

## **PIONEER TREK**

When the Latter-day Saints longed to gather in the West from 1856 to 1860, handcarts were a means of helping them on their journey. Today, youth and adults seek to grasp the spirit of faith, courage and determination these saints represented. Many youth dress the part and pull handcarts over the original trail; others pull handcarts on land in their areas. No matter where they are, all who participate open themselves to having their hearts touched by the pioneers' sacrifices and testimonies of the Savior.

Pioneer Trek Youth Conferences typically vary in length from three, four or five days. Youth and leaders dress in pioneer clothing, divide into trek families of 8-12 people and pull handcarts on dirt roads. Leaders design their treks to accomplish their own themes and objectives. There are also a variety of factors which impact the design of pioneer trek itineraries. These factors include the time to travel to the site, the distance and terrain available to pull handcarts and the location of appropriate campsites.

There is no exact pioneer trek outline. Each group can be blessed with inspiration for their youth according to their individual situations. Many follow the basic four-day trek consisting of about a 10-13 mile pull the first day with a women's pull near the end of the evening. The second day is spent pulling 4-5 miles in the morning with pioneer or challenge initiative games in the afternoon. That night participants generally have a hoedown and family home evening. On the third day the groups stay at their base camp and participate in spiritual activities such as solos and testimony meetings. The last day the groups finish their trek with a 3-6 mile pull to the pick-up point.

Other groups may want to only pull a few miles and set up camp the first day, where they have a hoedown and a fireside speaker. The second day is more challenging, and they have their Women's Pull on the third day. Still others may feel their youth need to pull long distances every day. Remember, part of the unique experience of trek is having the youth work together as a family to accomplish a goal they could not complete by themselves.

## **PURPOSE OF A HANDCART TREK**

Pioneer Trek Youth Conferences can be quite expensive both in terms of financial resources and time commitment of the leaders and the youth. Therefore it is necessary to have a commitment to the trek experience and have adequate planning and preparation to insure that it is a meaningful experience for all involved. *Uppermost, remember that it should be a spiritual experience, not just a recreational activity.*

The trek should assist all to experience and appreciate some of the hardships of the early Church pioneers, including those of the handcart companies; to learn of their suffering and sacrifice, and feel of their testimonies and their continued love for and faith in their Savior, Jesus Christ, as they heeded the call of their prophet to "Gather to Zion." This experience should also encourage participants to learn about the pioneers in their own life

and help the youth gain an understanding of what it takes to be a pioneer. This experience can leave a lasting legacy for the future.

## **PIONEER TREK OBJECTIVES**

When BYU first started conducting pioneer treks, they focused on five objectives:

1. Gain a stronger testimony of the Savior Jesus Christ and the Restored Gospel.
2. Gain a greater appreciation for one's ancestors and the pioneers.
3. Gain deeper feelings of gratitude and love for the family at home.
4. Increase individual self worth.
5. Gain new friends and appreciation for the new "trek family".

Although pioneer trek has changed, and now individual groups conduct their own treks, these objectives are still applicable.

## **Mormon Handcart Historic Sites in Wyoming**

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"The Mormon Handcart Historic Site honors the faith, sacrifice, and charity of Latter-day Saint emigrants who journeyed to Zion by handcart between 1856 and 1860. In particular, it acknowledges the extreme sacrifices and hardships of emigrants caught by early snows in 1856 and their rescuers. Visitors will understand that the gospel principles of faith, sacrifice, and charity which sustained and succored the handcart pioneers will sustain them today in their times of adversity.

#### **Key Messages:**

1. Faith: Faith in Jesus Christ and in His restored gospel motivated, sustained, and succored Latter-day Saints as they entered the waters of baptism, journeyed to America, endured adversities, and contributed to building Zion.
2. Gathering to Zion: Motivated by their faith in Jesus Christ and their desire to be obedient to a prophet of God, Latter-day Saint converts gathered together in the American West where they could make temple covenants and help establish Zion.
3. Sacrifice: Latter-day Saint emigrants left homelands, families, and friends behind, shared resources, endured the rigors of ocean and overland travel, and sometimes, as in the case of the 1856 tragedy, suffered illness, extreme hardship, and risked death in order to gather to Zion.
4. Charity: Latter-day Saints donated funds to help their fellow Saints gather to Zion. When tragedy struck in 1856, the Church, under the direction of Brigham Young, mounted a heroic effort to rescue the emigrants, to deliver

them safely to the Salt Lake Valley, and to provide care and comfort.”

**\* Church Historic Sites C`ommittee 2007**

The Missionaries serving at Mormon Handcart Historic Sites in Wyoming, (Martin’s Cove, Willie Center, and Rock Creek Hollow) focus on these messages as they assist those who come there to trek.

**ESTABLISH GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

It is important that leaders prayerfully consider the needs of their own group and design their pioneer treks around their own objectives. Leaders should begin with the “So what?” attitude. What are you trying to teach your youth and leaders? What principles do you want to instill? What are the *principles* involved in the pioneer stories: faith, courage, devotion, heeding the call of a prophet, sacrifice, service, commitment, etc., that your trek should be focused around? The main purpose of having a theme and objectives is to help the trekkers relate what they learn from the pioneer stories and hands-on experience to their own life and concerns.

If appropriate preparations are made and it is properly conducted, the trek can be a life changing experience for the youth, and for the leaders!

**EXAMPLES OF TREK THEMES**

**Believe...Hope...Endure...2 Nephi 31:20**

Remember, we know we will face storms of another kind, but learning to survive is a lesson that was taught by those who suffered before us. The handcart companies passed their tests. Now it’s our turn.

**Join Hands In Faith...**

“If we are faithful the day will come when those deserving pioneers and ancestors, whom we rightly praise for having overcome the adversities in their wilderness trek, will praise today’s faithful for having made their way successfully through a desert of despair and for having passed through a cultural wilderness, while still keeping the faith.” *Neal A Maxwell*

**Press Forward With Faith**

“Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of all men.” 2 Nephi 31:20

**Remember**

“Seek this Jesus of whom the prophets and apostles have written and offer your whole souls as an offering unto him.” Ether 12:41, Omni 1:26

**Tried, Tested and True**

“Oh, remember my son (and daughter), and learn wisdom in thy youth; yea, learn in thy youth to keep the commandments of God.” Alma 37:35. The focus of this conference

would be on the faith, sacrifice, determination, and endurance which the early Saints possessed.

### **Walk with Me**

The focus of this conference would be gaining a deeper testimony of Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ and our relationship to them and our fellow men. The objectives could be listed as:

1. Develop new relationships with our Father in Heaven and the Savior.
2. Develop a renewed appreciation on a personal level for those who have preceded us and their contributions to establishing the gospel on earth.
3. Develop and gain new friends and relationships.
4. Develop ourselves; understanding better who we are and what principles are really important in a culture where materialism and self-gratification are so predominant.

### **PIONEER TREK PLANNING PROCESS**

Pioneer Trek preparation usually begins a year in advance. Remember that each stake or ward will need to examine their needs and what they are trying to accomplish. As leaders begin the planning process for pioneer trek, they may want to consider the following questions:

- Why are we doing it?
- Where can we go?
- Where can we get handcarts?
- What time of year shall we do it?
- Who is in charge?
- What is the theme?
- What is the budget?
- Who will be involved?

### **EXAMPLE OF PREPARATION SCHEDULE**

Again, most groups start a year prior to their trek or earlier to begin their planning process. The following is just an example of a timeline for general items you will want to plan for.

1. Committee chairman or High Council review trek information
2. Determine where and when the pioneer trek will be conducted.
3. Determine where to get handcarts or a time table for building handcarts.
  - a. If building handcarts, consider building plans, cost, who will build the handcarts, transportation, and storage.
  - b. Other stakes in the area may be willing to invest in building handcarts to use in the future.
4. Confirm trek dates with Bishops and YM/YW Presidencies.
5. Determine theme, objectives and planning schedule/basic outline.
  - a. Those groups that have never conducted a trek may need to have a meeting with all stake and ward leaders to explain the trek, answer

questions, and help everyone understand the purpose, so they will support the experience.

6. Gather names and call committee members.
7. Have Bishops suggest potential Ma/Pa's. Confirm all committee members and begin meeting with committee heads monthly. Provide descriptions and give assignments.
8. Insure that the following items have been established:
  - a. Arrangements for transportation
  - b. Arrangements for portable toilets if needed
  - c. Arrangements for water tanks if needed
9. Review ward lists of potential attendees.
  - a. This will help in planning food, transportation, number of families, etc.
10. Committee heads turn in rough budgets
11. Extend calls to Ma/Pa's
12. Meet with Youth Committee to plan fireside and establish their involvement.
13. Begin publicity with the Pre-trek Fireside for the youth and the parents.
  - a. Encourage everyone involved to study the pioneer stories.
  - b. Encourage families to do their own family history.
  - c. Introduce a Trail of Faith Award.
  - d. Some groups have a short parents' meeting after the fireside (help them see how their family can grow together for this experience, answer questions, and talk about solo letters).
  - e. Provide registration forms and medical releases.
  - f. Outline clothing and gear needs.
14. Continue publicity—announcements in ward bulletins.
  - a. Schedule publicity visits to individual wards for youth and parents.
15. Ma/Pa's first training night; introduce theme and overview of trek
16. Start a physical conditioning program
17. Focus on publicity
  - a. Gather from each ward registrations and medical release forms.
18. Meet with committee members for follow-up discussion.
  - a. Discuss food, transportation, communication, medical personnel safety and activities.
19. Hold two fireside/training sessions with Ma/Pa's.
  - a. Discuss medical issues, including symptoms of common trekking ailments. (Treatments will be handled by professional medical personnel, who are required to accompany the trek.)
  - b. Share pioneer stories, scriptures, etc.
  - c. Provide all information about the food and equipment needed.
20. Have Ma/Pa's set apart or given a blessing/attend the temple
  - a. Youth can also attend the temple to do baptisms for the dead.
19. Trail Boss and Support Staff review the route and details for transportation.
20. Review the list of participants and medical forms
  - a. Divide youth and adults into families.
  - b. Make plans for special-needs individuals.
21. Conduct a **Training Trek** with the Ma/Pa's Training on site, if possible, with key committee heads.

21. Conduct the **Pioneer Trek**
22. Hold a reunion fireside with video and a few youth who had memorable experiences.
23. Conduct an evaluation with the Trek Committee for future use.

## QUOTES FROM THE PROPHETS

“We cannot begin to understand the journeys made by those who laid the foundation of this dispensation until we understand their spiritual underpinnings. Once we make that connection, however, we will begin to see how their journeys parallel our own. There are lessons for *us* in every footstep they took—lessons of love, courage, commitment, devotion, endurance, and, most of all, faith.” -*M. Russell Ballard*

“Now, I think our prophet today is telling all of us, in this day and time, to go and bring in those people who are out on the plains. Each worthy young man should go on a mission. And each one of us, though we may not be called to active missionary service, can be on a mission and be involved in a cause that is greater than we are, the greatest cause of all in the world: the salvation of each of our Father’s children.” -*James E. Faust*

“It is good to look to the past to gain appreciation for the present and perspective for the future. It is good to look upon the virtues of those who have gone before, to gain strength for whatever lies ahead. It is good to reflect upon the work of those who labored so hard and gained so little in this world but out of whose dreams and early plans so well nurtured has come a great harvest of which we are the beneficiaries. Their tremendous example can become a compelling motivation for each of us. For each of us is a pioneer in his own life, often in his own family and many of us pioneer daily in seeking to do God’s will and lift and serve those around us.”  
-*Gordon B. Hinckley*

“I wish to remind everyone within my hearing that the comforts we have, the peace we have, and, most important, the faith and knowledge of the things of God that we have, were bought with a terrible price by those who have gone before us. Sacrifice has always been a part of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The crowning element of our faith is our conviction of our living God, the Father of us all, and of His Beloved Son, the Redeemer of the world.” -*Gordon B. Hinckley*

“Let us never forget that we have a marvelous heritage received from great and courageous people who endured unimaginable suffering and demonstrated unbelievable courage for the cause they loved. You and I know what we should do. God help us to do it when it needs to be done.” -*Gordon B. Hinckley*