



The Nevada Northern Railway was built in 1906 to access the Nevada Consolidated Copper Company's porphyry copper deposits near Ely, Nevada. Construction began at the CP mainline (which was SP-owned in 1906) at Cobro, Nevada, and proceeded southward. The railroad's symbolic completion included a Copper Spike ceremony in Ely. The mines closed around 1980 and the Nevada Northern suspended all operations in 1983. The tracks are still present, but all but a few miles in Ely are unusable. The 140-mile long line was an easy build because its course runs north-south, as do the valleys; the NN used two valleys, the Goshute and Steptoe valleys, which are separated by low hills at Currie that required just a few curves to negotiate.

This westward view across Steptoe Valley of the road to the former mining town of Cherry Creek, which is lost in the vastness. Also lost is the NN grade, which runs north-south along the far side of the un-vegetated playa dry lake. Playa lakes are typical features of the internally drained valleys of the Great Basin. The 9,000-foot Cherry Creek Mountains rise above the valley in the background.



A water tower and a small building are all that remain of Cherry Creek station. This location is just south of the road to Cherry Creek (previous photograph) and about four miles east the town of Cherry Creek.



The NN track through the Steptoe Valley was used as recently as the 1990s, when a brief resumption of copper mining by Broken Hill Proprietary Company, resumed rail service from mines a few miles west of Ely, through Ely and then north to Shafter, where the NN line crosses the Western Pacific (now UP) mainline. Both the mine and railroad shut down again in 1999, the last time these rails carried payload. A few hoppers abandoned on the NN tracks at Cherry Creek station were presumably left by Broken Hill Proprietary Company in 1999.



The switch for a siding at Cherry Creek station.



The NN rails disappear into the sagebrush on a frosty fall morning near Cherry Creek station. Recent plans by Sierra Pacific Resources for the construction of the "Ely Energy Center," a 2,500 megawatt coal-fired generating plant in the Ely vicinity, are raising the possibility that the railroad may see yet another revival, this time carrying inbound loads of coal.