



Oregon Trail Cutoffs and the Donner Party

November 2026

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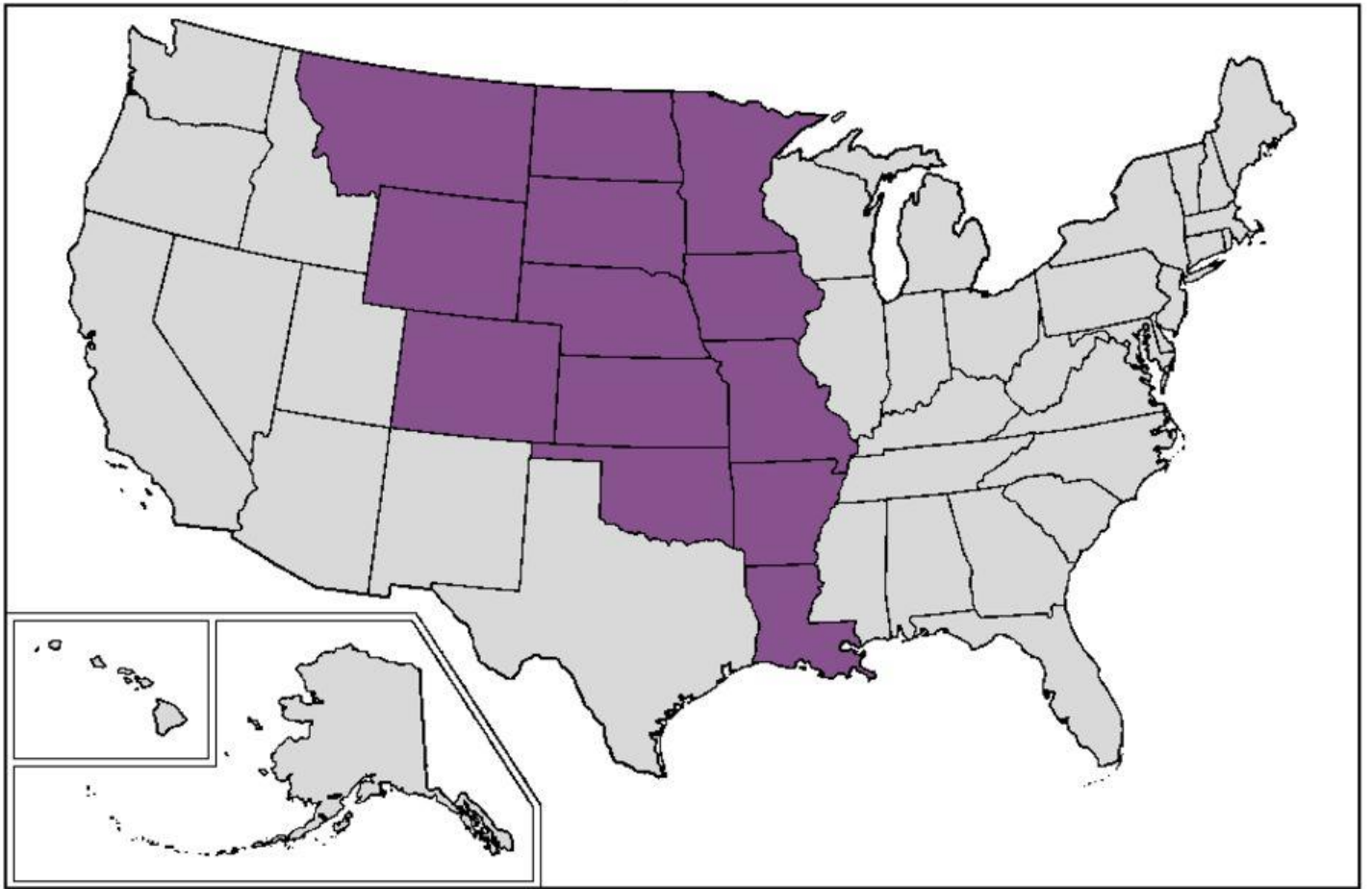
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Louisiana Purchase map (www.commonswikimedia.org)



Emigrant trails map (www.commonswikimedia.org)

Parting of the Ways California Road at Raft River



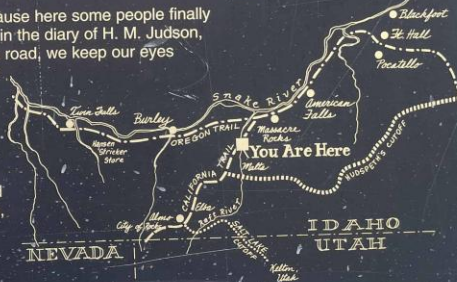
In 1811 the first white expedition to go through this area of the Snake River and the lower end of the Raft River Valley was the Wilson Price Hunt expedition from St. Louis to Astoria. However, the area was well known to the French and British trappers.

The California Cutoff was first proven a feasible route in 1826 by Peter Skene Ogden and his Snake Brigade who crossed Granite Pass. Joseph Chiles, in 1842, determined a wagon route was feasible as he wandered from California toward Fort Hall. In 1843, Chiles, with Joseph Walker as guide, eight wagons, and thirty emigrants, turned southwest here and headed to California. Walker defined the California Wagon Trail from here to the Humboldt and to California. John C. Fremont camped September 26, 1843, on the Raft River. From 1843-48, the California Cutoff was the main route from here, southwest to the City of Rocks.

Between 1841 and 1860, about 500,000 people passed this point. Before 1848, more than 100,000 emigrants turned here on their California journey. The route continued to be used until the railroads connected in 1869.

The Parting of the Ways could be called Decision Point because here some people finally decided between heading to Oregon or California. As noted in the diary of H. M. Judson, August 11, 1862, "...bid goodbye to...they take the California road, we keep our eyes straight ahead. No tear shed, no regrets expressed. We feel considerable relieved and think we have had our train purged of many a contrary stubborn disposition and shall have less contention and fault finding."

When the California Trail met the Salt Lake Cutoff, many pioneers took that trail into the Salt Lake Valley. Returning members of the Mormon Battalion, traveling east, pioneered a route to Salt Lake. Addison Pratt, of the Mormon Battalion, named "Twin Sisters" in the City of Rocks. This route was used by 25,000 travelers in 1849-1850, and thousands more passed through until 1869. An estimated one-third of the forty-niners traveled this way.



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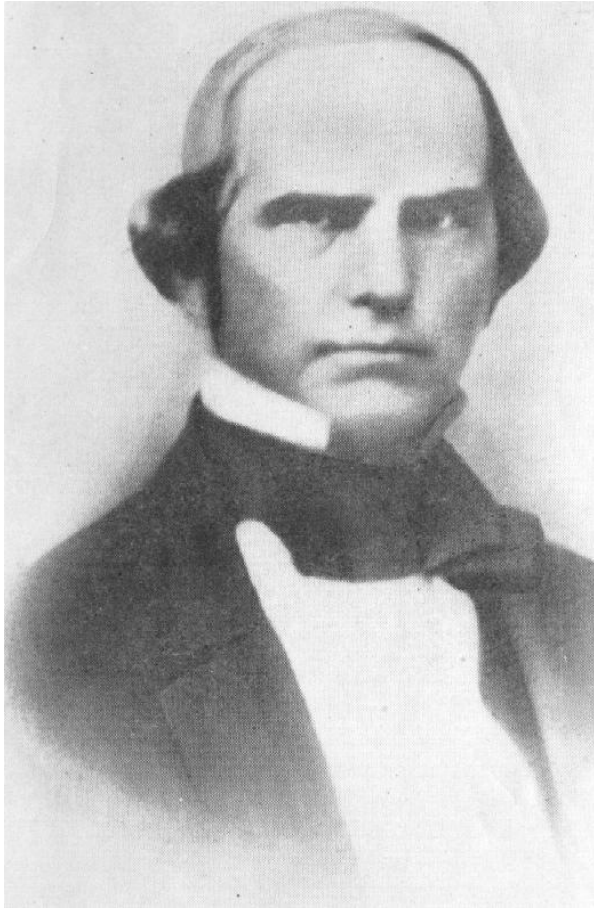
DUP Marker #520: Parting of the Ways California Road at Raft River (Photo courtesy of Jacob Barlow)



Emigrant Canyon sign (Marguerite Mower photo)



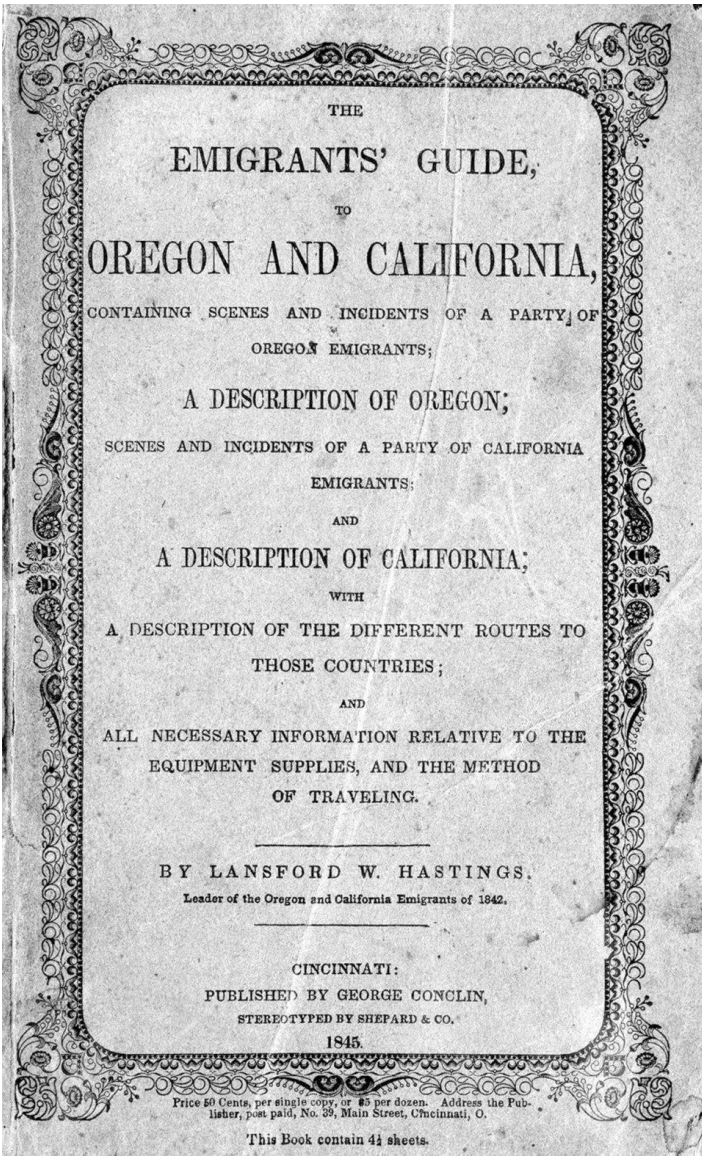
Twin Sisters rock formation at City of Rocks, Idaho (NPS Photo)



Lansford W. Hastings (www.commons.wikimedia.org)



View of Salt Desert from Pilot Peak, Nevada (www.commons.wikimedia.org)



The Emigrant's Guide to Oregon and California by Lansford W. Hastings (www.commons.wikimedia.org)



Hastings Cutoff map (www.commons.wikimedia.org)



George Donner (www.commons.wikimedia.org)



James and Margaret Keyes Reed (www.commons.wikimedia.org)



Donner-Reed Museum, Grantsville, Utah (Alex Mower photo)



Donner Party yoke and artifacts recovered from Salt Desert, Donner-Reed Museum (Julie Thompson photo)



Donner Party wagon wheel hub recovered from Salt Desert, Donner-Reed Museum (Julie Thompson photo)

Donner Party wagon wheel with broken spokes, Donner-Reed Museum (Julie Thompson photo)





Donner Party ox shoes recovered from Salt Desert, Donner-Reed Museum (Julie Thompson photo)



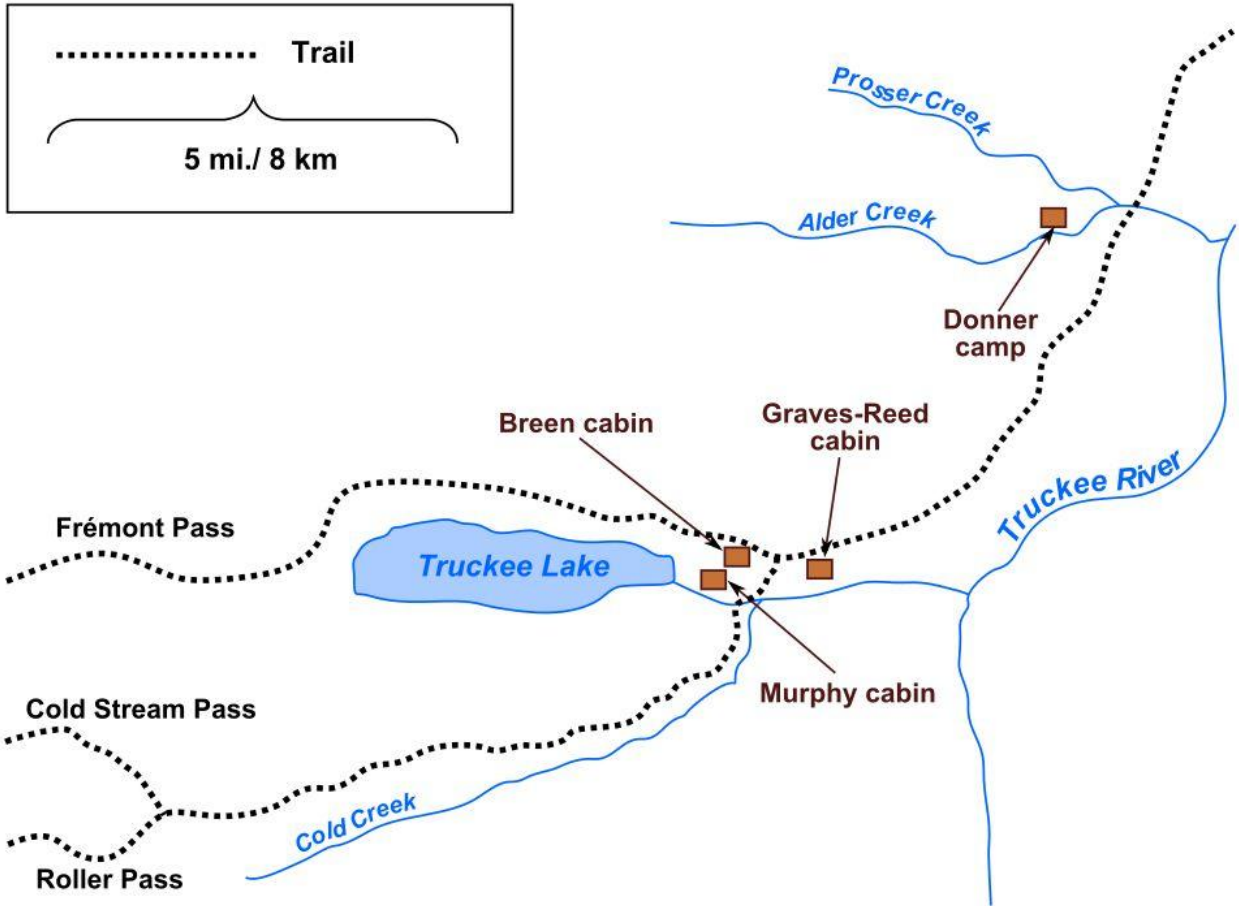
Boots worn by cattle, Donner-Reed Museum (Julie Thompson photo)



“Among the Sierra Nevada California” by Albert Bierstadt (www.commonswiki.org)



Donner Pass (www.commonswiki.org)



Truckee Lake map (www.commons.wikimedia.org)



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