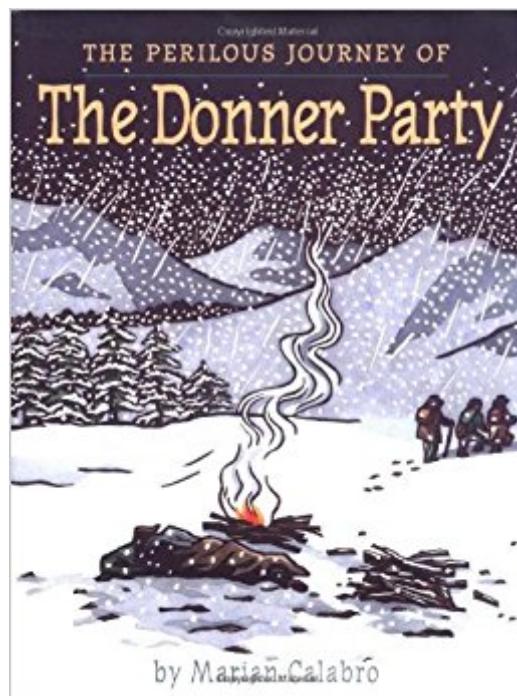


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# The Perilous Journey Of The Donner Party



## **Synopsis**

On April 14, 1846, the Donner Party set out from Springfield, Illinois, in search of a better life in the largely unsettled California territory. The trip started well but eventually questionable choices and infighting delayed pioneers' attempt to cross the Sierra Nevada until winter. As the impassable snows closed in and their supplies dwindled to nothing, the group faced an almost hopeless struggle for survival that would push some toward the final taboo of cannibalism. Nearly half the members of the Donner Party were children. This account, filled with selections from the survivors' letters and diaries, focuses on the children's experiences, making it uniquely compelling and accessible to young readers. Index, bibliography, chronology, group rosters, suggestions for further research.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Calabro's (Operation Grizzly Bear) gripping account of the Donner party's infamous 1846 trek from Illinois to the largely unsettled territory of California chronicles the unfortunate choices, travel conditions and personality conflicts that conspired against the pioneers to leave them stranded in the mountains for the winter. Of the 90 emigrants, teenagers and children comprised almost half of the party and proved the majority of survivors. Calabro incorporates memoirs, diaries and letters to capture the sense of adventure and joy at the start of their journey and to provide insight into the acts of rancor, heroism, cruelty and kindness that surfaced throughout the expedition, mountain imprisonment and rescue. The author conveys much of the experience through the eyes of survivor Virginia Reed, who was 13 when the party headed west; young readers will be particularly moved

by her powerful letter at the end of the ordeal, printed here in its entirety. Calabro responsibly tackles the cannibalism that made these settlers an object of horror in their own time and the subject of grisly jokes in our own. By placing the desperate act in context, the author shows the dire circumstances that forced survivors to resort to, in her words, "the last taboo." She includes an insightful epilogue on the survivors, and devotes a chapter to the party's enduring legacy and the ancestors, landmarks and monuments that stand as testimony to both their sacrifice and survival. Maps, pictures, drawings and etchings from museums as well as the author's own collection support the skillful exposition of this horrifying and tragic episode in the history of the West. Ages 10-up.

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Gr. 5^8. The story of the Donner Party, the ill-fated wagon train that faced horrific circumstances on its way to California, is the subject of books, videos, and, now, Web sites. Calabro's offering is a fine addition to the Donner Party canon and particularly well suited to its young audience, for whom the story of hardship and survival will be nothing short of riveting. Calabro wisely chooses to tell her story primarily through the eyes of one of the young emigrants, 12-year-old Virginia Reed. Using a letter Reed wrote to her cousin (reprinted in its entirety at the book's conclusion) as well as other original documentation, Calabro painstakingly traces the Donner Party's journey, from its optimistic beginning in Springfield, Illinois, to its destination in California--after the group had endured death, starvation, and even cannibalism of the fallen. Though never resorting to sensationalism, the book does not skimp on any of the details as the Donner Party finds itself trapped in the Sierra Nevada, with both supplies and hope in short supply. Calabro's research is meticulous. The book comes alive with details about clothing, household items, and, always, the food, even the tiniest morsels. She moves the story into the present with her interviews of survivors' descendants. There is an extensive bibliography as well as a list for further reading, a chronology, and a roster of the dead. Numerous photographs and reproductions of art and artifacts are included. Sometimes a heavily researched book can be dry, but not this one. From the haunting cover with its lonely campfire to the recounting of a survivors' reunion, this is a page-turner. Ilene Cooper

Good book. Lots of research went into this book. Explained the people involved. Lots of good information.

I used this as a read-aloud for a 5th grader and 2 6th graders. We enjoyed the book very much. I never learned about the Donner Party in school. This book was very thorough and was loaded with

historical photographs. It is a fascinating story and there were days when I read from it for over an hour- I couldn't put it down.

I read this as one of the many choices for a college course. I found it very interesting and extremely informative on the adventure.

very sad but a great story

Was good. Informative. I wish it would of had a litte more detail. The book could have been longer. More pictures also would have been nice.

A great way for youth to learn history about a subject that could be scary. The author handled the topic in a manner that my 12 year old granddaughter will be able to understand. We will visit the area this month and see where the Donner Party was trapped for such a long period of time.

Nice

very enlightening!

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