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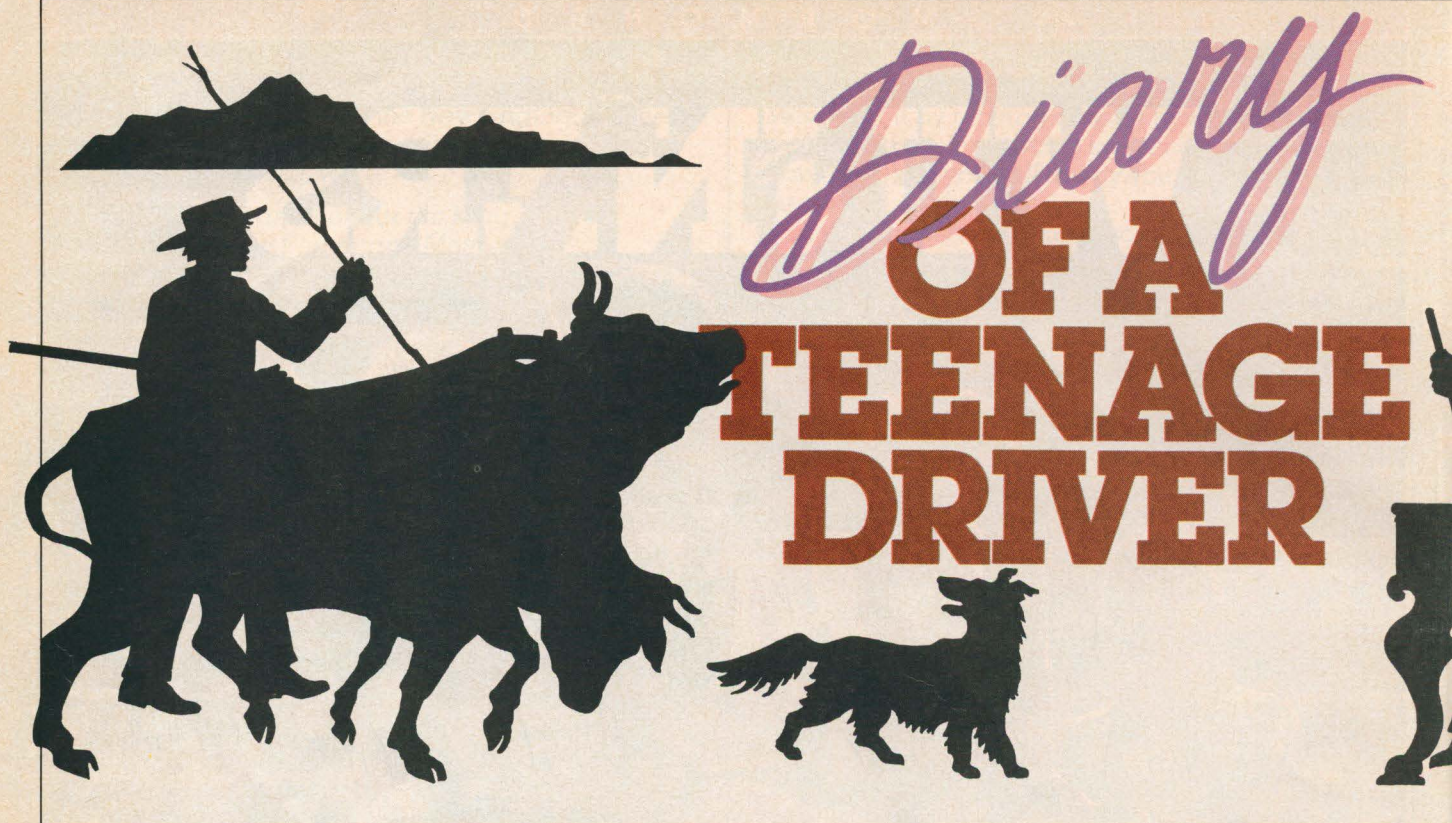
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**Z** by William G. Hartley

ebulon Jacobs, standing guard duty, witnessed one of the funniest moments to occur on the Mormon Trail. He and Henry Parker were posted outside the circled wagon train when it happened. It was a dark August night in 1861. Zeb's diary tells the story:

"About 10 o'clock P.M. we saw a man running towards us. We hailed him and found that he belonged to Heber C. Kimball's train, which was a short distance ahead of us. The Utah Boys had induced him to catch rabbits in Yankee fashion by building a small fire and lying down by it with an open sack for the rabbits to run into, and then hit them on the head with a club, now and then giving a low whistle; other boys going out to drive the rabbits in."

This may be the only pioneer account ever penned of what today is called a "snipe hunt." Zeb's diary continues:

"All of a sudden the boys gave a yell. The man thought the Indians were upon him, and off he started at full run. He had run about a mile when we stopped him. The fellow was scared out of his wits. The cause of his scare was this, that he knew everything but Yankee tricks. We took him back to his train which was three-fourths of a mile distant.

The method of catching rabbits just described was a trick."

Nineteen-year-old Zeb Jacobs was out on the Mormon Trail because President Brigham Young knew that teenagers like to drive. The prophet hired some older boys, including Zeb, to drive his wagons and carriages in Salt Lake City. But then, early in 1861, Brigham wanted to try a new way to transport immigrants across the plains. He decided to send out "down-and-back" wagon trains—"down" from Utah to Florence, Nebraska, to pick up passengers and bring them "back" to Utah. Needing drivers for the Utah wagons he called Zeb and other "Utah Boys" on down-and-back missions for spring and summer.

Zeb could handle wagons and teams, but he also had skills with a pen. During his down-and-back trip he penned a diary, one of the best trail diaries kept in 1861 and one of the best LDS teenage diaries ever written. Like a camera using words instead of film, his diary recorded some trail pictures, mostly fun pictures that teenagers enjoy. Let's look in his diary and pick out some word pictures that show what it was like being a teenage driver on the Mormon Trail.

Driving one of the 40 wagons in the Joseph W. Young wagon train, Zeb rolled out of Salt Lake City around April 23, 1861. Three other trains left too, making 200 wagons total heading east that week.





The Utah trains did not travel empty. "In my wagon," Zeb wrote, "I had a couple of ladies to take East; they are going to Boston." But his delight in escorting the ladies was short-lived. A west-bound company brought news from "the States" that civil war had broken out, so the ladies decided to return to Utah with that company.

Besides passengers, the Utah wagons were stuffed to their bows and covers with flour and supplies to be dropped off at various stops on the "down" trip for use on the "back" trip.

The trail seemed new to Zeb, who was only six when he traveled it to Utah. So, like a tourist, he watched for famous landmarks along the trail. At one, Devil's Gate in Wyoming, he examined the spot where the snowbound handcart companies holed up in November 1856. Those pioneers had left behind much of their baggage and buried many prized possessions until someone from Utah could pick them up. According to Zeb, he and the Utah Boys "dug out a piano, and several sacks of salt, which had been cached 4 years ago. They were not damaged in the least."

In May and June he noticed much traffic on the trail. On June 8 his diary noted that Zeb "met 205 emigrant teams bound for California." Two weeks later he wrote that they passed a large band of Sioux Indians "going to fight the Pawnees."

For eight weeks Zeb guided wagon and team

eastward. Then in late June he parked his wagon in the Joseph W. Young train's campground about two miles northwest of Florence, Nebraska. For the next two weeks Zeb was a taxi driver, taking his wagon into Florence, picking up passengers for the Young train, and shuttling them to the campground. July 5 was a typical taxi day for him: "I left camp and went to Florence, after a load of Saints. The day was very warm, and I was very tired after my day's work." Missouri River steamers unloaded company after company of Saints at the giant LDS campground in Florence, congesting it; "emigrants stowed away in every nook and corner," is how Zeb described it.

On July 11 Zeb and his train pulled out and started the "back" part of the trip, 1,000 miles to Utah.

Some immigrants were troubled by the rough-looking, rough-talking Utah Boys. According to Englishman William Yates, another diarist on the trail that year, the boys looked and acted like poorly educated frontiersmen. Brother Yates, however, was fooled by appearances, for his own diary is notches below the quality of the one kept by Utah Boy Zeb Jacobs.

The immigrants learned quickly to appreciate the boys' abilities with oxen and wagons. And they liked to see the Utah Boys do much of the wagon trains' dirty work. Zeb and the others had to hunt for firewood and buffalo chips, build fires, track



down missing cattle, set up and break camps, haul water, and spend hours in rivers helping wagons to cross. At Loup Fork crossing, for example, Zeb "had the pleasure of getting a dunking several times, helping the wagons over." Near Fort Laramie he wrote: "I was in the water most of the afternoon helping the teams across. The weather was cold." The boys seemed to enjoy showing off their expertise and strength, however, especially when teenage girls were watching.

The boys' main assignment was caring for cattle and wagons—hitching, unhitching, feeding, shoeing, corralling, guarding, and mending harnesses. This work provided Zeb with some unexpected adventures. One day, according to his diary, "I was helping to shoe an ox, and witnessed the mosquitoes and horse flies driving off the horses and cattle, and in gathering the animals we kept what is called the dog-trot for about a mile. I finally caught a horse and jumped on him, and with considerable difficulty I succeeded in getting the animals back to camp."

One night the "mules and horses took a notion they would go and accordingly they went." The boys started in pursuit "but the night was so dark that we had to take the advantage of the lightning to tell us which way we were going." When Zeb saw something move in the distance he tried to run to it. "At last I got lost in a swamp but managed,

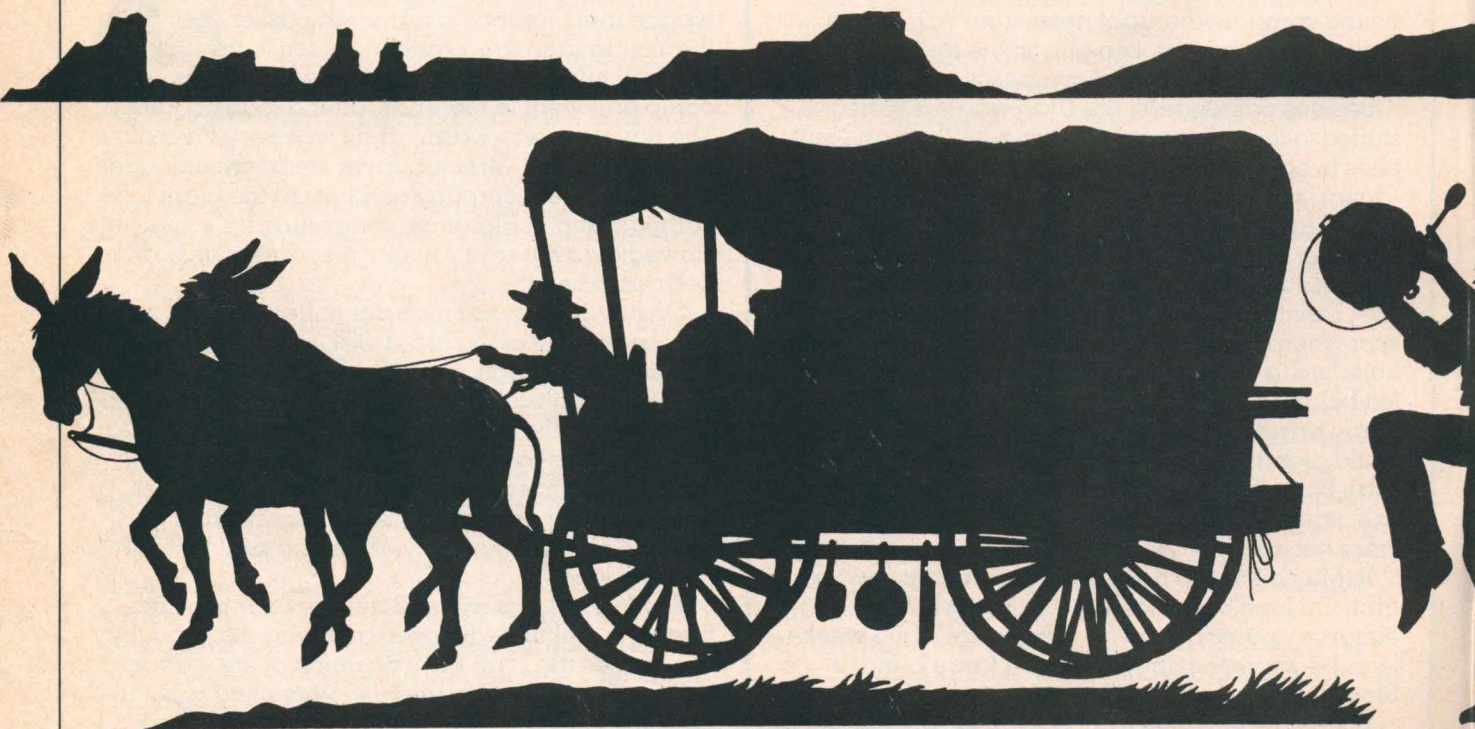
after much trouble, to get back to camp without finding the animals." Next morning, on foot, the boys found the animals more than nine miles from the camp.

One night Zeb let the terrain keep the cattle from wandering: "Being on guard, I took the mules up a large ravine and stayed until midnight, then Bro. Henry Parker relieved me."

For teenagers life can never be all hard work. The Utah Boys had fun on the trail too. One day they "caught a string of fish." Another time they "had a family swim in the Platte." One morning Zeb and one of the men "crossed the river and found plenty of chokecherries and currants. After satisfying our own appetites we filled our hats and pockets." In recrossing the river "we got ducked several times, but we hung on to the fruit." Back at camp they shared the berries and "finding breakfast ready, we ate heartily."

On July 24, Pioneer Day, the Utah Boys decided to help the campers celebrate. With good-humored exaggeration Zeb wrote of their fun:

"We were up at daylight and called out the 'National Guard' [the boys] which fired a volley of musketry, and any kind of guns that were handy. Then the 'Martial Band' struck up 'Hail Columbia' (the band was composed of tin pails, pans, bake-kettle lids, bells, and various instruments of music); then there was another volley by the Guard; and at





sunrise, the firing of cannon (which was about 3 inches in length), and concluded the morning performance with an Indian jig."

That night the boys held a "grand ball" at the "Bachelors Hall," meaning a square dance in front of their tents.

August 17 provided one of the highlights of the boys' fun on the trail. According to Zeb: "As we woke up in the morning all hands began laughing at each other, as our faces were besmeared with tar and wagon grease. Some of the boys from the other camp had paid us a visit and left their compliments upon our faces."

Humor also helped Zeb describe how the mosquitoes plagued them at swampy stretches of the trail. "Some of us went in the river to bathe," he wrote once, "but we found the mosquitoes there ahead of us. They very soon got rid of us." Another evening he said the boys were "entertained with a large and renowned band of minstrels (mosquitoes); they kept us dancing all night."

On August 30, in the middle of Wyoming, the teenage driver received a special honor. Captain Joseph W. Young needed to rush ahead of his train to catch up with another wagon company, so he selected Zeb to drive him in a wagon pulled by mules. (Mules travel much faster than oxen.) Zeb drove as fast as he could for three days and then Captain Young, needing to travel even faster,

hailed a passing stagecoach, boarded it, and left Zeb to travel alone.

Zeb liked the fast mule team which moved him 20 to 45 miles a day, double what wagon trains could cover. But driving alone on the hot, dusty trail and camping by himself at night had its lonely moments. So he enjoyed catching up to other travelers and visiting with them. Late on September 3 he overtook the Joseph Horne train "where I joined the people in that camp in a dance." An injured man in the camp needed to be hurried to Salt Lake, so Richard Horne joined Zeb as a traveling companion, "and I was very glad of his company," Zeb confessed.

Zeb, the teenage driver, put his mule-pulled wagon and injured passenger into Salt Lake City in near record time, arriving on September 7 at breakfast time. He beat his Joseph W. Young wagon train there by 16 days. In total, down and back, Zeb had been on the trail for 18 weeks.

It is not known if Zeb kept any diaries after 1861. He made down-and-back trips again in 1862 and 1863. In 1866, at age 24, he married. He served in the Blackhawk War as a sergeant in the cavalry. By career he became a railroad man, working as a popular conductor on the Utah Central Railroad. Late in life he became a guard at the state penitentiary. He remained a lifelong faithful Latter-day Saint. ❏

