

Ten Miles of Track

During their attempts to lay as much track as possible and to encourage their crews to work harder and faster, both railroad lines, attempted to set records of the most track laid in a single day. The contest would eventually be won by the Chinese and Irish workers of the Central Pacific. On April 28, 1869, Crocker and Strobridge completed their preparations for setting the record (Sinnott 1994:49; Williams 1988:261). They had all of the equipment assembled and the men in place (Sinnott 1994:49; Williams 1988:261). The roughly five thousand men had been told that they would be paid four times their regular wage for this single day's effort (Sinnott 1994:49; Williams 1988:261). The workers organized into two eight-man rail teams consisting of the bigger Irish workers while the Chinese workers would grade, lay ties, place spikes, and offload the tools and other equipment as needed (Sinnott 1994:49; Williams 1988:261). The grading crew included 400 Chinese tapers, who would compact the ballast along the grade, as well as 20 spikers (Sinnott 1994:49; Williams 1988:261-2). As crews and animals tired, they were replaced with fresh replacements, which kept the line progressing (Sinnott 1994:49; Williams 1988:261).

Work began at sunrise and ended at sunset (Williams 1988:261). At the end of the day, the ten miles of track had been graded, rails and ties laid, and spiked (see Figure 7.7). The Chinese workers had nailed 26,160 spikes that weighed approximately 55,000 pounds, laid 25,800 ties, turned 14,080 rail connecting bolts (Chew 2004:84; Williams 1988:263). The Irish workers had laid an incredible 3,520 rails at a total weight of 2,112,000 pounds (Williams 1988:263).

End of the Line

By May 1869, the two railroad companies began preparations to join their lines at Promontory, Utah. On May 10, 1869, as the last spike was driven in the Utah desert, the blows were heard across the country. Telegraph wires wrapped around spike and sledgehammer transmitted the impact instantaneously to the rest of the nation. When the signal was received that the last spike had been driven, the Nation celebrated.

While the Chinese workers had paid the cost of construction with thousands of lives lost, the project was finally completed (Chew 2004:84). While the actual death toll among the Chinese laborers will remain unknown, estimates suggest that the total number is more than 2,000 (Chew 2004:94-98). The Chinese workers returned to mining and some back to China, while others helped to build railroads in Colorado, Nevada, Idaho, Texas, and Montana. Their contribution to the construction of the First Transcontinental Railroad cannot be forgotten.

Mormon Participation in the Transcontinental Railroad

On May 10, 1869, the rails of the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific Railroads were joined at Promontory, Utah, uniting the eastern and western states, along with the various