

"Never take no cutoffs"
Youth Fireside September 10,2006
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Ideas and quotes for this fireside are taken from:: Elaine L. Jack, "Never Take No Cutoffs," Ensign, Aug. 1994, pg 64

Donner Party

- 1846, 90 people, Illinois, Missouri, Tennessee, Iowa, and Ohio
- 42 died
- Reached Fort Bridger, Wyo
- There decided to take a unproven route
 - Instead of proven, safe route south around the Sierra Nevada
 - Hastings cutoff across SL, across northern Nevada and then over the Sierra Nevada near Reno
- The shortcut was not what it was purported to be
 - The Hastings Cutoff was supposed to save as much as three hundred miles, but the path led into a blind canyon.
 - What reportedly would take a week took thirty days
 - The stretch across the Salt Flats was almost twice the distance indicated, not forty but seventy miles.
 - The immigrants had too few provisions, too little water for themselves and their animal
- Upon finally reaching the towering Sierra Nevada, the careworn company rested
- They squandered their last week of good weather by gathering strength for the final days of their journey.
 - Had they not stopped, they would have made it - but it snowed.
- The party was one day short of clearing the final mountain pass when early storms in late October buried them in snow depths of more than twenty feet.

- They built crude shelters of logs, rocks, and hides and ate twigs, mice, their animals that did not run away, and then their own shoes.
- Finally, some of them resorted to eating their dead comrades.
- Four rescue parties worked their way in from the west that winter and spring to save those who were miraculously still alive.

Lessons from the Donner Party

- We each have our own journey – LIFE!
- Our journey is a more important one – Journey to our home in the Celestial Kingdom
- There are lessons to be learned from the Donner party
 - Can be applied to our journey

Lesson 1: "Never take no cutoffs"

- In May 1847, shortly after her rescue from the snowbound encampment near what is now Donner Lake, twelve-year-old survivor Virginia Reed wrote to her cousin in Illinois this message: "Never take no cutof[f]s and hur[r]y along as fast as you can" (quoted in George R. Stewart, *Ordeal by Hunger: The Story of the Donner Party*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1960, p. 361).
- Beverly Sills:
"There are no shortcuts to anyplace worth going."
- The Donner party's intention was not to be marooned but they gambled on an unproven shortcut
- Matt 7:13-14 (straight is the gate...)
 - Our destination is clear and there are no shortcuts
- We will be tempted from all sides to stray from the path
 - Satan tempts us to stray – a little here and a little there
- The path may seem hard so we are tempted to seek peace or happiness in other ways
- There is no lasting joy or happiness or peace other than the Lord's way.
"Wickedness never was happiness"
- Sometimes we break what we consider to be lesser commandments in our attempts at shortcuts
 - Lie a little here, break the Sabbath day, etc. etc.
- What does "Never take no cutoffs" mean?
 - To enter in at the strait gate and to stay on the straight and narrow path.
- "Just as the Donner party set off with the best of intentions but strayed into disaster, we too can be led into blind canyons and forced to cross treacherous desert sands if we relax our devotion to the Lord's cause."
- There are no shortcuts to the Celestial Kingdom – the path is clearly and simply laid out

Lesson 2: Travel light

- One family in the Donner party was unable to leave behind their cherished personal belongings. They had a specially built wagon twice the size of a typical Conestoga to carry their treasures across the wilderness. But the cumbersome wagon was slow and difficult to maneuver. Ultimately it was abandoned on the Salt Flats as water and food became far more valuable than tables and chairs.
- Matt 16:19,21-22 (Rich young ruler)
 - Are we willing to leave behind the world to be like Heavenly Father?

Lesson 3: Anger, Derision, and Contention Thwart Our Progress

- Anger and friction delayed and divided the Donner party on their journey. Factions splintered the group into camps of “us” and “them.” Before the party reached the Sierra Nevada, one of the members had killed another. Such discord led, in part, to their temporal tragedy.
- Satan loves dissension in any form.
 - He encourages harsh feelings, angry words, ruthless judgments, scorn, pride, and the cruelest of actions.
- Luke 23:34 (Father Forgive them...)

Lesson 4: "Hurry along as fast as you can"

- The Donner party showed us the risks of taking our time. All of us have no time to lose.
- Old Chinese saying:
“Man who sit with legs crossed and mouth open waiting for roast duck to fly in have long hunger”
- The Donners waited—and the snows came, and their journey was a tragedy
- Joshua 24:15 (choose ye *this* day...)
- Helaman 13:38 (do not procrastinate)

Lesson 5: Sometimes we need to be rescued

- Some members of the Donner party were saved only because of the timely rescue efforts of others, people who set aside their work and their personal safety to find those who were lost.
- Sometimes we are rescuers
- Sometimes we may need to be rescued
- Sometimes we need a friend
- Sometimes we need to be a friend
- When was the last time you made someone's day a little lighter?

Lesson 6: Journeys are packed with troubles

- The Donner party had big troubles that crippled their course.
- Although we each have obstacles and difficulties in our lives, we need not fear or give up
- D&C 90:24 (Be believing...)
- How does it work? – Through the *Atonement*
 - *God so loved the world he gave his only begotten son*
 - Through the Atonement we can find peace (Matt 11:28-30)
 - We can have hope
 - The atonement will exchange "*Beauty for Ashes*" (Isaiah 61:1-3)
 - Consecrate our afflictions for our gain (D&C 121:7-8)