

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

I rigged up my trout rod that I had brought with me from Liverpool, fixed my reel, & artificial fly & went to one of the brooks close by Camp to try my luck at catching trout....

—Wilford Woodruff, 8 July, 1847

The power of the air rules and the dust is worse than intollerable.

—Eliza R. Snow, 24 September 1847

The day has been hot and sultry, and mosquitos are very troublesom.

—William Clayton, 13 July 1847

Very, very dirty thro brush & timber – up the Mt. where we met J.T. who asked me if I had lately seen my face, his own being behind a black mask – we then went slash mash down over stumps, trees, etc, etc.

—Eliza R. Snow, 1 October 1847

The grass on this creek grows from six to twelve feet high... many signs of deer, antelope, and bears.

—William Clayton, 22 July 1847

...and beholding in a moment such as 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, July 21, 1847

Hurra, hurra, hurra, there's my home at last!

—Thomas Bullock, 24 July 1847

Prepared by the Utah Historic Trails Consortium

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THE MORMON TRAIL

FORT BRIDGER TO SALT LAKE CITY

Following the
1847 Pioneers of
The Church of Jesus Christ
of Latter-day Saints on the
last leg of their epic journey.



FOLLOWING THE PIONEERS



On April 5, 1847, the vanguard of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Mormons, headed west to the Great Basin. The pioneer company of 148 people, led by Brigham Young, was seeking the best route across the Rocky Mountains into the Valley of the Great Salt Lake. After years of violence and persecution in the Midwest, the Mormons sought an isolated area where they could permanently settle and practice their religion in peace. The Great Basin became their chosen "Zion."

The wagons pulled out of Winter Quarters (present-day North Omaha) and ascended the broad valley of the Platte River, traveling across Nebraska to Fort Laramie. Waiting at the fort to join the vanguard company were "Mississippi Saints," who had wintered over in Pueblo, Colorado, with Mormon Battalion members from the "Sick Detachments."

The pioneers followed the North Platte and Sweetwater Rivers across Wyoming to the crest of the continent at South Pass and descended to the Green River, where they were joined by a small group of Mormon Battalion members. This enlarged party traveled on to Fort Bridger, on Blacks Fork, arriving on July 7, 1847. They tarried at this "shabby" fort only long enough to do some trading and repair wagons.

The articles generally at Bridger's fort were at least one-third or one-half higher than at any other post in America that I ever saw.

—Wilford Woodruff

They now left the well-traveled Oregon-California Trail, which swung sharply northwest, following the faint, year-old track of the Donner-Reed party west-southwest along the Hastings Cutoff and into Echo Canyon.

There is a very singular echo in this ravine, the rattling of the wagons resembles carpenters hammering on boards inside the highest rocks.

—William Clayton

The final 116 miles from Fort Bridger, across the Wasatch Mountains, were the most difficult of the entire trip. Travel through the narrow willow-choked canyons and over the rocky crest of the Wasatch was so difficult that it took the pioneer company 14 days to complete this part of the journey.

Counselled the company not to go any further until they had spent several hours labour on the road over which we passed yesterday afternoon: all who were able to work laboured about two thirds of the day on the same.

—Orson Pratt

Crossed Canyon Creek 8 times—the road sideling, stumpy, bushy, etc.

—Eliza R. Snow

Orson Pratt led an advance party over Big Mountain and down Emigration Canyon, entering the valley on July 22, 1847. By the time Brigham Young, delayed by illness, entered the valley on July 24, the first crops were already in the ground.

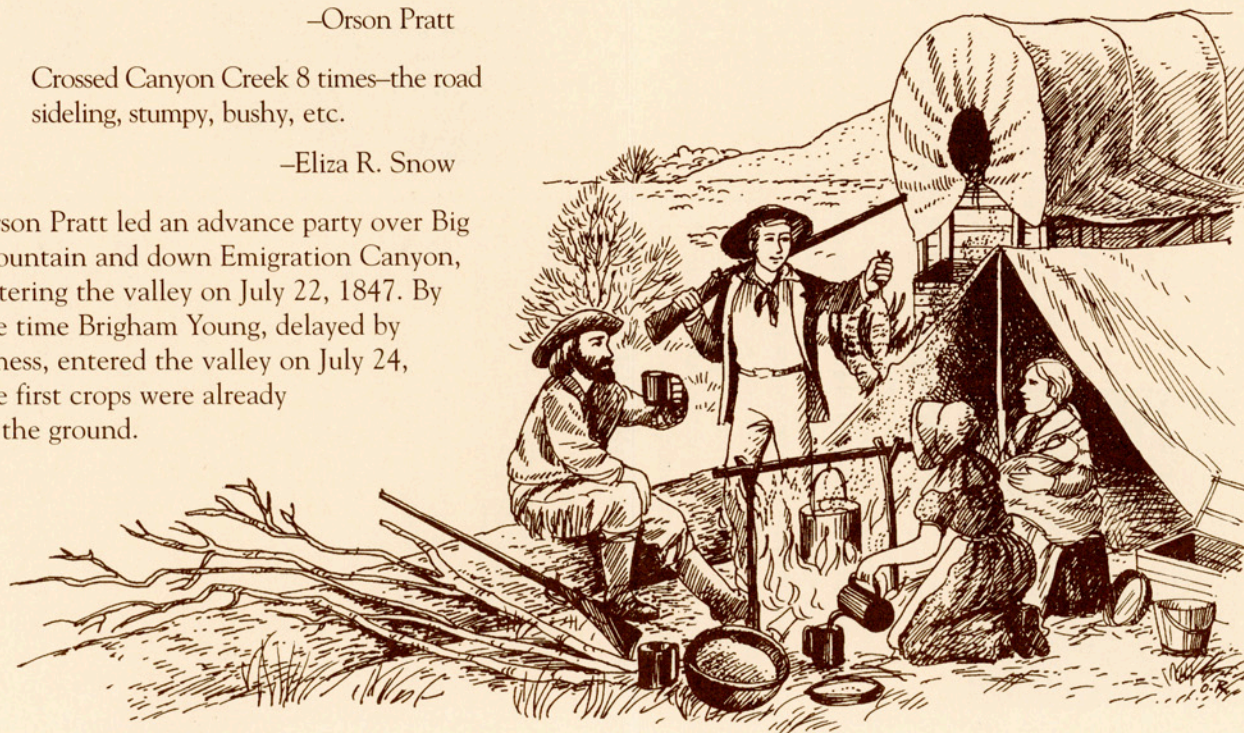
On arriving there was much cheered by a handsome view of the Great Salt Lake.

—William Clayton

This forenoon commenced planting our potatoes, after which we turned the water upon them and gave them quite a soaking.

—Orson Pratt, July 24, 1847

In later years, this route from Fort Bridger to the Valley of the Great Salt Lake became a fundamental part of the wagon road to the Utah settlements and California. Emigrants headed to Oregon, by way of the Salt Lake Cutoff, argonauts seeking their fortunes in the California gold fields, and Pony Express riders galloping through on their way to Sacramento, California, or St. Joseph, Missouri, all passed along this route.



1 Fort Bridger

The fort was established by famed mountain man Jim Bridger as a trading post and way station for emigrant wagon trains. When the pioneer company rolled into the fort, they saw “four log houses and a small enclosure for animals.” Today, the reconstructed trading post and several 1880s military buildings are administered as a Wyoming state park.

In good weather, it is possible to drive close to the trail west of Fort Bridger on the original transcontinental rail-bed. Take Leroy Road, Exit #24, and follow the dirt road south. In 3.25 miles, look for a historic marker on your right. In Piedmont (past the coke ovens) turn west on County Road 173, and follow it to Highway 150. The pioneer company crossed the Bear River close to the Highway 150 bridge. The trail west of here is on private land and is not accessible to the public. Take Highway 150 north to Evanston, and proceed into Utah on I-80.

2 Echo Canyon

This 25-mile long narrow defile winds its way through some of the most sublime scenery on the entire trail. The canyon gets its name from its peculiar ability to transmit sounds along its perpendicular red rock walls. This was the first sizable canyon most of the emigrants had ever seen, and they were fascinated by the romantic scenery. The trail entered Echo Canyon from the southeast between mile markers 188 and 187.

We traveled most of the day in a Canion or narrow opening between 2 ranges of mountains... curious mtns which delight me.

—Eliza R. Snow

Continue southwest down I-80 about 1 mile to milepost #186.

3 Castle Rock

The prominent cliffs of Castle Rock are to your right at milepost #186. Below this large crag was a popular emigrant campsite, where Brigham Young's party camped on July 15, 1847, the first of many emigrant companies to stop here.

For a slower and more intimate look at the trail, leave I-80 at Exit #180, signed Emory, and drive down the frontage road for 8 miles to the fortifications.

4 Fortifications

A careful look along the tops of the cliffs to the north (right) shows remnants of stone fortifications. Erected by the Mormon Militia during the “Utah War” of 1857, they were strategically positioned at the canyon's narrowest point to defend the Valley of the Great Salt Lake.

Head west down the frontage road to the town of Echo, where wayside exhibits on the history of the area can be found in front of the old school. (If you chose to stay on I-80, be sure to stop at the Echo Welcome Center, where wayside exhibits discuss the Mormon Trail and Echo Canyon as a historic corridor. Take exit #169 to Echo.)

5 The Witches Rocks

Between Echo and Henefer the “Obelisk” and “The Witches Rocks” can be seen on the hillside to the north. They are described as looking like figures in kirtles and steeple-hats or bonnets. In the moonlight their appearance was “exceedingly weird and witch-like.” Most emigrant companies camped in this area along the Weber River.

Continue to the Henefer overpass and on into town. Turn south (left) on Highway 65 and go to the exhibit kiosk in the city park west of the rodeo grounds.

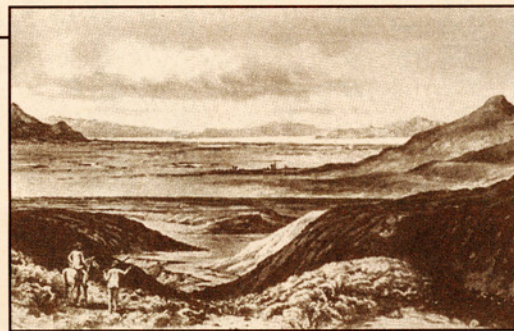
6 Pratt's Pass Camp

The emigrants crossed the Weber River just upstream from Henefer and camped at the mouth of Main Canyon in an area called Pratt's Pass Camp. They then turned southwest and ascended Main Canyon to avoid the nearly impassible Weber River Canyon.

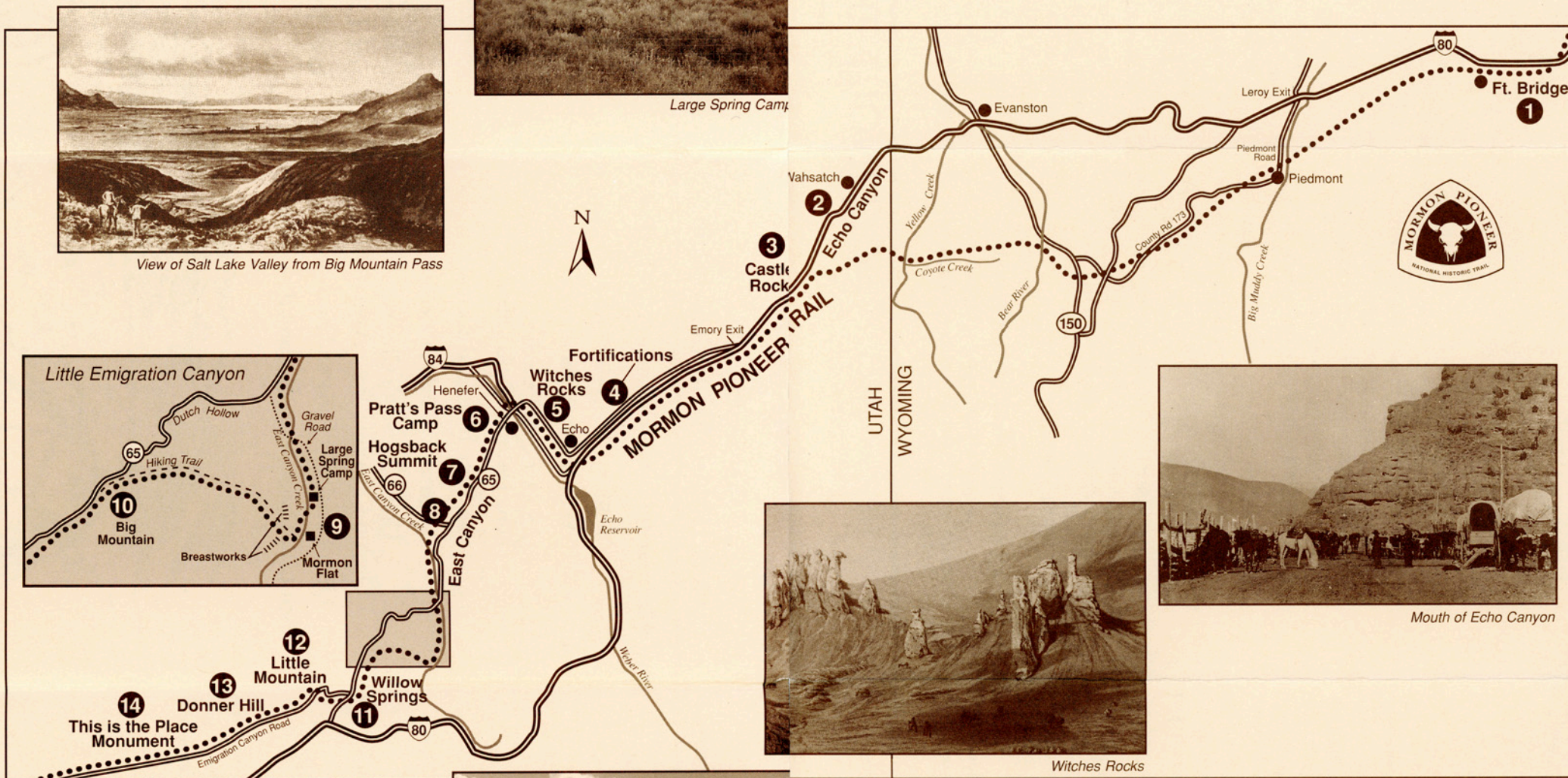
From Henefer, the trail follows the Donner-Reed route up SR 65 to the pullout at Hogsback Summit.



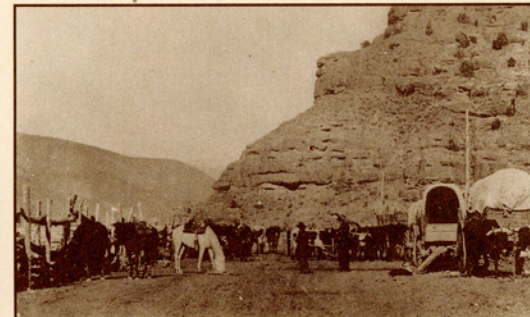
Large Spring Camp



View of Salt Lake Valley from Big Mountain Pass



Witches Rocks



Mouth of Echo Canyon

8 East Canyon

The trail dropped down into East Canyon, where the pioneers found the canyon floor choked with willows and brush. A road had to be cut through the dense thickets. The Mormons called it “decidedly the worst piece of road on the entire journey.” The trail entered the canyon where today the state park boat ramp enters the reservoir.

Return to the intersection of SR 65 and SR 66. Turn right onto SR 65. About 5 miles up East Canyon Creek, SR 65 leaves the trail and goes west up a side canyon. To follow the trail up East Canyon Creek requires driving some 3 miles on a graded dirt road, which continues south where SR 65 begins its ascent up Big Mountain.

9 Large Spring Camp and Mormon Flat

About 3 miles up the East Canyon Creek road is a large sagebrush flat above a clear water spring. This area was known as Large Spring Camp. Most emigrant parties rested or camped in this area. At Mormon Flat, 1/4 mile farther up the gravel road, the trail turned west up narrow, winding Little Emigration Canyon and climbed to Big Mountain Pass. A 4.3-mile hiking trail gains over 1,400 feet in elevation on its way to the pass. This portion of the trail was the longest sustained climb on the entire route and is a rare opportunity to walk the original trail in Utah.

We left East Canyon Creek & traveled to the west 5 miles up hill, an exceeding hard hill to clime.

—Wilford Woodruff

After viewing the wayside exhibits at Large Spring and Mormon Flat, vehicles must return to SR 65 and turn left to reach Big Mountain.

10 Big Mountain Pass

From this vantage point, the pioneers caught their first glimpse of the Valley of the Great Salt Lake. As you stand on the summit gazing out at the valley, look down the western slope and remember that wagons had no switchbacks cut into the side of the hill. They had to go straight down that hill; or, on their way back east, they had to go straight up the hill.

Continue on down the switchbacks of SR 65 about 5-1/2 miles to a pullout above Little Dell Reservoir.

11 Willow Springs

Good water and adequate forage were extremely important for emigrants and their animals. Willow Springs, in the canyon below, provided plenty of good cold spring water, abundant grass in a large meadow, and a good place to camp. It was the most important campground and resting spot on the trail between Large Spring Camp and Emigration Canyon.

We nooned by a splendid spring in a small birch grove. We saw more timber during this half days travel than we had seen in a month.

—Wilford Woodruff

One mile west on SR 65, turn right up Emigration Canyon Road, signed Pioneer Memorial Backway, and proceed to Little Mountain Summit.

12 Little Mountain

Wagons could not sidehill to the top of Little Mountain, as the present road does. Instead, the trail continued down the canyon bottom, now under Little Dell Reservoir, to an area below the dam. There, the pioneers hitched multiple teams of stock together to pull the wagons straight up the slope. On the summit, they locked their wheels for brakes and slid straight down the other side into Emigration Canyon.

Continue down Emigration Canyon to its mouth. Watch on the left side of the road for a monument commemorating the Donner Party.

13 Donner Hill

Near the mouth of Emigration Canyon the pioneers found wagon tracks going over a very steep hill. Here the Donner-Reed party, despairing of cutting through the final tangle of brush, double-teamed their tired oxen to

pull their wagons out of the canyon. Rather than pull up the hill, the Mormons hacked through the last half-mile of brush and willow in just four hours.

14 This is the Place Monument

On July 24, 1847, Brigham Young's group went down the north bank of Emigration Creek to a spot near where “This is the Place Monument” now stands. After surveying the valley below, they descended to a campsite just northwest of the Salt Lake City-County Building at 400 South and Main.



This is the Place Monument



View from Hogsback Summit