

## Goals/Objectives/Student Outcomes:

Students will:

- Create a sample travel diary that describes some portion of the trail as it crosses one county in Iowa.
- Learn to compare aspects of the available travel technology, topography of the land to be crossed, weather, and factors such as the presence of helpful or hostile residents in the area the route will traverse.
- Become more sensitive to how different people react to situations depending on their age, gender, and personal background.
- Better understand situations in which a person or a group may be persecuted for beliefs—religious and otherwise.

## Materials:

- Paper
- Pencils or pens
- Outline maps of Iowa
- Detailed maps of Iowa (such as DOT highway maps)
- Sample diary entries from the Mormon Trek in 1846
- Readings about the historical context of 1846

## Background:

In 1844, Joseph Smith, Jr., the leader of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (known as Mormon), was murdered in the Hancock County, jail at Carthage, Illinois. This event was the culmination of a long series of persecutions of Smith's followers. Most of the members of the church in Nauvoo, Illinois then accepted Brigham Young as their leader and organized themselves to move west where they could worship in peace.

During the next two years, the approximately 20,000 Mormon residents of Nauvoo completed the building of their temple, gathered supplies and equipment, and began selling their property. Beginning in early February 1846 the Mormons began crossing the Mississippi River to Iowa. There they formed a permanent camp site that was called Sugar Creek. The river crossing was dangerous at

that time of year because the channel was filled with floating chunks of ice and the water was frigid. For a few days the temperature was cold enough that the water froze over completely and the people were able to drive their wagons across what they referred to as a "bridge of ice."

The Sugar Creek Camp was a horrible place because of the cold temperatures, the snow, the lack of food for the people and the animals, and the temporary nature of the shelters in which the Mormons were forced to live. While in this camp they organized themselves into groups of Hundreds, Fifties, and Tens. These numbers did not refer to the number of people in a group, but to the number of able-bodied adult males in each group. Moving west according to these Hundreds, Fifties, and Tens, they began the long, arduous trip across Iowa during the worst weather imaginable.

For the next several months they went west across Lee, Van Buren, Davis, Appanoose, Wayne, Decatur, Clarke, Union, Adair, Cass, and Pottawattamie Counties until they reached the Missouri River in the summer. Three permanent campsites were established as they moved west. Garden Grove in Decatur County and Mount Pisgah in Union County were referred to as "farms," because several thousand acres of land was plowed and crops were planted. This was to supply food to the people who would follow this trail during the next seven years—until 1852 when all the Mormons who intended to go west finally had traveled across Iowa. In addition to crops, these permanent camp sites contained blacksmith shops, wheel and barrel repair shops, and other establishments to provide equipment and repairs to the thousands of people passing through.

Crude houses were built, and several families remained in these permanent camp sites for several years. Because of the severity of the weather, the lack of food, and the difficulty of the travel, many people became ill and died. Some were buried along the trail where the death occurred. Others were buried in cemeteries in Garden Grove, Mount Pisgah, and the last of the permanent camp sites, first called Kaneshville and later called Council Bluffs. Actually, the Mormons often referred to this latter area as "Winter Quarters" because the first group stayed there during the winter of 1846-47 and then made the rest of the journey across the Great Plains during 1847. The final destination was the valley of the Great Salt Lake in what was later called Utah.

Winter Quarters was another organizing station, and spread over both sides of the Missouri River, into what later became Omaha and Florence, Nebraska. Houses were built, land was plowed, and crops

were planted around this area too. The farms north of Council Bluffs and Omaha were referred to as "Summer Quarters."

As the Mormons passed through southern Iowa they encountered settlers in the first few counties. Some of these settlers helped them and some hindered them. Money was raised by working at carpentry and bricklaying, and also by performing band concerts. Food was purchased as long as the settlements and existing trails lasted, but by the time the Mormons got to Davis County there were no trails to follow, and they had to make their own. They also made their own bridges over creeks and rivers, and invented ways to pull wagons out of mud holes. Wagons were pulled by teams of horses or oxen, and other livestock was driven in herds so that when they arrived at their destination they would have the animals to start farms.

Most of the travelers were family groups, and the men, women, and children all had assigned tasks to help with the move. Many possessions had to be left behind them in Nauvoo because wagons that were too heavily loaded tended to break down and also were more likely to get stuck in the mud. That spring was wet in Iowa, and the amount of snow and rain made travel all the more difficult. Since they started the journey in the winter, the animals suffered from lack of grass, and often had to subsist by grazing on the bark and branches of small trees.

Without the expert organization, the required amounts of supplies, and the help of the group, the trip would not have been possible. As it was, it was one of the most difficult yet most important movements of people on the American frontier. Many who made the trip kept diaries and journals, and many others wrote their reminiscences afterward. It is from this enormous amount of written material that we have such excellent knowledge of what it was like for the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to cross Iowa in 1846 and the following 6 years, over a route that has come to be known as the "Mormon Trail."

## Procedure:

1. Read selections from diaries to the students. Discuss the recurring themes in the diary entries such as, food, the temperature, rain and snow, difficulties in crossing creeks and rivers, and sickness.)
2. Discuss the matter of how people traveled at that time in history. What technology was available to them? What was the cost? This particular migration was of families in groups and was very well organized. How many miles could a family travel in a day? What obstacles did they encounter? What preparations could be made in advance to make the journey easier? What supplies did they need to pack and take with them? What did they eat, and how did they prepare it? What did they wear?
3. Read the historical background about why these people were traveling across Iowa and where they were going.
4. Discuss the conditions in the United States in 1846. What else was going on that influenced what this group of people did? Why were these people not protected under the Constitution (freedom of religion)? Why did their neighbors treat them in such ways that they felt they had no alternative but to leave their homes and travel such long distances in such unfavorable weather?
5. Begin to create draft copies of fictitious diaries. Students will need to decide if they want to create the diary of an adult or child, a man or a woman, a leader or a follower. Discuss the dates the diaries will cover, how to describe the crossing of a particular part of Iowa, and

whether the diaries will describe all aspects of travel or concentrate on only a few.

6. Read, rewrite, and edit the draft fictitious diaries. When they are in a form that is acceptable to the student, then the students will read their diaries aloud to each other until every student has read at least a part of the diary he or she has written.

7. Selections from original diaries should be read aloud and compared with the diaries created by the students for similarities and differences. Remember, the original diaries differed from one another just as much as the original diaries will differ from the fictitious diaries created by the students.

Some of the fictitious diaries may lend themselves to role-playing, readers' theater presentation, or actual dramatic presentation. If there are diaries that are suitable for such adaptation, this can be a culminating activity.

## Assessment of Outcomes:

The students can evaluate their own created diary in terms of realism.

The students can evaluate each others' diaries in terms of realism.

The students can pick out particularly imaginative and realistic passages and read them aloud again.

The students can think of other situations in history in which groups of people have been forced to leave their homes and move to an unknown place. Reasons for moving, methods of travel, and the difficulties of movement can be compared and contrasted (for example, the Pilgrims to Plymouth in 1620; the Africans to North America as slaves in the 17th and 18th centuries; the Native American Indians when they were forced to move west or onto reservations; the Japanese-Americans who were forcibly re-located to camps at the beginning of World War II).

## Extensions and Adaptations:

The students can visit a Mormon Trail or camp site and see firsthand what the geographical terrain was like.

The students can develop geography skills to complement the historical analysis skills inherent in this unit.

The students can learn library research skills when looking for background and contextual information.

The students can learn creative writing skills when preparing the fictitious diary.

The students can learn more about social customs of another time: e.g. what people ate, wore, and how they interacted with each other.

The students can learn more about the technology of travel and how it changes, particularly as it changed to meet existing challenges.

## Resources:

Janath Cannon. *Nauvoo Panorama*. Nauvoo: Nauvoo Restoration, Inc., 1947.

Porter French. "On the Trail of Brigham Young." *The Iowan* 26 (Summer 1978): 46- 52.

Stanley B. Kimball. "The Iowa Trek of 1846." *Ensign* 2 (June 1972): 36-45.

Stanley B. Kimball. *Discovering Mormon Trails*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1979, pp. 14-17.

William J. Petersen. "The Mormon Trail of 1846." *The Palimpsest* 47 (September 1966): 353-367.

Jacob Van der Zee. "The Mormon Trails in Iowa." *The Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 12 (January 1914): 3-16.

"Historic Nauvoo." Video (16 minutes), Nauvoo Restoration, Inc., 1990.

The local branch of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The Iowa Mormon Trails Association. The National Park Service.

The local and county historical societies in counties and towns through which the trail passed.

Farmers who own land through which the trail passed and where remnants of the trail or campsites may still be visible.

## Selected Diary Entries

13 February 1846, Eliza Snow, Sugar Creek Camp: "Crossed the Mississippi and joined the camp. . . . We lodged in Brother Yearsley's tent, which, before morning was covered with snow."

13 February 1846, Patty Sessions, Sugar Creek Camp: "The wind blows. We can hardly get to the fire for the smoke, and we have no tent but our wagon."

14 February 1846, Eliza Snow, Sugar Creek Camp: "After breakfast I went into the buggy and did not leave it till the next day. Sister Markham and I did some needle work, though the melting snow dripped in through our cover."

18 February 1846, George A. Smith, Sugar Creek Camp: "The snow began to fall early this morning in great quantities and lasted all day. Everything looked gloomy. . . . The wind blew so strong from the northwest that it uncovered our tent. . . . Our hunters went out and brought in six rabbits. We dined on rabbits, corn meal, and potatoes."

23 February 1846, Patty Sessions, Sugar Creek Camp: "We got canvas for a tent. Sewed some on it."

23 March 1846, Orson Pratt, Shoal Creek Camp: "The day is rainy and unpleasant. Moved only seven miles. The next day went through the rain and deep mud, about six miles, and encamped on the west branch of Shoal Creek. The heavy rains had rendered the prairies impassable; and our several camps were very much separated from each other. We were compelled to remain as we were for some two or three weeks, during which time our animals were fed upon the limbs and bark of trees, for the grass had not yet started."

24 March 1846, George Smith, Chariton River Camp: "The ground was so soft that it required three or four yoke of oxen to draw our two horse wagon. We have suffered more the last three days than at any time since we left Nauvoo."

6 April 1846, Hosea Stout, Hickory Grove Camp: "This day capped the climax of all days for travelling. The road was the worst that I had yet witnessed, up hill and down, through sloughs, on spouty oak ridges and deep marshes, raining hard, the creek rising. The horses would sometimes sink to their bellies on the ridges. Teams stall going down hill."

6 April 1846, Patty Sessions, Locust Creek Camp # 1: "Brother Rockwood came to our wagon; told us the word was to get out of

this mud as soon as possible. We move before breakfast, go three miles, cross the creek on new bridges that our men had made; had to double team all the way."

9 April 1846, Orson Pratt, Locust Creek Camp # 1: "We encamped at a point of timber about sunset, after being drenched several hours in rain. The mud and water in and around our tents were ankle deep, and the rain still continued to pour down without any cessation. We were obliged to cut brush and limbs of trees, and throw them upon the ground in our tents, to keep our beds from sinking in the mire."

9 April 1846, George A. Smith, Locust Creek Camp # 1: "We travelled very well about two or three miles when the roads began to get very bad. We had to double our teams and get each other out of the mud. About noon it began to rain in torrents and every driver soon got wet to the hide. It seemed as though the bottom of the road had now fallen out, for wagons sunk in the mud up to their beds, and the women and children had to get out in the rain so that their teams might pull the wagons through the mud. Frequently we had to put eight or ten yoke of oxen to a wagon to get the wagons out of the mud holes."

16 April 1846, Horace Whitney, Rolling Prairie Camp: "Today eight rattlesnakes were killed by our company, and two of the oxen in the same were bitten."

17 April 1846, Horace Whitney, Pleasant Point Camp: "Our principal hunters went out before starting this morning and cut down two bee trees, bringing into the commissary three pails of first rate honey; they also killed two deer and turkeys during the day which were distributed to the company."

Reminiscences of Helen Mar Whitney, Garden Grove Camp: "The next day another fishing excursion was taken, when Horace caught a dozen or more. These substantial were very acceptable, as we had had no meat—except a little that had been given to us—for a number of weeks, but had subsisted principally on sea biscuits and that sort of fare. At Garden Grove we had our first trial at eating cakes made of parched corn meal, one meal of which sufficed me."

10 May 1846, Parley Pratt, Garden Grove Camp: "A large amount of labor has been done since arriving in this grove; indeed the whole camp is very industrious. Many houses have been built, wells dug, extensive farms fenced, and the whole place assumes the appearance of having been occupied for years, and clearly shows what can be accomplished by union, industry, and perseverance."

18 May 1846, Helen Mar Whitney, Mt. Pisgah Camp: "Monday morning the brethren had to build a bridge before starting, and had to stop and build another in the afternoon. We travelled ten miles and encamped at evening in a grove on the brow of a hill, a small bottom intervening between us and the middle fork of Grand River, which abounded in fish, such as sun fish and catfish."

Reminiscences of Zina D. Young, Mt. Pisgah Camp: "Sickness came upon us, and death invaded our camp. Sickness was so prevalent and deaths so frequent that enough help could not be had to make coffins, and many of the dead were wrapped in their grave clothes and buried with split logs at the bottom of the grave and brush at the sides, that being all that could be done for them by their mourning friends."

28 May 1846, Patty Sessions, Mt. Pisgah Camp: "Sister Rockwood gave me some tallow. I panned 17 candles. I thought it quite a present. Sister Kenneth Davis gave me a piece of butter. Thank the Lord for friends."