

ACTIVITIES COMMITTEE

The term “Group Leaders,” rather than Ma’s and Pa’s will be used in all documents from www.handcarttreks.com . Priesthood leaders are free to determine the actual term used to designate the Group Leaders.

The use of the Mormon Battalion for the Callout has been discontinued. Priesthood leaders should use alternate methods for separating the young men from the women.

Groups should plan their activities to accomplish the goals they have set for the trek. Remember that the most important thing is to prayerful consider your theme and the lessons your youth need to learn. ***Many groups try to do it all and overwhelm the youth.*** Trekking itself creates many powerful teaching moments, so prayerful pick those activities that will teach the lessons your youth need to learn. Remember to ***be flexible*** throughout the experience plans may have to be changed.

The following activities are just ideas to get your mind thinking about the different possibilities.

ACTIVITIES BEFORE PIONEER TREK

Remember that the youth will need to be prepared physically, mentally, and spiritually to have the trek experience be most effective. Include a variety of preparatory activities to help set the mood.

Pre Trek Fireside.

Most of the stakes have a pre-trek fireside about 3 or 4 months before their trek where they have speakers talk about the trek experience, introduce the theme, trek guarantees, give information about clothing and registration. The youth council can sing a special song to go along with the theme. Sometimes someone in the stake dresses up as an old pioneer and comes into the meeting acting in first person to get the youth excited. Youth council should be involved in planning this fireside.

Recruitment

Group Leaders visit the young men, young women’s classes and Relief Society just after they return from their training trek. They dress in pioneer clothes to give the youth and mother’s ideas for clothing. The Group Leaders encourage the youth and the parents to be a part of trek and give a few suggestions on how to stay warm and pack their clothes.

Assign Everyone a Pioneer or Family History Name

The youth receive the name of a pioneer or do research prior to trek and bring the name of an ancestor who demonstrated great faith or courage to overcome a great difficulty in their life and who they can look to for strength. During the trek, they wear the name of that pioneer and they find out what happened to that person. They have opportunities to share what they have learned about the individual they are representing/walking with.

Trail of Faith Award

Different goals are created that the youth can accomplish before the trek. They focus around reading pioneer stories, temple work, becoming physically prepared, and reading from the scriptures. For example, the youth can read on the internet about the pioneers at www.lds.org/gospellibrary/pioneer/pioneerstory.htm or they could clean up a cemetery, visit the Pioneer Memorial Museum, do baptisms for the dead, keep a journal for a month, learn a pioneer song, etc. The youth earn a special reward that they take with them on the trial.

Help Build/Repair Handcarts

Depending on if your ward or stake is building their own handcarts look for ways to involve the youth in the process. They will treat the handcarts with great care if they have been involved in building them.

Church History Videos

Show videos/slides of the handcart pioneers and the Saints gathering to Zion from different church materials.

Temple and Family History

Youth can attend the temple to perform baptism for the dead. They can also visit the Family History Center and learn about doing their own family history.

Memento

Sliver Link-One group had the youth string a link of chain onto their shoe lace or around their neck. The link sat at the top of their foot. As the youth walked they would look at their feet and be reminded of their ancestors and what kind of link they would be. At the end of the trek, people of all ages from the ward came up with a gold link around their neck to help the trekkers pull the last mile of the route.

Memento

Wooden Spoon-One example is having the youth carve a wooden spoon. Their spoon would be their sole eating tool for the trek. Those that spent time whittling on their spoon had an easier time eating on trek and those that didn't struggled with eating. Some stakes have an activity before trek where they practice whittling. This is a physical memento that each trekker brings home from trek with them. One Bishop said he was going to hang his spoon in his office so his youth could see it and remember trek when they visited with him. Others give the youth a *tin cup* that they use along the trail, or a *small leather journal* to record their experiences and bag to carry it.

Clothing & Food

Besides making bonnets and bloomers some groups have activities before trek to make soap, jam, dried fruit or jerky to take and use on the trek. Or they have people demonstrate different pioneer type activities like spinning, weaving, dying wool, making cheese, homemade soap or Dutch oven cooking. Get as many people in the wards

involved. Some groups prepare a small medal can of cream with a marble that they tie to their handcart and so they have butter to put on a loaf of bread.

Conditioning Program/Pre Trek Hike.

Some groups introduce a physical conditioning program to help get the youth and adults exercising. They might have a hike or a walk for all the youth and Group Leaders. They test out the shoes they will be wearing on the trek. Stress to the youth and leaders about being physically prepared. Walk during the hot part of the day with long sleeves, pants and a hat. Drink plenty of water, start now to teach the importance of hydration. Stress good shoes and socks that minimize

Service project/Duty to God or Personal Progress.

It is a great opportunity for the youth of the stake to take on a trek project for their Duty to God or Young Woman project. Young men have made food boxes for the handcarts or wooden lanterns that held a candle for each family. Young Women projects have help the younger girls make bonnets and dresses. They have also made the dolls for each family that is carried as a family member.

Equipment Check

Make sure that everyone who is going has everything that they will need for the trip and that they do not bring things like radio's or ipods, etc. Some groups only allow 17 lbs of personal equipment.

Buss Ride Activities

If there is a long buss ride groups have taken time to have pre recorded stories of pioneers or church history "Who am I" they listen and try to determine who the person is. They also have puzzles or word finds that involve pioneer theme. Ask them to answer a question questions about what they think they will get out of Trek. Play string games like "Cat's Cradle" or make Whirligig's (buttons on string that continue to spin when the string is pulled).

ACTIVITIES DURING PIONEER TREK

Family Banners/Flags

Banners-Some stakes make a banner with their stake's theme on it for each family. The families add their family trek name and everyone signs it with their trek name. The families hang them on the cart or have a small pipe that they attach it to and put it in the corner of the cart.

Flags-Groups usually have at least one handcart with an American Flag. Other groups divide the families into companies and give them a different country flag. So there might be a company from England, Italy, Holland, or France, etc.

Journals/Music

Some groups provide a small journal prior to the trek with quotes from the pioneers, President Hinckley, or other General Authorities. They also include their trek theme, encourage from the stake leaders and words to some appropriate Church hymns.

Family Discussions/Scripture Study

Many groups have family discussions throughout the experience that the Group Leaders direct. They focus around the stake's theme, pioneer stories, and the scriptures. The family discussions are kept short and some are planned while others happen when the Group Leaders feel their trek family would benefit from them. Many times they have the youth share the stories they have learned.

They also plan time for scripture study as a family each morning or sometime along the way. Group Leaders should take opportunities to share from the scriptures or ask the youth to share scriptures that relate to what they are learning and experiencing.

Group Morning Devotionals

As a large group or in companies, the groups get together to hear a few short stories or thoughts from the leaders. Great opportunity to involve the Stake Patriarch so that the youth get to know him better.

Vignettes/Storytellers

Someone from the stake learns pioneer stories beforehand and presents them at various points along the trail or in camp. Along the trail groups have had the trekkers run into a number of different pioneer characters. For example, a midwife stands next to a cart and describes how she helped women deliver their children in wagons or tents on their way to Zion. Husband and wife stand over a grave and describe the feelings they have as they bury their child. Joseph Kirkwood describes how his brother James gave his life to help him up and over Rocky Ridge. Porter Rockwell describes Joseph Smith or Ephraim Hanks tells about bringing buffalo meat to the starving handcart pioneers. Some groups have these storytellers come when they are in camp or at the end like Brigham Young welcoming them to Zion.

Others have the Group Leaders or individuals read from the pioneers journals along the trail. Make sure that everyone can hear. Allow for the noise of the wind or other extraneous sounds; divide into smaller groups if needed. *These stories should be used to teach gospel principles that can be applied to the youth's life.*

Musical Instruments

Groups should utilize music along the trail. Some groups have violins or a harmonica playing at the end of the women's pull. Others assign one youth per family who has learned a number of songs that they can teach or they have a musical instrument to play around the campfire. Another group had a young man who played the bag pipes at their final fireside. The Trail Boss called out the names of the youth who represented those who might have died along the trail and had them stand up.

Indians/Mountain men/Mobbers

Some stakes have Indians and mountain men come and set up teepees in a camp a little ways off from the base camp. The youth go and trade with the Indians to get things.

They also learn stories of the dealings that the pioneers and Joseph Smith had with the Indians.

Some groups have mobbers attack or drive them out of their campsite. One group ended their first day early and everyone was pleasantly surprised. They set up camp, cooked dinner, and started a dance. Mobbers came in and told them to pack up and leave in 20 minutes. The mobbers drove off with their water and porta-johns. The youth loaded up and pulled into the dark until they came to where the mobbers had left the porta-johns.

Carry 4oz of Flour

Groups give each youth or have the Group Leaders 4 oz of flour to represent the food ration given to Willie Handcart Company. This is a powerful reminder of what little they had to eat. They share stories about how the men would give up their portion to their wives and children.

Hardships on the Trail

Leaders hand out on a piece of paper identifying a problem the pioneers faced while on the trail. The trek family has to act as if this problem happen to them and figure out how to deal with it. For example, broken cart, everything wet and the family has to repack handcart, illness, lost shoes, broken leg, blindness, stream crossings, death of a family member, etc. Many times on difficult treks individual hardships naturally occur.

Silent Pull

The Trail Boss may ask everyone to pull silently for a while to allow time for everyone to hear the sounds of the handcarts and look around them at the nature they are passing through. It allows everyone some time to focus on why they are there.

****Women's Pull/Men's Callout**

This experience usually occurs near the end of the first day on a very difficult hill. There are several ways of conducting the women's pull. One example is to have the Group Leaders gather their family and talk the challenges the pioneers faced or they discuss how Heavenly Father can help us with our trials. They tell the family that when they start to pull that they will be on silence. The youth should think about the gifts and blessing that Heavenly Father has given them, they should also think of ways to communicate without words to their trek brothers and sisters. After they pull the handcarts for about 15 minutes in silence the Trail boss signals the Group Leaders to take the young men off. As the Group Leaders pull the young men off they whisper that the men can not pull or push the cart but they should encourage the girls. The girls pull the handcarts until the trail boss signals for the young men to rejoin in the pull. At the end of the women's pull the group gathers and sing Come, Come Ye Saints and other hymns.

The Callout can be used to separate the young men from the young women. A priesthood leader will explain that throughout the early days of the Church, men (fathers) were often called to serve missions, colonize the Territory, or, as in the case of the

Handcart Companies, they died on the trail. The women were often left to fend for themselves. The men are separated and march just around the corner out of sight and meet together. The leaders talk to the young men about following the prophet, honoring the priesthood, and womanhood. The women meet and talk about what it means to be a sister in Zion and how they can help the young men honor their priesthood. Then they pick up the carts and start pulling. The young men are instructed to stay on silence, and when their handcart pulls past they are to join in but not pull the cart. The Trail boss later signals when the young men can join the carts. They pull for a few more minutes then stop and sit in silence until everyone is there then they sing some hymns or break into families and share more pioneer stories or thoughts and feelings.

When the rations of the Willie and Martin handcart companies were limited, many of the men did not eat their share but rather gave it to their wives and children. Thus, a disproportionate share of the men died, leaving the women and children to pull the handcarts.

****Festival of activities**

Groups usually have a festival of activities one of the days. Families are grouped into 2's or 3's and move to different stations. This is where each stake or ward group can be creative and have a number of different fun activities. Some of them include:

Pioneer games, hair washing, archery, horse shoes, hatchet throw, stick pull, jump rope, spear throwing, sawing logs, cow pie toss, family band competition, marble making, branding leather (like Trek 2000), spitting seeds (cold watermelon), stilts, milking cows (gloves filled with milk), learning to lasso, old time baseball, tug a war, potato sack races, three legged races, water relay races, challenge games (like A-Frame, Jacob's Ladder, Spiders Web), mountain man activities & stories, make dolls, quilting, learning Brigham Young's alphabet, stick ball, hoop relays, walk through containers of ice carrying someone, pie or watermelon eating contest, potato peeling contest, candle making, taffy pull, making fire with bow drill or flint & steel, making butter (whipping cream in a tightly sealed jar and shake for 20 minutes), etc.

Hands on Spiritual Experiences.

Groups often have one day focus on spiritual activities such as Sunday school, solo, and a testimony meeting. Some try to have a spiritual "hands on" activity, such as a scavenger hunt, bury their baby dolls, hunt for the lost sheep, compass course, Gospel Rocks activity or have historical visitors like Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, or Ephraim Hanks come to visit. This can be a time to focus on an important gospel principle that your youth need to learn.

Some groups provide a time for the youth to spend with their own bishops for a special gathering and treat. Each bishop or counselor is responsible for an hour with their youth.

One group had the Group Leaders, before their family testimony meeting, take some time and wash the feet of everyone in their family. Then they talked about what it meant for the Savior to kneel before his disciples and wash their feet. The Group Leaders bore their testimony of the Savior. It set the tone of the testimony meeting having it centered about Christ.

Some groups have several of the older youth three or four from each company (prior to trek) learn about one of their ancestors. They are asked to bring something small that would represent their ancestor. For example, one boy talked about his great-great grandfather who was a carpenter, he brought a small hammer. One girl talked about her ancestor who loved the stars, so she had a small wooden star. Within the companies these youth shared about their ancestor.

Another group had the youth write down on a popsicle stick their own personal weapons of rebellion, things in their lives that were making their handcart heavy to pull that they could change. As families they buried these and make commitments for the future.

Baby dolls.

This can be a good experience but it needs to be handled with great respect and should be something that you feel prompted to do. Each family at the beginning of trek is given a baby doll that they name and take turns carrying throughout the trek. One effective way to give the families the baby is to have a woman along the trail who talks individually with each family as they pass. She explains that her husband and other children have died and that she is sick and can not go on, she asks the family to take her baby to Zion. Or a father holding his real daughter can say that his wife had died giving birth and he can not care for the new child and his other children.

Some groups on the day of the solo inform the families that the babies have died and that they should bury them. It is important that the Group Leaders are prepared before hand for this experience. When they bury the doll the Group Leaders explain that it is just a doll but to think of what the pioneers had to do. They share pioneer experiences and talk about the joy the knowledge of the resurrection brings us. Other groups have people come and take the dolls, asking the youth to report how they have cared for the dolls.

Pony Express

This may or may not involve a horse, depending on local regulations and availability. Parents prepare letters for every youth. If a parent doesn't, have a youth leader prepare a letter. Parents are encouraged to include in their letters an experience of an ancestor that demonstrated great faith, how their family joined the church or how they overcame a trail in their life. Bring letters packaged and deliver them prior to the solo experience.

****Solo experience.**

Before the solo, either the Group Leaders or one of the priesthood leaders in a group meeting challenge the youth to do a few things during the solo. For example the leaders should provide paper and pencils for the youth to write a letter to themselves, their

parents, or the Savior. The youth can also write in their journals about what they have learned from the pioneers or read a specific chapter in the scriptures. The stake has the parents write a personal letter to their youth before the trek to be opened during solo. Sometimes the Stake President/Bishop writes a letter for the youth to read during this time. This should last at least one hour.

Camp Fire Program.

Smaller stakes with 10 to 12 families have a skit night where each family has to put on a skit for the group. The trail boss narrates the evening.

Celebrating holidays.

Trek families can celebrate holiday's like Christmas. Each family member makes a gift for his or her buddy. Buddies are assigned when the family first sits down together and everyone looks to the person on their right and that person becomes their buddy. The Group Leaders need to give suggestions and help for those that aren't sure what to do. Some examples that they can give their buddy as a Christmas gift is a poem, a list of their good qualities, bouquet of flowers, grass wreath, or a Trek 2002 carved in a piece of wood etc. It is amazing what the youth can come up with. These gifts are exchanged the last night around the campfire. Some families have decorated trees or sagebrush as their Christmas tree.

Hoe down

Stakes usually have a hoe down at point in their program. Many groups have live bands with a caller. For larger groups it is important to have a sound system and generator. If the stake wants to have a square dance it is important to have a pre-trek activity where the youth learn how to square dance. It can be very difficult to teach that many youth at one time. Large group dances like the Virginia reel or the Pan Cake Pokka can be fun without a great deal of explanation. Remember for the hoe down to be successful everyone should have to dance, that includes the Group Leaders.

Testimony Meeting

Make sure that everyone can hear. Some groups have their Stake Presidency speak and then ask for testimonies for youth that represent all the Ward groups. Then they separate into their companies or families for smaller group testimonies. Other allow as many youth bear testimony as would like, but be prepared for a long meeting. They just keep on going.

End of the Trail Celebration

Greet trekkers with the waving of a white hankie when they arrive at the end point. Some do this when they are picked from the trail other do it when they arrive back at the Stake Center. (Find out about the celebration of arrival of the first handcarts in Salt Lake City)

Firesides

Speakers for firesides and other locations should relate the messages of struggles and sacrifices of those sturdy pioneers, and for the youth to develop their own faith and

rededication to surmount the struggles which they must face as they become pioneers in their own time.

ACTIVITIES AFTER PIONEER TREK

Trek Family Reunions

Many times individual trek families will gather at the homes of the Group Leaders for dinner and to share pictures that they took on the trek. This is a great time to have fun and for the Group Leaders to follow up with what was taught on the Trek.

****Trek Reunion Fireside.**

It is important to have a photographer/historian who takes pictures and/or video of the trek. The pictures and/or video can be shown at a Trek Reunion Fireside that the parents, siblings, and the youth attend about a month or two after the trek. The youth love to see and relive the moments on trek. Some groups write up a short history that has pictures of every family and the young can order their own cope of the history. Often stake leaders also ask a couple of the youth and a Group Leader who had a spiritual experience on trek to talk at the fireside.

The most successful trek video's are those that are around 20-30 minutes long that capture the spirit of the experience. On the DVD that groups give to the youth is the short video and then more picture and video sections so that the youth can watch more if they would like.

Evaluation

It is important to meet with the committees one last time to evaluate the experience and what was learned. Create a final report, "trekimonies", material archive, and recommendations for the future.