

John Chislett Reminiscence of Handcart Migration of 1856.

We had not traveled far up the Sweetwater before the nights, which had gradually been turning colder since we left Laramie, became very severe. The mountains before us as we approached nearer to them, revealed themselves to view mantled nearly to their base in snow, and tokens of the coming storm were discernible in the clouds, which each day seemed to lower around us....

Our seventeen pounds of clothing and bedding was now altogether insufficient for our comfort. Nearly all suffered more or less at night from cold. Instead of getting up in the morning strong, refreshed, vigorous and prepared for the hardships of another day of toils, the "Saints" were to be seen crawling out of their tents looking haggard, benumbed and showing an utter lack of that vitality so necessary to our success....

Our old and infirm people began to droop, and they no sooner lost spirit and courage than death's stamp could be traced upon their features. Life went out as smoothly as a lamp ceases to burn when the oil is gone. At first the deaths occurred slowly and irregularly, but in a few days at more frequent

intervals, until we soon thought it unusual to leave a campground without burying one or more persons....

Death was not long confined in its ravages to the old and infirm, but the young and naturally strong were among its victims. . . . Weakness and debility were accompanied by dysentery. This we could not stop or even alleviate, no proper medicines being in the camp.... Many a father pulled his cart, with his little children on it, until the day preceding his death. I have seen some pull their carts in the morning, give out during the day, and die before next morning

Each death weakened our forces. In my hundred I could not raise enough men to pitch a tent when we camped, and now it was that I had to exert myself to the utmost. I wonder I did not die, as many did who were stronger than I was. When we pitched our camp in the evening of each day, I had to lift the sick from the wagon and carry them to the fire, and in the morning carry them again on my back to the wagon. When any in my hundred died I had to inter them; often helping to dig the grave myself. In performing these sad offices I always offered up a heartfelt prayer to that God who beheld our sufferings, and begged him to avert destruction from us and send us help....

We traveled on in misery and sorrow day after day.

**[LeRoy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen, Handcarts to Zion, (Glendale, CA:
Arthur H. Clark, 1960), pp. 102–3]**