

Crossing the Plains to Utah

May – September, 1848

Phineas W. Cook's wagon

Having given up the wagon he built in Michigan to Brigham Young and the Pioneer Company in 1847, Phineas had to build another wagon at Winter Quarters. Most likely it was similar to the wagon he had already built, and was built in the same yard in which he and Solomon Angell worked on wagons to help others be prepared for the journey ahead.



The wagon Phineas built in Michigan is now on display at the DUP Museum in Salt Lake City and is the wagon used by Brigham Young when he came into the valley in 1847

PWC Journal: *“The fourteenth day of Feb’y. I told president Young that I wanted an opportunity to talk with him if he felt willing(.) he answered he was... I told him I wanted to go with him to the mountains(.) he said I should have it, and if he went I should go with him(.) he wanted me to help fix up his waggons and get ready for the journey, so the 15th I went at it with Soloman Angel(.) we fixt all the waggons by the time to start(.) we left winter quarters the 19th day of May(.)”*

PWC Journal: *“A few days before we got ready to start about the time the camp at Summer Quarters moved in, the oxen ware drove in from the farm(.) my cattle was thin*

and I was affraid they would not stand the journey, but I said nothing about it for fear that they would think that I was finding fault.”

“The wagon was the usual method of transportation employed by both Mormons and non-Mormons alike on the trails. The emigrant wagon was not the large Conestoga wagon used back East on the National Road or similar wagons sometimes employed by traders on the Santa Fe Trail, but was typically a small farm wagon about eight to ten feet long.

“It might be pulled by oxen, mules, or horses. Emigrants often argued among themselves about the advantages of each type of team. Oxen were usually stronger, slower, cheaper, and could eat a wider variety of vegetation and, thus, could subsist better along the trail. They were also a little less likely to be stolen. Mules were less expensive than horses but more expensive than oxen, but they could travel faster than oxen. Horses were the fastest, the most expensive and had feed requirements that were the hardest to provide during the early years of trail travel. They were also the most likely to be stolen by the Indians. Although all draft animals were used by Mormons, it seems that oxen were employed most often.”¹

Brigham Young's Wagon Company

Phineas W. Cook crossed the plains in the First Division of Brigham Young's Company in 1848.²

¹ Hill, W. E. (1996). *The Mormon Trail: Yesterday and today*. Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 2006, p. 11.

² *Journal History of the Church*, December 31, 1848, Supplement, p. 4.

An unusually large company, 1,220 people crossed the plains in Brigham Young's company that year, including Brigham Young's whole family. By the time the five companies had crossed the plains to Utah in 1848, there were 4,500 saints in Utah,³ an astounding number, considering the complications encountered with insufficient maps, hostile Indians, poor trails, dangerous river crossings, sickness, and animals weakened by travel and by the previous difficult winter.

After six weeks on the trail Brigham Young sent three brethren ahead to carry letters to the saints in the Salt Lake Valley. In the *Journal History of the Church* his detailed letter and request for help is mentioned.

Brigham recorded: "The letters were sent to Elders Parley P. Pratt and John Taylor and the Presidency and High Council in the Valley, detailing many items of news; which I forwarded together with 205 letters which we had brought from Winter Quarters, by the hands of John Y. Green, Benjamin Rolfe [Benjamin W. Rolfe] and Cyrenus Taylor [Cyrenus Henry Taylor]."

In the nine-page letter he apologized for not bringing all he had planned to carry to the Salt Lake Valley in 1848:

"You must not be disappointed in not seeing the Printing Presses type, paper, mill irons, mill stones, carding machine, etc, as I have fully calculated on the teams that you sent from the Valley bringing them on. We have the poor with us; their cry was urgent to go to the mountains, and I could neither close my ears nor harden my heart against their earnest appeals. I could bring my carriage and horses with my swift teams and be with you in 30 days, but I cannot forsake the poor in the hour of need, and when they stand most in need of comfort. I am disappointed in not bringing the presses, etc., but I can not avoid it; it is out of my power to do every thing.

"The first company led by Lorenzo Snow left the Horn <(Elkhorn)> on the 1st day of June, the 2nd company led by Zera Pulsipher, on the 2nd[,] the third company led by William Perkins on 3rd of June <and> the fourth company <led> by myself on Monday 5th. The fifth company <which> was left at the Horn under the direction of Elder Heber C. Kimball, who <was> were attacked by the Omaha or Otoe Indians on Tuesday the 6th of June. Howard Egan was shot in the arm, and Brother Ricks [Joel Ricks] was also severely wounded; both are now recovering. The Indians had <four> killed and <three> wounded. The brethren also lost one ox in the skirmish."⁴

Mormon Companies used the north side of the Platte River, partly because Winter Quarters was also on the north side of the river. Grass and feed were more plentiful on the north side, and there were fewer travelers to mingle with. Since the Platte River crossed the entire state of Nebraska, they followed it all the way to the present city of North Platte where the North Platte flows into it, at which time they had to cross the river to follow the North Platte.

³ Russell Rogers Rich, *Ensign to the Nations : A History of the Church From 1846 to the Present*, p. 175.

⁴ Brigham Young Letter, in *Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 17 July 1848, 3-9, <http://lds.org/churchhistory/library/source/1,18016,4976-4618,00.html>

BILL OF PARTICULARS

FOR THE EMIGRANTS LEAVING THIS GOVERNMENT NEXT SPRING.

Each family consisting of five persons, to be provided with

1 good strong wagon, well covered with a light box.	25 do Seed grain,
2 or 3 good yoke of oxen between the age of 4 and 10 years.	1 gal. Alcohol,
2 or more milch cows.	20 lbs of Soap each family,
3 or more good beavers.	4 or 5 Fish hooks and lines for do.
3 sheep if they can be obtained.	15 lbs. Iron and Steel.
1000 lbs. of flour or other bread or bread stuffs in good sacks.	A few lbs of wrought nails,
1 good musket or rifle to each male over the age of 12 years.	One or more sets of saw or grist mill Irons to company of 100 families,
1 lb. Powder,	2 sets of Pully Blocks and ropes to each co'y for crossing rivers.
4 do Lead,	1 good Seine and hook for each company,
1 do Tea,	From 25 to 100 lbs of Farming & mechanical tools,
5 do Coffee.	Cooking utensils to consist of a Bake kettle, frying pan, coffee pot, & tea kettle;
100 do Sugar,	Tin cups, plates, knives forks, spoons, & pins as few as will do.
4 do Cayenne Pepper,	A good tent and furniture to each 2 families.
2 do Black do,	Clothing & bedding to each family not to exceed 500 pounds.
4 do Mustard,	Ten extra teams for each company of 100 families.
10 do Rice for each family.	
1 do Cinnamon,	
1/2 do Cloves,	
1 doz Nutmegs,	
25 lbs Salt,	
5 do Saleratus,	
10 do Dried apples.	
4 bush. of Beans.	
A few lbs of dried Beef or Bacon.	
5 lbs dried Peaches,	
20 do do Pumpkin,	

N. B. In addition to the above list, horse and mule teams, can be used as well as oxen. Many items of comfort and convenience will suggest themselves to a wise and provident people, and can be laid in in season; but none should start without filling the original bill.

BILL OF PARTICULARS—LDS Archives
(Note: On the listing, "do" means "ditto.")

On the left is a guide for emigrants published in *The Nauvoo Neighbor*:

Notice each family is urged to provide wagon and animals, 1,000 lbs. of flour, a gun, powder, lead, tea coffee, 300 lbs. sugar, cayenne and black pepper, mustard, rice, cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, 25 lbs. salt, dried fruit, beans, beef and pumpkin. By 1848 few had the means to provide everything on the list.

Seed grain, alcohol, soap, fish hooks and lines, nails, iron, steel and cooking utensils, as well as serving items were listed. Each family to have a tent and limited clothing and bedding.

Each 100 families should have extra teams, saw or grist mill irons and pully blocks and ropes for crossing rivers.

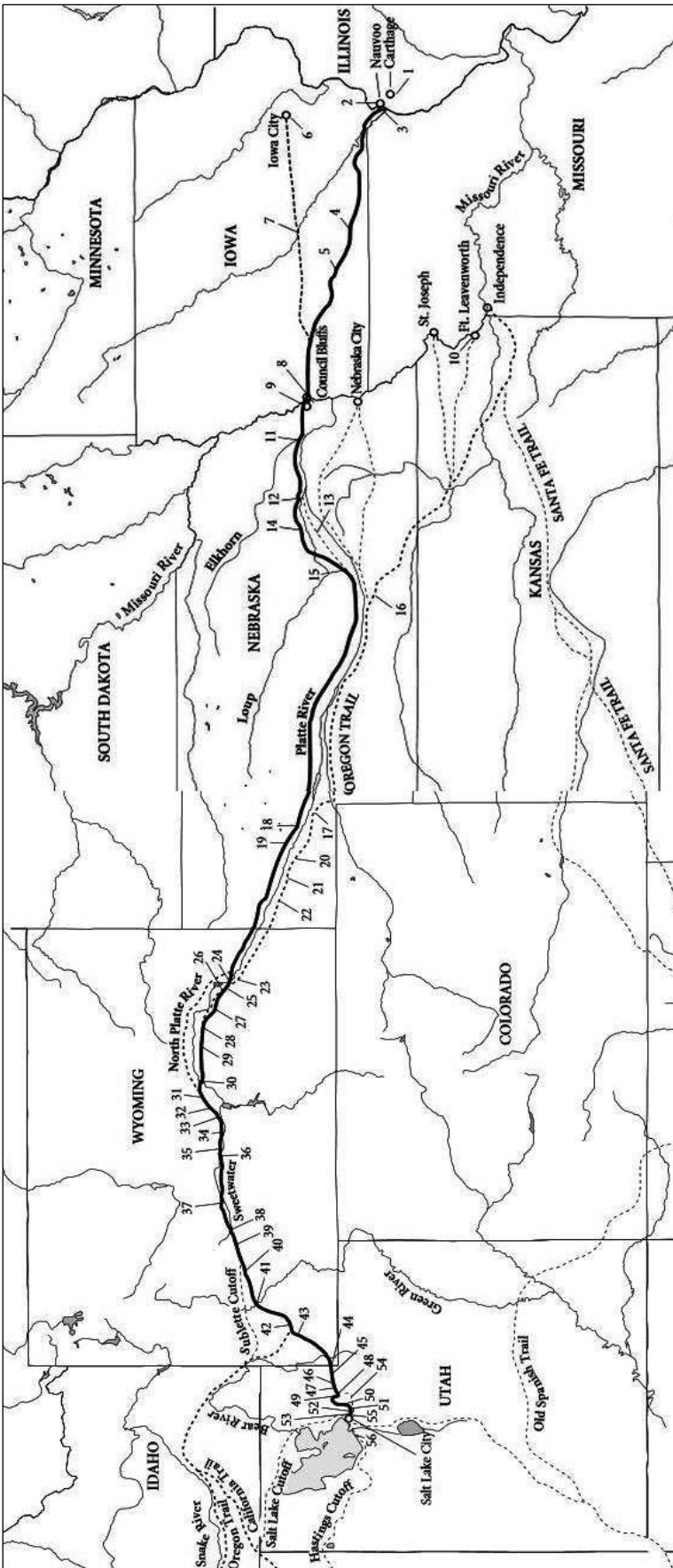
“Near Fort Laramie the Mormon Trail crosses the North Platte River. Then it generally follows the south side of the North Platte until it again crosses the river near present-day Casper, Wyoming. There the trail cuts across to meet and follow the Sweetwater River to the South Pass area. Turning southwest, the trail then heads down the Big Sandy, across the Green River, and over to Fort Bridger. This major section follows the Oregon National Historic Trail and parts of the California National Historic Trail.

From Fort Bridger the Mormon Trail continues in a south-westerly direction down into Echo Canyon to the Weber River and over the Wasatch Mountains into the Valley of the Great Salt Lake. The majority of the route west of Fort Bridger had been first used by those emigrants following the Hastings Cutoff going to California in 1846. It was the Donner-Reed Party that cut the wagon route over the Wasatch Mountains. This whole route represents the one used by the Mormon

pioneers in 1847-48.

“Many of the Mormons who came in later years often followed portions of other routes, which varied depending on the year they traveled. The map included in this book (reprinted on the next page) shows the Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail route.”⁵

⁵ William E. Hill, *The Mormon Trail: Yesterday and today*. Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 2006, p. xviii, https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1098&context=usupress_pubs



THE MORMON NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL MAP SITES

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|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Carthage | 10. Fort Leavenworth | 19. Ancient Bluff Ruins | 28. Red Hills | 37. Rocky Ridge | 46. Echo Canyon |
| 2. Nauvoo | 11. Elkhorn Ferry | 20. Courthouse Rock | 29. Black Hills | 38. Oregon Buttes/Table | 47. Monument Rock |
| 3. Keokuk | 12. Loup Ferry | | | 39. South Pass | 48. Pulpit Rock Camp |
| 4. Garden Grove | 13. Lone Tree | | | 40. Big Sandy | 49. Witches Rock |
| 5. Mt. Pisgah | 14. Pawnee Village | | | 41. Green River & Lombard Ferry | 50. Canyon-Dixie Hollow |
| 6. Coralville | 15. Wood River | | | 42. Church Butte | 51. Big Mountain Pass |
| 7. Fort Des Moines | 16. Fort Kearny | | | 43. Fort Bridger & Fort Supply | 52. Emigration Canyon |
| 8. Council Bluffs (Kaneville) area | 17. Ash Hollow | | | 44. The Needles | 53. Donner Hill |
| 9. Winter Quarters/Omaha Area | 18. Indian Lookout | | | 45. Cache Cave | 54. Coalville |
| | 19. Ancient Bluff Ruins | | | | 55. Parley's Canyon |
| | 20. Courthouse Rock | | | | 56. Great Salt Lake |
| | 21. Chimney Rock | | | | |
| | 22. Scotts Bluff | | | | |
| | 23. Fort Laramie | | | | |
| | 24. Mexican Hill | | | | |
| | 25. Register Cliffs & Trail Ruts | | | | |
| | 26. Laramie Peak | | | | |
| | 27. Sidley Peak | | | | |
| | 30. Fort Casper & Mormon Ferry | | | | |
| | 31. Rock Avenue | | | | |
| | 32. Prospect Hill | | | | |
| | 33. Independence Rock | | | | |
| | 34. Rattlesnake Pass & Devil's Gate | | | | |
| | 35. Split Rock | | | | |
| | 36. Old Castle | | | | |

Reprinted in "The Mormon Trail, Yesterday and Today,"
by William E. Hill, USU, 2006.

The following places, items and events are mentioned in the journal of Phineas along the trail:

Circular Saw at Winter Quarters

Phineas knew if he had a chance he could be of service to the saints in their new location. Knowing Winter Quarters was being abandoned in a few weeks, Brigham Young told Phineas to take anything he wanted from the old mill irons which had been left by those who had gone to the valley. Phineas found one saw he thought would be useful.

PWC Journal: I tied a circular saw to the reach of my waggon under the box hoping to have it when I got to the valey(.) Brother Brigham told me that I might have anything that I could find among the old irons which had belonged to the church in Nauvoo(.) I did not find much but that, which I thought was worth taking(.) it had an iron shaft in it(.) but when I came in to the valey to my surprise one day Brother Kimble (Heber C.) came to me and said he wanted his saw that I took from him at winter quarters, I told him that I brought a saw, but I did not suppose it was his for I was told that whatever I could bring that was among the old irons I was welcome to, as my own, he said he did not give me that promice and he must have it(.)

At the time Phineas was leaving Winter Quarters Heber C. Kimball was organizing his own large company to leave for the mountains. The saints at Winter Quarters essentially were all destitute, and required considerable help to have their wagons and animals ready for the journey. No doubt Kimball had no time to worry about the mill iron he knew was in the pile, but recognized it once they had entered the valley.

One can see how a large iron saw and shaft could be tied onto the supports under his wagon.

Phineas no doubt worried that carrying the heavy saw would add to the burden when his team was already weakened by a hard winter. The whole effort testifies to his determination to provide for himself and offer a service to others. Before reaching the valley he had to have help because his animals gave out. That and other bad luck dogged him along the way, but with the help of others his wagon with its load made it to the valley.



Brigham Young University Lee Library L. Tom Perry Special Collections; MSS P 24

**A picture taken of a pioneer company before the railroad came through in 1869.
(Courtesy L. Tom Perry Special Collections, BYU Library)**

Elk Horn River

PWC Journal: "...the 1st camp was 5 miles out whare we camped a week or 10 days waiting for Brigham and the rest(.) when he came we all started out for the Elk horn(.) we built a raft and crosst the river on it with our wagons(.) this river was about 10 or 12 rods wide and 10 or 12 feet deep(.)"



ELK HORN FERRY—Simons, Collections:
Council Bluffs Public Library

This view by Simons shows an actual ferry site seen from the west side looking back east at the approaching wagons. Possible remnants of the trail coming down the hill can be found and there are stories of possible graves in the area.

On Saturday, June 11, 1853, Piercy wrote, "The approach to Elk Horn is over a sideling road, and the descent into the lowland which borders the river is difficult. Another wagon was broken...." This is the view of the ferry in 1853 when Frederick Piercy came west with the Mor-

mons. He described the crossing, "On account of the narrowness of the stream they are able to stretch a rope across the river, which, being held by one or two of the ferrymen in the boat, by means of a smaller rope with a noose attached, enables them to guide the boat which is partly carried by the current, and partly dragged by them to the desired point on the opposite bank. The cattle were compelled to swim across." Here is Piercy's view of one of the ferries.

In 1848 this river was almost 200 feet wide. This view of the Elk Horn River shows the ferry built by the Mormons. (Hill, W. E. (1996). *The Mormon Trail: Yesterday and today*. Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 2006, https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1098&context=usupress_pubs)

On the west side of the Elk Horn River the pioneers made a camp while they organized into companies.

PWC Journal: *we camped on the west side of the river till sometime in June when we took up our line of march after organizing ourselves into companies of 10s 50s and 100s each company with their respective captains Alen Tailer was captain of our hundred and John Harvey of our 50 and*

Alva Hanks of our 10 which was 1st hundred 1st 50 and 2d 10.

"We traveled on guarding ourselves nights by taking our turns(.) My turn came once in 5 or 6 days(.) the fateagues of the journey was vary great, watching our cattle against the Indians."



ELK HORN SITE—Today

The Platte River



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."

(Ensign, January, 1980,

<https://www.lds.org/ensign/1980/01/the-way-it-looks-today-sites-on-the-trail-west?lang=eng>)

"The Platte is one of the most significant tributary systems in the watershed of the Missouri, draining a large portion of the central Great Plains in Nebraska and the eastern Rocky Mountains in Colorado and Wyoming. The river valley played an important role in the westward expansion of the United States, providing the route for several major emigrant trails, including the Oregon, California, Mormon and Bozeman trails.

"The first Europeans to see the Platte were French explorers and fur trappers about 1714; they first called it the *Nebraskier* (Nebraska), a transliteration of the name given by the Otoe people, meaning "flat water." This expression is very close to the French words "rivière plate" ("flat river"), the probable origin of the name Platte River."⁶

Fort Laramie

Fort Laramie in present-day eastern Wyoming was a little over half-way to the Salt Lake Valley. It was where Phineas began to lose some of his oxen.

One of the great challenges in the westward migration was the problem that their animals sometimes became weak or died. It was one of the hallmarks of Brigham Young's leadership that he was able to help provide hundreds of travelers with



FORT LARAMIE—From Piercy's *Route from Liverpool to Great Salt Lake Valley*

Courtesy William E. Hill, *The Mormon Trail: Yesterday and today.*

⁶ Platte River, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Platte_River

animals and equipment, constantly providing for the needy and enlisting the help of others both at the Missouri River and in Salt Lake City. Phineas is just one example of Brigham's amazing leadership and concern for every individual.

PWC Journal: *"About 3 or 4 days drive from fort Laramie one of my oxen was taken sick at night and died before morning, this was an ox that Brigham had let me have in place of the one that George had sent to the mountains the year before(.) this caused me much trouble but they let me have another to fill the place of it(.) The next day I found my leaders (oxen) were feeling as I had before thought they would do(.) the next day in the morning one of them had hard work to get up alone(.) I went to Brigham and asked him what I should do(.) he told me to leave him and if he got better some of the brethren would drive him along and if he died it would be all right, and I could have another yoke in their place(.) this was hard for me to do for he was a favorite ox but Brigham had told me to and it was law. When we started out he got up and followed on(.) he kept up to the company with a little urging by the brethren till within two miles of the camping place, for he then turned out of the road and laid down tired out."*



Pioneer Wagon Ruts at Fort Laramie. One can see how hard climbs like this one could wear out the oxen. (Blog: oneroadatime.com)

"Here (at Fort Laramie) they were 522 miles from winter Quarters. Owing to a drought, they had found feed very scarce, and had been compelled to use feed they had brought. Brigham took the boat and crossed over to the fort, which was a small, rude trading post. Here, after consultation, they decided to transfer to the south side of the Platte. At Laramie they were joined by a company of Mormons from Pueblo, consisting of sick members of the battalion who had been left there, with others who had joined them there.

"From Fort Laramie to the crossing of the North Platte, 124 miles, their route was, in general, along the Oregon Trail. But Bancroft, quoting from manuscript, says: "There was no trail after leaving Laramie, going over the Black Hills, except very rarely. For a short distance before reaching the Sweetwater (they) saw a wagon track. It was a great surprise and a great curiosity."⁷

Fort Laramie was 522 miles from Winter Quarters. From that point the trail angled northwest almost to central Wyoming, following the North Platte River. There they would see the Black Hills on their way to the Sweetwater River 124 miles away. An account from the Pioneers in 1847 describes the challenges of isolation and scanty feed for their animals in this desolate corner of Wyoming.



It is estimated that 400,000 emigrants came along this trail. Each wagon wore down the sandstone a little more over the years. (Blog: oneroadatime.com)

⁷ Hiram F. White, "The Mormon Road," p. 248, <http://files.lib.byu.edu/mormonmigration/articles/MormonRoad.pdf>

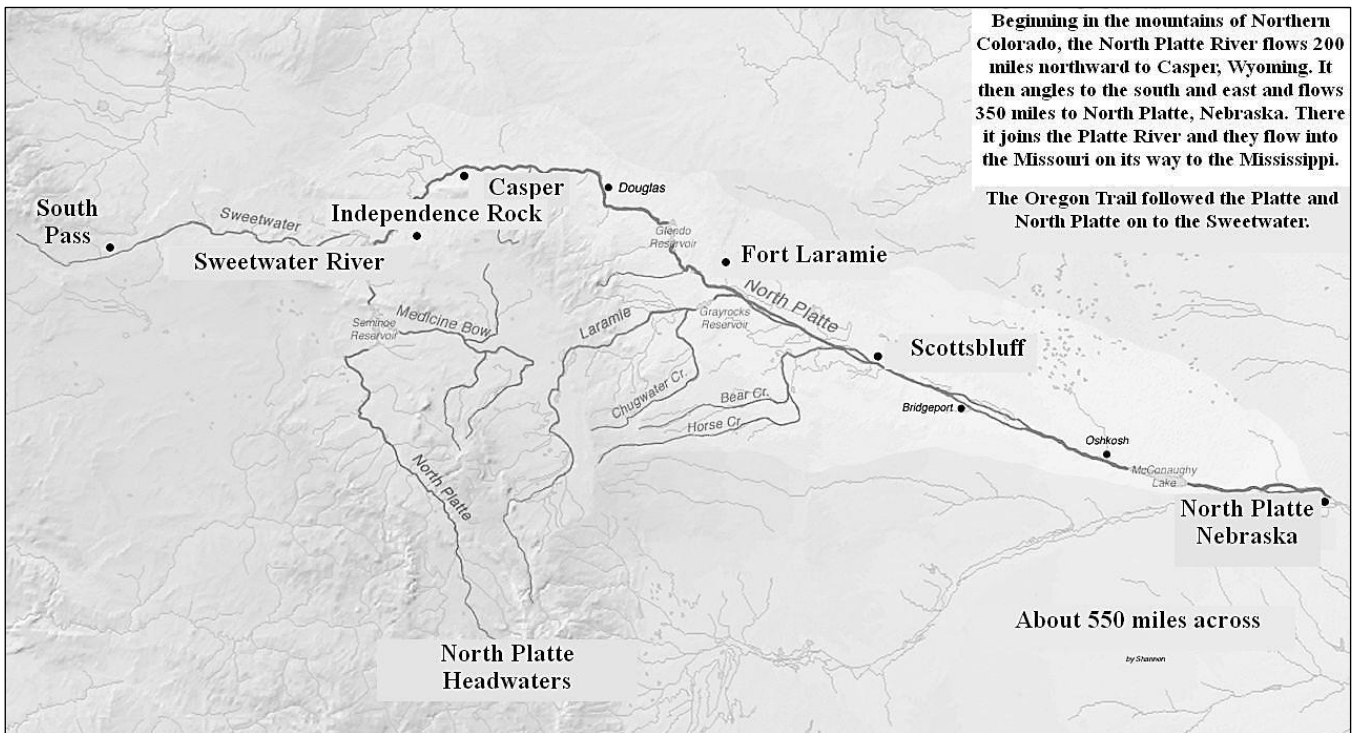
North Platte River - Crossing to the north side on the Oregon Trail

Near Fort Laramie the Mormon Trail crossed the river and followed along what came to be known as the Oregon Trail, where both the trail and the feed for animals was better. Phineas mentions crossing the Platte River at Laramie. At that point it was technically the North Platte.

PWC Journal: *“We cross the Platt about 1/2 a days below fort Larimee(.) that day Ann Eliza turned over her teapot and scalded her foot which was vary sore till Mother Angel gave her some camphor, which soon healed it and stopt the pain immediately.”*



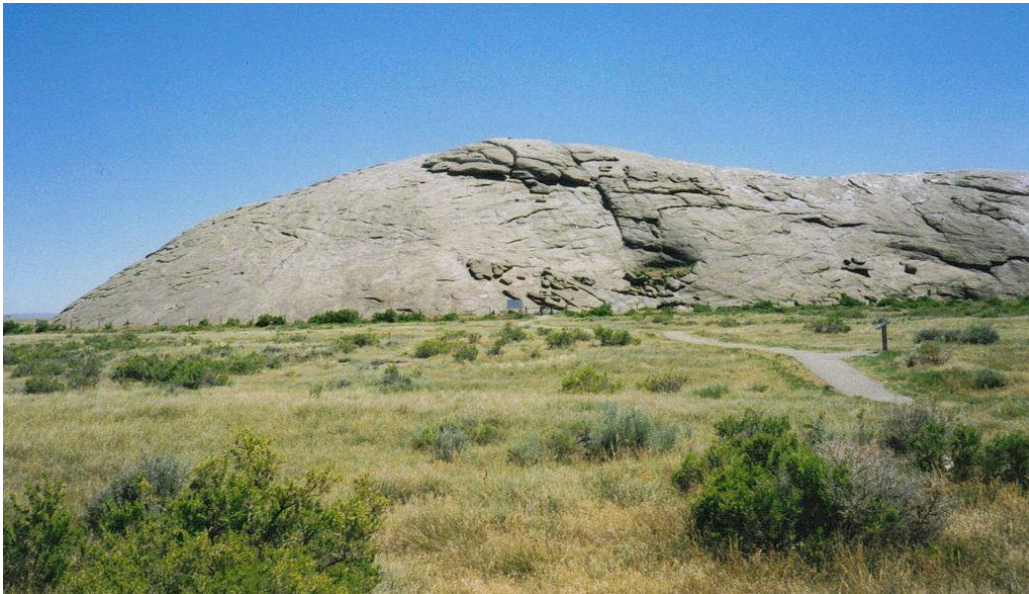
The Otoe people called it "flat water;" the French called it "rivière plate." Pioneers called it The Platte River



North Platte River, Wikipedia, (Courtesy <http://www2.demis.nl>)

Independence Rock

PWC Journal: "...we got to the head of Sweet Water or near it in the neighborhood of independence rock..."



Independence Rock, the "great register of the desert." (Courtesy Wikimedia Commons)

Literally a granite mountain, Independence Rock is still as isolated as it was when pioneers noted it on the Oregon and Mormon Trails. "It is located in the high plateau region of central Wyoming, north of the Sentinel Rocks ridge and adjacent to the Sweetwater River. It is accessible from a rest area on Wyoming Highway 220, approximately 20

miles (32 km) northeast of Muddy Gap and 60 miles (97 km) south-west of Casper.

"The rock derives its name from the fact that it lies directly along the route of the Emigrant Trail and that emigrant wagon parties bound for Oregon or California, which usually left the Missouri River in the early spring, attempted to reach the rock by July 4 (Independence Day in the United States), in order to reach their destinations before the first mountain snowfalls. John C. Frémont camped a mile below this site on August 1, 1843, and made this entry in the journal of his 1843-'44 expedition:

"Everywhere within six or eight feet of the ground, where the surface is sufficiently smooth, and in some places sixty or eighty feet above, the rock is inscribed with the names of travelers. Many a name famous in the history of this country, and some well known to science, are



1870 photograph of Independence Rock. (Dept of the Interior. General Land Office. U.S. Geological and Geographic Survey of the Territories. - https://arcweb.archives.gov/arc/arch_results_detail.jsp?&pg=3&si=0&st=b&rp=digital&nh=15)

to be found among those of traders and travelers... ”⁸

“Fremont carved a large cross into the rock monolith, which was blasted off the rock on July 4, 1847 by some among hundreds of California and Oregon emigrants who had gathered on the site. Some Protestants considered the cross Fremont carved to be a symbol of the Pope and Catholicism. John Frémont was actually a member of the United States Episcopal Church.”⁹

“Independence Rock is one of the most famous trail landmarks. Father Pierre DeSmet had called it the "great register of the desert." Piercy, who documented the trail in 1853, wrote, ‘We proceeded to the ford of the Sweetwater, about a mile beyond Rock Independence. It is a large rounded mass of granite, on which are inscribed the names of many passing emigrants.’ Emigrants wrote their names on the rock with whatever they had available-paint, tar, or chisels. Some of the old names can still be seen.”¹⁰

Saltwater Lakes

Phineas mentioned in his journal that when they came to the Sweetwater River, they gathered salt from a lake bed, a phenomenon which occurs in hot, dry climates. Some journal writers called it alkali.

PWC Journal: *“When we got to the head of Sweet Water or near it in the neighborhood of independance rock we came to lakes of saltwater whare we gathered large quantities of it, formed in a crust from one to 6 inches thick.”*

“A dry lake is formed when water from rain or other sources, like intersection with a water table, flows into a dry depression in the landscape, creating a pond or lake. If the total annual evaporation rate exceeds the total annual inflow, the depression will



Salts are left behind in shallow lakes after years of continual flooding and evaporation. The travelers on the Oregon and Mormon Trails often gathered it to use.

⁸ Fremont, John, et al., *Report of the exploring expedition to the Rocky Mountains in the year 1842*, Gales and Seaton, printers, 1845.

⁹ Bigelow, John, *Memoir Of The Life And Public Services Of John Charles Fremont*, Kessinger Publishing, 2006, p. 465 ISBN 978-1428655478, reprinted in Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Independence_Rock_\(Wyoming\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Independence_Rock_(Wyoming)).

¹⁰ (Hill, W. E. (1996). *The Mormon Trail: Yesterday and today*. Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 2006, https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1098&context=usupress_pubs.

eventually become dry again, forming a dry lake. Salts originally dissolved in the water precipitate out and are left behind, gradually building up over time. A dry lake appears as a flat bed of clay, generally encrusted with precipitated salts. These evaporite minerals are a concentration of weathering products such as sodium carbonate, borax, and other salts.”¹¹

Last Crossing of the Sweetwater River

PWC Journal: “when we got to the last crossing of the sweet water we camped about two weeks waiting for help from the valey(.) While we ware camped in that place many of our cattle died(.) I lost one out of my team and another was sick...”

Help from the Salt Lake Valley

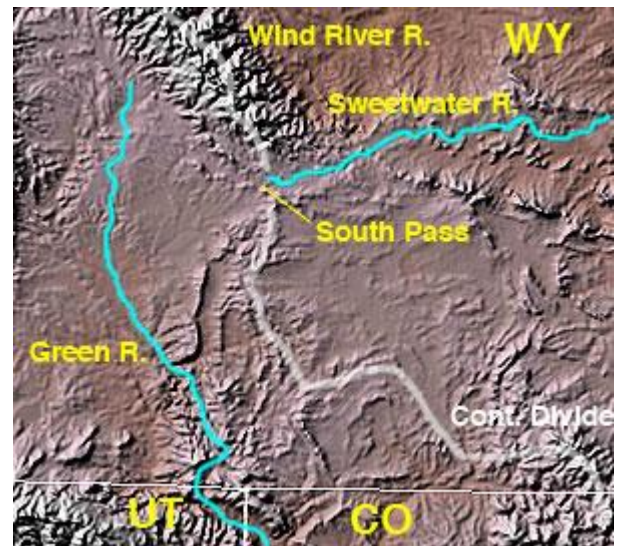
Brigham Young sent a letter to the Saints in the valley in July, asking for wagons and teams to be sent to help the saints coming to Utah, as well as salt to be sent to the saints at the Missouri River. He requested the wagons and teams to meet them at Green River, but at the last crossing of the Sweetwater, apparently they could go no further, and they waited there:

“It is our intention to be at Green river on or about the 20th of August, at which place we shall be most happy to receive a wagon load of salt, which will be of very great benefit to those saints who will have to return from that place with the return teams to Winter Quarters. We shall also be very thankful for some salt, as we started with very little, anticipating meeting a goodly number of wagons, and some of them we expected would have brought some salt with them.

“If it would be convenient for you to send out a number of teams to meet us at Green river, it would be quite an assistance to us, but if you cannot, we shall make arrangements to build a Fort, leave the goods and the families with them, and we will work ourselves into the Valley by the help and assistance of the Lofd <Lord> as quick as we can; but if you send to us, it will require one hundred wagons at least, well manned with teams and drivers, and well fitted up with covers, so as to leave none behind.”¹²

Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball, in another letter, summarized the trek up to the date of August 28:

“We have been sixty-three days in travelling from the Elkhorn to the last crossing of the Sweetwater at an average of 12 miles per day, resting 22, including Sundays, to recruit and strengthen our cattle. The very dry



The Pioneer trail followed the Sweetwater, over South Pass to the Pacific side, and on to the Green River. (Courtesy Wikimedia Commons)

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dry_lake

¹² Brigham Young Letter, in *Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 17 July 1848, 3-9, <http://lds.org/churchhistory/library/source/1,18016,4976-4618,00.html>

season, the scarcity of grass, the heavy dragging, dusty roads and inhaling so much of the alkali by breathing, eating and drinking has been the cause of our losing many of our cattle... Several worn-out animals have been devoured by the wolves which abound in great numbers on the route; the cattle that have died without any appearances of sickness were the best and fattest.

“The health of the camp has been generally good, although there have been some 20 cases of the mountain fever, all of which are recovered or recovering.

“When all the camps have arrived at the last crossing of the Sweetwater, it is our intention to take into consideration the best method of removing those of the brethren who are there without wagons, cattle, or even tents to shelter them from the stormy blast, and the chilling frosty nights (on account of their returning the borrowed teams to Winter Quarters) to Green river; where they can build huts, and have plenty of fire wood to keep themselves warm until our teams can return to their aid and remove them into the Valley. Although you will see by the Epistle from the council in the Valley, that they are endeavoring to send us all the assistance they can; yet we don't anticipate that they will send enough to unlock our fetters and enable us to go to the Valley in a body.”¹³



1870 Photo of the Sweetwater River

Looking back at the Sweetwater River shows why they had to cross it so many times. (Department of the Interior. General Land Office. U.S. Geological and Geographic Survey of the Territories. - <https://arcweb.archives.gov>)

thousand miles had been a great strain on people and animals. From the crossing of the North Platte in Nebraska it was a steady climb of 109 miles to the high plateau of Wyoming at South Pass, which is not known for its fields of lush, green grass. During the two weeks they were there, many animals died.

“By 1843 the Sweetwater River valley was a regular wagon trail providing the water, grass and fuel needed on the Oregon, California and Mormon Trails across Wyoming. The Sweetwater provided an almost direct path from the Platte and North Platte Rivers to the wide South Pass Continental Divide between the Atlantic Ocean rivers and Pacific Ocean rivers. South Pass was the easiest pass across the Atlantic and Pacific drainages. These wagon trails crossed the meandering Sweetwater River about nine times on their about 10 to 20 day trips along the Sweetwater River before they reached South Pass.”¹⁴

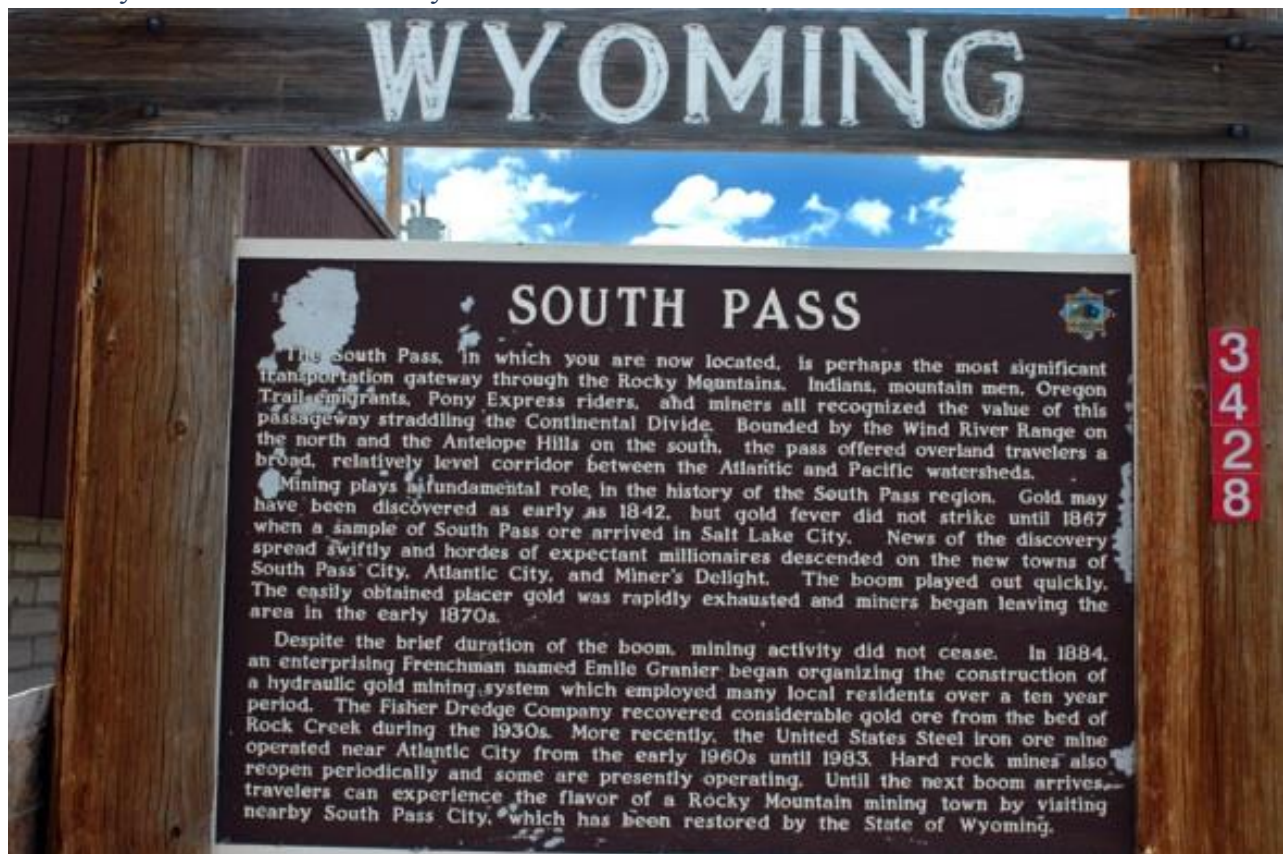
The last crossing of the Sweetwater River marked approximately 700 miles from Winter Quarters. Having endured a difficult journey the year before just to get to Winter Quarters in Indian country, and then surviving the winter as they prepared for a trek of over a

¹³ <https://history.lds.org/overlandtravel/sources/4621/young-brigham-and-heber-c-kimball-letter-in-journal-history-of-the-church-of-jesus-christ-of-latter-day-saints-28-aug-1848-2-4>

¹⁴ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sweetwater_River_\(Wyoming\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sweetwater_River_(Wyoming))

Some of the brethren were asked to drive wagons and teams for emigrants who had no one to help them. Brigham Young released them at the last crossing of the Sweetwater River, providing wagons and teams for them to return to the Missouri River. Then the whole company waited for others to come from the Salt Lake Valley to take over, as Brigham had requested in his letter printed on page 2 of this document. Elijah Averett was one of the twenty brethren who returned to their families after reaching the Sweetwater. He was in the same group of 50 with the Cooks, and described his experience:

Elijah Averett Journal: “Br Brigham called on me to go and drive his first wife Marys wagon across the plains. Allen Taylor Capt. of the hundred, and John Harvey captain of the first fifty and David Carnes captain of the second fifty, we crossed the Horn river and finished organizing the company and rolled out for the mountains[.] We crossed the plains without any particular accident. We saw a great many buffalo. I went to the head of Sweet Water [Sweetwater]. There the President lost a good many cattle. He let me have a wagon and two yoke of steers, and I started back for my family in company of br. John Taylor and fifteen or twenty others.”¹⁵



Orson Pratt tried to locate the line of the Continental Divide with a barometer as they crossed the Divide and entered what was then called Oregon Territory. But South Pass was so flat he could hardly find it. The Salt Lake Valley was 200 miles away from that point.¹⁶

¹⁵ Elijah Averett, Averett family, Notebook [ca. 1916-1965], 36-38, <http://www.lds.org/churchhistory/library/source/1,18016,4976-15339,00.html>.

¹⁶ <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1980/01/the-way-it-looks-today-sites-on-the-trail-west?lang=eng>

The South Pass camp is where the Cooks received help from others sent from the valley. Phineas had lost all but one of his oxen, one of them Brigham had loaned him. He would not have made it without help:

PWC Journal: *“A man by the name of Orin Porter Rockwell a stranger to me but well known in the church as an old friend of Josephs, he told me that he had 4 mules to hitch to some ones waggon and take it to the valey with a man to drive it. I went and asked my captain Alva Hanks to let him hitch to my waggon which he (the driver) did and took it through to the valey...”*



South Pass in Fremont County, Wyoming, the crossing on the Oregon and Mormon Trails to the Pacific side of the mountains. At over 7,000 feet, this view looks eastward toward the Atlantic watershed. (Wikimedia)

Phineas Cook is not the only one who struggled with loss of animals at the Sweetwater. Allen Taylor was captain of the hundred in which the Cooks traveled, and described in a letter to Brigham Young, who had moved on, their problems with cattle:

“As we were encamping on Sweet-water under the gravelly bluffs it happened that some of our cat[t]le strayed off. As soon as I found that cat[t]le were missing, I went on ahead with another man with me; finding that they had followed the road, we kept it & found 19 head <6 miles east of Independence Rock>...The 19 head were found amongst a very large gang of Buffalo, & the others kept the road, seamingly from the traks, & then got in with a herd of Buffalo & got off, we have spent 8 dais ahunting for them...I have had men out a hunting for them all the time till now, but all in vain; there is 9 head gone...”¹⁷

In his July letter President Young sent an appeal for as many wagons and teams as the brethren at Salt Lake City could provide. He mentioned Elder Heber C. Kimball’s company which was 25 miles behind. Elder Kimball was also struggling because animals were dying daily.

“I have heard from Brother Heber today. His companies are 20 miles and upwards, in our rear, the cattle many of them worn out, and four or five dying every day. At this place we have three or four dying daily.

¹⁷ Allen Taylor to Brigham Young, 6 Sept. 1848." In Brigham Young, Office Files 1832-1878, General Correspondence, Incoming, 1840-1877, S-Y, 1848. (CR 1234 1, reel 30, box 21, folder 14) <https://history.lds.org/overlandtravel/sources/11928>.

“Be it known to all the camps between this place and the Valley, that all the teams, wagons men and means that come from the Valley must be allowed to come on to this place and not be turned back on the road.

“It is also my desire that all the wagons and teams that you may hereafter think kind enough to send unto us, that you instruct the men to come on straight to this place; for it is our intention to bring up the rear, and pick up every slow team, or those who are not enabled to convey themselves any further.”¹⁸

Young and Kimball noted in their letter sent to the Pottawattamie Saints August 28, both the arrival of teams from Salt Lake City and the departure of other teams back to the Missouri River to help the saints leaving the following year. They suggested the next year when the Pottawattamie Saints came west that teams from the Salt Lake Valley would meet them at Fort Laramie instead of South Pass at the last crossing of the Sweetwater.

“I arrived at the last crossing of the Sweetwater on the 20th (of August) and tarried to return the borrowed teams and wagons to Winter Quarters; On hearing of the heavy loss of cattle in Elder Kimball's company I returned 25 miles and met him where we wrote the Epistle to Pottawattaomie [Pottawattamie], from which the above is extracted. In said Epistle, which we dated 28th, we proposed to send our mountain teams next season to Fort Laramie and take to the Valley all the emigration that the Pottowattaomie [Pottawattamie] saints could forward to that point. As we were finishing our epistle we had the pleasure of announcing the arrival of Bros Lorenzo and Abraham O. Smoot from the Valley in charge of 47 wagons and 124 yokes of oxen that had been sent for our assistance; this relieved our feelings much.

“Elder Kimball and I returned from this point, 48 men and boys, 59 wagons, 121 yokes of cattle, 44 mules and horses in charge of Allen Taylor to Winter Quarters.

“We also wrote to Elders Richards and Lyman and sent by Bros. Ben Rolfe, <John> E. Forsgren and <Ephraim> K. Hanks, giving them a copy of <the> epistle from the Valley and requesting them to read our epistle to Bro. Hyde and forward the same by Captain Taylor; also wishing them, if in straightened circumstances through loss of cattle, to keep their companies together and continue moving, so as to get west of the South Pass, and send word what their circumstance were and what help they required.”¹⁹



South Pass, a gradual descent onto the Pacific side of the continent. (Ensign, January, 1980, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1980/01/the-way-it-looks-today-sites-on-the-trail-west?lang=eng>)

¹⁸ <https://history.lds.org/overlandtravel/sources/4620/young-brigham-letter-in-journal-history-of-the-church-of-jesus-christ-of-latter-day-saints-24-aug-1848-2>

¹⁹ <https://history.lds.org/overlandtravel/sources/4619/young-brigham-letter-in-journal-history-of-the-church-of-jesus-christ-of-latter-day-saints-20-aug-1848-2>

Orrin Porter Rockwell

“Orrin Porter Rockwell, son of Orin Rockwell and Sarah Witt, was born 28 June, 1813, in Belchertown, Hampshire Co., Mass.; and died 9 June, 1878, in Salt Lake City, Utah. As a boy he listened eagerly to the conversations in his home between his parents and the parents of the Prophet, and he used to beg his mother to allow him to sit up and keep the pine torch burning so that he could hear the message. He picked berries by moonlight and sold them, and also gathered and sold wood, to obtain money which he gave to the Prophet to help print the Book of Mormon. The Prophet in his Journal, after recording the organization of the Church on April 6, 1830, writes: "Several persons who had attended the above meeting, became convinced of the truth and came forward shortly after, and were received into the church; among the rest, my own father and mother were baptized, to my great joy and consolation; and about the same time, Martin Harris and Orrin Porter Rockwell."



**Orrin Porter Rockwell about the time
Phineas met him near South Pass.
(Courtesy Cameron Wilde)**

“Porter Rockwell, as he was generally called, loved the Prophet with all his heart and soul, and at any time would willingly have laid down his own life in his defense. He was arrested for the attempted assassination of ex-Governor Boggs of Missouri, and although not the slightest evidence could be brought against him, he was clapped into irons and incarcerated in a vile dungeon for nine months. He was offered his freedom and any amount of money he might name if he would lure the Prophet into the hands of his enemies, but Porter indignantly refused. His mother eventually discovered his place of imprisonment and brought him 100 dollars, with which he secured the services of a lawyer. When brought to trial the charge against him was dismissed. He was released, and after many narrow escapes from ambush, and perilous adventures, he rejoined the Prophet in Nauvoo.

“In Nauvoo, when the Prophet was recording in, ‘The Book of the Law of the Lord’ the names of those who had proved faithful under all conditions, he entered there the: name of Orrin Porter Rockwell with this comment: ‘He's an innocent and noble boy; he was an innocent and noble child, and my soul loves him. Let this be recorded for ever and ever. Let a blessing of salvation and honor be his portion.’”²⁰

Rockwell went with Brigham with the Vanguard Company in 1847, and returned to South Pass to help Brigham’s company in 1848. He was a loyal follower of Brigham Young as well, especially in the earlier years of his life. The many stories of his coarse manners were circulated a few years later.

²⁰ The Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine, Vol. XXVI, October 1935, No. 4, p, 154-155. (Published Quarterly by the Genealogical Society of Utah, 50 North Main Street, Salt Lake City, Utah.) Reprinted in Family Search

The Green River

After Porter Rockwell's driver took over the Cook's wagon, Phineas was free to help someone else.



Ferries were much safer than fording or floating the river--but they were expensive. Here, modern reenactors cross the Green River on a replica ferry. Wyoming SHPO photo.

Brigham asked him to drive a freight wagon from South Pass to Green River, after which he drove a wagon for Augusta Cobbs, whose previous driver had probably gone back to the Missouri River.

PWC Journal: *"I drove a team with luggage for Brother Brigham to Green River after which I drove sister Augusta Cobbs wagon (a woman belonging to Joseph Smith) the rest of the way to the valley."*

"Members of the Pioneer Company, including President Brigham Young, crossed

the Green River near this site in early July 1847. Some of the men stayed and established a permanent ferry here. Before leaving, the company met several members of the Mormon Battalion who had wintered in Pueblo, Colorado. They also encountered Sam Brannon who had journeyed from the San Francisco area to meet with President Young. This site is about twenty-six miles west of Farson, Wyoming where SR 28 crosses the Green River."²¹



The Green River, approximately the spot where the Pioneer trail made its crossing. Here it was about over 400 feet wide and 20 feet deep. (BYU, Harold B. Lee Library)

"The most popular place to cross the Green for those on the main branch of the westward emigrant trails was the so-called Lombard Ferry, established by mountain men in 1843.

"In 1847, the first Mormons made their way over the trails to the Salt Lake

²¹ Kenneth R. Mays, "Mormon Ferry on the Green River,"

<https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/RelEd/id/5605/rec/1>

Valley. Soon, tensions were running high between mountaineers, more or less under the leadership of Jim Bridger, and the Mormons. The dispute arose over who would control the lucrative commercial interests at Fort Bridger and various ferries that operated on the Green.

“In 1850, the mountaineers sold what’s now known as the Lombard Ferry to Mormons who ran it for the next eight years. During that time, it was usually called the Green River Mormon Ferry. The name Lombard Ferry did not attach to the site until years after the emigration, when William Lombard took over the operation in 1889.

“During the peak emigration months of May, June and July, emigrants sometimes had to wait several days to cross, as a ferry could only handle around 40 wagons in a day. Encampments of waiting emigrants often grew crowded and unsanitary, with little forage for the animals.

“Evidence of the vast camping area can still be found on the eastern shores of the New Fork River, along with ruts leading away from the site. Rates could go as high as \$16 per wagon for the crossing. Those emigrants who could not afford the toll or were too impatient to wait their turn often lost everything when they misjudged the current or slipped off the narrow gravel bar that allowed safe passage.”²²

“The Green is a large, deep, powerful river. It ranges from 100 to 300 feet (30 to 100 m) wide in the upper course to 300 to 1,500 feet (460 m) wide in its lower course and ranges from 3 to 50 feet (1 to 15 m) in depth. It is navigable by small craft throughout its course and by large motorboats upstream to Flaming Gorge Dam. Near the areas where the Oregon Trail crosses, the river is 400 - 500 feet (150 m) wide and averages about 20 feet (6.1 m) deep at normal flow.”²³

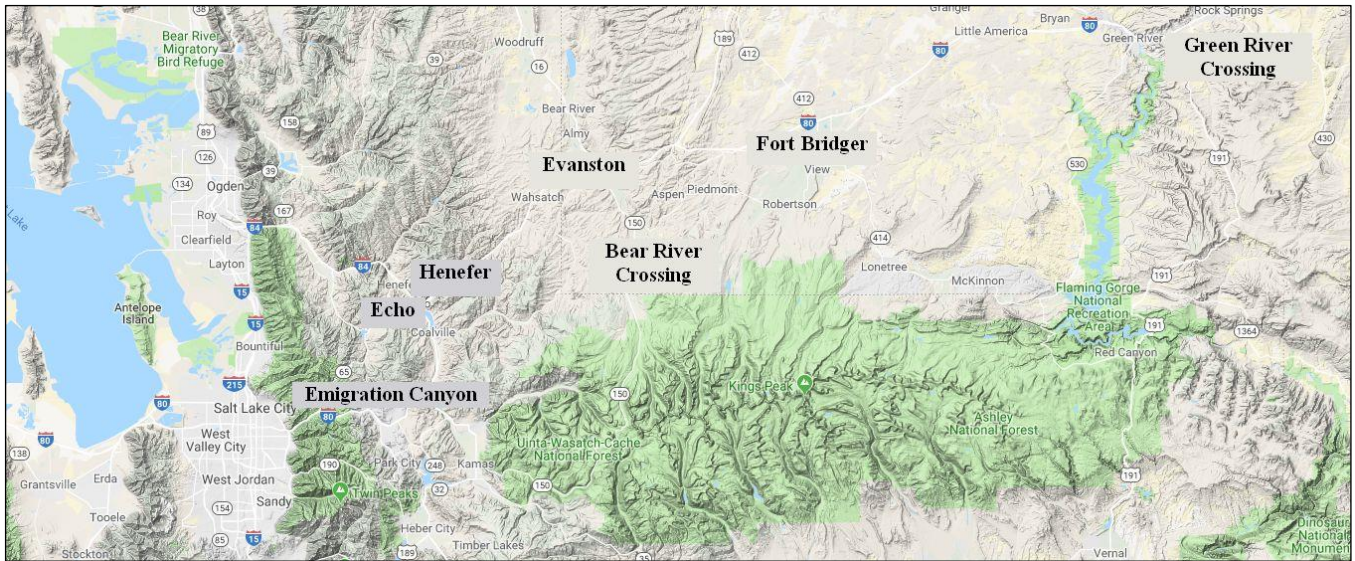
Getting to the river from the Sweetwater was an arduous trip through South Pass and onto the Pacific side of the Divide. There was no river to follow, and they anxiously looked ahead for the Green River, especially because the nights are cold in the high Wyoming plateau and it was already late August.

From the Green River crossing, the pioneer trail followed approximately the current I-80 interstate highway across western Wyoming to Fort Bridger near present Lyman, Wyoming. They then traveled west and south of Evanston where they crossed the Bear River and continued westward through the mountains toward Henefer and Echo Canyon. This was probably the most difficult ascent of the whole Mormon Trail.



²² Lombard Ferry on the Green River, Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office, <https://www.wyohistory.org/encyclopedia/lombard-ferry-green-river>

²³ Green River, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_River_\(Colorado_River_tributary\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_River_(Colorado_River_tributary))



From Green River at right, through Fort Bridger and the Bear River Crossing, the pioneers headed for Weber Canyon at Henefer, through Echo Canyon on the way to Emigration Canyon, an uphill climb of over 150 miles on a trail which was only a wagon track. Interstate 80 now closely follows the pioneer trail. (Google)

Augusta Cobb

Born Augusta Adams 7 Dec. 1802 at Lynn, Essex, Massachusetts, she married Henry Cobb in 1822, and by 1838 they had nine children. Henry and most of the children returned to Massachusetts, but Augusta and her children Charlotte and James stayed in Nauvoo where she reportedly was taken as a plural wife of Joseph Smith.



Augusta Cobb was 44 years old when she came to Utah (Courtesy Niels Bjerre Hansen)



Looking West from the Henefer side of the pass. It looks solid and smooth now, but was a hard climb for the early pioneers. (Ensign, January, 1980, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1980/01/the-way-it-looks-today-sites-on-the-trail-west?lang=eng>)

Augusta and Charlotte came to Utah in Brigham Young's company in 1848. By that time she had been taken as one of his wives, and he cared for her throughout her life. She and both of her children who stayed with the church died in Salt Lake City.

Sites along the Mormon Trail



Trail of the Mormon pioneers. After South Pass the Oregon Trail angled northward through Idaho. The Mormon Trail turned southward into Utah.

https://www.google.com/search?q=mormon+emigrant+trail+map&client=firefox-b-1&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=1ShRKMouSr2FM%253A%252Cc_p5NQZQcZ18AM%252C_&usg=AFrqEzdhOVb61TJo3vahH9BuDeKRfs-x_A&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwi1xJK8vtLcAhVpxFQKHV8yCJcQ9QEwAXoECAQQBA#imgdii=vj8OWM5aQuc92M:&imgrc=CfbgAi0wmbclcfM:

Entry into the Great Salt Lake Valley

From the Green River, the pioneers followed the Black Fork for a time; then the Bear River. The final ascent began at Hennefer, Summit County, in Utah. It is called the Weber Canyon Explorer's Trail. The Donner-Reed Party of 1846 blazed a trail through the mountain, and the pioneers of 1847 followed it into the valley. The California Gold Rush emigrants used the trail, and the Overland Stage in 1856 and the Pony Express in 1860 followed it through the mountains. The Utah Highway Department has set a marker East of Highway 30, South and east of Henefer, on the curve toward Echo.

Right: 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 followed by Interstate 80.

Below: 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.

(*Ensign*, January, 1980,
<https://www.lds.org/ensign/1980/01/the-way-it-looks-today-sites-on-the-trail-west?lang=eng>)



On August 1, 1847, two weeks after entering the valley, the pioneers decided to build a fort at approximately the present location of 400 West and 300-400 South, now called Pioneer Park. By December a wall had been built and 2,000 people lived inside the fort. A few homes were being built in the valley, but most were still inside the fort. While many came back to the fort to live for the next winter, some began to scatter to their own farms.²⁴

The valley that second year in 1848 was cultivated on land irrigated by City and Emigration Creeks, now downtown Salt Lake City. When the Cooks came into the valley they found a few cultivated fields and a few adobe houses scattered about. They

first camped in Brigham Young's yard, and then found a cabin to rent inside the fort. However, by spring many began moving out of the fort, including the Cooks.

In the spring of 1849 Brigham Young wrote a letter to the saints contemplating emigration, telling them of the success of the growing seasons, in spite of drought and crickets, and the safety of the city.

“On our arrival in this valley, we found the brethren had erected four forts, composed mostly of houses, including an area of about 47 acres, and numbering about 5,000 souls, including our camp. The brethren had succeeded in sowing and planting an

²⁴ *The Old Fort: Historic Mormon Bastion, The Plymouth Rock of the West*, Compiled and published by Nicholas Groesbeck Morgan, Dr., SLC, UT: 1964, FHL book 979.2258 H2mn, pp. 9-10, 31-32.

extensive variety of seeds, at all seasons, from January to July, on a farm about 12 miles in length, and from 1 to 6 in width, including the city plot...The forts are rapidly breaking up, by the removal of the houses onto the city lots; and the city is already assuming the appearance of years, for any ordinary country; such is the industry and perseverance of the Saints.”²⁵

Over the years, hundreds of thousands of saints throughout many nations gave up everything to migrate to the “mountain of the Lord.” What inspired them to be part of this great gathering?

The answer lies in their conviction of the truths restored to Joseph Smith. While on the pioneer trek of 1848, Brigham Young’s letter on August 28 to the Saints in Iowa focused their amazing determination to endure all hardships in order to gather in the mountains and worship as they chose:

“We ~~are~~ now say to all the saints, observe the instructions <which> have been given to you, hearken to and obey the counsel of those who are placed over you; prepare to come west, get and retain the spirit of the Lord; be patient under your trials and tribulations; travel in peace and be ye blessed; travel as though your only desire is to carry out the principles of the kingdom,”²⁶

That determination and conviction is the only thing which could have brought them to the Salt Lake Valley through over a thousand miles of trackless wilderness.

²⁵ The History of Salt Lake City and its founders, by Edward W. Tullidge, FHL book 979.2258 H25 Vol. 1, p. 53-54.

²⁶ <https://history.lds.org/overlandtravel/sources/4621/young-brigham-and-heber-c-kimball-letter-in-journal-history-of-the-church-of-jesus-christ-of-latter-day-saints-28-aug-1848-2-4>