

Welcome to Martin's Cove

Martin's Cove

Entering Public Lands

You Are Here

Sweetwater River

Foot trail to Martin's Cove

Devil's Gate Trail

Devil's Gate

Rattlesnake Pass

Kiosk

Emigrant Trails

Public parking area

Devil's Gate interpretive Site

BLM Access Road

For additional information:
U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Lander Field Office
1335 Main Street
Lander, WY 82520
(307) 332-8400

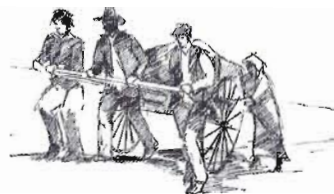
Suggested Reading
Aubrey L. Haines: Historic Sites Along the Oregon Trail



Aerial View of the Martin's Cove area



The Edward Martin Handcart Company



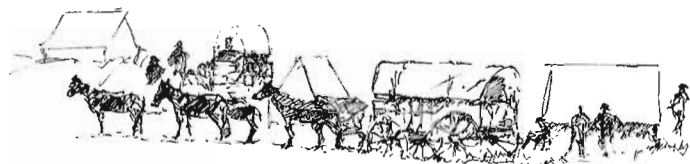
The Mormon handcart disaster of 1856 resulted in the greatest loss of life from any single event during the entire Westward migration period.

That year, five companies of Mormon handcart emigrants journeyed from Iowa City, to Salt Lake City. The first three companies made the journey without incident. The last two companies, traveling late in the season, were not so fortunate. Here is a summary of what happened to the Fifth Company, led by Captain Edward Martin.

July 28, 1856 – The Martin Handcart Company begins its ill-fated journey with nearly 600 emigrants, most of whom have come to America from England.

August 27 – The Martin Company leaves Florence, Nebraska. The emigrants make good time across Nebraska and eastern Wyoming.

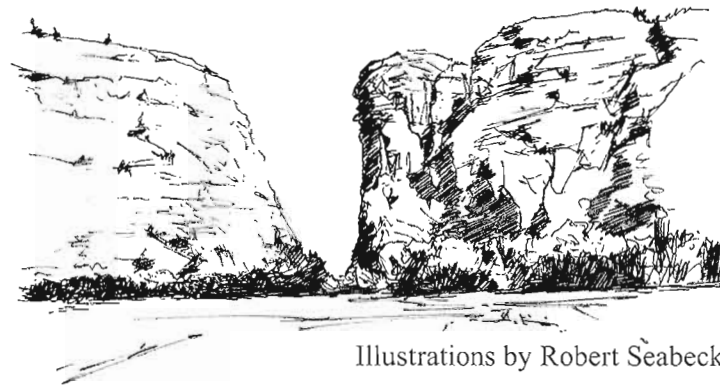
October 8 – In Wyoming, the company arrives at Fort Laramie. The handcart pioneers continue up the Platte River through present-day Guernsey, Glendo, and Douglas, but are suffering from shortened rations and fatigue. At Glenrock (Deer Creek), the company makes the fateful decision to discard clothing and personal effects in order to lighten loaded handcarts. These desperate measures are aimed at helping the emigrants meet the anticipated rescue wagons before running out of food or getting stalled by the inevitable winter storms.



Meanwhile, a rescue company heads east from Salt Lake City in search of the two handcart companies.

October 19 – The Martin Company reaches the Last Crossing of the Platte River at present-day Mills, Wyoming. When the emigrants cross the river, they are immediately hit by the same snowstorm encountered by the Fourth Company (the James Willie Company) at Ice Slough and by the rescue company at South Pass. The Martin Company moves a short distance, then continues on to the Red Buttes camp, located on the Platte River near present-day Bessemer Bend, which is about 40 miles east of Devil's Gate.

The Martin Company stalls at Red Buttes because of a combination of exhaustion, lack of food, illness (including hypothermia), inadequate clothing, poor equipment, and bad weather. These factors will lead to the death of more than 50 handcart pioneers, or nearly 10 percent of the company, in this general area.



Illustrations by Robert Seabeck

October 21 – The rescue company delivers aid and encouragement to the Willie Handcart Company at the Sixth Crossing of the Sweetwater, near present-day Sweetwater Station. Most of the rescue group continues eastward, searching for the Martin Company and the two wagon trains traveling with them. The rescuers stop near Devil's Gate and send an advance party eastward to find the emigrants.

October 28 – The advance rescuers find the Martin Company at the Red Buttes camp and tell the emigrants that help is on the way.

October 29 – Martin Company members resume their journey toward Devil's Gate.

October 31 – The emigrants are met by rescue wagons about 18 miles east of Devil's Gate at Horse Creek. They receive desperately needed food and clothing.

November 2 – After arriving at Devil's Gate, the Martin Company takes shelter at an abandoned trading post previously operated by a French trader.

November 4 – The company resumes the journey, but after traveling only two miles, they cross the Sweetwater and take refuge in what is known today as Martin's Cove. The emigrants remain there for several days, waiting for the weather to improve.

November 9 – The Company leaves Martin's Cove and again resumes the journey to Salt Lake City.

November 30 – The Martin Company finally arrives in Salt Lake City after the loss of between 135 and 150 lives, about one fourth of the company.

The significance of Martin's Cove is that it was used as a campsite by the Martin Handcart Company after their rescue and after their arrival at Devil's Gate. The exact number of deaths in Martin's Cove is impossible to determine; only a few names have been identified with reasonable certainty.

Martin's Cove is one of many sites along the Oregon-California-Mormon Trail where emigrants died.

Many factors – bad weather, lack of food, illness and exhaustion, and the decision to leave too late in the year – brought about the fate of the Martin Company.

