



The San Joaquin & Sierra Nevada Railroad was originally built as a 3-foot narrow gauge line that ran from Lodi, on the Southern Pacific (1876) mainline, westward 13 miles to Bracks Landing on the San Joaquin Delta, and eastward 25 miles from Lodi and the SP main line to the Sierra Nevada foothill town of Valley Springs. The railroad was incorporated on March 28, 1882, and construction was completed on April 15, 1885. The railroad was built as a common carrier with copper mining being its primary traffic. On March 15, 1888 the SJ&SN was consolidated into the Northern Railway Company, a SP subsidiary. In 1897, the Northern Railway abandoned the track between Woodbridge (2 miles west of Lodi) and Bracks Landing and converted the rest of the line to standard gauge. The following year, the Northern Railway was consolidated into the SP. In 1927, the Western Pacific Railroad completed a branch from its 1909 main line (west of Lodi) to a landing with access to the Sacramento Delta agricultural region at Terminous; this line closely follows the western, abandoned section of the SJ&SN (1885n)(the WP branch is not shown separately on the Southwest Railroad History Map). The WP branch was abandoned in the 1960's.

In 1925-1926, the SP extended the eastern branch line 8 miles east from Valley Springs to Kentucky House (2 miles west of this location). The last 4 miles of the branch to Kentucky House were sold to the Calaveras Cement Company on April 28, 1929. In 1935, the Calaveras Cement Company built this bridge over California Highway 49 (see the "1935" to the left of the "Calaveras Cement" in above photo). The grade that leads to this bridge is currently Cement Plant Road, an unpaved road that extends east from Kentucky House 5 miles through this location on Highway 49 and through the town of Calaveritas to a pit just east of Calaveritas. I have passed under this bridge for years assuming it was a railroad bridge, and when I got out and photographed it in 2019, I was impressed by the trestle over Willow Creek (which begins to the right of the concrete bridge, see next photo). Willow Creek is a tributary of Calaveritas Creek, which passes under the Highway 49 via the bridge in the foreground.

When I returned to the office to research this location, I could find no record of the railroad ever extending east of Kentucky House. I checked the Abandoned Rails website, which hints at this extension: "Local geographic evidence points to a possible extension of the right-of-way to a quarry once located at this site [referring to the pit just east of Calaveritas]; the right-of-way cannot be confirmed." So, I checked historical topo maps. A 1902 map shows the line extending only to Valley Springs, as expected. A 1945 map shows the line extending only to Kentucky House, reflecting the SP's 1925-1926 extension, and an unnamed road leading from Kentucky House east along the alignment of Cement Plant Road to a "Lime Quarry" that is at the location of the pit just east of Calaveritas. It is unlikely that a rail extension was built in 1935 (age of the bridge) and then abandoned by 1945; it is more likely that the Calaveras Cement Company constructed Cement Plant Road as a rubber-tire haul road between the Lime Quarry and the Kentucky House cement plant in 1935. But a railroad extension that was quickly abandoned and re-purposed as a road cannot be ruled out.

The SP was operating three freight trains per week between Lodi and Kentucky House until the Calaveras Cement Company closed the plant at Kentucky House in 1984; the Lodi - Kentucky House line was abandoned soon thereafter. The line from Woodbridge to Lodi is known as the Woodbridge Branch and terminates near the General Mills plant in Lodi; this 2-mile branch of the SP (1876) mainline is the only part of the SJ&SN (1885n) alignment that still has tracks.





Eastward view of the trestle that carries Cement Plant Road over Willow Creek. The 1935 concrete bridge and Highway 49 are just out of view on the right. It sure looks like a railroad trestle!