

ENSIGN

THE ENSIGN OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

January 1980

*The Great
Nineteenth-Century
Mormon Migration:
The
Pioneer Trail
Today*



EASTERN ENDS OF THE TRAIL WEST

By Stanley B. Kimball

GENERAL EMIGRANT ROUTES, 1840-68

From 20 July 1840, when the first Mormon converts arrived in New York City from England, to 1 May 1869, when the first transcontinental railroad was completed, Mormons officially developed or used twenty-two points of departure, or staging grounds, from New York to California. From each of these points, all Saints except those who came via California eventually picked up the famous Mormon Trail and followed it to Zion.

Only the first two groups of English immigrants in 1840 debarked at New York City; for the fifteen years there-

after all European immigrant groups sailed to New Orleans and then up the Mississippi River to various points of departure. After 1856, immigrants could go by railroad to Chicago and beyond, so they again landed in New York City, and also in Boston and Philadelphia. Until 1845 they went straight to Nauvoo, Illinois. Afterwards these other points of departure were developed:

Winter Quarters (later Florence), Nebraska, 1846-48

Council Bluffs, Iowa, 1849-52

Saint Louis, Missouri, 1852

Keokuk, Iowa, 1853

Westport, Missouri, 1854

Mormon Grove, Kansas, 1855-56

Iowa City, Iowa, 1856-57 (There

was no formal immigration in 1858 because of the "Utah War.")

Florence, Nebraska, 1856-63

Saint Joseph, Missouri, 1859

Genoa, Nebraska, 1859

Wyoming, Nebraska, 1864-66

North Platte, Nebraska, 1867

Laramie City, Wyoming, 1868

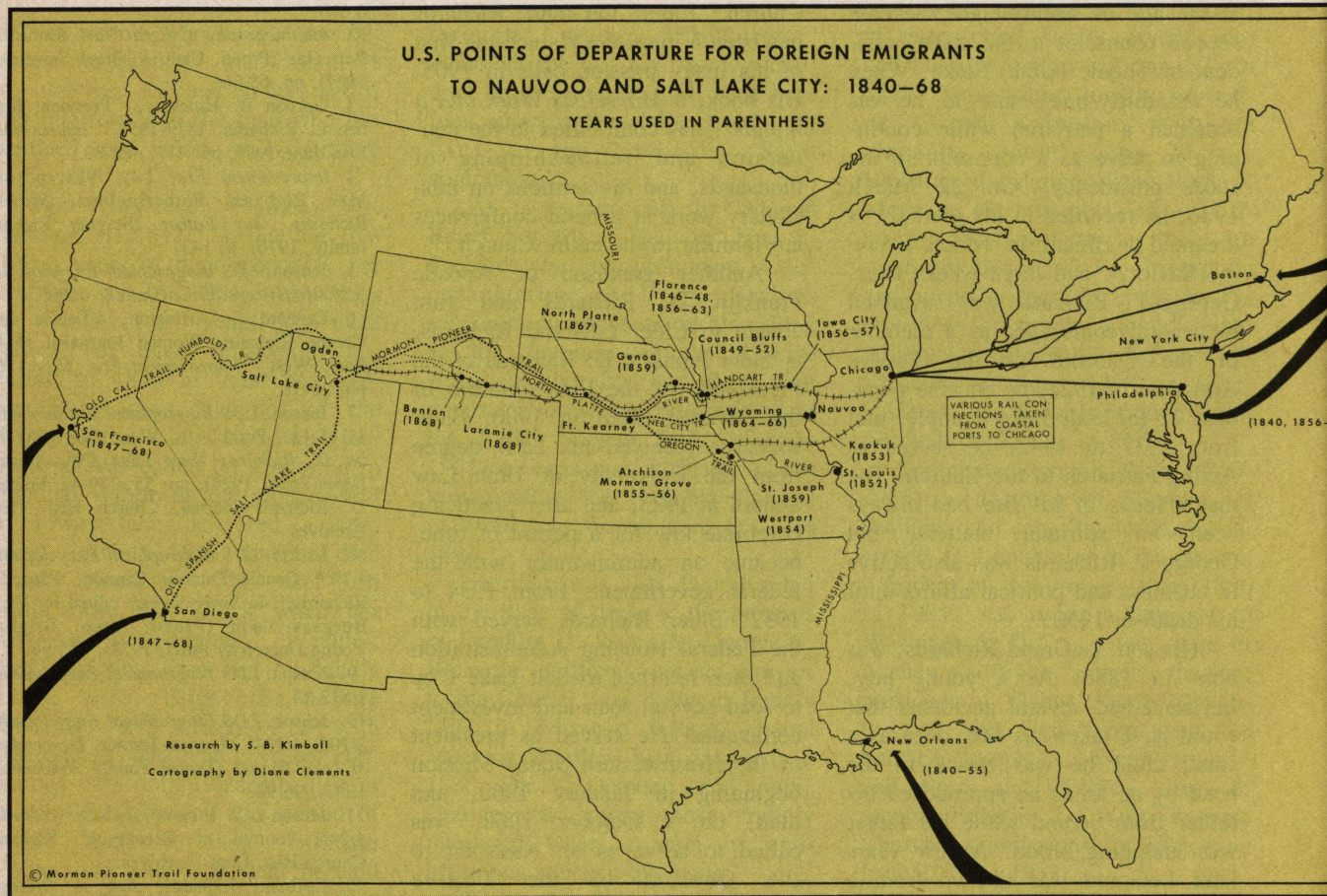
Benton, Wyoming, 1868

A relatively small number of Saints from New York, Europe, and the Pacific area entered the United States at San Diego and San Francisco and followed either the Old Spanish Trail or the Old California Trail to Utah.

The Union Pacific Railroad began moving west from Omaha, Nebraska, 10 July 1865. Thereafter, Mormons

U.S. POINTS OF DEPARTURE FOR FOREIGN EMIGRANTS
TO NAUVOO AND SALT LAKE CITY: 1840-68

YEARS USED IN PARENTHESIS





took trains to three different Union Pacific railheads: North Platte, Nebraska, in 1867, and Laramie City and Benton, Wyoming, in 1868. The first two settlements prospered, but Benton has the distinction of becoming the first ghost town in Wyoming. (The town lasted only three months—from July through September 1868.) On the eastern edge of the Red Desert, eleven miles east of Rawlins, near the North Platte River, the site of vanished Benton is marked today by a Union Pacific milepost exactly 672.1 miles west of Omaha.

THE MORMON GROVE SAINTS' TRAIL, 1855-56

Between 1848 and the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, the Mormons developed several points of departure for the Far West. Most of these outfitting stations were located along the Missouri River. During 1855-56 the preferred place was Mormon Grove, Kansas, four miles west of Atchison, an important Missouri River port city. Located on the prairie at the head of Deer Creek, Mormon Grove was an excellent camping place with water, wood, and range for stock. And, like the other Mormon camps along the Missouri, it was close enough to the port city so the Saints could easily purchase supplies, but it was far enough away to allow space for tent cities and grazing animals, and to avoid the assorted evils of river ports.

Soon after the first Mormons arrived there in April 1855, they fenced 160 acres, a quarter section, and planted twenty. That year eight companies, totaling 2,041 people and 337 wagons, left Mormon Grove for Zion. A group of fifteen members remained behind to await the next year's immigrants. During the 1856 season, however, only one company of ninety-seven Saints left from Mormon Grove. Most immigrants were then going directly by rail from the east coast to Florence, Nebraska.

At Atchison the Saints debarked the river boats at the foot of Atchison Street. From there today's traveler

should take Highway 73 approximately 4.5 miles straight west and turn south on a section road. The first farmhouse on the west side of the road marks the farm of Mr. Floyd Armstrong, where the old cemetery—all that is left of Mormon Grove today—is located. At least sixteen Mormons were buried there, but no traces of the graves remain.

Back on Highway 73, going west to Horton, you will pass through Lancaster, a stage stop on the old road. Two miles from Horton is Kenekutt stage stop. (Ask locally for directions.) Stage stops in the area that no longer exist are Capinoma, just north of Granada, and Richmond, three miles north of Seneca.

The great Oregon Trail was not just a single trail; it had at least two main branches and many feeder trails. The Mormon Grove Trail, part of the Fort Leavenworth Military Road, was one of the many feeder trails. Near Maryville, the trail crossed the Big Blue River and joined the Oregon Trail proper, which then followed the Little Blue as far as possible towards Fort Kearney, Nebraska. (Later, the Pony Express Trail from Saint Joseph followed much the same route. Pony Express fans should visit the stations in Seneca and Hollenberg.)

The Mormons spent little time at Fort Kearney. Instead, they forded the Platte there, picked up the old 1847 Mormon Trail north of the river, and followed it to the Valley.

Between Steel City, Nebraska, and Fort Kearney, the state of Nebraska has erected thirty-four markers. These can help travelers gauge how close they are to the old Oregon/Mormon Grove Trail. East of Fort Kearney, this trail was joined by another feeder trail, the Nebraska City Cutoff Trail, which Mormons used in the 1860s.

HANDCART TRAIL, 1856-57

In 1856, when rail travel was finally possible from the east coast clear to Iowa, Iowa City became the point of departure for the Valley. Thousands of

European converts, mainly from England, Wales, and Scandinavia, landed in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia and traveled by train via Chicago for Iowa City, the end of the Mississippi and Missouri Railroad.

The train was faster and more comfortable than the ox cart, but hardly luxurious. Averaging twenty miles an hour, without sleeping or eating accommodations, the smokey, sooty trains operated on wildly erratic schedules. But on the Saints came.

Immigrants debarked at Iowa City from a depot only three blocks east of the present one, crossed the Iowa River, and went to the staging area three miles away—a small settlement known as Clark's Mills (later called Coralville) situated on the banks of Clear Creek.

From there, the journey of many Saints after 1856 took on an unusual dimension. Handcarts, claimed to be faster, cheaper, and easier, were their mode of travel. The famous handcart experiment involved 2,962 people in nine companies from 1856 through 1860, but only the first seven companies (2,071 Saints; 67 percent of the total) trod Iowa soil. The last two companies were able to ride various railroads all the way to Council Bluffs/Florence.

With the exception of companies four and five—the famous Martin and Willie companies, which started too late in the year and were trapped in Wyoming snows—the system was a success. But after 1860 the Church sent large ox-team trains to haul immigrants to the Valley from the Missouri River and other points west.

In Coralville, the Daughters of the American Revolution have erected a bronze tablet commemorating the handcart companies just west of the intersection of Fifth Street and Tenth Avenue, on the south side of the road. Immediately south of this intersection, flowing parallel with Highway 6, is Clear Creek. Also in Coralville is the Mormon Trek Boulevard.

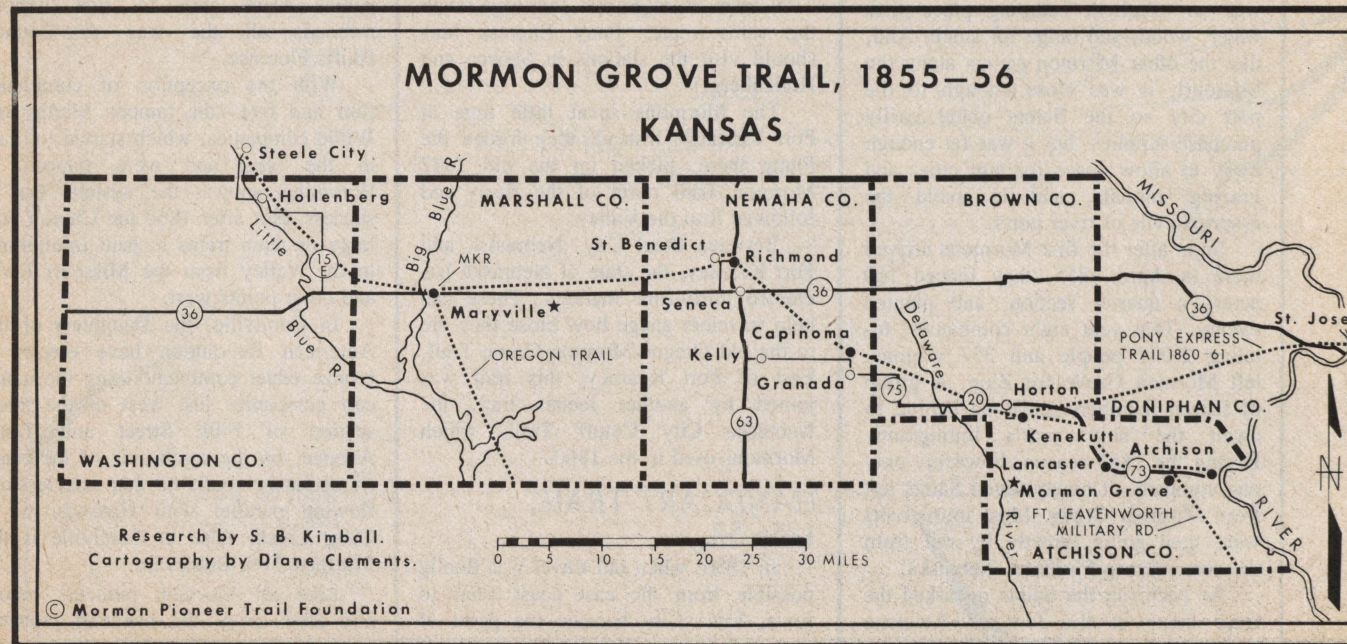
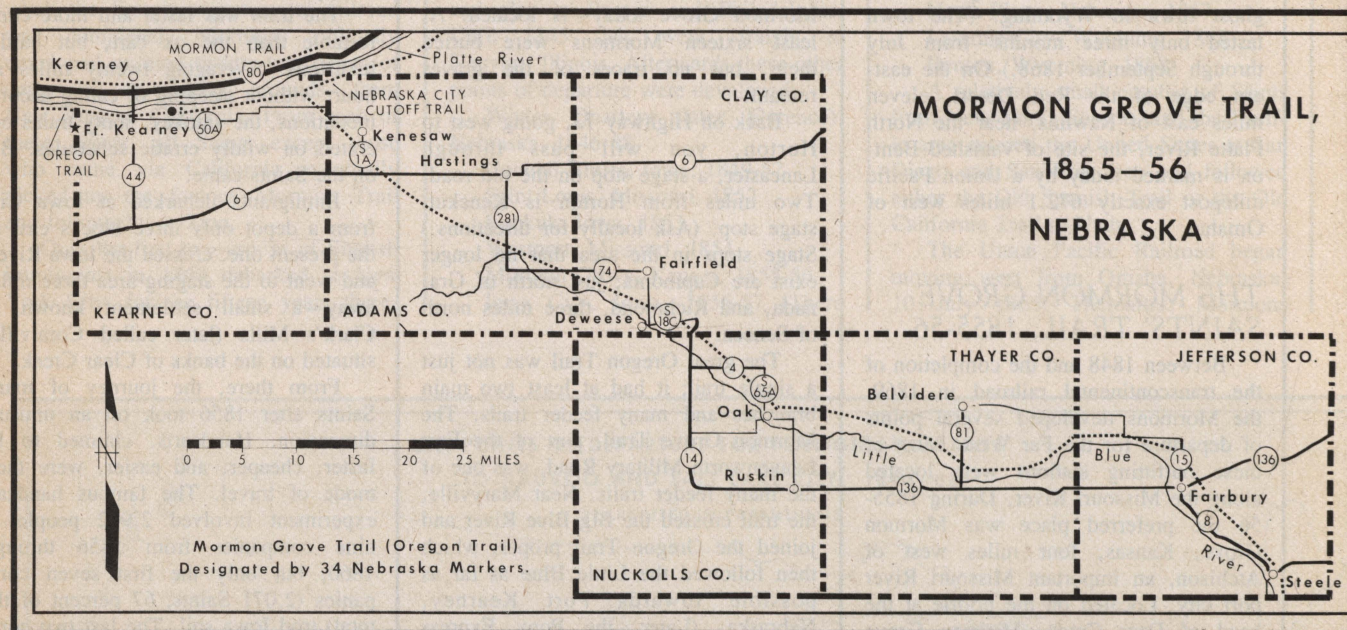
Like all Mormon pioneers before and after them, the handcart pioneers used the best, most convenient roads

and trails. Since at least 1846, when Brigham Young led the Saints across Iowa, there had been a road of some kind between Iowa City and Council Bluffs. Beginning as a military road, it served later as a territorial, state, mail, and coach route. Most of the handcart journals of 1856-57 refer often to the good Iowa roads. In fact, had the Saints not been so poor, they could have ridden by coach to the Missouri River for about \$11.00.

Today's Highway 6 follows this old trans-Iowa road, one of the oldest and most historic in the state. From Coralville, the pioneers passed through Homestead and South Amana, two German colonies established in 1854. (This part of Highway 6 up to Grinnell is also officially marked as the Hiawatha Pioneer Trail.) Passing slowly through Marengo (the future site of Brooklyn), Grinnell (the future site of Kellogg), Newton, and Rising Sun,

they reached Fort Des Moines. The old fort on the west bank of the Des Moines River was abandoned at the time, but still standing. Near the intersection of Riverside Drive and South West First Street is a granite marker and part of the newly restored fort.

West of Des Moines, the Mormons proceeded via Adel and Redfield to Bear Grove. Merely a wide spot in the road today, Bear Grove was then an important coach stop, a place where the



pioneers obtained needed supplies. (Ask locally for directions to Bear Grove.)

From there the Saints traveled the old Dragoon Military Road, now largely non-existent but approximating the dotted line, to Council Bluffs. At Lewis they intersected the older 1846 Pioneer Trail and followed it directly to Council Bluffs, where, crossing the Missouri by ferry, they arrived at the new staging ground in Florence, Nebraska, and made final preparations to follow the

famous Pioneer Trail to the Valley.

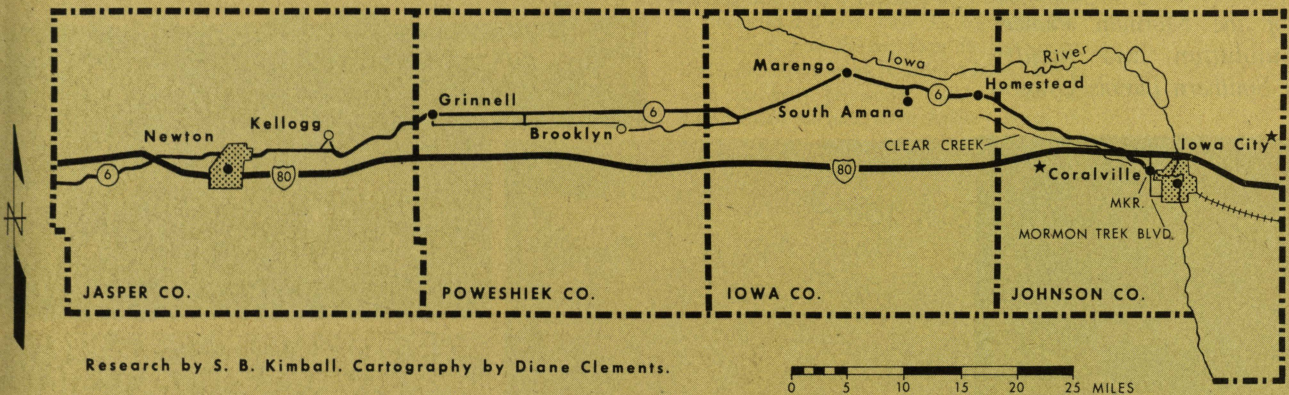
The 275 mile trip from Iowa City to Council Bluffs/Florence took handcart companies from twenty-one to thirty-nine days—an average of twenty-five days, eleven miles per day. But although these handcart pioneers did not know it when they arrived, Iowa roads were veritable superhighways compared to those west of the Missouri.

Two markers in the Lewis town square commemorate the Mormon Trail.

One, a section of a telephone pole, has "Mormon Trail" carved into it; the other is a handsome bronze marker placed by the Daughters of the American Revolution in 1917. In the camping area of Cold Spring Park, two miles south of Lewis, is a third, telephone pole-type marker. □

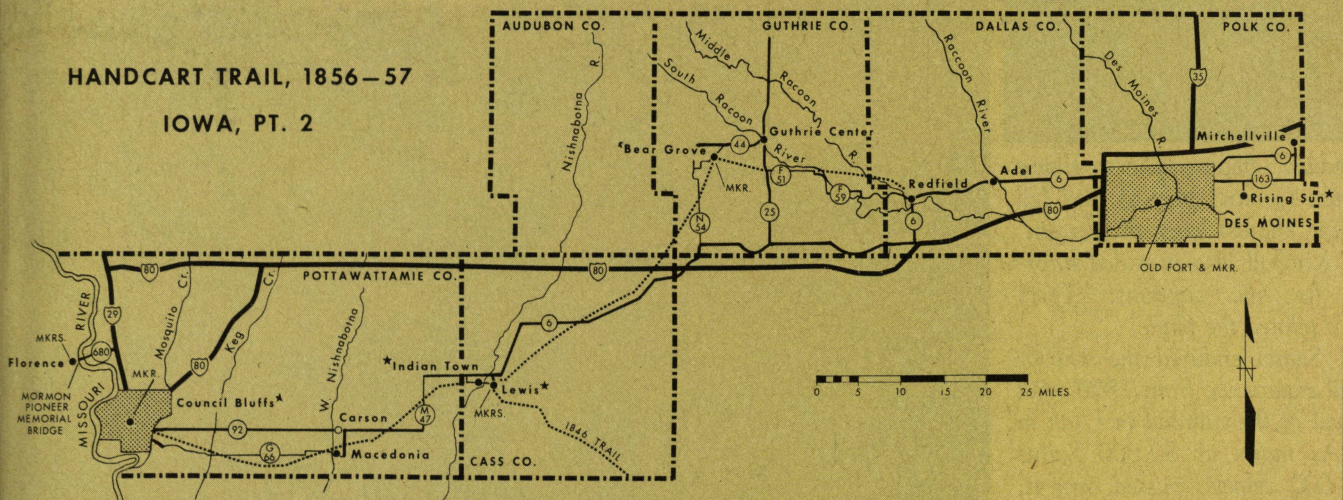
Stanley B. Kimball, professor of history at Southern Illinois University, serves as a high counselor in the St. Louis Missouri Stake.

HANDCART TRAIL, 1856-57 IOWA, PT. 1




© Mormon Pioneer Trail Foundation

HANDCART TRAIL, 1856-57 IOWA, PT. 2



THE WAY
IT LOOKS TODAY

SITES ON THE TRAIL WEST

 In the ENSIGN'S continuing tour of Church history sites, we follow the Saints in the trans-continental trek that, for many, was the second leg of a journey begun at European ports. Stanley B. Kimball, historian of the Mormon Pioneer Trail Foundation and faculty member at Southern Illinois Univer-



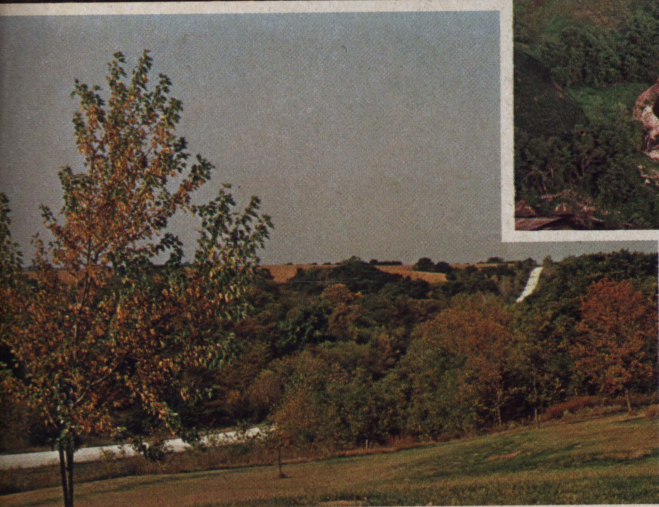
sity, guided photographers Eldon Linschoten (ground photos) and Jed Clark (air photos) over the terrain. Brother Kimball also provided information for the captions; Terry Roylance piloted the plane.

The Saints endured the 1,400-mile trail experience from 1846 until the arrival of the railroad in Utah in 1869. As many as 80,000 Saints and 10,000 vehicles passed over it; perhaps 6,000 pioneers were laid to rest beside it. It became a rite of passage, not only for these 80,000 Latter-day Saints but also, symbolically, for their descendants.





Nauvoo, far left, was the departure point for the Saints' first wagons west. Page 34, right, shows a typical sunset on the trail west of Sugar Creek. Here, six miles west of the Mississippi shore at Montrose, Iowa, the pioneers made their staging ground in an area formerly part of the Ambrosia Branch of the Zarahemla Iowa Stake. They camped here from 4 February to 1 March 1846 in bitter cold and rain. Page 35, top left, shows Sugar Creek from the air. Page 35, left center: Early fall colors mark Garden Grove, looking west, the first "permanent" camp on the trail across Iowa. Located about halfway across the



state, it was designed to serve the needs of Saints who would follow. It lasted until 1852. The view is from an LDS cemetery just west of the modern community. Bottom left: Mt. Pisgah, which also lasted until 1852, was the second "permanent" camp, named by Parley P. Pratt (see Deut. 3:27). Here the Saints built log cabins where today's cornfields silently parade, and here many members of the Mormon Battalion were sworn in. Above: Locust Creek looking eastward, near Sewal, Iowa. On this approximate site, William Clayton penned the stirring words to "Come, Come Ye Saints," 15 April 1846. Trees marching across the middle ground and the bridge mark the course of this otherwise insignificant creek.





Bottom, far left: Council Bluffs looking south. Known to the Indians for centuries and to the white men since the Lewis and Clark expeditions, these Missouri River Bluffs were a rendezvous point. Latter-day Saints called the first settlement there Miller's Hollow, then Kanesville. Now a modern city, in 1847 it saw the sustaining of Brigham Young as Joseph Smith's successor. Saints lived here until the 1850s. Bottom right: Mormon Pioneer Memorial Bridge at Winter Quarters, looking east. Dedicated 1853, it spans the Missouri River approximately where the early Saints propelled a ferry between Council



Ancient Ruins Bluff, west of Lisco, Nebraska. This formation was one of the most dramatic topographical features in this bland section of the Mormon Trail. On 23 May 1847, Brigham Young and most of the Quorum of the Twelve climbed the center bluff, held a council meeting, wrote their names on a buffalo skull, and placed it on the southwest corner of the bluff. Pioneers claimed that from here they could "look farther and see less" than from any other site on the trail.



Above: The Platte River. The Saints followed its shallow, gentle valley for over 600 miles through Nebraska and Wyoming. It furnished fish, turtles, fowl, protection from prairie fire, and, above all, water. Still a lazy, unnavigable, braided stream full of quicksand, its frontier reputation has always been "a mile wide, six inches deep, too thick to drink, too thin to plow, and maybe a pretty good river if it hadn't flowed upside down." Left: Sand Hills, looking east. Here, near Sutherland, Nebraska, the sand hills reached to the Platte, forcing the Saints to pass over them. Some of the old ruts are clearly visible to this day.

Chimney Rock, framed by fog and sunflowers, was 425 miles west of Winter Quarters, a reminder in weathered stone of factory-town smokestacks. No one is known to have climbed its fragile slopes and pinnacles.





Looking west down Mexican Hill on the Platte River near Guernsey, Wyoming. The Saints who drove their wagons down this precipitous groove through solid rock later claimed that if a tin cup fell out of a wagon on the way down, it would land in front of the oxen.



Laramie Peak from the air, looking west. This 10,000-foot pyramid forty-five miles west of Fort Laramie signaled the beginning of the western mountains, both an obstacle to and a promise of the Saints' home in Zion. At Fort Laramie, the Saints picked up the Oregon Trail and followed it to Fort Bridger 397 miles west.



Heber Springs near Horse Shoe Creek west of Glendo, Wyoming. Its lush green meadows were a favorite camping ground for the Saints. Heber C. Kimball, a superb horseman and frequently a scout, was the first Latter-day Saint to come upon them.



Walking up Deer Creek, near Glenrock, Wyoming, in September 1847, Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and a few others returning from the Salt Lake Valley to Winter Quarters flushed a mother grizzly and escaped her charge only by clambering up these rocky cliffs.



Just above: Twilight view of Platte Ferry at present-day Casper, Wyoming. Here at "Last Crossing," the northernmost point on the trail, the Mormons left the Platte River for good; for several years they maintained a ferry here that transported not only Latter-day Saints but many California goldseekers across the river.



Top left: Looking east through Devil's Gate near Independence Rock. This chasm attracted Latter-day Saint boys who tried to follow the Sweetwater River through its 1500-foot length (and couldn't) or climb its 370-foot crest (and could). According to an Indian legend, the gap was ripped out by the tusks of a trapped monster gouging his way to freedom. Inset, top: From the air looking west we see another view of Devil's Gate and the Sweetwater River. The Mormons followed this beneficent river for 109 miles; with the Platte, it made it possible to reach the Great Basin in one traveling season rather than wintering in hostile country. The Mormon Trail passes to the gate's left. The Sweetwater may have been so named because of the sugar-loaded mules that once fell into it, or perhaps because most other water in this area is brackish. Above: Emigrant Gap looking west. One of several "Emigrant Gaps" along the western trail, this one is near Devil's Gate. Every westering Mormon passed through it.



Right: Independence Rock, looking west. At this famous camping site, Mormon children climbed the rock's sides and many adults painted or carved names and initials on it. The modern road in the foreground suggests the old trail. Some Astorian fur traders camped here on a July 4, probably giving the rock its name.





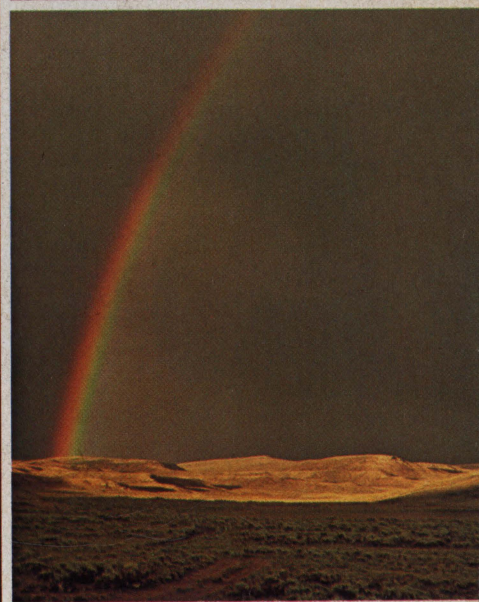


Martin's Cove, looking west (far left) and from the air (center). Only one group of Mormons ever camped in this hidden cove somewhat off the regular trail in an elbow of Wyoming's Rattlesnake Mountains. The Martin Handcart Company of 1856, desperately seeking shelter from an early blizzard, huddled in this cove where many of the fifty-six who eventually froze to death perished. In the aerial view, the Sweetwater River is visible, top left of photograph; the Saints sheltered to the right. Page 42, bottom: All but one company of Saints—the Willie Handcart Company—traveled this lovely, lonely stretch of the Sweetwater in peace. Just left: The Willie Handcart Company of 1856 was caught in a blizzard near here on Rock Creek. Just below the road, to the right of the creek, is a collective grave of many of the sixty-seven who perished in that company, in death as well as life a companion to the Martin Company. Below: South Pass looking west. Here the Saints crossed the continental divide over a pass so flat Orson Pratt could hardly locate the line with a barometer, and entered the vaguely defined Oregon Territory. Their future home was about 200 miles away.





Left: The 1847 pioneers built a ferry here near the confluence of the Green River and Sandy Creek; here Samuel Brannan met Brigham Young and unsuccessfully tried to persuade him to settle in California. Above: Church Butte from the air looking west, possibly named from LDS services held here on Sundays. Located on Highway 30, west of Granger, Wyoming, it neighbors Black Fork River, right edge of photograph, which the Saints were following. Top right: Pacific Springs' water flows west, not east, since it is located just west of South Pass. An important rendezvous point, it saw the meeting between the returning 1847 pioneers and the second 1847 company.



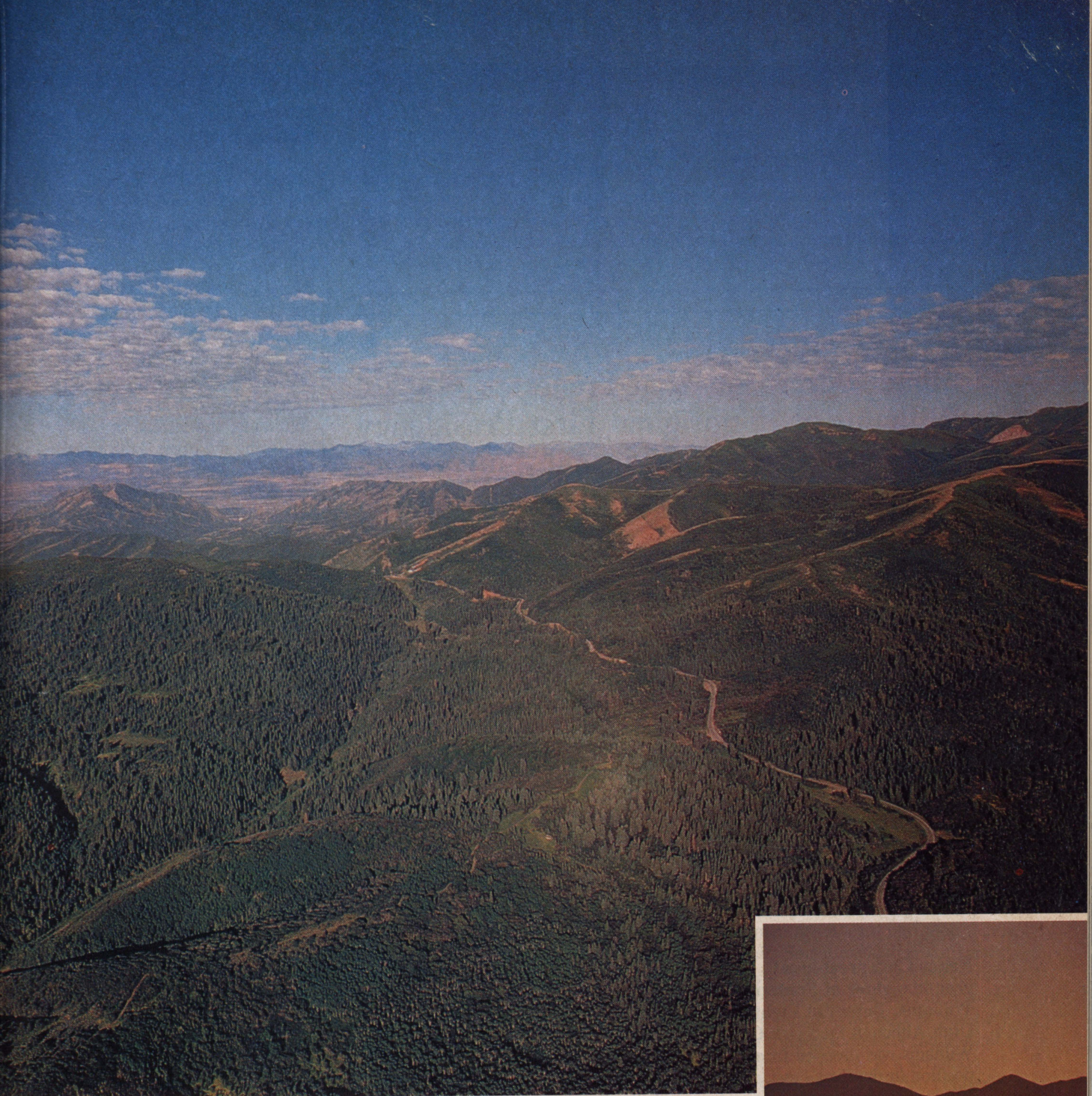
Above: Coyote Creek Canyon, between the Bear River and Echo Canyon, about one and one-half miles east of the Utah border, looking east. Here Brigham Young was stricken with mountain fever for two weeks, making him trail the vanguard into the valley by two days.

Right: The Needles, looking east from Utah, at the mouth of Coyote Creek Canyon. A famous topographic feature on the Mormon Trail, they are located about a half-mile east of the Utah line. Heber C. Kimball climbed them in July 1847 to pray for Brigham Young's recovery.





Top left: Echo Canyon, looking east. This major link in a ninety-mile-long series of natural breaks that led the Saints from Wyoming's Bear River into the Valley is now traversed by Interstate 80. Just above: Looking west from the hogback out of Henefer, Utah, the heart-breaking summit of Main Canyon, over which the Saints had to painfully maneuver their wagons. Top right: Aerial view to the west showing Little Emigration Canyon in the foreground, cresting atop Big Mountain. To the right lies the original route into the Valley; left is Parley's Canyon, named for Parley P. Pratt, who blazed it in 1848 in an attempt to find an easier way into the Valley. By 1862 his new route (Highway 40) had become the preferred road. Below, right: Now dense with homes and businesses instead of sagebrush and willows, the floor of the Salt Lake Valley still opens out in a welcoming vista for the traveler.



Right: Hazed by sunset, Salt Lake City's "This is the Place" Monument memorializes the LDS migration in granite. Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Wilford Woodruff serenely gaze over their Zion in the tops of the mountains.

