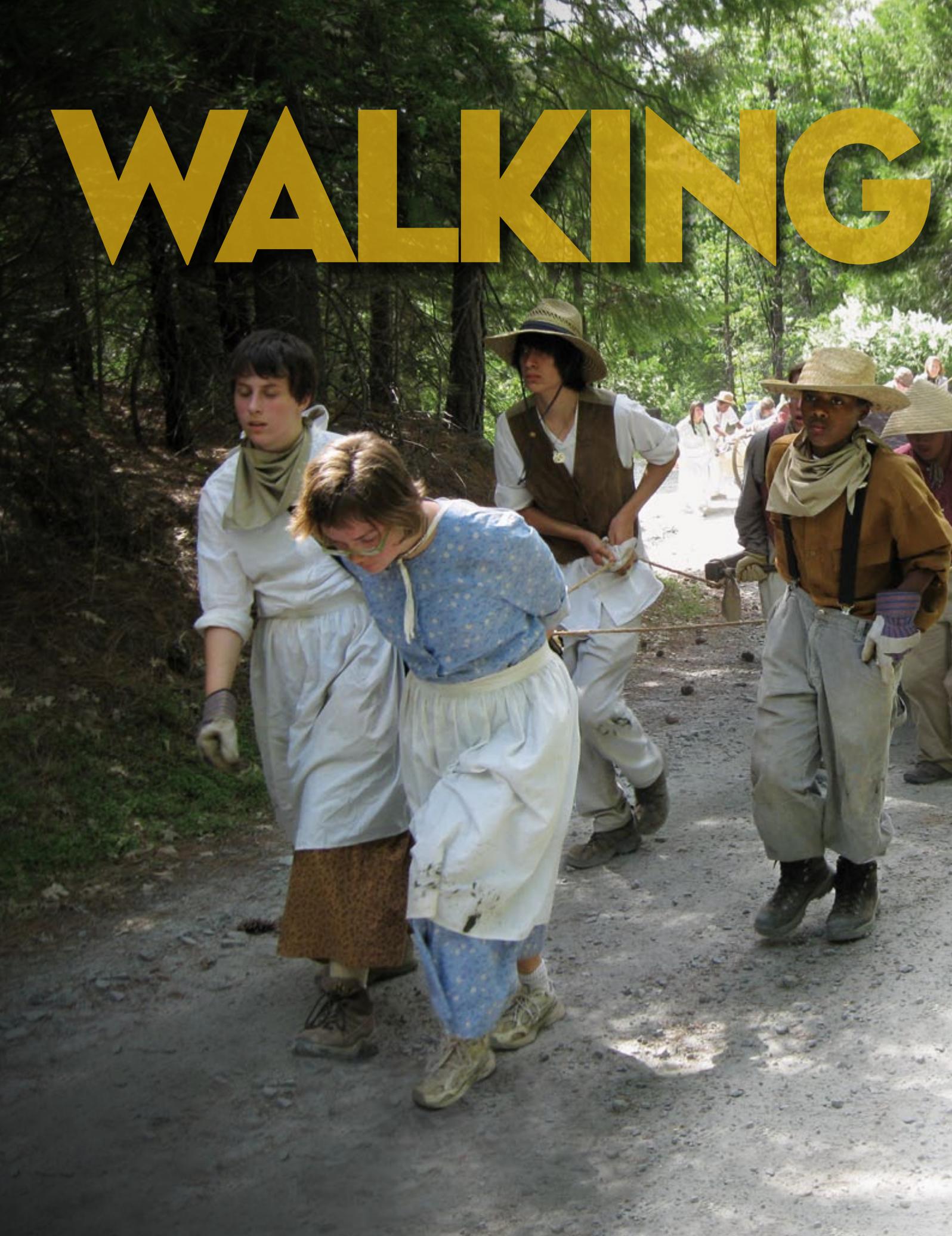


WALKING



with Our Ancestors

These teens made their pioneer trek more personal by focusing on stories of ancestors.

By Margaret Snider

A pioneer trek can provide teens with a small sense of what their ancestors went through to help build what they now enjoy, a chance to tackle a difficult task, and an opportunity for bonding with each other. For youth in Northern California, it was a time to think about those who came before.

Each participant who took part in the three-day, 30-mile trek chose and researched an ancestor, a departed relative, an LDS pioneer, or someone else associated with the pioneers. They wrote the person's name on a cirlet of leather and wore it around their necks to keep that person in mind as they struggled over the same rugged terrain that the LDS pioneers faced in the Sierra Nevada Mountains on the Mormon Trail.

"We are traveling on the shoulders of the people who came before us," said Stake President Alan Fisher as the group met before starting out. "Be strong. Lead the charge against immorality. You are called to be the pioneers to lead, to guide, preparatory to the coming of the Savior."

The participants divided into families of approximately 10 people, with wards being mixed.

Starting out in high spirits, the youth soon began to rely on each other. The first day was a 16-mile, mostly uphill, grueling hike that



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF MARGARET SNIDER



A pioneer trek gave these youth an opportunity to learn about what the pioneers experienced. "It's just a glimpse of what their lives were," says Brooke A. (above). "This experience is one that we'll never forget."

took 11 hours. Brooke A., 18, says, "The first day was so difficult. The other two days were so emotional and spiritual because our bodies were so weak. We had to rely on something bigger than us."

Jared M., 14, says he walked for his ancestor, Paul Maughan. "He was a little kid who fell out of the wagon and was trampled by the wagon behind. I'm walking for him. I knew this was going to be really hard, and it was. But I was kind of excited."

Some youth walked for ancestors who were pioneers in different parts of the world. Alex B., 17, is descended from Germans who were transplanted to Russia and then immigrated to the United States. Alex's great-great-grandfather was one of those pioneers.



Elvis H., 16, did not have ancestors who were LDS pioneers. He chose to walk for Norton Hunter, who was important to the pioneers because he made

handcarts that they pulled and pushed across hundreds of miles.

Elvis started out with enthusiasm. After the difficult first day, he was excited to reach camp, but he couldn't sleep because he was in pain. The next day, he was taken to the hospital, where he was operated on for appendicitis. "In my situation, if we were back in pioneer days, I probably would have been one of those graves on the way."

Alexis A., 17, says the trek was a lot harder than she expected. "I walked for my Grandpa Brodowski. He actually passed away last December. He was a pioneer in his family because he converted and was the only



member in his family. In the end, everything turned out OK, and he actually

started a great generation of LDS members."

Though the youth faced many difficulties, the pioneers tackled many more. Brooke says, "We can go on hikes with our family, but to physically have to also pull a couple-hundred-pound handcart is totally different. We didn't have to carry babies or take care of toddlers. They didn't get to rest like we did when we got to camp. It's just a glimpse of what their lives were. To just have this experience is one that we'll never forget."

Marilyn M., 15, testified to the group at the very end of the trek: "Most of you know that I really did not want to come on the trek, but I learned after coming that you will always be able to have strength. It may come through other people, but the Lord is going to give it to you. It's just like our scripture for the year, 'Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest' (Joshua 1:9). That's so powerful. It's completely assuring that we can have the Lord with us wherever we go." **NE**



