

# Memorialized on 160th anniversary

Mormon Battalion crossed rugged land on famous southwest march

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## LDS CHURCH NEWS

YUMA, Ariz. — On the 160th anniversary of the march of the Mormon Battalion through this harsh area, a nine-foot bronze statue was unveiled in honor of the men and women of the military unit.

The battalion crossed the Gila and Colorado rivers near here on Jan. 8-11, 1847.

More than 700 people attended the unveiling of the nearly half-ton bronze likeness of a battalion soldier, created by R. C. Merrill. The statue was placed on a four-foot pedestal made of reinforced concrete. Embedded within the pedestal are 10 plaques, featuring the history and map of the march, rosters of the companies and commanders, journal entries of its commander, Lt. Col. Philip St. George Cooke, that detail the difficulty of the march, and his praise of the battalion upon reaching San Diego in California.

The unveiling took place during a 40-minute ceremony, Jan. 11, at West Wetlands Park in Yuma.

Yuma Mayor Larry Nelson, a member of the U.S. Army of the West committee as well as the Yuma 9th Ward, spoke. Nearly all members of the Yuma City Council and Yuma County Supervisors were in attendance.

Several direct descendants of battalion members traveled from as far as Colorado and Utah. Norm Erekson, national commander of the U. S. Mormon Battalion Inc., also attended. Several re-enactors took part, including Cap

Cresap, who brought his replica 4-pound Sutter's Mill cannon, and fired it at the moment of the statue's unveiling.

Venturer Crew 8097 placed 160 U.S. flags along the road leading to the monument, adding a dramatic entrance for the attendees. The Yuma Arizona Stake held an Aaronic Priesthood encampment during the weekend to commemorate the 160th anniversary of the battalion's presence in the area. More than 80 youth and several adults earned the Arizona Mormon Battalion Trail Patch as they hiked the Mormon Battalion Trail through Devil's Point, east of Yuma.

Funds for the statue came from private donations and proceeds from the sale of bronze maquettes, or replicas, of the statue.

While the weather on the day of the unveiling was sunny and warm, a few days later Yuma experienced its coldest recorded temperatures, breaking records set in 1897. This coincided with journal records of the battalion, which on Dec. 30, 1846, according to the journal of Col. Cooke: "The day was very cold, with a high west wind. The march, thirteen or fourteen miles — too far, if avoidable, considering the heavy pulls at the hills and over some of the road."

Arriving at the present-day site of Yuma on Jan. 8, he wrote: "Mouth of the Gila. I got the mules over safely and early; they had icicles on them. There were still some hills of the 'Devil's Point' to pass; then we had a very good road. The march was about sixteen miles. The country around the two rivers is a picture of desolation; nothing like vegetation beyond the bottoms of the rivers; black mountains with wild-looking peaks and stony hills and plains fill the view." The Colorado River, he wrote, "has immense bottoms difficult to pass; they are of rich soil. I believe it to be the most useless of rivers to man; so barren, so desolate and



More than 700 people, including city and county leaders, attend unveiling ceremony of heroic-size statue 160 years after the Mormon Battalion crossed Gila and Colorado rivers on their way to California in 1847.

*Photo by Darryl Montgomery*

difficult, that it has never been explored...."

On Jan. 10, he wrote: "The weather is said to be colder than known in many years. The wind blows again, and slow work is made at crossing... (but we) will continue at it, if necessary, all night."

Battalion member William Hyde noted that because of the low rations of nine ounces of flour and eight ounces of pork per day, "Men were detailed to gather muskeet (mesquite) to take along for the mules. This is a kind of bud that grows on small trees or bushes which resemble the Locust tree. Some of the messes ground some buds to mix with their flour in order to enlarge their rations... The river at this place, as near as we could judge, is about one mile wide."

The crossing of the Colorado River proved quicker but more difficult than expected.

"On reaching the Colorado River, a day was spent in fixing up some more zinc wagon boxes, with a view to having to ferry the river," wrote William B. Pace. "The boats were made ready and loaded, and run aground, then it was discovered that by wading, the boats could be got across, then the teams were hitched up and the river forded before night, thus saving several days in ferrying."

But the crossing was still difficult, reflected Col. Cooke afterwards. "With my mind full of anxiety, I force myself to the task of recording the deeds of the day. I am in camp at the 'well,' fifteen miles from the river; I made a firm resolve that here the battalion should come to-day; and, for these reasons, I had not rations or time, under the probable state of affairs in California, to spend another day beyond the river. The battalion were crossing, I believe, all night... The river had an inch of ice in calm places, and quite a number of mules fell and were drowned."

And wrote Daniel Tyler: "After the baggage was all over, the loose animals were driven across. One hundred and thirty of our poor sheep were still alive, though, like ourselves, almost famished."