



The trek of the Martin Handcart Company, from Iowa City to Salt Lake City in 1856 was later described by John Jaques, a member of the company.



The company of emigrants, of which this hand-cart company constituted the largest part, embarked at Liverpool, May 22nd, 1856, on the packet ship *Horizon*, Captain Reed, a Scandinavian and a gentleman. Among passengers were the persons who had given the first sixpence to the Mormon Elders when they first went to England. The names of those persons were Samuel Pucell and family. The passengers on board numbered 856, of whom 635 were Perpetual Emigrating Fund emigrants, 212 ordinary, and seven cabin passengers. I believe all were Mormons. On the 30th of June the steamer *Huron* towed the *Horizon* to Constitution wharf [Boston], when the emigrants debarked. They took [railroad] cars for Iowa City, crossing the Hudson at Albany, and passing through Buffalo on the 4th of July.

During their stay in the Iowa camp the emigrants employed themselves in making carts and doing other preparatory work until July 28th, when the camp broke up, and the hand-cart portion moved off nearly a mile for a start and then camped again. The hand-cart emigrants were divided into two companies, one under Edward Martin and the other under Jesse Haven, altogether numbering about 600 persons. Some of the emigrants who came in the company to Iowa City were numbered in two wagon companies, under John A Hunt and Benjamin Hodgetts which left the rendezvous camp about this time. Many of the carts had wooden axles and leather boxes. Some of the axles broke in a few days, and mechanics were busy in camp at nights repairing the accidents of the days. One wagon with mule-team and two wagons with ox-teams were apportioned to each handcart company to carry provisions, tents, etc.

The last hand cart company arrived at Florence, on the west bank of the Missouri, on the 22nd of August. This was the site of "Winter Quarters," of the great Mormon camp from Nauvoo, in the winter of 1846. There, owing to the lateness of the season, the important question

was debated, whether the emigrants should winter in that vicinity or continue the long and wearisome journey to Salt Lake. Unfortunately, it was determined to finish the journey the same season. At Florence the two hand-cart companies were consolidated in one and put in charge of Edward Martin, assisted by Daniel Tyler (both Mormon Battalion men). August 25th the company moved from Florence to Cutler's Park, two and a half miles, and camped, stayed there the next day and night, and left the next morning....

The company arrived at Fort Laramie October 8th, and camped east of Laramie Fork, about a mile from the fort. On the 9th many of the company went to the fort to sell watches or other things they could spare and buy provisions. The commandant kindly allowed them to buy from the military stores at reasonable prices--biscuit at 15 1/2 cents, bacon at 15 cents, rice at 17 cents per pound, and so on. Up to this time the daily pound of flour ration had been regularly served out, but it was never enough to stay the stomachs of the emigrants, and the longer they were on the plains and in the mountains the hungrier they grew. Soon after Fort Laramie was passed, it was deemed advisable to curtail the rations in order to make them hold out as long as possible. The pound of flour fell to three-fourths of a pound, then to half a pound, and subsequently yet lower. Still the company toiled on through the Black Hills, where the feed grew scarcer for the cattle also.

In the Black Hills the roads were harder, more rocky and more hilly, and this told upon the handcarts, causing them to fail more rapidly, become rickety, and need more frequent repairing. One man's hand-cart broke down one afternoon in the hills, and by some mischance the company all went on, leaving him behind, alone with his broken cart and his family's little stock of worldly goods thereon. He was drawing his little child in his cart, as he had drawn her most of the journey, and as he subsequently drew her to the last crossing of the Platte, but when his cart broke down he had to transfer her to somebody else's cart and send her on with the company. So he remained behind with his cart, anxiously expecting somebody to turn back and help him, but no one came. Night drew on apace, and still he was all alone, save and expecting the presence of a prowling wolf, which could be seen in the streak of light on the western horizon, a little outside of ordinary rifle range. Happily just as darkness was settling down, Captain Hodgett's wagon company was observed coming down the opposite hill, from the east, at the base of which it encamped, a quarter or half a mile distant from the benighted and lonely handcart; he eagerly went and told his tale of misfortune to the wagon people, and they took him in for the night.

On the 19th of October, the company crossed the Platte, for the last time, at Red Buttes, about five miles above the bridge. That was a bitter cold day. Winter came on all at once, and that was the first day of it. The river was wide, the current strong, the water exceedingly cold and up to the wagon beds in the deepest parts, and the bed of the river was covered with cobble stones. Some of the men carried some of the women over on their backs or in their arms, but others of the women tied up their skirts and waded through, like heroines that they were, and as they had done through many other rivers and creeks. The company was barely over when snow, hail and sleet began to fall, accompanied by a piercing north wind, and camp was made on this side of the river. That was a nippy night, and it told its tale on the oxen as well as on the people. At Deer Creek, on the 17th of October, owing to the growing weakness of emigrants and teams, the baggage, including bedding and cooking utensils, was reduced to ten pounds per head, children under 8 years, five pounds. Good blankets and other bedding and clothing were burned,

as they could not be carried further, though needed more than ever, for there was yet four hundred miles of winter to go through. The next day after crossing the Platte the company moved on slowly, about ten miles, through the snow, and camped again near the Platt and at the point where the road left it for the Sweetwater. It snowed three days, and the teams and many of the people were so far given out that it was deemed advisable not to proceed further for a few days but rather to stay in camp and recruit. It was hoped that the snow and cold would prove only a foretaste of winter and would soon pass away and the weather would moderate, but that hope proved delusive.

The 28th of October was the red letter day to this handcart expedition. On that memorable day, Joseph A. Young, Daniel W. Jones and Abel Garr galloped unexpectedly into the camp amid the cheers and tears and smiles and laughter of the emigrants. These three men, being an express from the most advanced relief company from Salt Lake, brought the glad word that assistance, provisions and clothing were near, that ten wagons were waiting at Devils Gate for the emigrants. Early on the morning of the 29th the hand-cart company left the Platte and struck across the country for the Sweetwater....At Greasewood Creek were found George D. Grant, R. T. Burton, Charles Decker, C. G. Webb and others, with six wagons laden with flour and other things from Salt Lake, who had come to the assistance of the belated emigrants. This was another time of rejoicing. On the evening of November 1st the hand-cart company camped at the Sweetwater bridge, on this side of the river, about five miles on the other side of Devil's Gate, arriving there about dark. There was a foot or eighteen inches of snow on the ground, which, as there were but one or two spades in camp, the emigrants had to: shovel away with their frying pans, or tin plates, or anything they could use for that purpose, before they could pitch their tents, and then the ground was frozen so hard that it was almost impossible to drive the tent pegs into it. Some of the men were so weak that it took them an hour or two to clear the places for their tents and set them up. On the 3rd Joseph A. Young and Abel Gair were sent as an express to Salt Lake to convey information as to the situation of the emigrants. In preparing for this express journey home, Joseph A. put on three or four pairs of woolen socks, a pair of moccasins, and a pair of buffalo hide over-shoes with the wool on, and then remarked, "There, if my feet freeze with those on, they must stay frozen till I get to Salt Lake."

At Devil's Gate an earnest council was held to determine whether to endeavor to winter the emigrants at that point or to push them on to Salt lake as fast as possible. It was decided to continue the march to Salt Lake the same season. Two or three days after arriving at Devil's Gate, the hand-cart company was in part reorganized, and most of the carts were left there.

The freight that could not be taken along was left at Devil's Gate, with twenty men to guard it during the winter, in charge of Daniel W. Jones, assisted by Thomas M. Alexander and Ben Hampton, of the relief party. The remaining men were chosen from the emigration companies. These twenty men had a hard time of it before they were relieved the next summer.

The passage of the Sweetwater at this point was a severe operation to many of the company. It was the last ford that the emigrants waded over. The water was not less than two feet deep, perhaps a little more in the deepest parts, but it was intensely cold. The ice was three or four inches thick, and the bottom of the river muddy or sand. I forget exactly how wide the stream was there, but I think thirty or forty yards. It seemed a good deal wider than that to those who

pulled their hand-carts through it. Before the crossing was completed, the shades of evening were closing around, and, as everybody knows, that is the coldest hour of the twenty-four, or at least it seems to be so, in a frosty time. The teams and wagons and hand-carts and some of the men forded the river. David R. Kimball, George W. Grant, Stephen Taylor and C. Allen Huntington waded the river, helping the handcarts through and carrying the women and children and some of the weaker of the men over. In the rear part of the company two men were pulling one of the hand-carts, assisted by one or two women, for the women pulled as well as the men all the way, so long as the hand-carts lasted. When the cart arrived at the river, one of these men, who was much worn down, asked, in a plaintive tone, "Have we got to go across there?" On being answered yes, he was so much affected that he was completely overcome. That was the last strain. His fortitude and manhood gave way. He exclaimed, "Oh dear I can't go through that," and burst into tears. His wife, who was by his side, had the stouter heart of the two at that juncture and she said soothingly, "Don't cry, Jimmy. I'll pull the hand-cart for you." * * While in the river the sharp cakes of floating ice below the surface of the water struck against the bare shins of the emigrant, inflicting wounds, which never healed until he arrived at Salt lake, and the dark scares of which he bears to this day.

The hand cart company rested in Martin's Ravine two or three or more days. Though under the shelter of the northern mountains, it was a cold place. One night the gusty wind blew over a number of the tents, and it was with difficulty some of the emigrants could keep from freezing. One afternoon Captain Martin and two or three other men started to go from the camp to Devil's Gate, but a snow storm came on and they mistook their bearings and lost their way. After wanderings for several hours, they came near perishing. In their exigency they endeavored to make a fire to warm themselves. They gathered some cedar twigs and struck match after match to light them, but in vain.. At length, with their last match and the aid of portions of their body linen, they succeeded in starting a fire. This was seen from the handcart camp, from which, after all their anxious and weary wandering, they were only about half a mile distant. Help soon came to the benighted wanderers and the "boys" carried Captain Martin, who was nearly exhausted, back to camp.... William H. Kimball left Salt Lake again, November 11th, with Hosea Stout, James Ferguson and Joseph Simmons, and met the hand-cart company four miles beyond the first station on the Sweetwater. By this time the shoes of many of the emigrants had "given out," and that was no journey for shoeless men, women and children to make at such a season of the year, and trudge on foot.

As the emigrants proceeded on their terrible journey, there was no appreciable mitigation of the piercing wintry cold, but its intensity rather increased. The Rocky Ridge and South Pass were crossed on the 18th of November, a bitterly cold day. The snow fell fast and the wind blew piercingly from the north. For several days the company had been meeting more relief trains, which had been urged on by the Joseph A. Young express, and as the company was crossing the South Pass, there was a sufficiency of wagons for the first time, to carry all the people, and thenceforth the traveling was more rapid....on Sunday the 30th [the company] passed down the latter canyon and arrived in the city about noon.