



1849 Wagon Train separation point -- Old Spanish Trail to the South, supposed Short Cut to the West.

Jefferson Hunt Marker near Newcastle, Utah

This site marks one of the most controversial events in the history of the California Gold Rush of 1849. Near here, a large group of 49ers deserted wagon train leader, Jefferson Hunt, and headed west toward present day Enterprise, Utah. Their subsequent trek is part of the epic story of the Death Valley 49ers. Hunt, with a small group, led only seven wagons south on the Spanish Trail. Why did all but a small remnant of the party leave Hunt, an experienced Frontiersman and the only one in the party who had been to California? This can be explained best by understanding Hunt's previous experience as Mormon pioneer and frontiersman.

Hunt was senior Mormon officer in the Mormon Battalion which journeyed from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas to San Diego, California as part of the Mexican War. After mustering out, he rejoined the Mormon pioneers (via Sacramento and the California Trail) in the newly established Great Salt Lake City in October 1847. Sensing the material needs of the

numerous Mormons who would be coming to Utah in the future, he convinced church authorities to send him to California that winter via the Old Spanish Trail to purchase cattle, horses, fruit trees, seeds, etc. After a difficult journey to southern California, Hunt returned with the horses and cattle in February 1848. A second group, mostly Mormon Battalion members who re-enlisted and wintered in southern California, came with Orin Porter Rockwell who had accompanied Hunt to California. This party left in April 1848 with a wagon loaded with seeds and supplies. On their return trip they left the Spanish Trail near present day Newcastle and shortened the journey by cutting north across the Escalante Desert to Beaver Creek.

Hunt, hearing of this shortcut, attempted to find it at Beaver Creek as he led the 49ers south in 1849. He failed, and his wagon train spent a very dry week on the Escalante Desert. His error, over-confidently thinking he could easily find the Rockwell shortcut, led to general irritation and cost him the confidence of most of the wagon train. Fortunately, many of the deserters either followed or rejoined Hunt and made it to San Bernardino, California.

(Text from Historical Marker near the separation point of the 1849 wagon train to Southern California.)

[Death Valley 49ers Article, Iron County Today](#)

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