit and read as we traveled and Horace could read or play his flute as he liked and none...can...appreciate the happiness it gave us to have a little wagon all to ourselves..."*

*—Helen Kimball Whitney, 1846 (new bride).*



*"My things are packed ready for the West.... In the afternoon put Sister Harriet Young to bed with a son. Made me a cap and...went to the Hall to see the scenery of the Massacre of Joseph and Hyrum Smith.... We bade our children and friends goodbye and started for the west. Crossed the river about noon."*

*—Patty Sessions, February 1846 (midwife).*

The homes in the "City of Joseph" became shops in late 1845 as parts of wagons were assembled, harnesses repaired, tires set, axles greased, wagon covers sewed, and clothing and food prepared. Brigham Young and good friend Heber C. Kimball "examined maps with reference to selecting a location for the Saints west of the Rocky Mountains and read various works written by travelers in those regions." Heber predicted the Saints would be better off "in the wilderness" than they were in Nauvoo. The young people were encouraged to continue with their schooling and piano lessons, but interest lagged as preparations for their exodus increased.

Everyone expected to depart in early spring when "grass grew and water ran," but the charters of the Nauvoo Legion and the City of Nauvoo were revoked in January and the Saints rushed their preparations. While Zina Jacob Young's wagon waited to cross she witnessed a near tragedy. "Shall I ever forget standing on...[the] porch seeing [a] wagon [sink] on a sand bar. The Brethren [took] little ones from the wagon cover. The bows just peeped above the water..."

In February, Parley Street became the site of great activity as the wagons rolled toward the ferry and as they passed the home of their dead Prophet, Joseph Smith, some of the Saints gave departing gifts to his wife Emma, who declined to go West with the Brigham Young camp.

Despite months of planning, rumors of anti-Mormon activities sent many Saints over in make-shift, hurried exile, with few provisions, scant

clothing, sick families, and weak animals. Those well prepared with beans, flour, coffee, tea, medicines, meal, and meat shared with the others. Still, the teams streamed to the Mississippi River, and by February 25 it had frozen solid.

Some of the Saints looked back and saw the Temple gleaming in the distance, and saw the smoke rising from chimneys of those too old, too poor, too unprepared, too sick, or too stubborn to leave. By 1850, the Temple had been destroyed by arson and wind.

They formed a staging ground on Sugar Creek some six miles west of the river. On March 1, nearly 5,000 Mormons in about 500 wagons moved out to the tune of "gee" and "haw." By April 22, midwife Patty Sessions had delivered four babies, attended three women who miscarried, and washed and ironed.

One new mother wrote that they left "trusting God like Abraham." Life and death ebbed and flowed among the Saints as snow, rain, wind, mud, and sleet altered their moods and hindered their travel.

Hundreds of Mormons continued to head West from Nauvoo in 1846 with few regrets. They were at last "bound for the promised land," somewhere in the Rocky Mountains.

The Mormon Prophet Joseph Smith's home on the bank of the Mississippi River in Nauvoo, Illinois. Joseph Smith, murdered in 1844, did not live to see the 1846 exodus from Illinois. That movement of the Mormon people to Salt Lake City, however, was to fulfill his prophecies and visions and complete the martyred prophet's work.



When built in the 1840s, the Mormon Temple at Nauvoo was one of the most impressive buildings in the upper Mississippi Valley. After the Mormons quit Illinois the temple was eventually destroyed. In 1962, the site was excavated revealing the outline and extent of the building.



*"Come, come ye Saints, No toil nor labor fear, But with joy wend your way:  
Though hard to you this journey may appear Grace shall be as your day....  
We'll find a place which God for us prepared, Far away in the West,  
Where none shall come to hurt or make afraid. There the saints will be blessed.  
All is well! All is well!"*

—William Clayton, April 1846.

No part of the long trek surpasses the tragedy and triumph of this hegira across the flat, open, prairie of Iowa—that Mormon Mesopotamia between the Mississippi and the Missouri rivers. Iowa consisted of little more than bluestem prairie grass, oak and hickory forest, rivers, streams, swamps and bogs. By mid-April, however, the robins had arrived and so had the sun and warmer temperatures. The Saints could rejoice.

In eastern Iowa the brethren went to work earning provisions, or anything a farmer might be willing to exchange for labor. One farmer offered *honey* to Pitt's Brass Band to play a concert for his family. The band also entertained in small communities such as Farmington and Keosauqua on the Des Moines River. Other men made rails, fences, barns, houses, and husked corn, thereby receiving in trade fodder, hay, corn, vegetables, or anything useful.

In good weather the blacksmith set up shop, and the sisters could wash and bake. One sister baked a batch of 11 loaves of bread one day which Eliza R. Snow declared "would have done honor to a more convenient bakery than...a fire in the wilderness."

Births were still occurring and so were deaths. It was a birth, however, that ushered in the greatest of all Mormon hymns, "Come, Come Ye Saints" (originally titled "All is Well"). William Clayton's famous journal paints the scene. April 15th. "This morning Ellen Kimball came to me and wishes me much joy. She said Dinatha [Clayton's wife back in Nauvoo] has a son.... Truly I feel to rejoice at this intelligence.... In the evening the band played and after we dismissed [we] retired to my tent.... We had a very pleasant time

Here, near Locust Creek in extreme southern Iowa in April of 1846, William Clayton wrote the words for the most famous of all Mormon hymns: "Come, Come Ye Saints." His words not only inspired the emigrating Mormons, but set forth, poetically, the Mormon motivation for going West. The hymn is sometimes called the "Mormon Marseillaise," or "Hymn Heard Round the World."



playing and singing until about twelve o'clock and drank health to my son.... This morning I composed a new song—"All is well."

The Camp of Israel was coping with many challenges, and many heard from loved ones back in Nauvoo about the difficulties of selling property. One pioneer considered himself lucky when he learned someone had bought his brick home in Nauvoo for "thirty-five yoke of oxen." Such oxen were often turned over to the agents in Nauvoo for the benefit of the poor waiting to join the exodus.

Wild strawberries, fish, deer, and wild turkey were soon plentiful and helped soothe the pains of hunger. Color began to appear on cheeks, and more faces were wreathed in smiles. It was a joyous sight to see the Saints "so cheerful in all of their afflictions."



Erected in 1990 at the entrance to the Tharp Cemetery, this Mormon and Wayne County, Iowa, marker commemorates the composing of "Come, Come Ye Saints" that was written nearby.



*"Clean straw was spread...the walls draped with sheets, Turnips were scooped out and in them was placed lighted candles...imparting a picturesque effect. Dancing, speeches, songs and recitations varied the exercises, which opened and closed with prayers."*

*—Joseph Fish, 1846.*

A few remaining Mormon Trail ruts in Iowa are mute reminders and evidence of the Exodus of '46. Not far from these ruts a permanent camp named Garden Grove was established for those who would follow. It was located about half-way across Iowa, and became a welcome reprieve for the weary Saints who arrived there on April 23. It was a fertile and beautiful spot and the green, lush valley was a feast to eyes too accustomed to frozen, drab, colorless earth. Those too sick to continue were urged to remain there as the brethren hurried to build log cabins and plant crops.

Within two weeks, 359 men under the leadership of Brigham Young cleared 300 acres of land, and cut 10,000 rails. Some of the timber was used for coffins to bury those weakened by ten weeks of meager rations and bitter cold. The main company remained there until May 12, and a group was assigned to stay behind to maintain the camp. Parley P. Pratt, one of the twelve apostles, was sent ahead to locate another permanent settlement and rode through the Grand River country in May. "[I] steered through the vast and fertile prairies and groves.... We crossed small streams daily.... [One day] while Riding about three or four miles through beautiful prairies, I came suddenly to some round and sloping hills, grassy and covered with beautiful groves of timber.... I called out: "This is Mount Pisgah!" Pratt was obviously reminded of the biblical Mt. Pisgah from where Moses saw the Promised Land. (Deut. 3:27) This name reflects the Mormon penchant for noting and cherishing Old Testament parallels to themselves. They were the "Chosen People," forced in exile to Zion, to the "tops

of the mountains," to make the desert "blossom as the rose." Prophecy was being fulfilled! Mt. Pisgah was quickly established. Cabins were built and peas, cucumbers, beans, corn, buckwheat, potatoes, pumpkins, and squash were planted. Fresh dirt was soon being turned as burial sites for the dozens of Trail victims stricken with pneumonia, scurvy, malaria, and other diseases. But during that fall and the winter of 1846-47, Garden Grove and Mt. Pisgah and other Iowa settlements were the scenes of dances, merriment and music as the Saints made their log cabins festive and warm. Despite their trials and tribulations, their prayers were filled with hope and thanksgiving, and the nights were made lively with celebrations and rejoicing, for the Saints believed in the emotional, spiritual, and physical benefits of song and dance.

This monument commemorates the permanent Mormon pioneer camp at Mt. Pisgah that lasted from 1846 to 1852, and the several hundred Mormons who died here. Named after the biblical Mt. Pisgah, it was established for the benefit of the Mormons who would follow the pioneers of 1846.

These remarkably well-preserved, quarter-mile-long set of 1846 wagon ruts on private land near Bridgewater, Iowa, have been deepened by over a century of erosion. Mormon Trail ruts are scarce in Iowa, having been obliterated by time and the plow. Early survey maps of Iowa confirm the location of the Trail here.





*“Brigham Young came up with his company driving his team in mud to his knees, as happy as a king.”*

*— Patty Sessions, April 1846.*

The one plague the original Children of Israel did not have to endure was MUD. But mud was one of the most stubborn and persistent enemies of the latter-day Children of Israel. In late March and early April the Mormons were often knee deep and axle high in mud. Tents were blown over, food was soaked, tempers were short, cattle were lost, children were cranky, and everyone was cold, wet, and totally miserable. Except, of course, the young boys who “went out Hunting and killed many deer and Turkey.”

On April 1, Patty Sessions wrote: “Mud aplenty. The worst time we have had yet.... Froze our shoes in the tent, [and] many could not lie down without lying in the water.” On June 7, Wilford Woodruff noted: “In the mud & water to my knees till 2 o’clock at night.” But the sun soon dried up the mud and Woodruff could rejoice on the 30th, when he beheld the Saints “pouring forth & gathering.”

One of those gathering was Louisa Barnes Pratt who recorded an amusing decision by the sisters: “Resolved that when the brethren call on us to attend prayers, get engaged in conversation and forget what they called us for that the sisters...pray by themselves...and go about our business. We believe in equal rights.”

Finally about mid-June, the Mormons reached the Council Bluffs area on the Missouri River and the first portion of the march was nearly over. It had taken more than three months to travel 265 miles! There, the pioneers were greeted by Chief Pied Riche of the Pottawattamie tribe. His people had also been driven westward by the cruel Indian removal policy of the U.S. government. The chief said: “So we have both suffered. We must help one another and the Great Spirit will help us both.”

Mud along the Trail’s route through Iowa was one of the greatest obstacles and annoyances to the emigrating Mormons. Oxen got mired and wagons sank to their axles. Often double teaming was necessary to extract bogged-down wagons. This particular area near the Missouri River is not on the Mormon Trail—rather it suggests what a dried-out stretch of a muddy trail might have looked like.



Because one suffers and does not deserve it is no reason we shall suffer always. I say we may live to see it right yet. However, if we do not, our children will.” The Mormons welcomed such rare friends.

Brigham Young had originally intended to push on to the Rocky Mountains in 1846, but when 543 men and boys became part of the Army of the West in the war with Mexico, the move was delayed. The Mormons, wanting to put one more river between themselves and their real and imagined enemies, asked for permission from the government to establish their main camp in present-day Nebraska. They began to cross “Old Muddy Face” (the Missouri) that July.

Before settling at what became known as “Winter Quarters” the Mormons tried out two other camp sites. The first one was quickly abandoned. The second one, called Cutler’s Park, lasted just long enough for it to later be officially designated “Nebraska’s First City.” Finally, in early September the real Winter Quarters, the “Mormon Valley Forge,” was established.



The Mormons reached the east bank of the Missouri River near Council Bluffs, Iowa, endless weeks and some 265 miles after leaving the Mississippi. Many Mormons stayed in the Council Bluffs’ area until at least 1853, and established communities and ferries there.



*"In loving memory of six thousand Pioneers who died on the plains between 1846-1869. The bodies of nearly six hundred of these brave souls were buried within this sacred enclosure."*

*— Inscription on Mormon Cemetery Gates, Winter Quarters.*

The Winter Quarters area was not only a permanent camp, but a preparation site for what the brethren knew would be a massive and difficult exodus in 1847. It quickly became a city of 3,483 people and 631 homes—some of logs, some of "prairie marble" (sod), and some mere dugouts. The log cabins and dugouts so hastily constructed were drafty and cramped. Winds off the river increased the discomfort and disease. Cattle needed feed, the sick needed care and medicine, and the hungry—which included everyone—needed food.

Some of the men with large families such as Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball, built several houses. One large, six-room house was filled with six adult women, five adult men, and about ten children.

The leaders were also responsible for families of the men in the Mormon Battalion, and others on proselytizing missions. Some of Kimball's extended family lived all winter in tents or wagons. But spunky women like Louisa Barnes Pratt "paid a five-dollar gold piece" for her 10- by 12-foot sod house.

"Black canker," pneumonia, and scurvy were widespread, and the nearby cemetery had burials nearly every day. Some of the dead had to wait for graves to be dug. Rank held no privilege in Winter Quarters, and most families were stricken.

There was also contention, unhappiness, bickering, trials, apostasy, and concerns over the Omaha and Oto Indians in the area. Brigham Young, unaffected by neither Rousseau's romantic concern for the Noble Savage, nor the common belief that the only good Indian was a dead one, wisely decided it was cheaper to feed them than to fight them. Throughout Trail days Indians and Mormons generally lived in harmony.

This nine-foot-tall statue, located in the Winter Quarters Cemetery in North Omaha, Nebraska, commemorates the death of Mormons in the Winter Quarters' area from 1846 through 1853, and all along the Trail through 1868. One of the finest examples of Mormon art, this statue of a grieving couple was created by Avard Fairbanks. The front and rear gates of this historic cemetery are equally well executed.

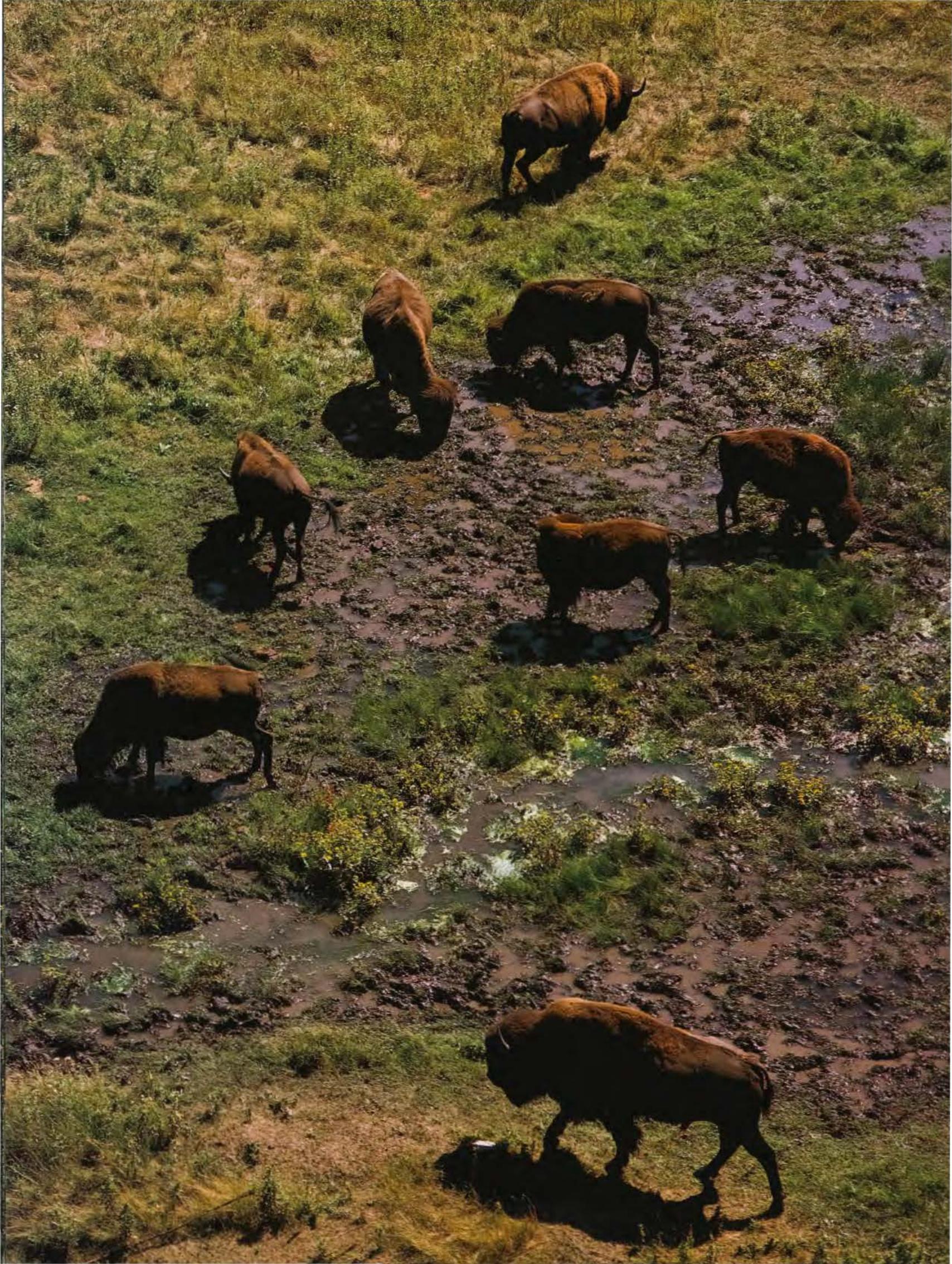


The Saints rejoiced with weddings, band concerts, songfests, festivals, choir practice, dances, quilting bees, and parties. They were entertained by a mystic Mormon "Indian Negro," who played the flute, fife, saucepan, rattler, and claimed to be Adam! Many journals comment on his visit. They made crafts, butchered hogs and cattle, bought and bartered for oxen, grain, food, tools, seeds, and wagons to head for the West. Several women taught school, and busy police chief Hosea Stout punished some rowdies with "18 hard lashes," and promised other boys a special party for cleaning guns.

In early April of 1847, when Brigham Young's pioneer group of 143 men, 3 women, 2 children, 72 wagons, 93 horses, 66 oxen, 52 mules, 19 cows, 17 dogs, and some chickens—all organized into units of 50s and 10s—prepared to leave, there was a feeling of adventure in the air. They crossed the Elk Horn and soon picked up the Platte River. The wagons (and two carriages), were packed, maps and travel literature checked, and teams assembled. The Saints were prepared—the rest was up to the Lord! "To Your Tents, O Israel."



This dramatic close-up of the statue in the Winter Quarters Cemetery clearly shows the sorrow of grieving parents as they bury their infant in a shallow grave dug in the frozen earth.



*“...I could stand on my wagon and see more than ten thousand buffalo.... The plains was perfectly black with them on both sides of the river.... O. P. Rockwell killed a two-year heifer which was good.*

*—Appleton Milo Harmon, 1847.*

In early May the pioneers spotted their first buffalo and could now use what was euphemistically called buffalo chips, *bois de vache*, or meadow muffins, for fuel. A typical song of the Trail was well known. “There’s a pretty little girl in the outfit ahead. Whoa Haw Buck and Jerry Boy.... Look at her now with a pout on her lips. As daintily with her fingertips, she picks for the fire some buffalo chips....” Aside from the aesthetics of the situation, buffalo dung, which was mainly dried grass, burned well, but a great deal was needed for it burned very fast.

The Saints were impressed with the magnificent bison which provided so many with so much on the plains. Some said the Indians found a use for all parts except the voice. They especially welcomed the fresh meat which they boiled, fried, roasted, or dried into jerky. The skin was worn or used for cover, and the fat was rendered down, molded into cakes, and used for candles.

Howard Egan said buffalo candles “burn beautifully.” Wilford Woodruff wrote that “The face of the earth was alive & moving like the waves of the sea.” Buffalo stampedes were dangerous and caused a few deaths. Some Mormon women once saved their camp by shaking their aprons and sunbonnets and shouting at a herd that got too close. The Saints also ate antelope, deer, geese, rabbit, prairie hen, fish, berries, and whatever else they could gather or catch.

The Mormons were eager to hunt. “We were delighted with buffalo hunting. Our eyes had never beheld such a sight—the whole country was covered with them,” one journal noted.

Capt. John C. Fremont referred to buffalo and Indians as the “poetry and life of the plains.” Buffalo (bison) such as these were a department store of supplies to many Indian tribes, and a welcome source of food to Mormons and other westering Americans. Mormons were under strict orders to kill only as necessary, waste nothing, and not to hunt for sport.



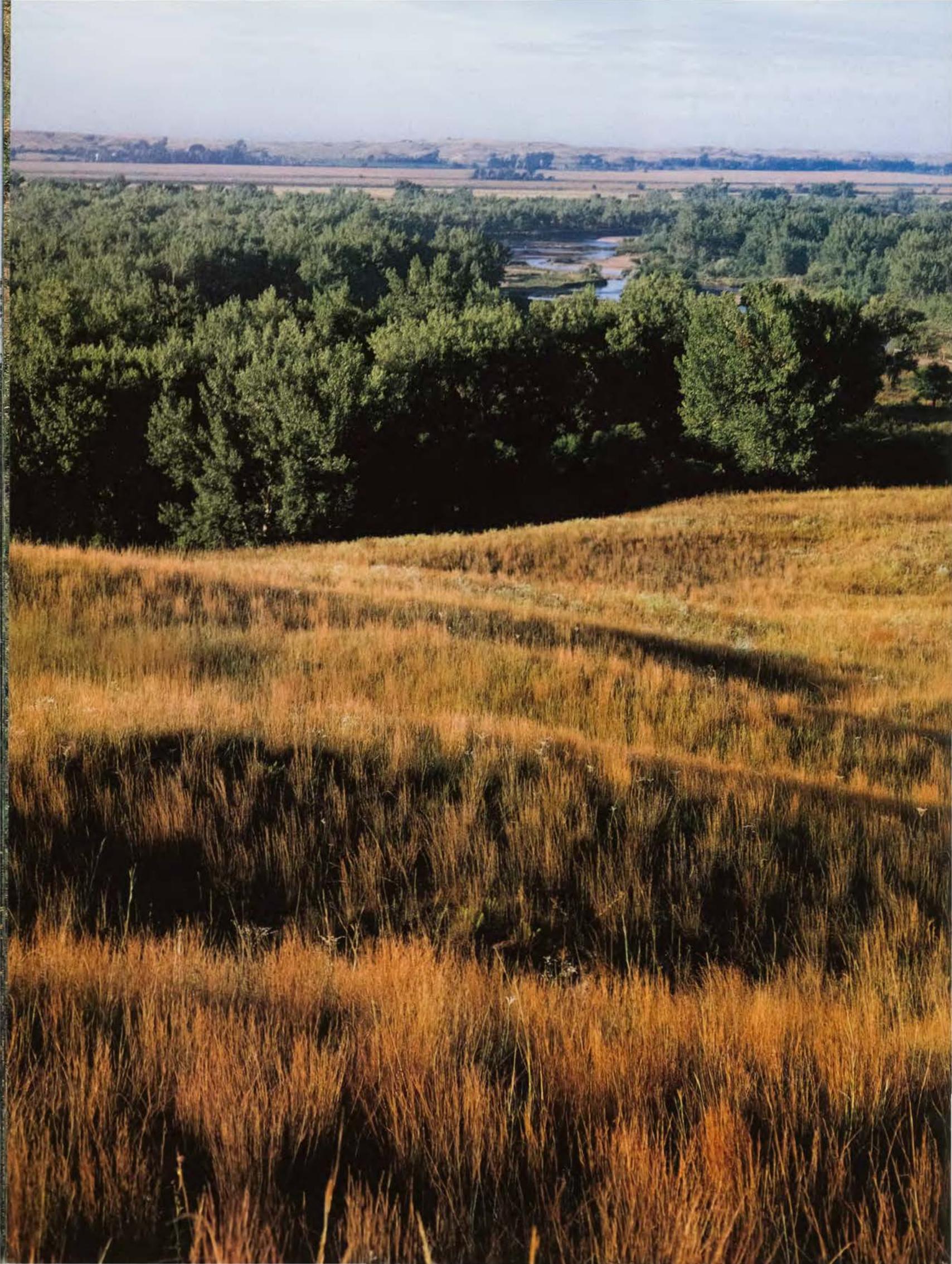
Near here emigrants passed the 100th Meridian and entered the anteroom of the Great American Desert, beyond which there is insufficient rainfall for agriculture without irrigation. To solve this problem in their new homeland the Mormons held all water rights in common, channeled the streams, dug a delivery system, and distributed irrigation rights by lot.

The pioneers began to meet more Indians, especially the Sioux, who were often clothed for battle. They also witnessed their first prairie fire. This dreaded scourge of the plains, sometimes caused by Indians stampeding buffalo or dry lightning, and whipped by winds, could rage 20 feet high, singe buffalo, and overtake a horse. They could not outrun it and had no time to build backfires, so they took their wagons to an island in the Platte and waited it out.

The Platte River, full of quicksand and sandbars, was nearly useless for navigation and seldom much of a food source. Nevertheless it provided the most essential need to the migrating Mormons—water. Also, it went in exactly the right direction—West!



PHOTO BY JED CLARK, COURTESY OF CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS.



*"We passed over sand bluffs which were decidedly the worst we had encountered and had to double team all our wagons. The mules were brave little fellows to pull."*

*—Frederick Piercy, 1853.*

During the spring of 1847, when Mormon wagons began rolling up the Platte River valley toward the Rocky Mountains, they had relatively easy terrain. Eventually, however, they reached the place where the sand hills came down to the river, and the teams had their first major encounter with heavy pulling. Hosea Stout was there on July 5, 1848. "Hard on teams today passing over sandy bluffs," he wrote. Several wagons were upset here.

Wagons were the major cause of accidents and the occasion for many deaths for women and girls who were often dragged under the wheels when their long dresses—totally inappropriate for the Trail—were caught on various parts of the wagons. At times children fell under the oxen. Six-year-old Lucretia Cox was killed by oxen in 1848. Draft animals could also kick, gore, and bite, and their waste harbored tetanus germs. But some pioneers had miraculous escapes from similar accidents.

Sanitation, especially the problem of human waste, was a serious Trail problem. The universal rule of the day was "Gents to the right, ladies to the left." If several sisters went together they could form privacy screens for each other by spreading wide their skirts. In camp there were usually "ditches" or latrines.

Beyond the sand hills the Mormons entered the broken lands of the Upper Missouri Basin and the scenery became varied and more interesting. Along this stretch on both sides of the Platte are some of the most famous and dramatic topographic features of the trails. Courthouse Rock, Chimney Rock, and Scotts Bluff guarded the Oregon Trail, while Indian Look Out Point and Ancient Bluff Ruins sentined the Mormon Trail. The pioneers began to talk about

As in Iowa, there are few good Mormon Trail traces in Nebraska. These wagon ruts in the sand hills on the north side of the North Platte River are the best. They were created because here the sand hills come right down to the river making it impossible to continue along the easy floodplain of the river. The only way past this barrier was to drive up and over the sand hills—a terrible job for oxen and handcarts.



the "romantic scenery," and they marveled at "Jupiter's four moons" seen through a telescope. They may have also noted the few celestial bodies mentioned in the Bible—Arcturus, Orion, and the Pleiades. The sidereal splendors of the night, without modern haze, must have been awesome.

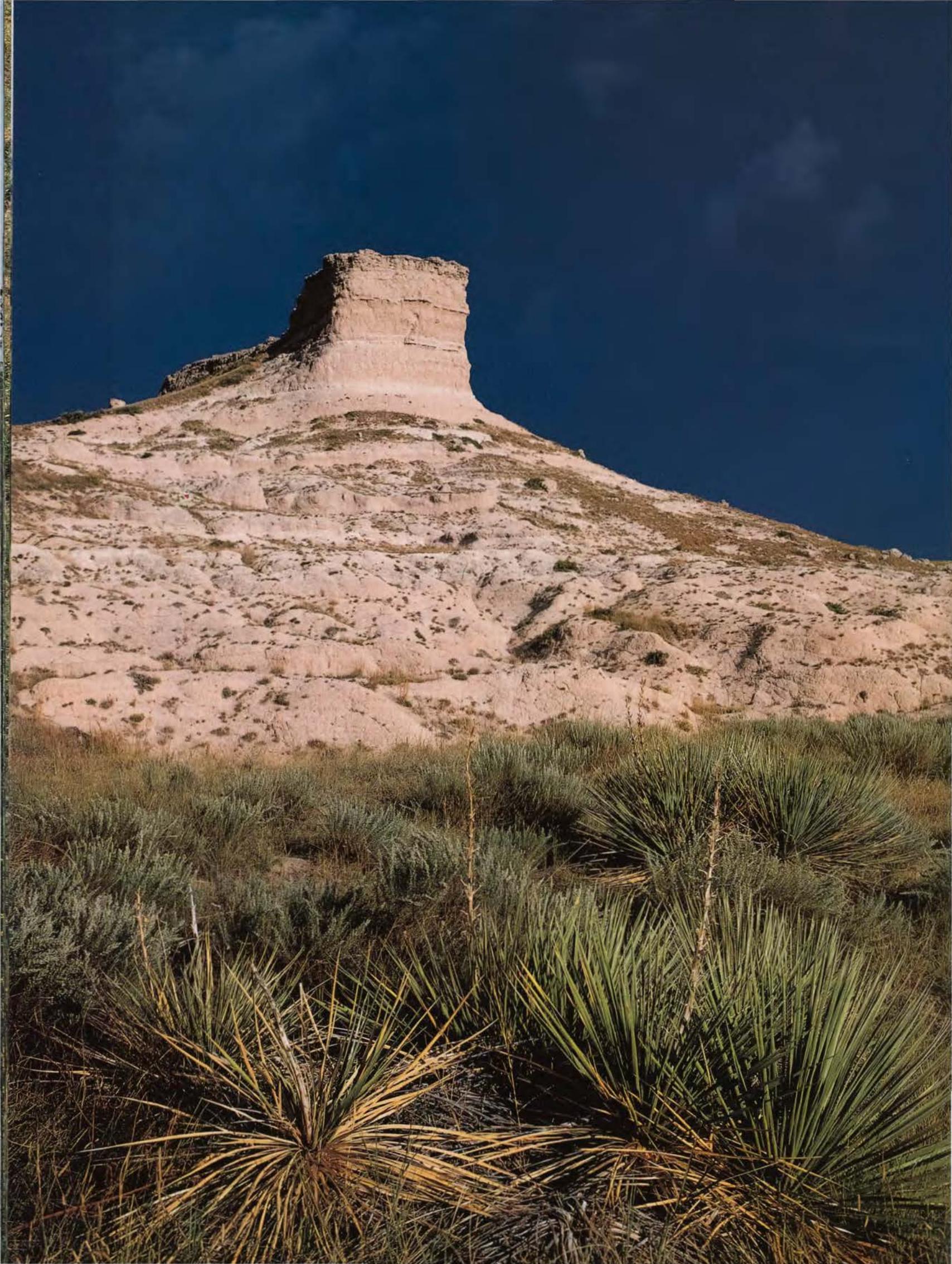
It was also in this area that William Clayton, with the help of Orson Pratt and Appleton Harmon, devised an "odometer," or mileage registering device which made the job of estimating distances traveled much easier and more accurate. Prior to that mileage had been determined "by-guess-and-by-golly," or by counting the rotations of a red rag tied to a wagon wheel. The remarkably accurate measurements in Clayton's popular *Emigrants' Guide* were made possible by this odometer.



In season the Mormon Trail passed through a variegated garden of flowers, partly relieving the tedium of travel. Then, as now, one can enjoy the prairie goldenpea, primrose, goldenrod, verbena, dotted gayfeather, and snow-on-the-mountain. The delicate and exquisite flowering plant shown here (some might call it a weed) was seen opposite Chimney Rock in present-day Nebraska.

To the careful observer there was a great deal of wildlife along the Trail—from the regal buffalo to the creative and shy spider.





*“Our caravan was encamped...when death began to invade [our] ranks.... The suddenness and the violence of the attack, together with the fact that the first victims were among our friends...made a profound impression upon my mind....”*

—Frederick Loba, 1854.

The dreaded cholera left few camps unscathed in the early 1850s. It was the worst enemy of westering people. The most celebrated grave of some 6,000 Mormon Trail deaths is that of Rebecca Winters who succumbed to this killer near Scotts Bluffs in 1852. William Reynolds scratched her name on an extra wheel rim, and she became part of history. His little daughter Ellis held a lighted candle as he inscribed “Rebecca Winters, age 50 years.” Then he prophetically added: “This will be a means of identifying this grave in years to come.”

Some companies lost 20 percent of their camp to this disease. Other deaths were caused by childbirth, consumption, measles, whooping cough, stampedes, drowning, lightning, starvation, exhaustion, gunshot wounds, wagon-related accidents, and a few by Indian attacks. Eventually the camps ran out of boards for coffins and the deceased were placed in blankets, hollowed-out logs, or between pieces of bark. Small children sometimes were buried in bread boxes or dresser drawers. Most bodies were covered with rocks, if any were handy.

The wagons often rolled out of camp over the graves to obliterate all traces and help prevent wolves or Indians from discovering the burial and desecrating the dead. Thomas C. Griggs wrote in 1861: “Grandma Foreman was run over by a wagon, burial by starlight without changing her clothes. No coffin or box and in a shallow grave marked by a buffalo skull on which penciled an epitaph.”

The pioneers of 1847 discovered an interesting formation near this area and named it “Ancient Bluff Ruins”. Some of them climbed the bluffs, wrote their names on a buffalo skull, and left it there. Others felt inspired to pray. There is a marker near here com-

memorating the historic 1836 trek of the first white women to travel the North Platte route, Narcissa Whitman and Eliza Spalding.

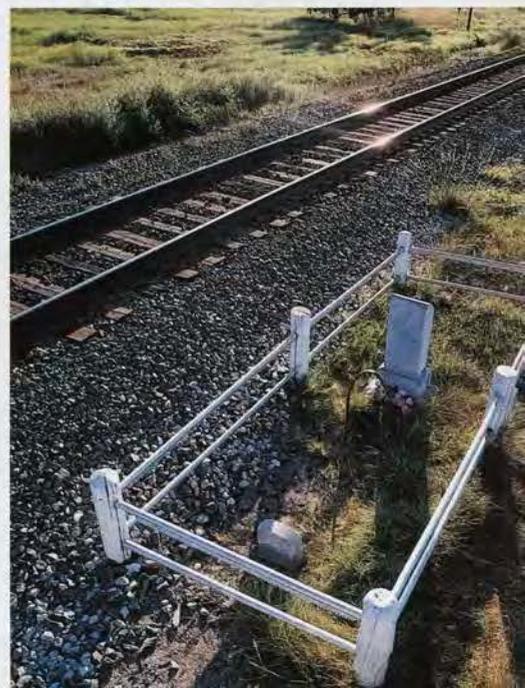
Rattlesnakes were seen in the bluffs. One “coiled itself up in a fighting attitude and vomited out about a tablespoonful of blood...” Emigrants were also plagued by snakes, poisonous spiders, scorpions, ticks, fleas, grasshoppers, gnats, mosquitoes, flies, and lice. English converts, however, were enchanted by the fireflies, a new sight for them.

Near here Young and company encountered and camped with a party of “Dacotah Indians with The White Flag of Peace,” who wanted to trade and get acquainted. Tobacco and bread were given and the pipe of peace smoked. The brethren wrote a letter for them to show to other camps regarding their “good behavior.”



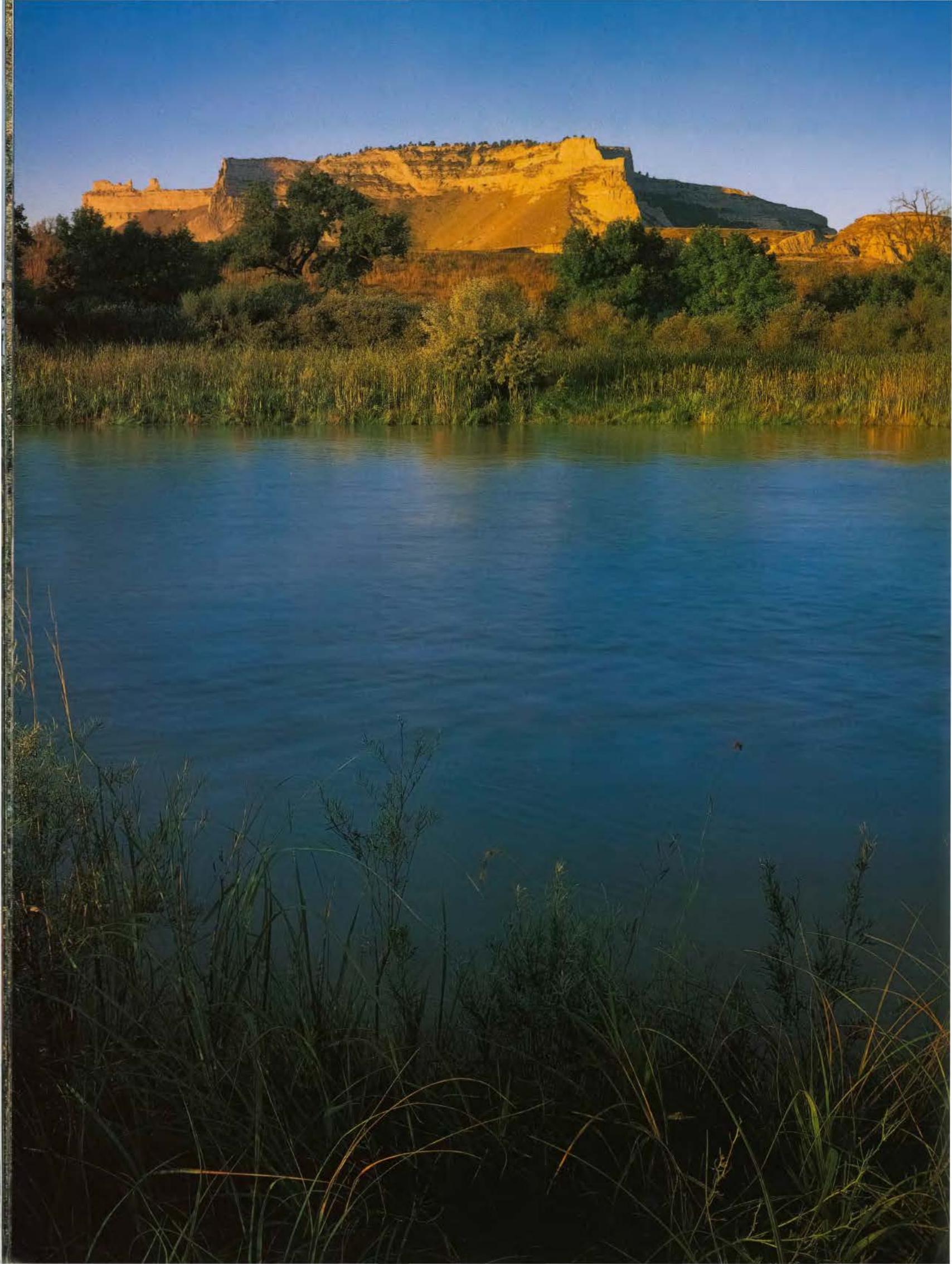
Most Mormon trail-side graves, up to 6,000 of them, have long since disappeared.

The famous Rebecca Winters' burial site is one of the few now known. Discovered by railroad surveyors in 1902, it is marked by an incised wagon rim that has withstood the ravages of time. Rebecca was a cholera victim in 1852.



The Ancient Bluff Ruins, so named by English Mormons who thought they resembled ruined castles, were the most dramatic landmark on the Trail in Nebraska. Many Mormons climbed them for the view. Even today one can look farther and see less from these bluffs than anywhere on the Mormon Trail.





*"There was a wild weird romance about the country like some dream, some imaginary scene materialized. During the evening sounds of music from different parts of the camp seem strangely harmonious with the almost death like silence of these uninhabited regions."*

—John Lingren, 1863.

The massive and romantic Scotts Bluffs on the Oregon Trail, which the pioneers had seen shimmering on the horizon for several days, generated much comment in Mormon journals. Albert P. Rockwood called them "bold and magnificent." It was here in 1847 that the men in the pioneer camp began to become a little "too worldly" for Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball. On May 28, Kimball witnessed card playing and other "unseemly" activities in the tents and wagons, and Brigham Young was disturbed with the same behavior in wagons near him. Some men were also square dancing with each other. Young sent for Kimball about midnight and they decided the men needed "the word and will of the Lord."

The next day Young convened a special "prayer circle" of the twelve apostles present and a few other brethren. They went out on the bluffs guarded by the trusted O. P. Rockwell, onetime bodyguard to Joseph Smith and frontiersman extraordinaire. The "sermon" Young later preached to the men has gone down in Mormon history. The whole camp was called to repentance, and it was a changed group of men afterwards. Young had little trouble with "light mindedness" after that incident. Appleton Harmon noted: "This day [I am] twenty-seven.... On it I received quite a lesson...." Typical old-time Mormons could take, even thrive on, chastisement from the proper authorities.

But Mormons did have a sense of humor and liked to engage in mock trials and elections. James Davenport, for example, was accused of "blocking the highway and turning ladies out of the way." One brother was voted the most even tempered man in

Most Mormons did not go directly past Scotts Bluff, which is on the Oregon Trail south of the North Platte River. From their Trail north of that river, however, they could clearly see the dramatic formation as viewed here, and often noted it in their journals. The bluffs, now a National Monument, were named after Hiram Scott, a trapper who died in the vicinity about 1828.



camp—"always cross and quarrelsome."

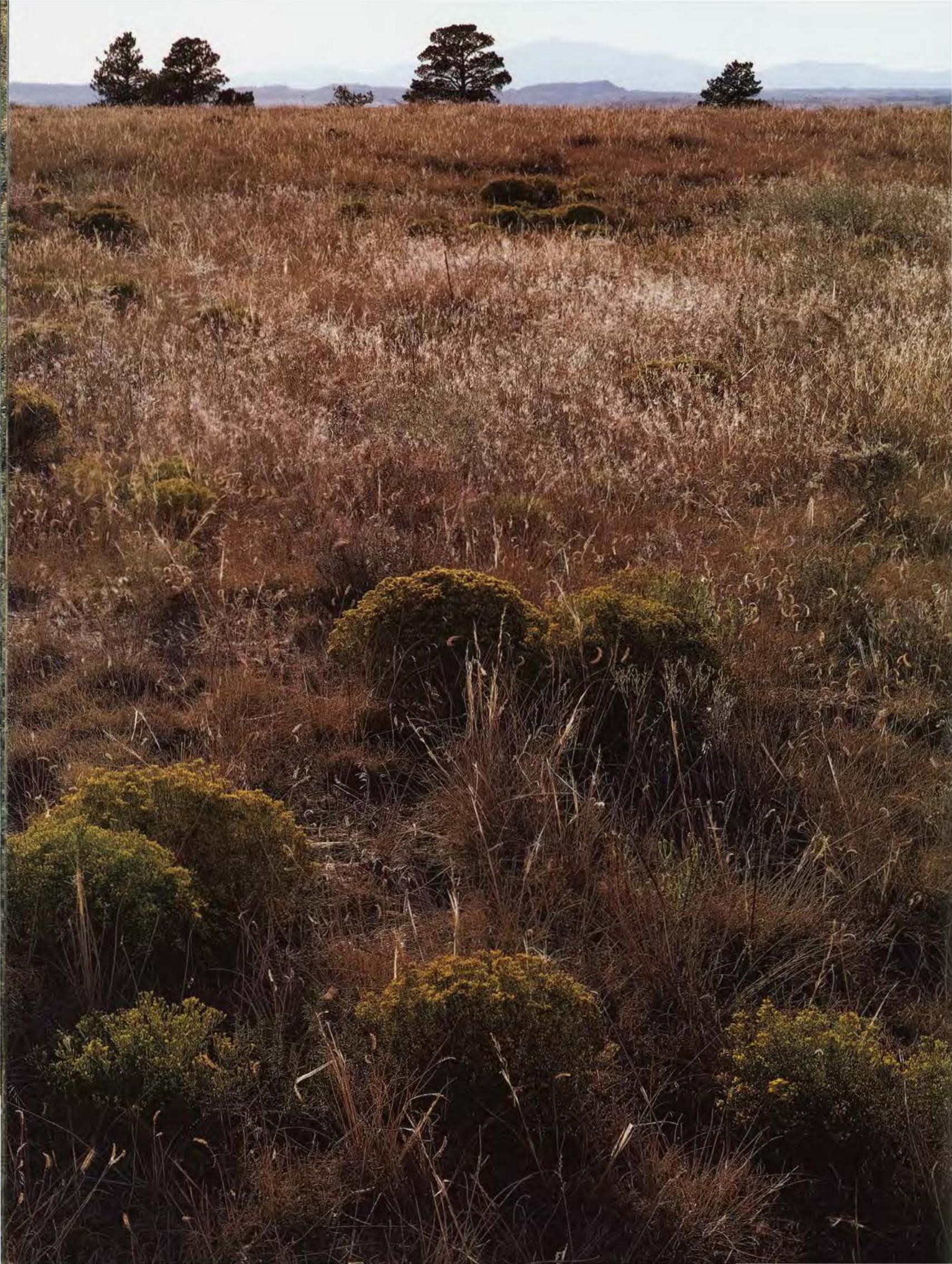
Mormon children were intrigued with the numerous prairie dogs along the Trail and tried unsuccessfully to make pets out of them. Little pioneers did have pets on the Trail such as cats, dogs, birds, chickens, doves, and rabbits. They also had dolls, sewing cards, balls, games, pocket knives, and other toys for amusement. They enjoyed picking up the pretty rocks and looking at the birds flying overhead.

Emigrants discovered a variety of flora. Orson Pratt comments on the many "herbs" they saw. "The air has been perfumed...by...herbs." He also announced that "prickly pear...has a very good flavour..."

Along here the pioneers met different Indian tribes. William Clayton comments on the costumes and decorations they wore, and twenty-year-old Sara Alexander, awed by the character of the Native Americans she met, left this view: "I shall always be glad I have seen the Indians in their primitive grandeur..."



The ubiquitous prairie dog was seen, all across the high plains. Many Mormons noted their playfulness and unusual barking call, but the multitude of burrows they dug were a danger to draft animals and horses that could break a leg by stepping into one.



*"Started for Fort Laramie.... [Visited] Mr. Bordeaux the principal man at the fort.... Snow was distinctly seen on the top of Laramie Peak with the naked eye which is upwards of 100 miles distant."*

—Thomas Bullock, 1847.

Fort Laramie, founded in 1834, was the first permanent human habitation the 1847 pioneers had seen since leaving Winter Quarters, and Bullock commented that "all were anxious to see an habitation once more." Here, the Mormons finally crossed the Platte River and picked up the Oregon Trail, the longest wagon road in history, which they would follow for 397 miles to Fort Bridger. In Trail days no one crossed the Platte unless absolutely necessary. Whatever side of the Platte emigrants started on, they stayed on as far as possible. Most Mormons started on and stayed on the north side to Fort Laramie, beyond which it was difficult to travel the north side. (Other Mormons started on the south side—that is on the Oregon Trail—and there they remained.)

It had been a most successful trek from the Missouri River so far, much more so than the trek across Iowa, for they were more experienced, better provisioned, and organized. They had suffered no deaths, little illness, and lost only four horses—two by accident, two taken by Indians.

James Bordeaux of Fort Laramie, was impressed when the pioneers asked permission to visit his quarters, and Mormon journals noted that Bordeaux called them the "best behaved Company that had passed there." The pioneers met several Oregon-bound companies at the fort and from that time, as long as they remained on the Oregon Trail, "the Main Street of the Old West," they competed with them for choice camping sites and feed for animals.

Their stopover at the fort left the pioneers spiritually and emotionally enriched and those with poetry in their souls could visualize this scene described by Sara Alexander in an 1859 Mormon camp. "After the suppers...there would be prayers and discourses

Nearing Fort Laramie, the emigrants got their first indication of the rigors ahead when they saw the imposing mountains they must either skirt or cross. The 10,272-foot-high Laramie Peak towered above the Black Hills, known today as the Laramie Mountains. Here we see the general terrain of this area with the famous peak on the horizon.



[then] singing with the accompaniment of guitars, violins and cornets.... These evenings recall memories of the most spiritual and soul-inspiring religious sentiments I EVER experienced.... Alone in the stillness with the Supreme Ruler over all, in that apparently boundless space. THOSE were the SERMONS that impressed me."

Overloaded wagons were being lightened by this time. One historian wrote: "The trail began to present an amazing litter of dead animals, strewn wagons parts, clothing and equipment. Emigrants who could not bear to see such waste, overloaded their wagons each day only to be forced to abandon them all again before nightfall."

Most emigrants rested themselves, their teams, and repaired their wagons at the fort for the toughest part of the trek was still before them. They could see Laramie Peak which portended the rigors of traversing unforgiving western mountains that seemed to call out for "men to match my mountains." The pioneers did not know it, but dangerous Mexican Hill was just down the road!

The Bachelor Officer's Quarters depict the restoration of Fort Laramie, built in 1841 by the American Fur Company, to its early post-Civil War appearance. The first of several forts along the Trail, it was here the Mormons crossed the Platte River and picked up the Oregon Trail proper.





*"At 12 o'clock we started on our journey, following the wagon road...the bluffs are very high and come near the river.... After seven and three-quarter miles from Laramie we descended a very steep pitch or hill and had to lock our wheels for the first time in six weeks."*

*—Howard Egan, 1847.*

Beyond Fort Laramie the pioneers could take the river or the plateau route. They chose the latter which soon brought them to the steepest decline along the whole Trail—the precipitous Mexican Hill. According to Clayton, "The descent being over rock and very steep, makes it dangerous to wagons, but it is not lengthy."

Going down Mexican Hill to the Platte River valley one Mormon declared that "If a tin cup fell out of a wagon it would land in front of the oxen." (The origin of the hill's name is not clear.) Soon after descending this steep hill many emigrants stopped to carve their names on a huge formation of sandstone known today as Register Cliff. Although few Mormons left names behind, they did note this landmark. William Ajax wrote in 1862: "There was a cliff...in a more advanced stage of petrification than those we saw yesterday, but yet so soft that any person with even a leaden knife, might engrave his name deeply in it in a very little space of time...there must have been hundreds of names engraved on it."

About two miles beyond Register Cliff, Mormon wagons helped deepen some of the most dramatic Trail ruts in the world—the famous Guernsey Ruts—which are at least four feet deep in sandstone. Today Trail travelers get an impressive view. Not even time will eliminate that monument to westering American "Empire Builders."

Wheelbarrows were occasionally used by emigrants heading for California or Oregon, but helping to deepen those ruts in 1856 was a uniquely Mormon travel experiment known as the Handcart Companies.

Mexican Hill, near present-day Guernsey, Wyoming, was one of the most difficult descents along the Trail. Here the Mormons dropped down from the bench land out of Fort Laramie to the floodplain of the North Platte River.

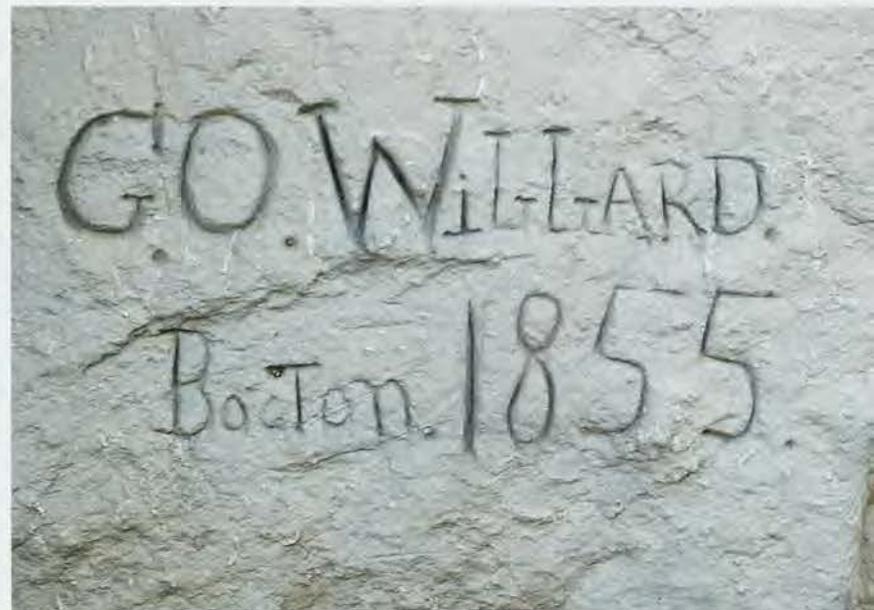
Emigrants, however, could enjoy that easy floodplain for only a short distance before they again found themselves in rugged terrain. Their wagons, forced to go "single file Indian style," eventually cut ruts four feet deep in solid rock.



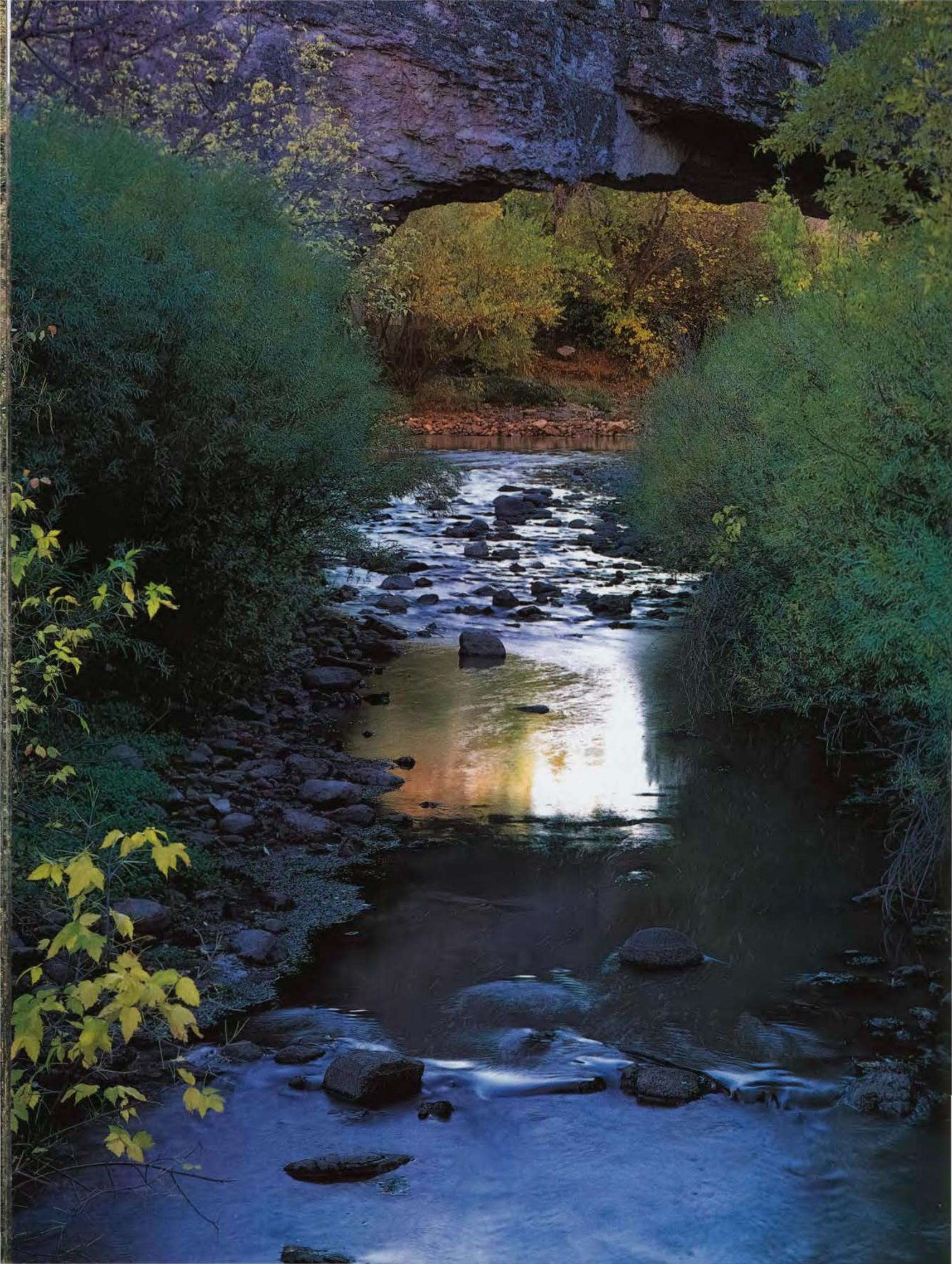
Many emigrants were weakened by short food rations by the time they got to these ruts, and some sick had already been buried.

Nearby is Warm Springs Canyon, often called the "Emigrant's washtub." It was a favorite place for Mormon women to wash because the water, about 70 degrees, was warmer than the cold river. Some seven miles down the road is "Porter's Rock," a natural formation and landmark of eroded sandstone named after the famous Mormon frontiersman Orrin Porter Rockwell. Beyond this are some springs variously known as Mormon Springs or Heber Springs, named for Heber C. Kimball, who first saw them.

Emigrants soon discovered salmon and trout in this region which increased the pleasure and diet of the pioneers. Fishing became a favorite pastime while camped at night—they even ate fish for breakfast. It seems clear at this point that the Saints were heading straight for the Valley of the Great Salt Lake. Most of the questions they asked of the mountain men they met were concerned with that area. Their Zion was becoming a reality.



Many emigrants left their names behind at opportune places. Beginning in about 1847 one of the most popular name-carving sites eventually became known as Register Cliff. Hundreds of names were easily incised in this mile-long formation of soft sandstone, but few early names remain.



*"We passed an arch of stone which stretched entirely across the river and over hung by very big hills of red sand stone. The arch was more than 20 ft. high. Passing up the stream we found that it broke through the high mountain in a rough & rugged current. There was fresh sign of Bear."*

—Hosea Stout, 1848.

Although somewhat off the Trail, many Mormons went over to see the marvel of nature known today as Ayers Natural Bridge. It was one of the famous "sights" to see. The emigrants commented on the abundance of wild grasses for good feed, and the scenery cheered the women in camp because they were seeing trees.

While there were three women and two children in the pioneer camp of 1847, we know very little of what they were thinking as they traveled the unknown regions westward. Harriet Young helped her husband Lorenzo keep his journal, and she interjected a thought or two about the mental and physical health of the sisters, and commented on the "romantic scenery." Harriet wrote on May 26, that she had "set a hen." Did her eggs hatch? Did these eggs survive the rough Rockies, and were her chicks among the eight in the valley that August?

By this time Harriet was exhausted, being about five months pregnant. (Two months after arriving in the valley she had a son, but he soon died.) Harriet's daughter Clara, married to Brigham Young, was along and so was Ellen Sanders, married to Heber Kimball. Ellen was three months pregnant when she reached the valley. Her infant also succumbed.

The famous Oregon Trail grave of nine-year-old Joel Hembree is not far from the arch. Hembree's was the first wagon-related accident, the first fatality of the Jesse Applegate party of 1843, and his grave is the earliest marked burial connected with the Oregon Trail. Thomas Bullock saw the original stone four years later and wrote: "A few rods from the Camp

was a Grave, several Stones piled on it, on one of which was written the name 'J. Umbree 1843."

On one occasion several pioneers, including Young and Kimball, were scouting for coal near the arch, and had actually found some (rare coal deposits were prized as fuel, and much preferred to dung), when suddenly they encountered *Ursus horribilis*—a grizzly bear—the most dangerous animal in the American West. (Once in the early days of San Francisco some "sports" arranged a contest between a tiger and a grizzly. The bear cuffed and bit the great cat to death in less than a minute.) This sow had cubs and immediately attacked the intruders. Five rifle shots did not even slow her down, and the brethren escaped only by clambering up some close cliffs. Luckily for the men, the grizzly is the only member of the bear family that is a poor climber.



Emigrants did not go west of the Missouri River until "grass grew and water flowed." Many grasses, including the golden prairie sandreed, grew along the Trail and ranged in height from near stubble to that in which a person could get lost. They provided draft animals and stock with vital forage.

Few, if any, emigrant wagons ever went near Ayers Natural Bridge located in a rugged canyon. The bridge, one of the great beauty spots and "things to see" along the whole Trail, was, however, only one and a half miles southwest of the Trail, so it was accessible for those emigrants who wished to ride over to it. The 20-foot-high, 90-foot-wide span is unique in that it is the only such formation in the U.S. with a stream, LaPrele Creek, flowing underneath.





*"President Young...stripped himself and went to work with all his strength, assisted by Willard Richards and other brethren, and made a first rate raft of White Pine and White Cotton Wood Raft."*

*—Thomas Bullock, 1847.*

Fort Caspar itself, 1858-67, was never particularly important to the Mormons, and few mentioned it in their journals. The fort's site on the Platte, however, definitely was. In 1847, the Mormons built the first commercial ferry here at "last crossing," where most emigrants crossed for the last time and left the river.

Mormons and other emigrants had enjoyed thinking up insults for the shallow, meandering Platte River. The consensus was, it was a mile wide, a foot deep, flowed upside down, was too thick to drink, too thin to plow, and would make a pretty good stream if it flowed on its side. Without the Platte, however, it would have been much more difficult to have settled the West. Here the Mormons started cross country to pick up the Sweetwater River, which Greg Franzwa has dubbed "the world's friendliest river."

Some of the brethren got invited to a delightful breakfast from an Oregon Trail camp near here of "Bacon, light fried Biscuits, good Coffee with Sugar & then Milk..." It was a rare treat to eat "from a Woman's Cooking."

Soon after "last crossing" the Mormons came to a horrendous stretch of road about 60 miles long, which became known as "Hell's Reach." The campsites were bad, the water worse, and stretches of alkali flats soon slowed the poor oxen down. Many were driven beyond their normal strengths and "gave up the ghost" at this point. The stench of dead animals was ever present, and many of those nearly dead were abandoned by their masters because they slowed down the march westward.

Along this portion of the Trail in 1850 a Sister Butterfield lost an ox, but discovered one abandoned

Fort Caspar, built in 1858 and abandoned in 1867, was a key element in securing emigrant travel and communication along the Sweetwater River section of the Trail, and the second important military post visited by the Mormons. The area was frequently called "last crossing" because here most emigrants finally left the Platte River and headed for the Sweetwater River. The site, if not the fort, was especially important to the Mormons because it was here in 1847 they established a commercial ferry.



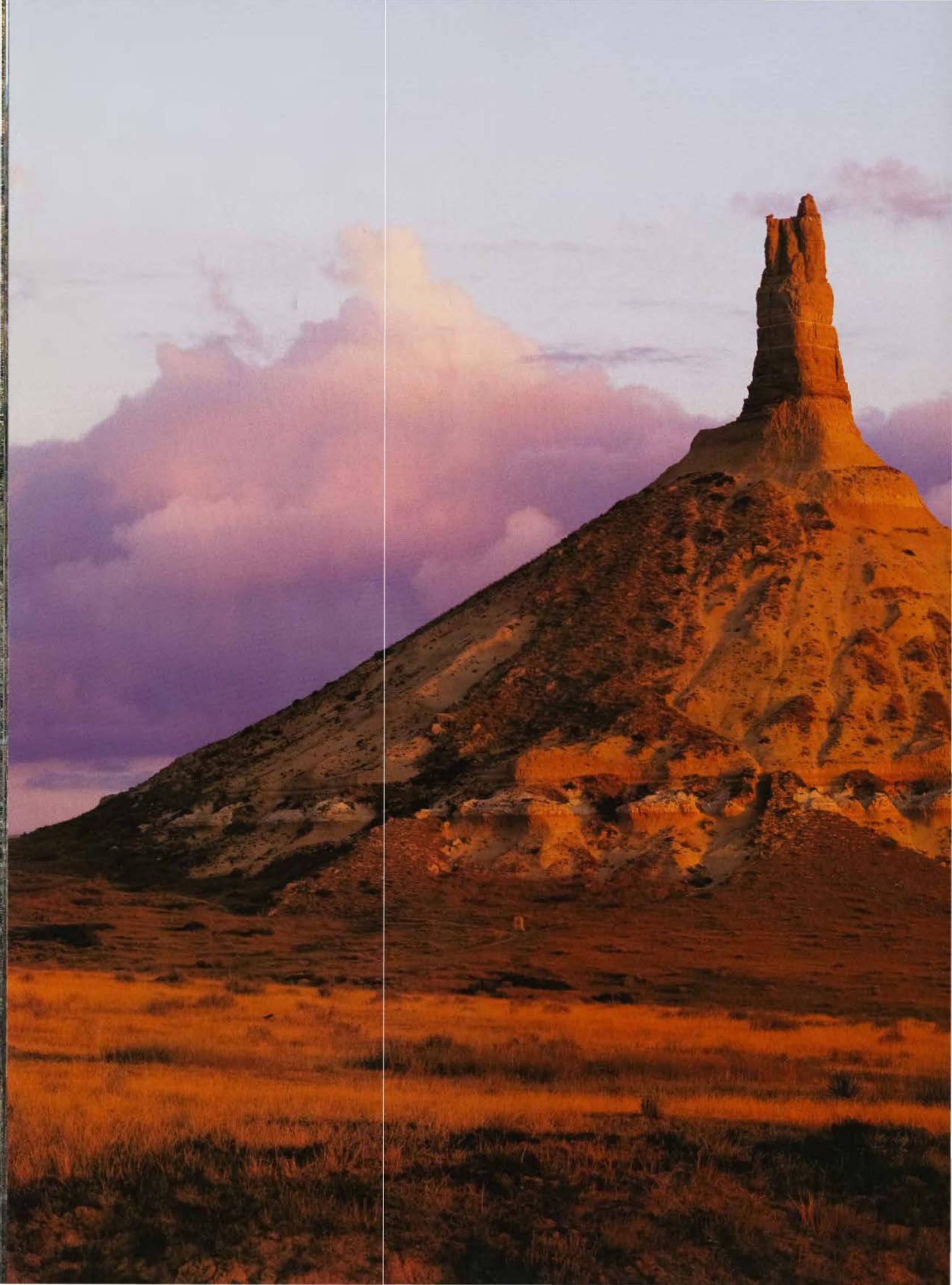
by another company. She wanted to keep the emaciated animal, but the brethren were against it. Sister Butterfield kept it anyway, hoping for a miracle, which she got. "[She] drove him along...[and] today he travels well..."

Mary Fielding Smith's celebrated ox incident of 1848 was also in this area. The beast lay down and refused to move. She requested the men to administer to the animal which revived and pulled her wagon on into the valley. Previously, in Iowa, Heber C. Kimball's horse had been bitten by a rattlesnake, and he administered to it, saying it was "just as proper to lay hands on a horse or an ox...as it was to a human being, both being creatures of His creation..."

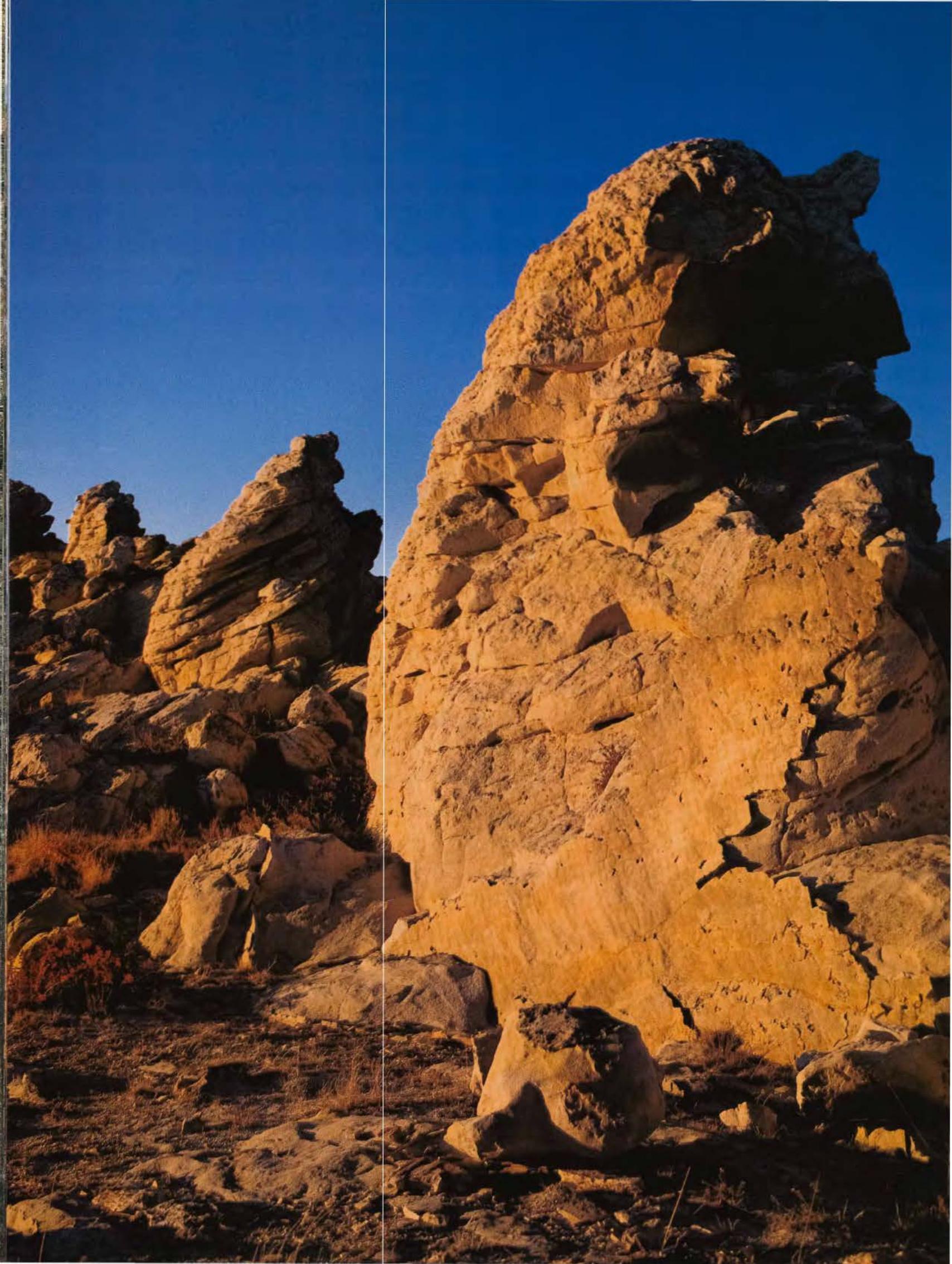


Occasionally Mormon emigrants experimentally planted seeds along the Trail for the benefit of those following. Along with other seeds they planted corn such as shown here at the Ft. Caspar stockade.

Overleaf: Chimney Rock in present-day Nebraska, was the most famous landmark on the Oregon Trail.







*"We came to Devil's Backbone, a long range of rocks, [which] looks like it had been thrown up from beneath...pointing up like ice in a jamb."*

—Elsie Barrett, 1863.

Weary teamsters and tired oxen struggled onward despite the difficult, rocky terrain. Many journals commented on the hordes of grasshoppers that had helped deplete the area of grass. Still, the optimism remained high in camp for they knew the Sweetwater River was just around the bend. The ground here proved to be miry, "smelled bad," was swampy, and many oxen got "buried in the mud." Mosquitoes and "Gad flies" were numerous, and both oxen and humans were plagued for miles. The water along this route was so bad that even the cattle refused to drink. Most of the time they had to use sage for firewood here because buffalo chips were scarce and so was wood.

Among the several landmarks along this part of the Trail were the Avenue of Rocks and the Devil's Backbone. Today, the quarter-mile-long Avenue is gone, a victim of road widening. According to Howard Egan, "About eight miles from [Willow Springs] there is a ridge of sharp pointed rocks, running parallel with the road for nearly a quarter of a mile." The Devil's Backbone remains, however, and some names carved there by the emigrants can still be found.

Next was Willow Springs, the only good water and campground between the Platte and Sweetwater rivers. Beyond these springs was Prospect Hill, so called because from its summit emigrants could see the gentle valley of the Sweetwater, giving them hope and "good prospects" for better water and an easier road. Clayton describes the view: "From the top can be seen a vast extent of country to the south, west, and north.... In the distance to the southwest can be seen a small body of water which we suppose to be a

part of the Sweet Water River."

The Sweetwater had been dubbed *Eau Sucree* because, according to one story, some French trappers lost a pack mule loaded with sugar there, but more probably because it was the first good tasting water in many miles and such a contrast to the awful brackish mess they had just driven through. This small beneficent stream, like the Platte, not only provided water but went in exactly the right direction—West! It flowed for 93 miles to South Pass, making it possible for travelers to reach their destinations in Utah, Oregon, or California in one season, thereby avoiding a winter in such hostile country.

Wilford Woodruff could only offer praise: "The Sweetwater River is truly sweet to man and beast after traveling through so much ground covered with salt, potash, and alkaline water. We turned out our horses in good feed, got supper which was Bacon, Buffalo, corn bread, coffee, milk and lay down upon the ground and spent the night."

William Clayton's famous "Emigrants' Guide" noted: "The road here passes between high rocks, forming kind of avenue or gateway, for a quarter of a mile." Here we see the well-known site at sunset.



Although this area and formation is usually called "Avenue of Rocks," it is actually the "Devil's Backbone," a half-mile-long formation of tilted bedrock intersecting the Trail at right angles.

Regrettably, modern highway workers bladed away most of the avenue to widen the road. During Trail days emigrants enjoyed thinking up fanciful names for unusual landmarks. Today, careful searching reveals emigrant signatures on these rocks.





*"Independence rock was another novelty...a thousand names were inscribed on the rock, which proved we were not the first adventurers.... [We] left our names with the rest; as we descended we saw...water dripping down into a spring [and it was] the sweetest, coldest water I have ever tasted."*

—Louisa Barnes Pratt, 1848.

Few Trail spots elicited more comment than Independence Rock where the emigrants met the Sweetwater River. The rock was probably so named because some early trappers once celebrated the Fourth of July here. After enduring 60 miles of "Hell's Reach," everyone with any energy left now celebrated. The water, view, and scenery were greatly anticipated, and spirits were renewed as they scrambled all over looking for names of people they knew who had traveled that route. The Mormons held dances, picnics, and parties on the rock, and many of them went away with a small souvenir, including Patty Sessions.

Some of the brethren knelt in prayer in behalf of themselves and their wives and families. Fresh and welcome soft rainwater was found in depressions in the rock, where it can be found today. Some Mormon emigrants said the rock and environs looked as if "giants in by-gone days had taken them [the rocks] in wheelbarrows of tremendous size and dumped them on the ground." Some others thought it looked like a giant turtle.

Mary Richardson Walker—missionary to Oregon in 1838—picked up a rock from atop this oval-shaped granite dome, and it is now in the Oregon Historical Society's Museum in Oregon. The author—a direct descendent of Heber C. Kimball—also has a rock from this famous formation. Many of the pioneers carved or painted their names in black, red, or yellow on the rock and many are still visible today. Father Pierre-Jean DeSmet, the famous Jesuit missionary to the Indians, called Independence Rock "the Register of the Desert."

Independence Rock! One of the most famous landmarks on the entire Mormon Trail. It is an oval-shaped outcrop of granite 1,900 feet long, 700 wide, and about 130 high. Of the various stories regarding its name, the favorite is that some early trappers once celebrated the Glorious Fourth here. Mormons climbed it, danced on it, and painted and carved their names on it. The Trail passed between the rock and the Sweetwater River.



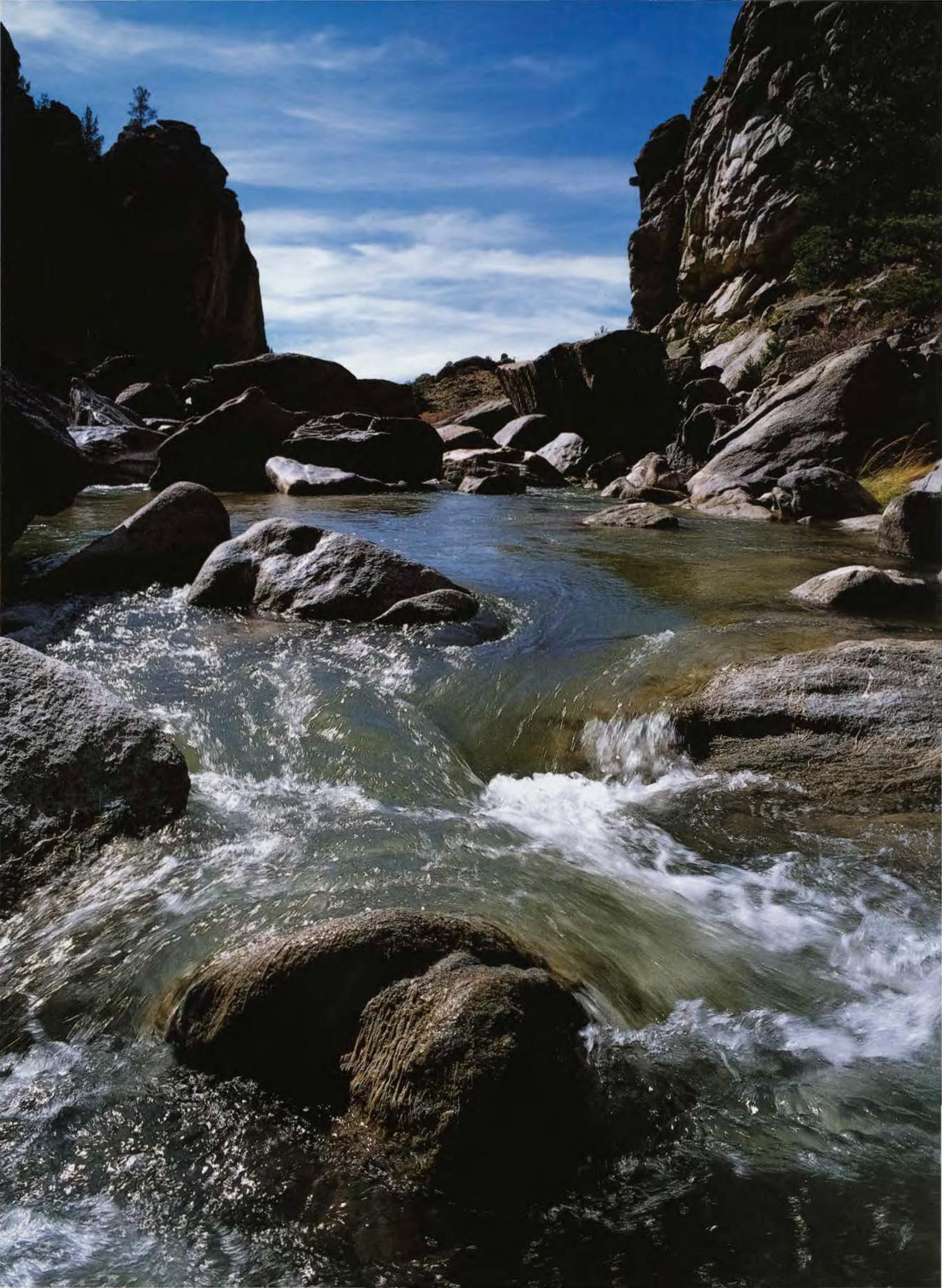
One Oregon pioneer even managed to get his wagon on top and "camped." What a dramatic view he must have had seeing the Sweetwater River meandering around the country, and Devil's Gate about six miles away. It would have been a dangerous spot during a lightning storm, however.

While camped near Independence Rock, Harriet Young baked a first-rate loaf of bread with saleratus (baking soda in natural form), which "was pronounced to raise the bread and taste equal to the best she had ever used...." The ever resourceful pioneers filled their buckets with saleratus for future use. Refreshed, they pushed on.

According to Orson Pratt, the Sweetwater was about three feet deep and seventy wide. At 6,000 feet elevation it got cold at night. Pratt mentioned frost "upon plants and vegetables which are the best radiators of heat," but the mornings were "delightful."



High plains lightning—dramatic, yes, but dangerous. Dry lightning could ignite perilous grass fires, wet lightning often accompanied torrential rains. This natural phenomenon could also kill draft animals and people. A handcart company suffered such a death in 1856, and in 1862 two other Mormons were killed while standing by their wagons.



*"Some boys ascended to the top [of Devil's Gate]...and were seen from below with their feet hanging over the giddy precipice, careless of danger and dropping stones in the abyss below, counting the seconds each took to fall."*

—Lorenzo Brown, 1848.

The young pioneers probably enjoyed Devil's Gate more than any other spot on the Trail. The Sweetwater, which runs through it, had refreshed both man and beast, and the weather was pleasant as most travelers had arrived by early July. Orson Pratt left a scientific description of this place: "The rock upon the right bank runs back from the river...and consists of alternated and perpendicular strata of gray granite and scoriated trap rock.... The bed of the river in this chasm is nearly choked up by massive fragments of rock...."

Heber C. Kimball tried to ride his horse through Devil's Gate in 1847, but the current was too strong. He wryly noted that "the devil would not let" him through. Apparently some in a later company actually passed through the rocks, because one journal noted they "...traveled 5 1/4 miles to Devil's Gate, where we passed through two rocks.... This is a curiosity worthy of a traveler's notice."

According to Shoshoni and Arapaho legend, the gate was formed by an evil spirit shaped like a gigantic beast with tusks, which, when trapped by the Indians, ripped open the gate and fled. Some say an earthquake caused it. The real answer is more interesting—eons ago the earth in the area began to rise, but so slowly that the river was able to maintain its original bed by erosion.

Sometimes young people climbed the gate and formed a human chain holding hands, permitting the end person to hang over the edge at a perilous angle to see below. From the top the view is stunning, either looking straight down or off to the horizon. The wind

is strong and one must be careful. Of course some pioneers wrote their names at Devil's Gate—it was part of the romance and ritual of the Trail.

The surrounding country was "one of romantic grandeur," and there were hundreds of ant hills nearby to amuse those children too frightened to tangle with Devil's Gate. Both adults and children mentioned picking Indian beads from those ant hills. Mary Jane Mount (Tanner) a ten year old following in the second division in 1847 remembered: "There were a great many ant hills...where we often found beads which were lost by the Indians and collected by these indefatigable little workers." (One can't help comparing those children—so content with ant hills—with today's TV and video generation.)

This area also has a tragic significance in Mormon history, as the Martin's Handcart company was stranded about two miles away in a cove waiting for food, rescue. . .and death. All three arrived!

Few things along the Trail were more commonplace than ant hills, but children were fascinated by them. Day after day they ran from one to another looking for beads that had been lost by Indians and gathered by industrious ants. The inventive Mormon children would then fashion these beads into jewelry.

The Sweetwater River plunges through Devil's Gate, another famous landmark on the Trail. Measuring 370 feet deep, 1,500 long, and as narrow as 50, no wagons could go through it, but people sometimes did just for the adventure. Even today emigrant names can be found in the chasm. In Trail days daring young people would climb to the top, form a human chain, and look straight down! The strong wind and dizzying view could be fatal. Merrill Mattes found a record of such a death in 1855.





*"We reached camp about sundown...my husband was still sinking.... I put him to bed.... [Later] I put my hand on his body when to my horror I disc. he was dead.... The [next day] they placed him in a pile with 13 others...[because they] could not dig a grave."*

—Elizabeth Jackson Kingsford, 1856.

About two miles from Devil's Gate is a tranquil spot called Martin's Cove. Sometimes one can see some geese or pelicans flying overhead. It is significant today as the location of the single most tragic event in Mormon emigration history. In October 1856, a severe and bitter-cold snowstorm forced about 570 handcart emigrants to take cover within a cove in the Sweetwater Rocks.

The Edward Martin company, which included some handicapped Saints, was already in a deplorable mental, physical, and emotional state by this time. Rations had been cut to just ounces per day of flour and, for several days at Martin's Cove, they lived on water, bark, and rawhide. John Jaques from England who lost three members of his family, left a moving account of his emotions during this time: "L...stood face to face with death in these repulsive aspects...[and] witnessed his victories daily.... [I] saw those near and dear to me succumb to his attack and [others] fall helpless victims to his all-conquering power...." Then dozens of wagons in a rescue party from the valley arrived with food and clothing, and "many lives were saved by the [help and] arrival in the valley...." Fatalities, however, numbered as high as 145.

About 70 miles west of Martin's Cove was another handcart company captained by James Willie with "404 souls." It is also part of this tragedy. One night the temperature reached 11 degrees below zero, and the freezing wind denied anyone a moment of comfort in tents or wagons, or huddled around puny, windswept fires.

The greatest tragedies of the 22-year-long Mormon use of their Trail were two handcart company disasters in 1856.

The two companies started late, had carts made of unseasoned wood, and ran into an early Wyoming blizzard. Scores died of hunger and exposure before being rescued. These calamities took place at Martin's Cove near Devil's Gate, and at the Willie's handcart site on Rock Creek depicted here.

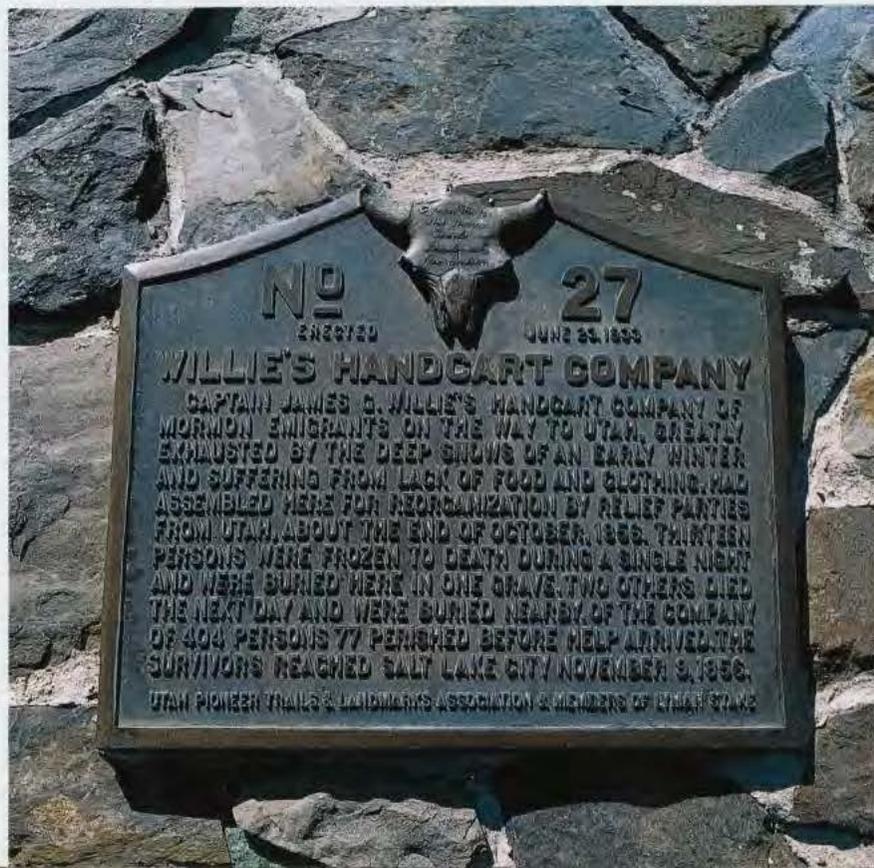


The Willie camp had reached an area now known as Rock Creek, which is picturesque during the summer months. But in October 1856, it was the scene of suffering and sorrow. They killed a few cattle, which helped, "but eating it without bread did not satisfy hunger.... It was enough to make the heavens weep...." wrote John Chislett in *Rocky Mountain Saints*. Chislett told of the renewed spirit in camp when the rescue wagons arrived from Zion.

"The change seemed almost miraculous so sudden was it from grave to gay, from sorrow to gladness and mourning to rejoicing." The prayerful Saints "knelt down in the snow and gave thanks to God for his kindness and goodness." The rescued companies pushed on and eventually made it to Zion.

Among the rescuers were Ephriam Hanks, Dan Jones, and William Kimball. Jones spent that winter in a nearby cabin at Devil's Gate guarding the possessions left behind. Some of the rescuers later in life suffered from their own exposure at this time. Despite these two tragedies, the handcart experience during the years 1856 to 1860 was generally cheaper, faster, and successful. About 3,000 crossed the plains in this fashion.

In vain the Martin handcart company of nearly 600 souls sought shelter from wind and snow in a cave in the Sweetwater Rocks along the Sweetwater River. At the same time, some 70 miles to the west, their companion company, the Willie company of about 400 persons struggled to stave off starvation and death on Rock Creek while awaiting rescue.





*"I listened to the children cry, the oxen low, the cows bawl, the sheep bleat, the pigs squeal, the ducks quack, the chickens cheep, and we could not tell them why they had to suffer so."*

—*Bathsheba B. Smith, 1849 (near South Pass).*

At famed 7,700-foot-high South Pass—the Continental Divide—the pioneers sometimes enjoyed a snowball fight. Intimate scenes of camp life are scarce in Mormon journals, that is why this comment by Bathsheba Smith is so valuable. Some men, hungry for family life, rejoiced at even an infant's cry, a sure sign of domesticity.

Seventeen-year-old Margaret Clawson's 1849 comments are also especially interesting and important to our understanding of camp life. She maintained her normal routine on the Trail. "Everyone was supposed to own all the land that was occupied by ox yokes, camp kettles, and everything that goes to make an outfit for traveling. So when any of the young folks called, I was as much at home sitting on an ox yoke as if I were sitting in a parlor in an easy chair."

When the Mormons crossed the shallow South Pass they came to Pacific Springs, a famous camp site where they refreshed themselves and their animals. These springs, so named because from that point all waters flowed into the Pacific Ocean, were the recognized beginning of the sprawling and ill-defined "Oregon Territory."

A few miles farther, on the aptly named Dry Sandy, the pioneers met famed frontiersman Moses Harris, and some of the brethren stayed up all night with him talking, asking questions, and reading Oregon and California newspapers. They also met some others going East and sent letters back "to the states" by them.

Trail travelers soon learned to approach most mountain men upwind, for they generally considered cleanliness as bad as godliness. Their idea of a bath

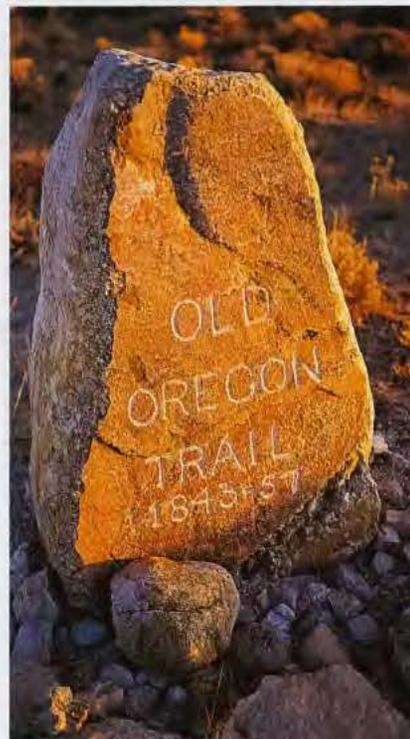
was to place their clothing on an anthill and let the ants eat off the lice and nits.

On June 28, they met the even more famous Jim Bridger—with whiskey on his breath—on his way to Fort Laramie. Bridger camped nearby and Brigham and company spent many hours asking the same questions they had just asked Harris. Bridger provided the pioneers with a positive belief that many crops could be grown in the Salt Lake Valley, and Young gave him a free pass to use the ferry at "last crossing."

There is a story that Bridger issued a \$1,000 challenge for the first bushel of corn raised in the Great Basin. Clayton noted that it was "impossible to form a correct idea...[because of the] imperfect way he gave his descriptions..." Bridger had difficulty expressing himself when drinking, but he certainly could tell tall tales about petrified birds singing in a petrified forest, or the one about a stream that ran so fast it cooked the trout. He also announced he threw a rock across the Sweetwater River and it just kept on growing until it became Independence Rock!

Across Wyoming for 397 miles, from Fort Laramie to Fort Bridger, the Mormons were on the Oregon Trail proper. Both emigrating groups saw the same sights and shared the same experiences. This 1906 marker was placed here by Ezra Meeker, an 1852 emigrant.

South Pass, the Cumberland Gap of the West, made the trek west possible, being the key to the overland route. It was about halfway to Oregon, and some two-thirds of the way to Salt Lake City. This pass is so shallow it is difficult to know when one has crossed it. One Mormon pioneer could determine it only with a barometer! The Oregon Trail marker on the horizon reminds us once again that across most of Wyoming the Mormon Trail and the Oregon Trail are one and the same.





*"Came among timber today near Green River, passed through some very beautiful country.... We forded the river, a wide rushing stream and clear as crystal, [and] along the sides the cottonwood trees were numerous."*

*—Jean Rio Griffiths Baker, 1851.*

Trees were rare along parts of the Mormon/Oregon Trail, and the cottonwoods on the Green River were a welcome sight and respite from the hot sun. It was an ideal campground, offering the essentials of wood, water, and grass—hordes of mosquitoes, however, were real pests.

Here Young and company met Sam Brannan, the leader of some Mormons who had gone to California by ship in 1846. He reported on the success of this venture, and on those members of the Mormon Battalion then at the "Pueblo de Los Angeles." Other returning members of the battalion were back along the Trail rushing to catch up with the pioneers.

After Brannan tried, unsuccessfully, to convince Young to settle in California he returned, left the church, became rich and famous during the gold rush, but later died in poverty.

Many of the brethren became sick at this Green River camp. Both Clayton and Bullock, the camp clerks, were stricken. Despite being sick, Bullock managed to plant a few kernels of white and yellow corn.

Although the pioneers were here on July 4, there is no evidence they celebrated other than enjoying some "pioneer ice cream"—snow mixed with sugar.

The flora and fauna combined to interest the pioneers. Journals comment on the many colorful wildflowers, "large bear paws," and the pesky mosquitoes and crickets. There was also an occasional moose seen by Trail pioneers, and the howl of wolves was often heard. "Scene lovely and delightful to look at," Bullock wrote in 1847, and mentioned fresh speckled trout "[which] did my eyes good to look at once

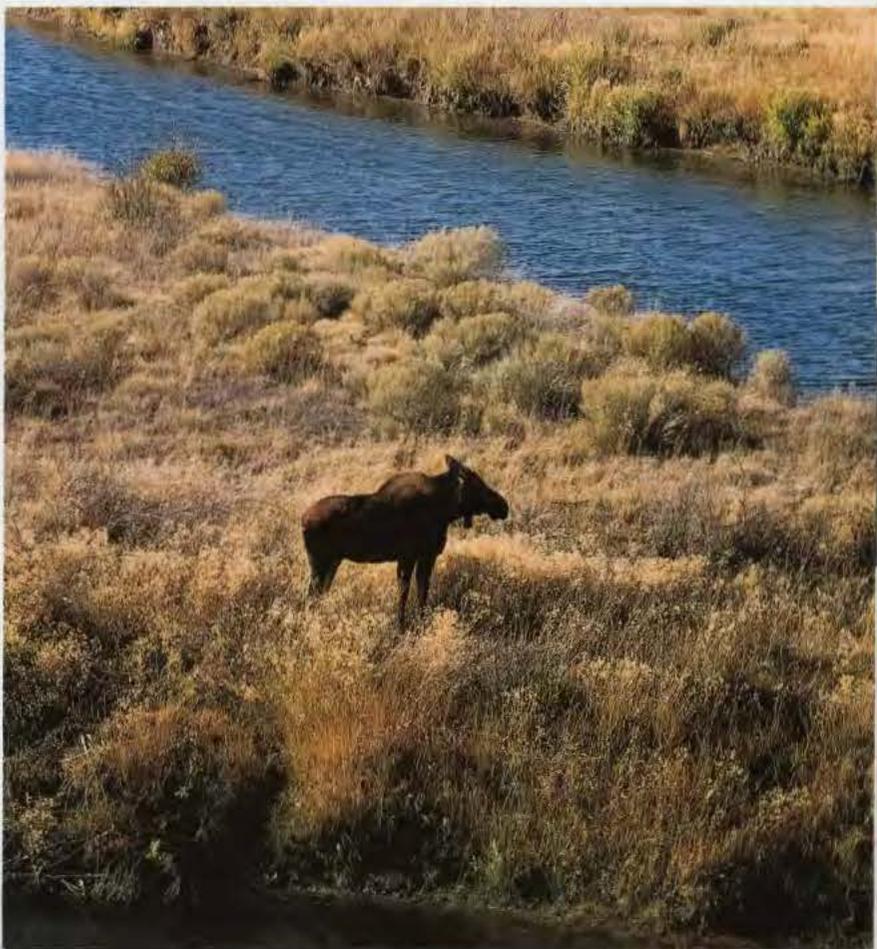
more." Wilford Woodruff and William Clayton, avid anglers, went fishing on horseback and caught salmon.

It was necessary to build a ferry to cross this nearly 300-foot-wide river. Because of high water, wind, and rain it took three days to get all the wagons across. Young detailed a party to stay behind and operate this ferry commercially. When the pioneers left the Green River, they traveled along the Big Sandy toward Fort Bridger, their next goal.

En route they passed a magnificently eroded butte of green and black sandstone which acquired the name of Church Butte because some Mormons were supposed to have held church services there at one time. These "bad lands" looked like something from another planet, but the Saints were getting closer to "the promised land."

Today, the Seedskafee National Wildlife Refuge in Wyoming encompasses a section of the Green River, a major western river and the largest tributary of the Colorado. Moose were part of trail-side fauna, but were not seen as commonly as deer, buffalo, or antelope.

The Green River in western Wyoming was the last major water barrier to the Mormons en route to their new Zion. The river's name may derive from green mineral deposits on its banks. In June of 1847, according to William Clayton, the river was 16 rods (264 feet) wide. He noted, "Good camping anywhere on the banks, and plenty of timber...Alt. 6,000 feet." The Mormons established a commercial ferry here in 1847.





*"We halted for noon a little east of a pudding stone formation. The ledge is on the right of the road, which passes along its base. The rocks are 100 to 200 feet in height, and rise up in a perpendicular form, being broken or worked out into many curious forms by the rains.... Mr. [Brigham] Young being sick, concluded to stop a few hours and rest."*

*—Orson Pratt, 1847.*

Most emigrants stopped to trade at Fort Bridger, rest their teams, and repair wagons. The fort was a great camping area. It was also a good place to "chore around," checking carefully for loose tires, cracked or broken spokes and felloes, weakened axles, loosened bolsters, broken braces and chains, worn hubs and brakes, broken bows, and torn tops.

Emigrants could also trade at the fort for "hides, hunting shirts, pantaloons, and buffalo robes." Heber C. Kimball, for example, exchanged two rifles for twenty buck skins which he considered a good trade. Others traded ponies and tobacco for meat and flour. Jean Baker, an educated wealthy convert from England, bought "forty pounds of very fine fresh beef.... I never saw finer [for] ten cents a pound!"

Bridger often invited Trail visitors in for treats, and one young Mormon wrote they were "treated kindly with raisins and sugar." Bridger was friendly with the Mormons at first, but when they started to become competitors for pioneer dollars, he turned foe. The Mormons eventually bought Bridger out, and the fort became a way station for the many Mormons and "Gentiles" heading that way. Part of a wall the Mormons built is all that is left of the Mormon era.

On July 9, at the fort, the Mormons quit for good the Oregon Trail they had followed from Fort Laramie. The Oregon Trail turned northwest, but the Mormons picked up the Hastings Cutoff, the barely visible track to the west left by the Donner-Reed party of 1846, many members of which tragically perished in the Sierra snows. From then on the pioneers were alone on the Trail.

The Needles, at the mouth of Coyote Creek Canyon, is almost on today's Wyoming-Utah state line. Since this famous landmark is made up of conglomerate rocks that look like cobblestones in hardened mud (or like extremely rocky concrete), emigrants often referred to this 7,600-foot-high formation as "Pudding Stone." From here Mormons, although they were initially unaware of it, got their first look at present-day Utah.



On July 11, a visitor to Brigham Young and company was "Mr. Miles Goodier [sic]." Goodyear lived in the region they were heading for, and the eager Mormons pumped Goodyear full of questions about the valley. He gave a favorable account—told them he had a lush vegetable garden, advised them about the Trail route, and sent them on with renewed hope for the future.

On July 12, at Needle Rocks, "a mountain of pudding stone composed of gravel and rock so its spires were reaching up like the pyramids of Egypt," near the present Utah border, Brigham Young became one of those too ill to ride a horse or walk. For over a week he suffered with tick or mountain fever and was delirious, feverish, and "much deranged in his mind."

Orson Pratt was sent ahead to prepare the road and to find the best spot in the valley to settle and start crops. Slowly the whole camp moved toward the valley, but teams were burdened and slowed by rough and "tedious" roads, stubborn willows, rocks, creeks, and ravines.



Fort Bridger in western Wyoming was built by the famous mountain man Jim Bridger, in 1843-44. An important supply and repair station, the fort was bought by Mormons in 1853, but they burned it in 1857 on the approach of a U.S. military force. All that is left from Mormon times is this reconstructed section of a cobblestone wall.



*"Here a birth took place.... The little new comer did well and was named Echo [Squires] in honor of the place of her nativity. The morning after she was born the father was running about camp inquiring of everybody if they had a pin...[so he] could pin something around the baby, but I don't think he [got] one...."*

*—Patience Loader, December 1856.*

About two days out of Fort Bridger the pioneers entered a ninety-mile-long natural highway, a chain of defiles that meanders through the forbidding Wasatch Range of the Rockies as if an ancient Titan had dragged a stock through the region.

By the time the Martin handcarters, who had suffered so in Wyoming, reached Echo Canyon they were riding in comfortable wagons with enough food and clothing to keep partially warm as they hurried to reach the valley. But Mother Nature waits for no convenient place nor time, and the jarring over rocks probably hastened "Sister Squires" labor pains.

There was a rainbow at the end of the Trail for most of these humble handcart Saints, for despite the hardships suffered, most enjoyed a much better life in the valley than they had in "the old country."

The brethren in 1847 killed antelope and other game here, caught some trout, and prayed and waited for the sick brethren to recover. The urge to leave a memento caused some of them to visit nearby Cache Cave, a trappers' landmark about as big as a large living room. It is not a true cave, rather a cavern hollowed out of limestone by water action. Many of the brethren "engraved their names on the sides," names visible today.

The pioneers were fascinated with the sounds of animals and ammunition and musical instruments in this canyon. The members of the brass band played some tunes and William Clayton was moved to pen: "Music, especially brass instruments have a very pleasing effort.... The echo, the high rocks on the north, form a scenery at once romantic and more interesting than I have ever witnessed." A rifle shot resembled a sharp crack of thunder and reverberated

for some time. Draft animals were sometimes uneasy for they may have thought that their lowing, braying, and neighing was being answered by others of their own kind over the mountains.

Progress has taken a lot of the beauty away from the birthplace of little Echo Squires. Originally Echo Canyon was a narrow valley "10 to 20 rods [165-330 feet] wide." Pioneers complained of being "shut up," of being "walled in by vertical and overhanging precipices of red sandstone...carved into many curious shapes," but the canyon was also "interesting and exceedingly picturesque".

In 1857, when a U.S. Army advanced on Utah to quell a non-existent "rebellion," the Mormons set up fortifications in the canyon walls at the narrowest part. Breastworks were erected, stones were piled up so as to cascade down on troops, and the stream was dammed to make a lake. Fortunately, none of these fortifications was ever employed—peace prevailed.

Mormon emigrants suffered weather extremes—hot, cold, wind, rain, snow, and lightning. Sometimes on rare occasions Mother Nature rewarded them with rainbows much as this August beauty captured on film over the Martin's Cove/ Devil's Gate area in Wyoming.

Construction has destroyed the famed echo in Echo Canyon, but the beauty and importance of the canyon live on. This 28-mile-long defile was a vital link in exactly the right place to help emigrants get through the rugged terrain on the eastern edge of the Wasatch Range of the Rocky Mountains. Today the Union Pacific Railroad and Interstate 80 dominate the canyon.





*"We passed many remarkable rocks today, but none I think so much so as Witches Bluffs on the east bank of the Weber river. They are more like gigantic & somewhat rude pieces of statuary in the form of women than anything else."*

*—Frederick Piercy, 1853.*

The scenery on this part of the Trail was spectacular, but the pioneers of 1847 could spend little time admiring it, so intent were they in getting down into the valley. Jean Rio Griffiths Baker wrote in her journal in 1851 that she wanted to explore the wonders in the canyons, but the jarring of the wagons produced an early gift to her daughter and Jean became a grandmother in September. She walked this part of the Trail with her grandson in her arms admiring the beauty. "The country for the last three days has been beyond description for wilderness and beauty; we are indeed among the everlasting hills.... The two ladies 'in the straw' were the only ones...in wagons...."

Weber Canyon, the earliest gateway into the Valley of the Great Salt Lake, had been used since at least 1828 by trappers and explorers, including Etienne Provost, Osborne Russell, and John Weber, after whom it was named. In 1846, some California-bound emigrants actually forced their wagons through the canyon to exit near modern-day Ogden, Utah. Neither the Donner-Reed party nor the Mormons attempted to do this.

It was intimidating and had delayed the Donner-Reed party a year earlier. The canyon drew them into steep mountains, rocky ridges, and streams exhausting the oxen. They gave up trying to take wagons down that forbidding canyon, and instead followed Lansford Hastings' new and largely untried "cutoff" which left the Weber River and went west up what is now called Main Canyon six miles to its summit. Most early Mormons also went this way.

Woodruff wrote: "We crossed the creek eleven

times in going 8 miles & the worst 8 miles we have had on the journey." The sick in wagons "stood the Journey better than we expected considering the road." Walking was preferred, but those too sick had no choice. On this stretch, the blacksmiths were busy making repairs.

There were clusters of willows in Weber Canyon, and emigrants often saw signs of bears, but seldom the bears themselves. It was believed they hid in the willows. Some emigrants fished for trout, others climbed the sides of the canyon and rolled boulders down to watch them smash into pieces. The men also found the "thin tall cotton woods" good to repair wagon axles with.

The Witches Rocks were formed by wind and water. The complete erosion of these round soft-rock vertical columns, geologically called hoodoos, was thwarted by caps of hard rock atop each "witch."

The several canyons the emigrants passed through were rich in flowers of all kinds. There were also currant and elderberries, vines, and wild wheat. This plant life suggested to the Mormons that frosts would not likely kill off crops as Jim Bridger had feared.

At the mouth of Utah's Echo Canyon, the Mormons turned down Weber Canyon. Here are located some interesting formations dubbed "Witches Rocks." This canyon, probably the earliest gateway into the Valley of the Great Salt Lake, was used by trappers from at least 1828. The Mormons, however, found it too difficult for wagons and soon turned southwest to follow the Donner-Reed party of 1846.



The common sunflower bloomed all along the Trail to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, sometimes in such profusion that they lapped at the feet of horsemen riding through a field. Travelers learned from Indians to eat the seeds.



*"It is evident that the emigrants who passed this way last year [the Donner-Reed party] must have spent a great deal of time cutting a road through the thickly set timber and heavy brush wood. It is reported that they spent sixteen days in making a road through from Weber River...."*

*—William Clayton, 1847.*

By the time the pioneers got to the summit of Main Canyon, or the Hogsback, they could appreciate what the Donner-Reed party had been through. Journals mention the tiring effort of removing stumps and sighting rattlesnakes and scorpions. Some modern historians have dubbed this summit "heartbreak ridge" because it was here weary emigrants first saw in the distance the final barrier of the Rockies they still had to cross—disheartening assurance that the worst of the mountains lay ahead not behind. The women must have wept. They were looking at the western edge of the Wasatch Range of the Rocky Mountains, the backbone of the continent, a great granite fortress testing and challenging all who ventured that far west.

Some Mormons, however, may have been enthralled at the awesome sight of nature in her western majesty and realm, and the view of light playing on distant peaks.

Some of the few, rather poor, Mormon Trail ruts left in Utah are near this summit. The soil in the Rockies is so rocky that deep Trail ruts were seldom formed. The best way to "read trail" in this area is to watch for rust marks on cobblestones. When wagons slide on these rocks, minute particles of iron from the wagon tires are transferred to the rocks. It then oxidizes, or rusts, and is still visible today.

In Trail days, "reading trail" was important to the welfare of emigrants. Today it can be a rewarding pastime as well as essential for serious Trail students, for authentic Trail ruts are the most interesting and important physical evidence of this part of our national heritage. Along most of the Oregon and Mormon

trails, wagons left deep ruts up to the Rocky Mountains. Often they can be easily spotted, but sometimes it is necessary to study the overall terrain, especially the vegetation.

In some places the vegetation is fuller in old ruts, in others it is more sparse. In some areas where the hard topsoil was broken up, rainwater still penetrates better and the growth is more lush. It is also true that ruts tend to collect water which aids growth. In some instances, however, the topsoil was simply broken up and blown away, leaving a poorer subsoil which, even today, supports only sparse growth.

Broad Hollow is beyond the Hogsback to the west, and here the Donner-Reed party sought an easier way through some tough country via this hollow. Almost all subsequent Mormons followed them until a road was cut through years later. Today, traveling this difficult part of the Trail is a matter of minutes in a car on good roads.

This Broad Hollow marker commemorates the Donner-Reed party of 1846, who sought an easier way through some difficult terrain via this hollow. Their trailblazing helped the subsequent Mormons through the Wasatch Range of the Rocky Mountains.

Some people call Hogsback Summit, "Heartbreak Ridge." It was here Mormon emigrants, after weeks of hardship since leaving the Platte River valley, got their first heartbreaking view of the towering western wall of the Wasatch Range that they still had to traverse to reach their new Zion. According to Clayton, "The country west looks rough and mountainous."





*"After issuing from the mountains among which we had been shut up for many days, and beholding in a moment such an extensive scenery open before us, we could not refrain from a shout of joy which almost involuntarily escaped from our lips the moment this grand and lovely scenery was within our view."*

—Orson Pratt, 1847.

From Broad Hollow the pioneers of 1847 had to do a lot of road improving as they slowly made their way into East Canyon. A beautiful canyon, it should have helped smooth the way for the pioneers and given them respite before they had to tackle the big mountains ahead of them. It was a pristine, tranquil place, like a meadow in a rugged forest. There were fish, wild flowers, and aspen, birch, and poplar trees, and willows. But looks can be deceiving.

In reality, even though the Donner-Reed party and Orson Pratt's advance company had cut their way through this canyon, passage was still dreadful. The pioneers had to negotiate two swamps and cross a creek 13 times before reaching the mouth of Little Emigration Canyon. The dense willows were nearly 20 feet high, and even where they had been cut down their sharp stubs hurt the feet of the oxen. In 1853, the road was still rough and treacherous. Frederick Piercy, riding a mule at the time, got himself mired in one of the bad crossings.

At the junction of East Canyon and Little Emigration Canyon was a favorite camping place called "Mormon Flat" where emigrants rested up for the big pull ahead of them.

Years later in 1857, when a U.S. Army of 2,500 troops under Col. Albert Sidney Johnston marched on Utah to quell a nonexistent "rebellion" the Mormons erected stone breastworks on both sides of the mouth of Little Emigration Canyon—defenses never used for peace was made with Washington D.C. Not a shot was fired on either side. (Mormons had put up even more impressive fortifications in Echo Canyon.)

Canyon Creek was located about halfway through the Wasatch Range and should have provided a gentle grade and valley for wagons as suggested in this view, but it did not. The Trail went through two swamps, and crossed the creek 13 times wearing people and animals out. After the last crossing, emigrants found themselves at the mouth of yet another canyon—that of Little Emigration.



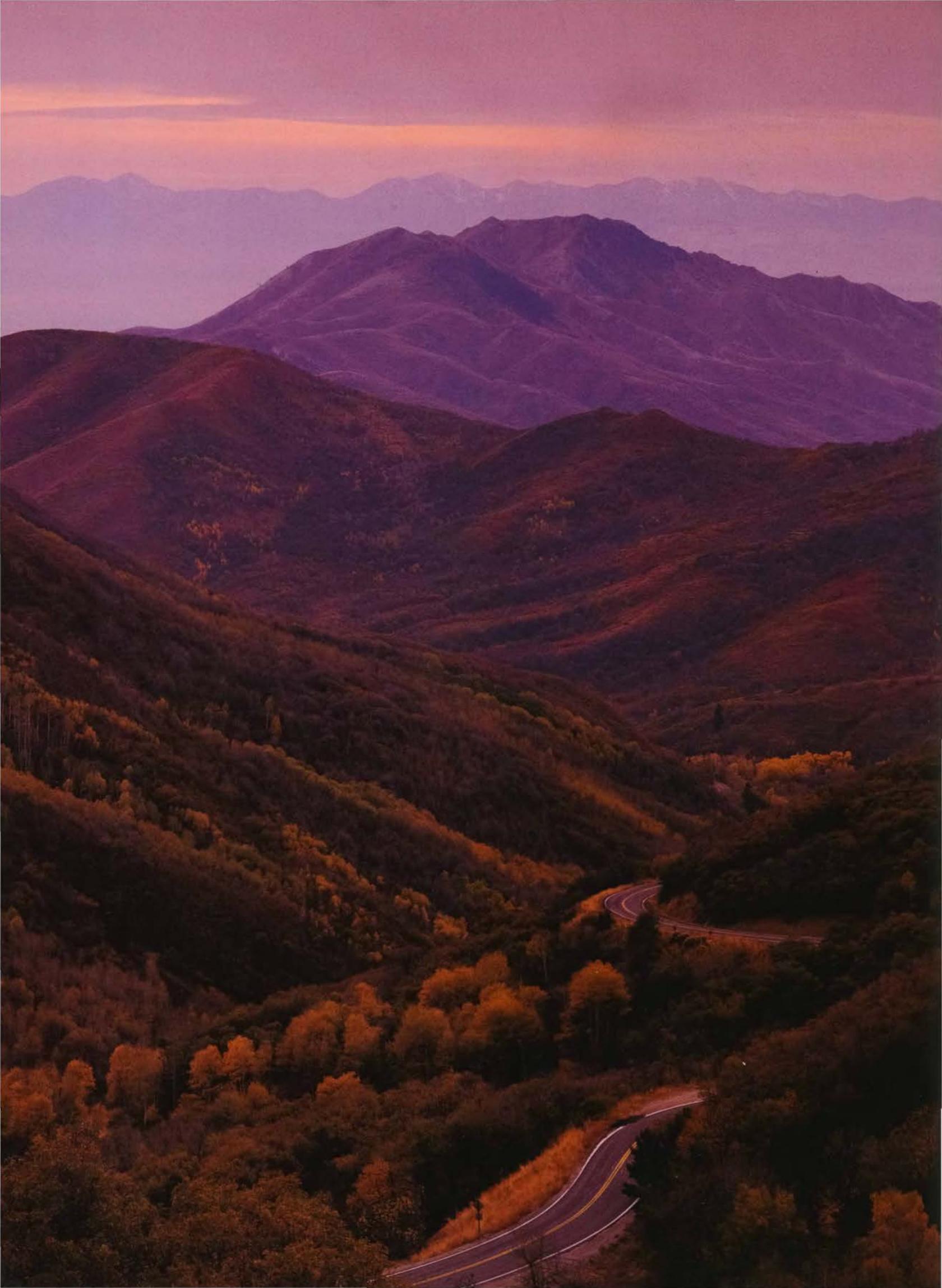
This army marched into the valley and through Salt Lake City and camped some 35 miles southwest of the city, establishing Camp Floyd. The soldiers remained there doing little except causing trouble with Mormons and Indians until recalled East at the beginning of the Civil War. The leaving army sold off—practically gave away—tons of supplies and equipment much to the benefit of the Mormons.

The old Trail goes four miles up the canyon to the crest of Big Mountain. It is the prettiest and most original portion of the Trail left in Utah and is a fairly easy hike—especially downhill.

All along this part of the Trail, between the Needles and the valley, the pioneers were split into three groups—an advance party, the main party, and those with the sick Brigham Young. Contact among the groups was maintained by couriers.



These stone breastworks at the mouth of Little Emigration Canyon were built as defenses during the "Utah War" of 1857, when a U.S. Army force approached Utah. Fortifications such as these and others in Echo Canyon were never actually used as the difficulties between the Mormons and Washington D.C. were solved peaceably in 1858.



*“Enchanting to the eye. There was the scene before us that we had long looked for and read and sung about, the City of the Saints. Oh, what joy filled each bosom at the sight.”*

*—John Crook, 1856.*

At the top of Little Emigration Canyon is the summit of Big Mountain from where Mormons got their first encouraging glimpse of their new home, their Zion. They were nearly out of the “everlasting hills,” and over the last barrier to a new life.

Orson Pratt wrote: “We succeeded in getting thro’...and came in full view of the Salt Lake in the distance with its bold hills towering up behind the Silvery Lake.... Bullock remarked: “I could not help shouting ‘hurra, hurra, there is my home at last.”

The Mormons who traveled the Trail after 1847 found their Zion already established, and many of the especially difficult parts of their passage through the mountains improved. Later pioneers also had a better route between the Missouri River and the mountains, including some supply and repair stations. By 1856, the handcart companies could buy some food which augmented the meager allotment of clothing and provisions they were allowed. At Fort Laramie a young bride in one handcart company was able to exchange her wedding ring for food.

The modern traveler is hardly aware of the steep climb those first wagons endured reaching Big Mountain, and the dangerous descent “through a immense growth of weeds, flowers, and trees,” leading to Little Mountain, so gradual are today’s roads meandering through.

Down Big Mountain they had to lock their rear wheels with chains, attach drag shoes (if they had any), and set what brakes they had—anything to slow the wagons down and make it easier on the animals. Some pioneers cut down trees and tied them to the wagons as drags. Going down a steep grade is harder

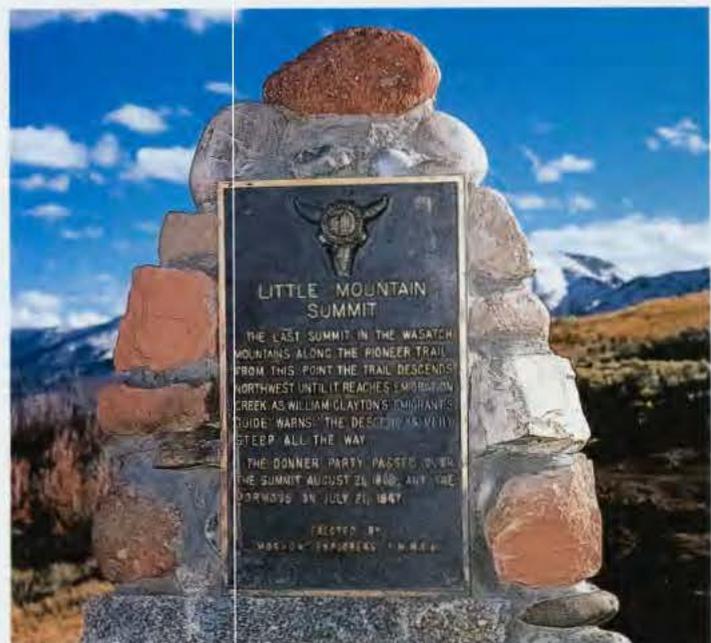
The 8,263-foot-high summit of Big Mountain provides one of the most beautiful and important views along the entire Trail. From this height emigrants caught their first sight of their new Zion. They were almost home!—just down and over. The Valley of the Great Salt Lake lay just beyond the center peak. Here we can imagine how rugged the wagon descent must have been compared to the ease of the present black-top road.



on draft animals than going up a steep climb.

What was Brigham Young thinking in the carriage over those rough roads as he lay in feeble health? Perhaps he was still too sick to respond. A. P. Rockwood, also sick in the carriage, wrote he knew “but little of what passes,” as they stumbled mile after mile down Big Mountain. But those who stopped to repair one more axle, lock one more wheel, hunt up one more ox, rescue one more neighbor, stop one more stubborn mule, calm one more frightened cow, still one more child’s cry, halt one more tumbling wagon, and swat one more mosquito must have had some dark thoughts.

What did the two pregnant women who were coming down those same mountains in 1847 think? Did they walk or ride? Did they smile or cry? Did they complain or pray? Did they remember that the original Children of Israel had no such trials? One journalist wrote that he was “growing very tired....” Those three words can best sum up the pioneer experience on this part of the Trail. The Saints summoned their last energy for their ZION was waiting for them!



Big Mountain was appropriately followed by Little Mountain (memorialized by this marker), which led directly down and into the final stretch of the 1,300-mile-long Trail—Emigration Canyon. Five miles down this canyon lay the Valley of the Great Salt Lake, the new Zion—home!



THIS IS THE  
PLACE



*"This is the place, drive on."*

*—Brigham Young, 1847.*

*"At night camped 5 miles from the city...[and]waited with impatience for morning which would terminate our journey."*

*—Hosea Stout, 1848.*

Many emigrants made one "last camp" in Emigration Canyon before heading into the Valley of the Great Salt Lake. Young and party camped here July 23, the last night before joining the rest of the 1847 pioneers. He was riding in Woodruff's carriage and, in the morning, Woodruff turned his carriage around so Young could get a better view of the valley. Woodruff noted in his journal that "President Young expressed his full satisfaction in the appearance of the Valley as a resting place for the saints & was Amply repaid for his Journey."

According to Hosea Stout, Young reconfirmed this in 1848 when he announced that "this is the place he had seen before he came here & it was the place for the Saints to gather."

Thirty-two years later, after Young was dead, during the excitement of Mormonism's 50-year jubilee in 1880, Woodruff embellished the events of July 24, 1847, with the following afterthought: "President Young was enwrapped in vision for several minutes. He had seen the Valley before in vision, and upon this occasion he saw the future glory of Zion and of Israel as they would be...when the vision passed, he said 'It is enough. This is the right place, drive on.'"

The advance party had explored the valley. The lack of trees was their only objection and they realized they would initially have to build out of Spanish brick or adobe. The Saints also improved the Trail at the mouth of Emigration Canyon and, of course, offered up a prayer. This honor was given to Orson Pratt.

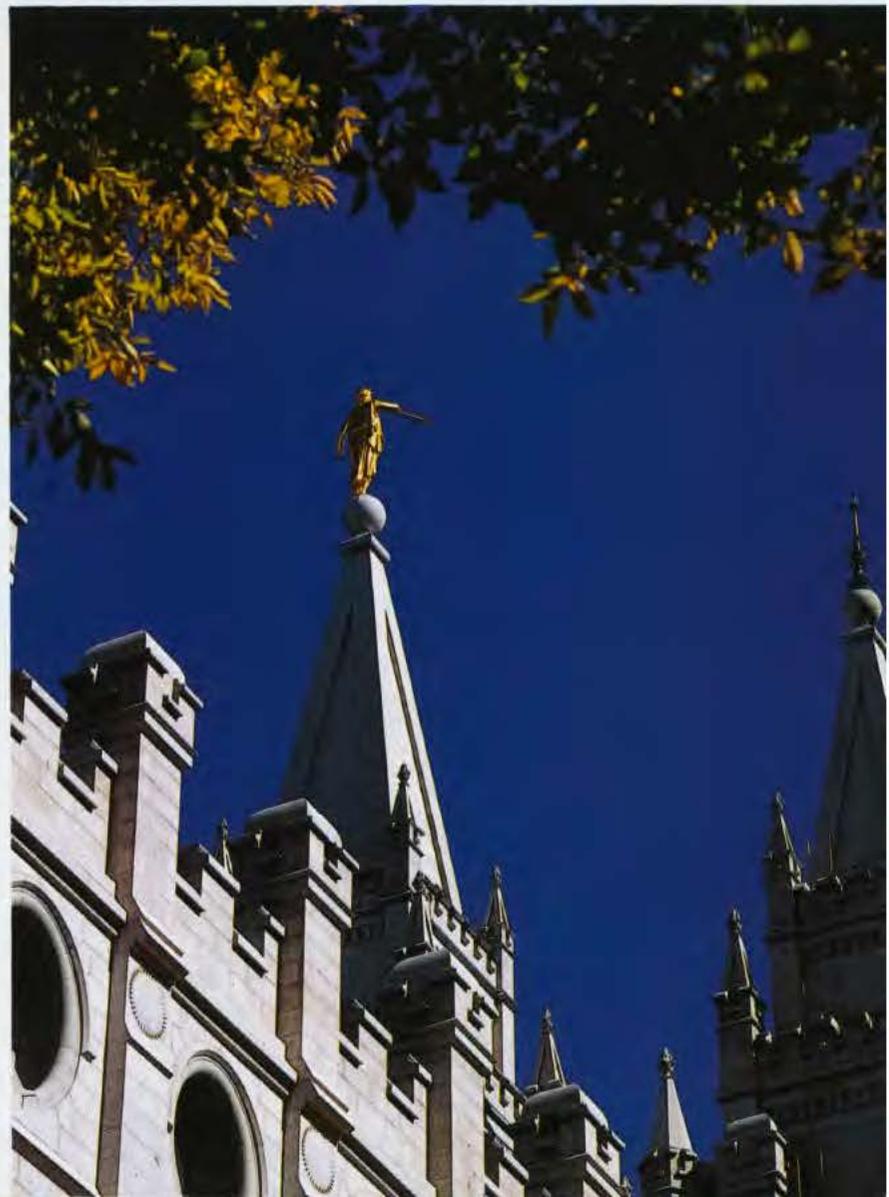
They also dammed City Creek for irrigation, dug ditches, plowed and planted about 35 acres of potatoes, corn, beans, turnips, and buckwheat—things

that would have the best chance of maturing in spite of the very late planting.

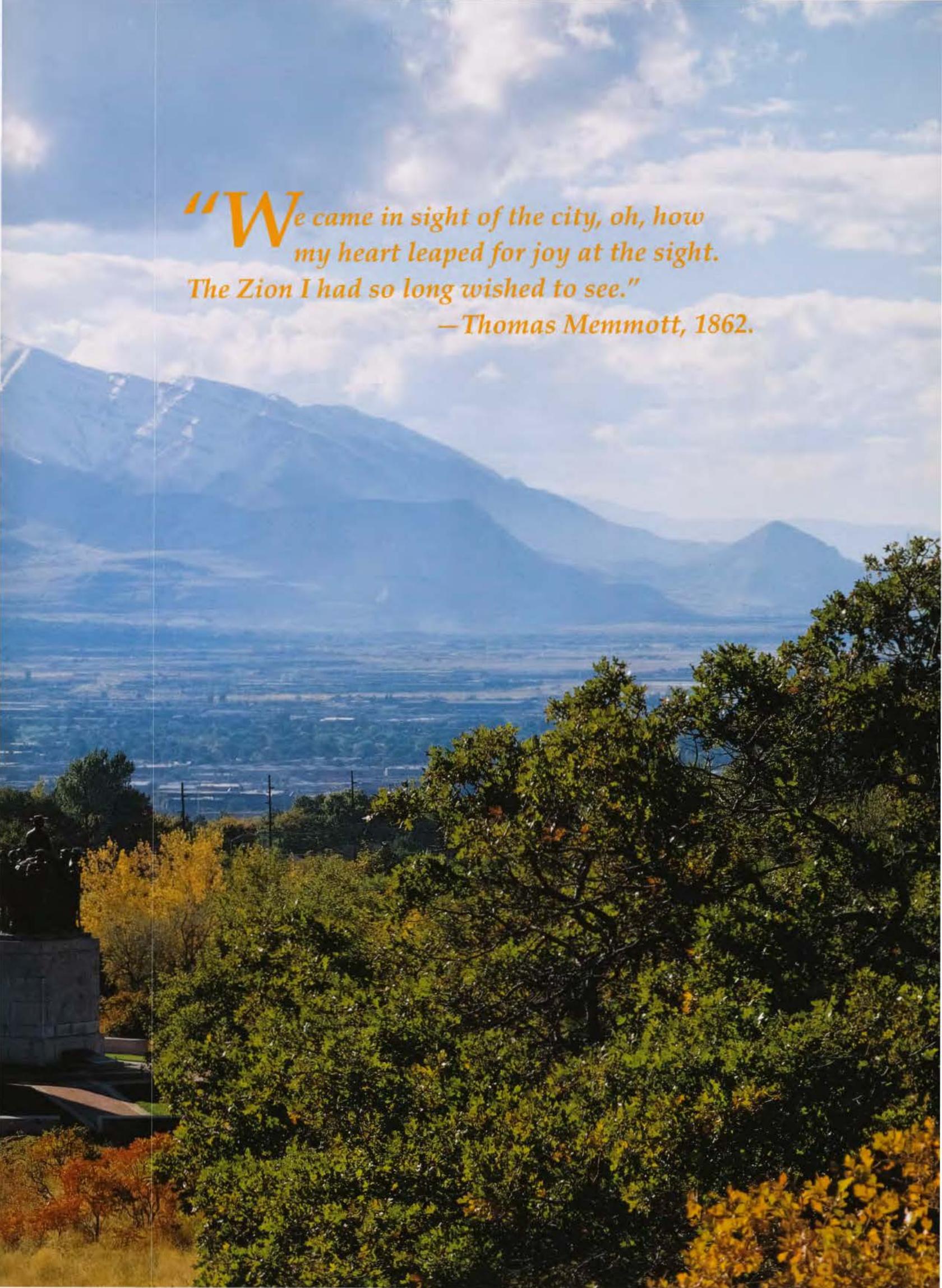
It was Young's illness that delayed his entrance into the valley until July 24. Erastus Snow and Orson Pratt had actually entered the valley July 21, and the advance company on the next day. Nevertheless July 24 became, and has remained, the second most important date in the Mormon calendar (the first is April 6, the day Joseph Smith organized the church in 1830). It is also the day Utah history officially begins. Everything in Mormon history is figured from before or after July 24, 1847.

According to Joseph Smith, the Angel Moroni appeared to him in 1823 to tell him that God had a work for him to do, and to tell him of the gold plates containing the Book of Mormon. This famous statue of the Angel stands atop the east spire of the Salt Lake Temple.

At the mouth of Emigration Canyon is the impressive "This is the Place" monument. This massive memorial, 60-feet high by 84-feet wide, was built in 1947 during the centennial of the Mormon pioneers reaching Utah. It honors not just Mormons, but many others who explored the Great Basin. Atop the monument are shown three Mormon pioneer leaders—Heber C. Kimball, Brigham Young, and Wilford Woodruff.





A scenic view of a valley with mountains in the background and trees in the foreground. The sky is blue with white clouds. The mountains are hazy and blue. The valley is green and flat. The foreground is filled with green and yellow trees.

*"We came in sight of the city, oh, how  
my heart leaped for joy at the sight.  
The Zion I had so long wished to see."*

*—Thomas Memmott, 1862.*



# Epilogue

In less than two years after leaving Nauvoo, with preaching from Brigham Young, plenty of support from each other, and a lot of help from the Lord, the Mormons had prayed, planned, pushed, and pulled their way across 1,300 miles of prairies, plains, rivers, and mountains to find their new home, their ZION! They were not trailing clouds of glory, but of dust, desolation, and determination.

The "movement of a great Nation" which had begun across a frozen wasteland in bleak and frigid winter weather, ended in the warmth of a brilliant July summer sun. Revelation or not, it was the first valley big enough and isolated enough to enable the Mormons to survive.

And while the men made all of the plans and took all of the praise, the "matchless heroism of the sisters" contributed much to the success of the 22-year trek. The West was kind to men and dogs, but hell on women and horses. These were women to match the mountains! They could also rejoice that their journey had ended in triumph (and a little tragedy), in the tops of "the mountains of the Lord." From Winter Quarters they had walked to their "Promised Land" in some four months, rather than forty years.

The Trail itself provided solace and spirituality, and many became closer to God. "There was a sacredness about [it]..." Mary Ann Stearns wrote.

July 1847, however, was not the time to rest. The leaders had several main tasks—to plant a colony strong enough to survive the coming winter, to return to Winter Quarters to prepare the main body of Mormons to go West in 1848, and to continue to improve the Trail for those who would use it for another 20 years.

The pioneers renewed their religious covenants by being rebaptized. Then they set about laying out a city, planting crops, assigning building lots, dealing with the Great Basin Indians, building homes, a fort, a bowery, fences, and exploring, for by the end of that year there would be approximately 1,650 Mormons in the valley. One does not wonder why the beehive was chosen as an important Mormon symbol.

The Salt Lake Temple, spiritual end of the Mormon Trail. A Mormon temple creates and encloses the most sacred of space to believers. It is the House of the Lord where two worlds meet—the sacred and the secular. The battlements and crenelations of the architecture secure this sacred space—the spires reach heavenward. The temple, built of solid granite, is intended to stand through the millennium. Its walls are 16 feet thick at the foundation, tapering to 6 feet thick at the top. The fountain repeats in counterpoint the upward sweep of the spires.

As soon as Young was convinced the colony would survive, he and 177 men left the valley on August 16 and 26, and arrived at the Missouri River in early October. There were two Winter Quarters that season—one on the Missouri and one in the valley. Both survived, but the faith of the western colony was sorely tried.

By May 1848, the crops looked promising, but the pioneers had forgotten that hordes of crickets had greeted them in the valley the year before. The crickets returned that spring "three or four to a leaf," and devoured the crops. The Saints, weak from hunger and desperate for food, fought back with brooms, sticks, fire, and water. After days of exhaustion, and hours of prayer, the poor pioneers were greeted by a sound from the heavens. This time their miracle was in the form of sea gulls which gorged on the insects. It is fitting that the sea gull became the state bird of Utah and is protected by law.

By that same May two large companies of Mormons totaling about 1,900 people, 620 wagons, and 3,500 horses, mules, and cattle left the Missouri River. (A third company of 526 left in July.) Most of them arrived in the valley that September and the real kingdom building began.

Many kinds of economic activities were encouraged, a city was built, and other colonies established. By the time of his death in 1877, Young had founded 358 colonies in Utah, Idaho, Nevada, Wyoming, and Arizona.

Mormons continued to develop their Trail. They built bridges, cut down river- and stream banks, provided trail-side services, traded fresh cattle for worn out stock, and established additional ferries and toll roads. In 1848, Clayton published his *Latter Day Saints' Emigrants' Guide*, so popular it even appeared in pirated editions.

In July 1847, they were no longer in the United States, but Mexico, a point of littler concern to them for there was virtually no Mexican presence there at the time. Seven months later, however, the treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, which ended the Mexican War, put the Mormons right back in their own country! In 1850, their settlements became part of the newly established Utah Territory which became a state in 1896.

In 1850, they set up the Perpetual Emigration Fund. Money was advanced to needy European emigrants that would be repaid after they reached the valley—hence a perpetual system. Some paid back, some did not.

As already noted, the unusual handcart manner of emigrating between 1856 and 1860 was generally successful. Thereafter ox-team trains were sent out from Salt Lake City to haul emigrants and supplies West. Finally, in 1869 the transcontinental railroad



was finished and the Mormon Trail became obsolete. Those emigrants who came West by train were dubbed "Pullman pioneers." All told about 70,000 Mormons went West before the railroad came.

The Trail, however, lives on in memory. The contemporary Mormon is prouder of nothing in his/her heritage more than having had an ancestor who "crossed the plains." There are two honorific pioneer societies—Daughters of Utah Pioneers and Sons of Utah Pioneers.

Since the 1930s, many groups and individuals have done much to identify and mark this famous Trail. In 1978, Congress added the Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail to the National Trails Act, and federal resources have since been used to preserve this part of our national heritage.

Temple Square and the Utah Valley are impressive monuments to the industry and perseverance of the Mormons. The accomplishments of these modern Children of Israel led by their American Moses, is as much a miracle as any performed by the original Children of Israel and their Moses. The faith, determination, devotion, sacrifice, and courage displayed in Nauvoo, Winter Quarters, along the Mormon Trail, and in the valley after they arrived is evident today in their magnificent Temple, clean wide streets, and the music and message that can be heard weekly from Temple Square.

#### SUGGESTED READING

- BROWN, JOSEPH AND DAN GURAVICH. *The Mormon Trek West*. New York: Doubleday, 1980. (For armchair travelers.)
- CLAYTON, WILLIAM. *William Clayton's Journal*. Dallas, Texas: Taylor Publishing Company, 1973. (Excellent, the classic account. Many editions.)
- KIMBALL, STANLEY B. *Historic Sites and Markers Along the Mormon and Other Great Western Trails*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988. (One of the best trail guides.)
- NIBLEY, PRESTON. *Exodus to Greatness: The Story of the Mormon Migration*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret News Press, 1947. (Old, but useful, detailed.)
- STEGNER, WALLACE. *The Gathering of Zion*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964. (A literary study.)

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This sea gull soaring over the Great Salt Lake reminds one of the unique place gulls occupy in Mormon history. The first Mormons in the Salt Lake Valley planted winter wheat in 1847, and more crops in the spring of 1848. That spring, however, a cricket plague proceeded to devour anything green. Then flights of gulls from the Great Salt Lake appeared, ate the insects, and cleared the area in three weeks. Grateful Mormons later erected what is thought to be the only monument to a bird in the world.

Inside back cover:

*Mormons, their Trail,  
their history cannot be  
properly understood  
apart from  
their belief in  
“continuous  
revelation” — their  
belief that God speaks  
to the  
world today through  
prophets as he did in  
biblical times. Might  
not such an  
otherworldly, ethereal  
sunset and reflection  
as this suggest  
heavenly visitations?*

Fog-enshrouded cottonwood  
trees on the Green River.

Back cover:

*“For some must push  
and some must pull,  
and we go marching  
up the hill.”  
— The Handcart Song.*

This outstanding bronze statue  
on Temple Square in Salt Lake  
City depicts a typical emigrant  
handcart family. Between  
1856 and 1860, 2,962 people in  
ten companies “crossed the  
plains” in such handcarts. This  
venture started at Iowa  
City, Iowa, and intersected  
the Trail of 1847 near  
present-day Lewis, Iowa.





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