

## Hastings Cutoff, A Shorter Route



## Pioneer Companies Follow Hastings Cutoff

During the 1840s, American interest in California and the Pacific Northwest grew. The question was how to make the long trip in the fastest and safest way. Wagon trains were using the Oregon Trail to Oregon. Some groups were taking a turnoff to California, but the trip was very long.

One of the first people to suggest a more direct route by way of the Great Salt Lake was Lansford W. Hastings. He had written *An Emigrant's Guide to Oregon and California* but had never taken a route near the Great Salt Lake. At Sutter's Fort in California he met Fremont, and they discussed the possible shortcut. Fremont agreed it could be done.

The next spring, Hastings and his men reversed Fremont's route and went east across today's Nevada to Pilot Peak. He and his group crossed the salt flats south of the Great Salt Lake, and then made their way through the Wasatch Mountains to Fort Bridger. Then they rode their horses along the Oregon Trail. Hastings left word asking pioneers to use what he called the Hastings Cutoff. At least five groups did just that.

### The Bryant Party

Edwin Bryant, a Kentucky newspaper editor, and eight friends reached Fort Bridger in July. They stayed for four days, talking to Hastings. Bryant and his group

decided to take the cutoff and set off on the back of mules. They followed the Weber River through the Wasatch Mountains into today's Ogden Valley. Then they went around the Great Salt Lake and west across the salt flats. Finally, they reached California in good shape.

Entering between the walls of the mountains forming the canyon, . . . we passed through it without any serious accident. The canyon is four or five miles through, and we were compelled to climb along the side of the . . . mountain, frequently passing under, and sometimes scaling, immense overhanging masses and projections of rock.

—Edwin Bryant

### The Harlan-Young Group

George Harlan had read Hastings' guide and prepared to take a company to California. He was joined by others, including Samuel Young and his wife and children. The group used the Oregon Trail to Fort Bridger, where they met Hastings. He agreed to guide their forty wagons through the mountains. It would be the first wagon train through Utah's mountains.

They passed quickly into Echo Canyon and down the Weber River. They made the rough passage through the canyon, but the trip was almost impossible.





They lost a wagon and a team of horses. Hastings felt he should warn future travelers to find a different route.

James Mather's party left Fort Bridger five days behind the Harlan-Young group. They, too, made the hard passage through Weber Canyon and joined the others. Then the two groups traveled together to California.

### The Lienhard Party

This party was made up of a few small groups. The "five German boys" included Lienhard and four Swiss and German friends who had just come to the United States. They were caught up in "California fever" and wanted to get free land there. They met Hastings in Morgan Valley, and he warned them to find a different route through the mountains. However, they ignored his warning and made it through the canyon. They pushed on to the south

edge of the Great Salt Lake and bathed in salt water. Then they, too, headed on to California.

*Many groups of pioneers passed through the Great Basin and the rugged Sierra Nevada to start a new home in California.*

On the 7th [of August] we reached the flat shore of the magnificent Salt Lake, the waters of which were clear as crystal, but as salty as the strongest salt brine. . . . The clear, sky-blue surface of the lake, the warm sunny air, the nearby high mountains, with the beautiful country at their foot, through which we on a fine road were passing, made on my spirit a charming impression. The whole day long I felt like singing and whistling; had there been a single family of white men to be found living here, I believe that I would have remained.

—Lienhard's journal



## The Donner-Reed Party

The Donner and Reed families and others followed the Lienhard party and were the last group of the year to use Hastings Cutoff. A large group of men, women, and children divided into two groups before they reached Fort Bridger. The largest group chose the longest way around by way of Fort Hall. The rest, afraid of not crossing the mountains of California before winter, chose Hastings Cutoff. In this smaller group were eighty-seven men, women, and children with twenty-three large wagons loaded with furniture, tools, clothes, food, and other supplies. Reed's family even had a double-decker "rolling palace" for elegant travel. The group made George Donner the captain of the wagon train.

*To protect themselves from the cold, some members of the Donner party built small brush shelters. They covered the brush with the canvas from their wagons.*

They reached Fort Bridger in late July and rested to strengthen their cattle for the trek ahead. Then they started out on the cutoff route. At the head of Weber Canyon, they found a letter from Hastings sticking in the top of some sagebrush. He said they should send a messenger after him and he would return and guide them through a route much better than Weber Canyon.

The group camped while Reed and two other men went through the canyon. They finally caught up with Hastings west of the Oquirrh Mountains. Leaving two of the men behind to rest, Hastings took Reed up a new route through Emigration Canyon east of today's Salt Lake City to the top of Big Mountain. There Hastings





showed Reed the route by which he could pilot his company through.

Reed joined his group, and they started clearing out a dirt road through the canyon. They cut down trees and bushes and moved large rocks. When they finally came out of Emigration Canyon into the Salt Lake Valley, the exhausted group made camp. Building the road through the canyon was the most notable feat of any pioneer group that year. But, it cost the Donner party time, which would prove to be a disaster.

The next day the group set out again and crossed the valley to the Oquirrh Mountains. In the past eighteen days they had gone just forty miles and had lost weeks of good weather.

The people still had to cross the hot, dry salt flats. They started traveling by night to get relief from the scorching heat, but still, without grass or water, tired oxen lay down and refused to move. The children cried for water and their mothers gave them lumps of sugar to cool their

mouths. When the moon rose, young Patty Reed said, "How can it be so quiet? We are at the end of nowhere."

Before long, cattle and oxen were lost. Wagons and supplies had to be left behind. After an agonizing trip across Utah and Nevada deserts, the group came to the high mountains of the Sierra Nevada. It was the end of October, and a long season of stormy weather was upon them.

Attempts to cross the mountains by wagon and on foot failed. The people dug in for the winter and built small cabins in the tops of the mountains. Storms raged and starvation set in. Death followed. To feed her children, Mrs. Reed and others boiled ox hides and bones. Animals were eaten. As the months went on, some of the starving ate the meat of the frozen bodies of those who had died.

Relief attempts from California were made through the winter. Finally, a rescue party from Sutter's Fort walked into the camp. "Are you from California, or are you from Heaven?" whispered a dazed woman.

The rescuers brought the last of the survivors out of the mountains. Of the eighty-seven people who had started from Fort Bridger, only forty-eight lived to reach California. One was the young girl, Patty Reed.



*This doll belonged to Patty Reed. She was eight years old when she and her family were rescued from the snowy pass. They were only one of two families to have every member survive. The doll is now on display at Sutter's Fort in Sacramento, California.*

## Linking the Past to the Present

A small white building in the Utah town of Grantsville serves as the Donner Party Museum. You can see tools, dishes, wagon wheels, and other items thrown out by the party as they made their way across the salt flats.



# Miles Goodyear

## Builds a Trading Post

Before they set out from Fort Bridger, the Donner-Reed party had met mountain man Miles Goodyear and his English partner, Mr. Wills. These two men planned to leave the fort within a few days and “settle at some favorable point on the Salt Lake, which in a short time will be a fine place for emigrants to **replenish** their teams by exchanging broken-down oxen for good teams.”

Miles Goodyear had come to the mountains as a fur trader many years earlier. He had married a beautiful Ute Indian woman, and they had two children. He thought a trading post along Hastings Cutoff would bring him a good living.

Goodyear and his partner traveled to the present site of Ogden and set up a trading post on the Weber River. Mountain men had camped at this site for many years. The men called the post Fort Buenaventura. They built a cabin, fenced a piece of land, and began a garden. They cared for sheep and cattle.

Goodyear did not stay in the cabin that first winter, but his partner did. Instead, Goodyear went to California with a pack of furs. He returned the next spring with horses to sell to travelers.

### Linking the Past to the Present

Goodyear’s small cabin is now part of an Ogden museum run by the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers. If you can, visit the cabin and think about what it was like to live in it.





Mountain Man Rendezvous are held every year at Fort Buenaventura. Participants enjoy celebrating the legacy of the West.

## Changing Boundaries of the United States

As a few groups were passing through Utah to the rich lands and mild weather of California, thousands of settlers were pushing into Oregon Country and settling there. In 1846, a treaty between the United States and Canada gave Oregon to the United States. The United States had grown.

However, the region of present-day California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and parts of today's New Mexico, Wyoming, and other land were still claimed by Mexico. No one from Mexico lived in today's Utah, but it is important to remember that the pioneer wagon trains were traveling over Mexican land.

*Today's Utah was part of a huge region owned by Mexico. California was also part of the region. The name "Utah" was not used at all then. The common term for the place was "the Great Basin," and it included much of Utah and Nevada.*





## Memory Master

1. Describe what John O’Sullivan meant when he used the term “manifest destiny.”
2. The first known wagon train to cross northern Utah belonged to the \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ (with her baby daughter) was the first white woman to enter Utah.
4. Why was John C. Fremont called “the Pathfinder” or the “Path Maker”?
5. How did Fremont contribute to knowledge about Utah?
6. Hastings’ route was supposed to be a shorter route to \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Identify some reasons the Donner-Reed party met with disaster.
8. How did Miles Goodyear contribute to the future settlement of Ogden?
9. During the time period of this chapter, present-day Utah was claimed by which country?



## Activity | Chain of Events

Dominguez and Escalante did not find the new route to California they were looking for. They didn’t convert Indians to their Catholic religion. Was their trip of any value? Follow the chain of events:

Dominguez and Escalante traveled through today’s Utah. Miera drew a map of their travels.



Humboldt, a geographer, later found Escalante’s journal.



Humboldt published some of the journal, including Miera’s map.



John C. Fremont, a government explorer, read the journal published by Humboldt and studied Miera’s map.



Fremont went into today’s Utah and wrote about the region.



Mormon leaders read the Fremont reports, which helped them plan their route to the West, where they would eventually settle.

1. According to the chart above, who was the first person who benefited from Dominguez and Escalante’s travels through today’s Utah?
2. How did Fremont benefit from the information gathered by Dominguez and Escalante?
3. Summarize one effect of Dominguez and Escalante’s travels on the settlement of Utah.