

**For Immediate Release (May 19, 2014 )**

### **Beehive Archive**

Welcome to the Beehive Archive—your weekly bite-sized look at some of the most pivotal—and peculiar—events in Utah history. With all of the history and none of the dust, the *Beehive Archive* is a fun way to catch up on Utah’s past. Beehive Archive is a production of the Utah Humanities Council, provided to local papers as a weekly feature article focusing on Utah history topics drawn from our award-winning radio series, which can be heard each week on [KCPW](#) and [Utah Public Radio](#).

### **Utah Journeys: Finding a Way Through**

**Migration and travel have shaped Utah. And Utah has shaped the way we migrate and travel. Literally. Over time, travel routes through Utah have tended to stay the same.**

Utah’s ruggedly beautiful landscape draws admiration and visitors, but has always posed major obstacles to travel.

In the distant past Native peoples pioneered the most forgiving paths through the jumbled landforms and arid deserts, and these trails largely defined the journeys made by later travelers. When trappers and explorers like Jedediah Smith and John Frémont “blazed” trails, they were actually following paths that had been trod by Native feet for centuries. Indeed, it was often Native peoples who showed intrepid explorers and pioneers the way.

Following these same paths, the “Old Spanish Trail” shows the difficulties posed by Utah’s landscape and the literal lengths that some would go to overcome them. In the 1830s and 1840s, unforgiving terrain and chronic conflicts with Native peoples discouraged direct travel between the Mexican cities of Santa Fe and Los Angeles. Instead, caravans of horses and mules made a circuitous trek through modern-day Utah, crossing the Colorado and Green Rivers, arcing north of the San Rafael Swell, then south again to the Mojave Desert.

During the same era, heavy traffic along the Overland Trail system caused a search for fresh pastures and alternate routes, stimulating trail variations known as “cutoffs.” In Utah, none was more important than the 1845 Hastings Cutoff, which brought California-bound travelers through the challenging Wasatch Mountains to the west desert salt flats. This route became well-trodden thanks to the tide of Mormon migration that began in 1847.

Journeys along the Overland Trail system declined after the transcontinental railroad was completed in Utah in 1869. Permanent railroad lines tended to follow the paths of least resistance already carved by trails and wagon roads. In many places, railroads were merely new technology layered over well-established routes.

The same holds true for Utah’s roads. In the early twentieth century, gravel highways replicated well-established patterns of movement, and our modern interstates generally follow those same historical routes – overland trails and the original transcontinental railroad.

*Beehive Archive* is a production of the Utah Humanities Council. Sources consulted in the creation of the *Beehive Archive* and past episodes may be found at [www.utahhumanities.org/BeehiveArchive.htm](http://www.utahhumanities.org/BeehiveArchive.htm). Gregory Smoak of the American West Center © Utah Humanities Council 2014

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