

## **Mormon Trail Overview**

On June 27, 1844 Joseph Smith, founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, was being held in a jail cell in Nauvoo, Illinois. That night a mob overran the jail house and killed both Joseph and his brother, Hyrum. The members of his church, Mormons, believed they had to get out of Nauvoo and find a safe place to live.

Brigham Young, another church leader, came forward to direct the movement of the Mormons. He promised the town of Nauvoo that 15,000 Mormons would leave Nauvoo by spring. Tensions were high in the area and Brigham and other leaders were worried about the safety of the group. Brigham decided to ask part of the group to leave earlier. This first group left on February 4, 1846 for a destination somewhere in the Rocky Mountains.

Problems at home made leaving difficult for the Mormon families. Many Mormons were unable to sell their belongings to other townsmen and were forced to leave the majority of their things. They abandoned houses, farms, and all sorts of personal items. They also had to prepare quickly for the travels ahead.

The first group found winter travel very difficult. Snow, mud and wind blocked their way and caused many delays. Some days they barely made any advancement at all.

Along the way, Brigham ordered groups to set up temporary camps to rest and prepare for the larger groups coming later. These camps built cabins, dug wells, put up fences and gardens, and built ferries for river crossings. Such advancements were very helpful to later travelers along the trail.

In October of 1846, the first group had only traveled about 265 miles into the area near Omaha, Nebraska. They established a new camp called Winter Quarters, where they waited out the winter months. In the spring, Brigham took a small well-equipped group and traveled on to the area of the Great Salt Lake. It was here that he proclaimed the new Zion, or promised land for the Mormons.

During the next twenty years approximately 70,000 Mormons followed Brigham's trail to the Great Salt Lake area, thus creating the Mormon Trail. Most followers traveled by wagon, but some new converts were unable to afford the cost of a wagon and necessary supplies. These late converts traveled with handcars provided by the church.

Almost all travelers walked the nearly 1,300 miles to the Salt Lake Valley.