The Mormon Trail

Directions: Read the article and then answer the corresponding questions.

1. Mormons belong to religion?

2. Who was the Mormon leader that led them into the western frontier?

3. Why did the Mormons choose to settle in the state now called Utah?

4. How did most Mormons travel to this new settlement?

5. Why did the Mormons refer to the land as ‘Milk & Honey?’

6. Why were Mormons having to leave and move into the western frontier?

7. Why is their journey called the Mormon’s ‘Trail of Tears?’
The Mormon Trail

Religious freedom, an American ideal, had on occasion been denied to certain sects because of prejudice. Mormons were once persecuted and forced from their homes. The north bank of the Platte River served as the exodus route for thousands of members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day-Saints (Mormons) and a roadway to a new life. Driven from Nauvoo, Illinois, Mormon leader Brigham Young led the first migration up the Platte River Valley in 1847 to found the proposed state of Desert, now the state of Utah. The north bank of the Platte was chosen to avoid contact with the travelers on the heavily used Oregon Trail that followed the south bank of the river from near Kearney westward. Among the expeditions which followed, were several so poor that pioneers walked and pulled handcarts.

During the following two decades, thousands more gathered at Winter Quarters on the west bank of Missouri River new Florence (now part of northeast Omaha) before beginning the trek across the plains and mountains to their land of “Milk and Honey.”

The Mormon Winter Quarters was established under the direction of Brigham Young to shelter more than 3,000 people during the winter of 1846-47. It was a haven in the wilderness for people who were fleeing from vengeful mobs. Unfortunately, they were housed in log cabins, sod houses, and dugouts that lacked adequate provisions. When spring arrived, more than six hundred of the faithful lay buried in the cemetery on the hill. Not to be deterred, a band of about five hundred persons left the Winter Quarters to cross the Plains to the Great Salt Lake Valley. Thousands of others would eventually follow this trail.

The journey called for strength and courage, as well as faith, for tragedy often stalked their wagons and handcarts, turning the valley into a Mormon “trail of tears.” Hundreds of Mormon pioneers were buried along the trail most in unmarked graves.

Handcarts were used by some of the Mormon pioneers in 1855 and in 1856. Although the carts were very inexpensive, pulling one was such backbreaking work that their use was discontinued.