

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF MARTINS COVE

On the 19th of October 1856, the Martin Handcart Company crossed the North Platte River, perhaps at Bessemer Bend—about six miles southwest of present-day Casper, Wyoming. That was the day the big snow storm hit. They pulled up the bluff, a little less than a mile above the river, and camped for the night. There was no fuel for a fire, they were cold, their clothes were wet and frozen, most of the tents were frozen, the ground was frozen, many just crawled into the tents on the ground for protection for the night. As many as 13 died of exposure before morning. The next day, they traveled about five miles up toward a small hill on which were some trees—they still had to go about 1/2 mile from camp for firewood.

The storm continued—it was impossible to travel; the snow was up to 12 inches deep—the temperature was below zero—plus the Wyoming winds. The conditions continued until the 28 of October. On October 28, 1856, three men on horseback arrived in camp. These men had been sent on ahead of the main rescue party to find where the Martin Company was and to assess their condition. It was reported to these men that 56 people had died since they had crossed the North Platte River. One of these men was Daniel W. Jones.

The message from the men was that provisions were near and that the Company was to increase rations again to a pound of flour for each person. If there were enough cattle left to kill, each person was to be given a pound of beef. They were told they must continue on tomorrow—they could not wait there—they had to go meet the wagons (which were 55 miles away at Devil's Gate).

The next day they traveled eight miles and camped at the Avenue of Rocks. Daniel W. Jones reported, "The train was strung out for three or four miles. There were old men pulling and tugging their carts, sometimes loaded with a sick wife or children—women pulling along sick husbands, little children struggling through the mud and snow. There were two of us and hundreds needing help. What could we do? This was a bitter cold night—several died." During the next two days they pulled the handcarts 17 miles.

Meanwhile Daniel W. Jones and his companions rode back to Devil's Gate to inform the men with the supply wagons that they had found the handcart people. They immediately moved out and met the handcart company near Greasewood Creek (present day Horse Creek). The boys from the Valley had large fires going and helped pitch the tents and provided a meal.

The next day, November 1, they traveled on to Independence Rock. On November 2nd, they arrived at the stockade at Devil's Gate. A fort/trading post had been built near Devil's Gate in 1851, but it had been abandoned in 1856, so there was no one around when the handcart companies arrived. George W. Grant, the 18 year old son of Captain Grant knocked down one of the cabins to provide firewood. It was 11 degrees below zero, there were 12-16 inches of snow, with drifts deeper than that, and a bitter wind was blowing. Thirteen more people died that night.

A council was held. "Do we try and survive the winter here or do we try to get to the Valley?" More storm was coming.

Two-thirds of the handcart people could walk no further. The only way to save them was to empty the wagons of the Hunt and Hodgett wagon trains and use them along with those from the Valley to carry the survivors. [The Hunt and Hodgett trains were hauling freight to Salt Lake City and were following the Martin Company. They were also hauling nearly 400 immigrants.] But they knew they had to get the people to shelter from the storm. On November 4, the Martin Company was taken about 3 miles to the Cove for protection from the winds, and the availability of firewood. (The Cove is a small valley between a large sand dune and the rock mountain.) As they came to the Sweetwater River, many, remembering the terrible experience crossing the North Platte River fell to the ground and sobbed saying, "We cannot do that."

Four young men stepped into the river. Nobody told them they had to do that— they felt it in their hearts. They were told many times to get out of the water; that if they stayed in it they would die. They stayed in the River a good part of the day and carried most of the Martin Company people across to the other side. Brigham Young, a prophet of God, later said that because of what they did in those few hours they had already earned all of the blessings the Father had.

Although the Cove helped some during the four days and five nights the Martin Company were there waiting out the storm, it was still very cold and many more would lose their lives — approximately 50-60. There are many special stories of their experiences while at the Cove. However, the great miracle of the Martin Company was that any of them made it from the last crossing of the North Platte River through Martin's Cove alive.

For over two weeks, these people had been losing loved ones, struggling to survive and have the strength to carry on. Many of them were near death. Our Heavenly Father allowed them to suffer in ways we can hardly speak or write about. Could Heavenly Father have prevented them from being in this situation? Of course he could have. Heavenly Father knew the type of people they were, and He knew they would be obedient. When someone asked President Hinckley why our Father in Heaven allowed it to happen, he said the primary reason was for us today. He said, "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."

President Hinckley also said it is up to us that, "those who here perished will not have died in vain." Our Father in Heaven allowed the Handcart Pioneers to suffer that we today might more clearly see our responsibilities. It also helps us to see our responsibility to our grandchildren and our great grandchildren. When they are looking back in 150 years from now, what will they say when our stories are read? A life that will inspire future generations is our responsibility.

This physical rescue of 1856 was the FIRST RESCUE. In 1992, the Riverton Wyoming Stake completed the SECOND RESCUE, a spiritual rescue. This was when the temple work linking the families together was completed.

Now our Father in Heaven and his leaders are in the middle of the THIRD RESCUE. Many of us are of the third, fourth, and fifth generations of the Church. We may have lost touch with those who suffered so much. We could fall away from the principles they held so dear. As we remember the pioneers and the heritage they left us, we should be gaining understanding as to

our responsibilities and strength to help those who do not understand. Our pioneers created our heritage. The purpose of our experience on trek is for us to get a feeling of who we are, and what our responsibilities are.

Do you think the Lord knew 150 years ago that YOU would be on trek today? Of course He did. He knows your name. He knows your potential to become His noble sons and daughters. You are here to strengthen yourselves. He needs you to be strong and faithful.

If you are going to experience the spirit of the handcart people, you will need to listen with your ears, see with your eyes, and feel with your hearts. You must slow down and let the spirit catch up. You must reach out in prayer and supplication. Think about their sacrifice in silence. They gave their physical lives. Today, most of us will not be required to give our physical lives. Today the challenge is to save our spiritual lives.

NOTE: A number of rumors have circulated about the ages of the young men from Salt Lake who carried the people across the Sweetwater, and that they died very soon afterward. The following information is as accurate as can be found to date: (Also note that there were 4, not 3.)

David P. Kimball	Age 17	Died age 44
George W. Grant	Age 18	Died age 49
Stephen W. Taylor	Age 22	Died age 86
Clark Allen Huntington	Age 25	Died age 65

They did, however, suffer from rheumatism and other infirmities in later years, probably as a result of that experience.