

## Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel, 1847–1868

### Source of Trail Excerpt:

Chamberlain, John Marvin, *Reminiscences* [c. 1925], [2-5].

### Read Trail Excerpt:

At Keokouck [Keokuk], it was certainly grand to feel land under our feet again, even though our journey was to be filled with hardships. We immediately made ready for our six months' journey to Utah. We had considerable difficulty in managing the cattle. They would turn the yokes every way. When we did get them accustomed to the yoke and hitched to the wagon they would try to run away and soon the chains would become tangled. When we felt we could drive them safely, the supplies were packed. Every available space was used in the wagons. Fourteen persons were assigned to our wagon, a Mr. [James] McNangton [McNaughtan] and his family and our family. After the provisions were placed, the bedding packed in the wagon, there was little or no room for much else: it looked as though father [Thomas Chamberlain] must leave his heavy tools behind. Captain Appleton Harmond [Harmon] turned to father and said, "Brother Chamberlain, you cannot [can not] take those carpenter tools with you." Father sat down on his tool-chest, deliberated for a few moments and then said sternly, "Then I stay here with my tools! A man might as well be without hands as to be without tools in a strange frontier country." "You are a very useful, handy man in our wagon train,—all right, tools go and you, too," came the favorable answer. With so many in our wagon, there was no room for me, and so I chose to walk. It was in May and the prairies were covered with grass and flowers. There were many creeks to ford, some of them one or two feet deep. I used to cross them on the big white ox, and such fun it was. One morning when I was helping my two brothers, William and Richard, yoke up the oxen, one ox stepped on my foot. It hurt so painfully that I cried. Mother [Elizabeth Jackson Chamberlain] fixed it as best she could and I tried [tried] to take my usual place in front of the train, but I could not walk. So mother sat down with me on a large rock to wait for the Captain. When he learned what had happened he helped me on his horse and we rode to his wagon, where I remained for the rest of the day. With that only exception, I walked all the way to Salt Lake City.

We made good time the first one hundred miles, covering from fifteen to twenty-five miles a day.

When we came to the Indian country, the Captain warned us that we could not be too careful and cautioned us not to go far from the train or camp at any time. We traveled up the Platte River, where I first saw wild Indians, the Potterwotamu tribe. One day about noon we saw four or five hundred very wild-looking Indians running across the prairie toward us. They came to a halt in front of our wagon, threw spears and tomohawks, drew their bows, threatening to shoot if we did not stop. They presented a dreadful sight, painted red and black, and their warwhoops were shriekingly fearful. They demanded the oxen, ten sacks of flour and five sacks of sugar to let us pass, but our Captain made signs on his fingers denoting one ox, one sack of sugar and one sack of flour. They finally consented. I will never forget how savage and wild they looked as we passed through their ranks. We had no further trouble with the Indians until we reached the Sioux country, where we had to make a second donation. But our Captain said that President Brigham Young told him it was better to feed the Indians than to fight them.

Now we traveled along the bank of the Platte River and passed many Indian camps. In one camp I saw a white girl about twelve years of age. She was dressed well, but could not speak English. No doubt she had been taken captive from some wagon train they had burned and destroyed and from people whom they had massacred.

We passed many lonely graves by the roadside with Buffalo heads as markers, the inscription having been made with black paint on the white skull. This was a source of grief and pity to me. There was a man by the name of Savin with the company. He had a light wagon and a pair of horses and could, and did, travel miles ahead of the wagon train. Mr. Savin was a geologist and liked to pick up curious specimens of rock which he would find along the roadside. He seemed not to sense the danger but one day, sad to relate, we found him lying by the road, scalped and with a half dozen arrows in his body. He was dead, his horse was gone and his wagon had been burned. I shall never forget that sight.

We crossed the Platte River in quite a number of places, sometimes fording and other times by ferryboat. The oxen did

not like to plung[e] into the cold water, so two or three young men would ride oxen ahead of the herd and then gradually crowd them into the river. Once in, they would always swim across. It was a strange sight to see only cattle horns and noses above the water.

My father [Thomas Chamberlain] was an expert hunter, and used to kill many ducks, rabbits and prairie chickens. He would then distribute them throughout the camp. When we reached the buffalo country he often took me with him in the early mornings ahead of the train to hunt them. This was exciting fun for me. We would creep up close to a big buffalo herd and then father would shoot at the buffalo closest to the road, cut it up and when the wagons came by would give a portion to each group. I remember having seen buffalo so plentiful that they almost covered the prairie like a black cloud as far as the naked eye could reach.

In the course of this trip my brother William caught the mountain fever. Mother got herb remedies from an old Indian Medicine Man which seemed to do him good, for he was soon well again.

We eventually came to Sweetwater Pass, so named because a wagon-load of sugar had accidentally been overturned in the stream, which made the water sweet for many days. It was so pure and good, and we had been using alkiline water. There were many mountain trout and other fish in the stream. Here my brother William was the big fellow. He would often let me go with him to hunt grasshoppers and to help him carry the fish back to camp.

Another thing of interest on our trip was Chimney rock, which we could now see not many miles away. This rock, resembling a chimney, was 250 feet high and its surface on the top almost level. Here a pair of eagles made their home. The only way it could be clim[b]ed was by first throwing a lasso-rope until it caught securely on a projection, and then using it to pull oneself up. In the evening after we had left Chimney Rock, while following a creek near camp, my brother William and I came upon a very old Medicine Man of the Sioux tribe. He had been left there by members of his tribe to die. This seems so very cruel, but it was then the custom of that particular tribe that, when a man or woman could not walk and travel with the rest of them in going from place to place, they be left by the side of the creek with some provisions to last a number of days before they died; when the wolves would then do the rest. This old fellow told us a romantic story about Chimney Rock in words similar to the following: "Many moons ago, our Sioux Chief had a daughter, Latuna (Dancing Waters) by name, who he wished to marry to one of his best warrior chiefs, Big Bear. Latuna refused because her heart belonged to another, a Blackfoot Chief by name of Night Hawk. So the Chief had his daughter placed on top of Chimney Rock with water and food and the threat that she was to stay there until she consented to his wish to marry Big Bear. Latuna, somehow, got word to her lover, Night Hawk, who planned carefully to rescue her from this fate and then to carry her to his own tribe. Fate is unkind at times to lovers, and the old Sioux Chief was secretly warned of Night Hawk's intention. He remained awake to watch for Night Hawk. As soon as the first faint ray of light disclosed to Latuna the torture of her lover who lay dying with arrows almost through his body, she cast herself from the rock in despair.["] Almost side by side they died together. Sad, was it not?

Another place of importance was Green River, close to Fort Bridger. This Fort was named for Jim Bridger, trapper and mountaineer, who lived there, and the river was so called because of the greenish tint of its waters. Jim Bridger was on good terms with the Shoshone tribe, for he had married one of their squaws. We replenished our food supply with groceries purchased at his store. A few days later we were met by a wagon from Salt Lake City filled with good things to eat—potatoes, onions and other vegetables, which the folks there had sent to us. And my, how good they did taste! The man handed me a carrot and it was more delicious than any candy I had tasted before, or since.

We came down Echo Canyon, crossed the Weber River and came part way up East Canyon to the Big Mountain, from the top of which I first saw Salt Lake Valley, the waters of its big inland sea shining in the rays of the setting sun—truly a grand picture! We camped at the foot of Little Mountain. Next morning we crossed it and came down Emigration Canyon.

Glorious day! We arrived in Salt Lake City on the 17th day of October, 1853. Our long journey was at last ended and we were all so happy and thankful.