

THE MORMONS AT SALT LAKE CITY – A TIMELINE

Date	Event
May 12, 1846	The Donner Party departed from Independence, Missouri, starting the California Trail dangerously late in the season.
July 20	The group reached Fort Laramie, Wyoming. While most headed to Fort Hall, Idaho, the Donner Party split from the main wagon train.
July 31	The Donners and Reeds took a suggested short-cut: the Hastings Cutoff, which proved longer and more treacherous than anticipated.
August 30	The party crossed the Great Salt Lake Desert, losing time, livestock and supplies in extreme conditions.
October 5	Reed killed a teamster and was banished from the group, continuing west alone while his family remained (he survived).
Late October	The party entered the Sierra Nevada, low on supplies; Native Americans killed several of their remaining oxen.
October 31	The Donner Party reached Donner Pass but was blocked by heavy snowfall.
November 1–10	Members built makeshift cabins at Donner Lake and Alder Creek; severe snowstorms isolated them and buried their oxen/ food was critically low
December 15	Baylis Williams, a Reed family employee, died from malnutrition, the first death.
December 16	Fifteen members, known as the 'Forlorn Hope,' set out on foot for help.
Late December	William Foster killed two Native American guides, Salvador and Luis, for food during the 'Forlorn Hope' expedition.
January 18, 1847	Seven survivors of the 'Forlorn Hope' reached safety in California.
January 31	The first relief party left Fort Sutter to rescue the remaining Donner Party members.
February 18	The first relief team reached Donner Lake and rescued 23 people, including 17 children.
Early March	John Stark, a rescuer, singlehandedly led nine survivors, mostly children, down the mountains to safety.
April 21	People continued to die of cold and starvation, waiting for rescue. The last survivor, Lewis Keseberg, was rescued from the mountains.
May	Of the original 87 members of the group, 47 survived, mostly children; only the Reed and Breen families survived without any deaths.
Consequences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Cautionary Impact: Survivors, such as Virginia Reed, recounted their ordeal, warning future travellers against shortcuts, untested routes, and getting caught by winter. Sensationalism: Stories of cannibalism were reported in the newspapers, feeding into the developing mythology of the American West as a deadly and exciting frontier.
1848	The California Gold Rush sparked a mass migration, overshadowing the cautionary tale of the Donner Party.