



1910-11-19

Letter from [John Muir] to [recipient unknown], [ca. 1910 Nov 19].

John Muir

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Recommended Citation

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The Donner party of emigrants bound for Cal. was organized in Illinois it consisted of about 80 persons & nearly equally divided of males & females & including a number of children. About a month was lost by taking a new road around the south end of Salt Lake instead of the usual route around the N. end. Therefore owing to this delay the party did not arrive at the foot of the Sierra until Oct. 31st 1846 when the snow commenced to fall, & their provisions began to fail. They attempted to cross but by this time they were at Donner Lake just below the summit of the Range they were stopped by the deep snow & built cabins & tried to pass the winter there. In a few weeks starvation started them in the face. 15 of the strongest started for Sutter's Fort for help. Suffered terribly. Distance 90 ms in straight line

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~~apparently had~~ ² died on the way except 4 or 5. one of them it is reported to the Indians & supplies were forwarded to the 3 divisions. There had eaten the dead as they fell. The news spread to Sutter's Fort & S. T. Capen Sutter promptly sent men & mules with provisions. S. T. raised 1500 dollars & several other relief parties ^{were} sent out. By this time it was about the middle of Feb. & the lost immigrants had been covered up in their log camp about 3 months & reduced to ^{the} last extremity, eating human flesh & ox hides. ~~Some~~ ^{Some} were dead & the most of the living were unable to travel. ^{the rescuers backs} The 1st relief party reached the camp Feb 13th 1847. ^{started back to their own camps} A 2^d March ^{party arrived} & started back with another lot of ^{the} immigrants but were overtaken by storm

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+ compelled to leave ³ the suffering on the road while going ahead for further help. but by the time the help came 3 were dead & the survivors feeding on them flesh. 3, Mr Donner his wife & Mr Haggberg were left in camp, & when the 3^d relief party reached it ⁱⁿ April Mr D & wife were dead & Haggberg alive. It was supposed ^{to} ~~be~~ ^{to} killed at & robbed Mrs D. after death of her husband. Of the 80 persons comprising the original party 36 perished for further information see Hittell's History of Cal & Peter Burnett's reminiscences -
John G. Jones

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Martinez, Cal., November 19, 1910.

Dear Madam:-

Here is a sketch of the fate of the Donner Party.

The Donner party of immigrants bound for California was organized in Illinois. It consisted of about eighty persons nearly equally divided between males and females and including a number of children. About a month was lost by taking a new road around the south end of Salt Lake instead of the usual route around the north end. Therefore owing to this delay the party did not arrive at the foot of the west flank of the Sierra until October 31st, 1846, when the snow commenced to fall, and their provisions began to fail. They attempted to cross but by the time they reached Donner Lake just below the summit of the range they were stopped by the deep snow and built cabins and tried to pass the winter there. In a few weeks starvation stared them in the face. Fifteen of the strongest started for Sutter's Fort for help. Suffered terribly. Distance ninety miles in a straight line. After all had died on the way except four or five one of them staggered to the Johnson's ranch and supplies were forwarded to the three or four survivors;- these had eaten the dead as they fell. The news spread to Sutter's Fort and San Francisco. Captain Sutter promptly sent men and mules with provisions. San Francisco raised fifteen hundred dollars and several other relief parties were sent out.

Donner Party

By this time it was about the middle of February, and the lost immigrants had been cooped up in their log⁺ camp about three months and reduced to the last extremity, eating human flesh and ox hides. Some were dead and most of the living were unable to travel. The first relief party reached the camp and started back with those able to travel, the children on the rescuers' backs, February 13, 1847. A second party arrived March 1st and started back with another lot of the immigrants but were overtaken by storm and compelled to leave the sufferers on the road while going ahead for further help, but by the time the help came three were dead and the survivors feeding on their flesh. Three, Mr. Donner and his wife and Mr. Keysburg were left in camp and when the third relief party reached it in April Mr. Donner and wife were dead and Keysburg alive. It was supposed that Keysburg killed ate and robbed Mrs. Donner after the death of her husband. Of the eighty persons composing the original party, thirty-six perished.

For further information see Hittell's History of California and Peter Burnett's Reminiscences.

Faithfully yours,