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Unruh

A similar congeries of route improvements, proliferating cutoffs,

and expeditions to retrieve beleaguered travelers characterized

the intra-state competition for overland emigrants on the

California end of the trail. There had been no California

Trail until 1844, when the Stevens-Murphy party

succeeded in taking emigrant wagons across the Sierra

Nevada into California. Crossing the forty-mile desert beyond

the Sink of the Humboldt, these resolute pioneers followed

the Truckee River to what would become known as

Donner Lake, struggled across rugged Donner Pass to the

Bear Valley, and then trailed down into the Sacramento

Valley. For the next three years this was the

route to John Sutter's fort, although the tragic

ordeal of the Donner party during the winter of

1846-47 did nothing to endear it to subsequent travelers.

In 1848 a party of Mormons departing from

California for Salt Lake City, carved out an alternate

trail along the Carson River. It was immediately

altered, also in 1848, by the Joseph Chiles party. Chiles,

already a venerable trail follower, was crossing the

plains for the fifth time in eight years. There was

relatively little difference between the Truckee and

Carson trails into the California settlements. In

length they were virtually identical, although the

Carson route was slightly less difficult. The Carson

Trail soon became, however, the preferred route.

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...Thus the "great migration" of 1843 not only de-
parted from

Independence, thereby providing the town fathers
with impressive

advertising arguments for future years.

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