

# The Hard Road West

50 mins HDTV

The true story of  
the ill-fated Donner party  
who set out in 1846 for a better  
life in California but whose journey  
ended tragically in the Sierra Nevada

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**April 1846.** The United States are just 69 years old, and two families with no experience of exploration, embark on a marathon journey into the unknown. Traveling 2,400 miles by farm wagon they cross deserts and mountains hoping to reach California in about 5 months. But their efforts are undermined by human error and violent winter storms. Ravaged by starvation, two ordinary families are driven to the very edge of endeavor and endurance.

Their journey west starts out well, and for a while it feels almost pleasant traveling across the plains. But they soon find that their supplies of food are running out.

They take a short cut to gain time but it ends up taking them far longer than the regular route. They are the last group out on the trail and reach the Sierra Nevada at the start of the worst winter for 50 years. 40 adults and 41 children become trapped in the mountains, hemmed in by 12 feet of snow.



Starvation drives them to eat bark from trees and hides from the roofs of their shelters. Finally when all food is gone they have no choice but to eat their dead. Thanks to this some make it through to California where they raise the alarm, but rescue comes too late for many.



*“Even the wind seemed to hold it’s breath as the suggestion was made that, were one to die, the rest might live.”* **Eliza Donner**

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