

THE MORMONS AND THE COLORADO RIVER

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BY
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During the colonization of the Great Basin of the West, Brigham Young and his followers were engaged in partnerships in transporting both immigrants and goods to the Mormon Mesa. The route used by the Saints in their trek westward in 1847, sometimes referred to as the "Mormon Trail", was via Omaha, Mouth of the River, Snake River, Fort Bridger, and thence across the mountains into Salt Lake Valley. This was the main route followed by Mormon immigration until the building of the iron road from the East to the Pacific Coast. It was, however, very unsatisfactory. Winter storms on the Rocky Mountains effectively shut the Saints off from contact with the people of the East for nearly half of the year. Furthermore, transportation across the plains and over the mountains from Omaha by ox teams was very expensive.

Before the Saints had been in the West a full five months, some of the more prominent pioneers and explorers had traversed the desert and mountains to Salt Lake City on the Pacific Coast, not only by way of the "northern route" along the Yellowstone River to San Francisco but also via the "southern route" to Los Angeles. These frontiersmen soon recognized the superiority of the southern over the northern route. They believed the Indians in the south to be less hostile. The route was never blockaded by heavy snows such as often occurred passage through the Sierra Nevada impossible. The southern route also had the advantage of a congenial climate making travel practicable throughout the entire year.

For these and other reasons the Mormons worked assiduously in helping to develop the southern route to the sea. Shortly after they a good wagon road was opened up from the Basin to Los Angeles which proved to be the most popular route to the Pacific Coast throughout the next twenty years. Although some of the early Mormon pioneers in California were the first to see the advantages of the southern route, it was the Mormons who first made it a reality. Many settlers also responded to the call.

From *Utah: A History*, by George Albert Smith, published by the Utah Historical Society, 1916, pp. 175-176.

AMERICAN HISTORICAL REVIEW

V. 44:3 [APRIL 1939], PP. 549-555