



In 1858, asphalt deposits were noticed by a land survey party west of Bakersfield at the future site of the Sunset Oil Field. The Buena Vista Oil Company incorporated in 1864 and began refinery operations near modern McKittrick and produced over 4,000 gallons of kerosene by 1867. The field continued to grow, and in 1892-1893 the McKittrick Sunset Railroad was built from the SP mainline at Kern Junction in Bakersfield west to McKittrick to service the oil industry as well as agricultural traffic.

Oil reserves were discovered south of McKittrick, and in 1901 the Sunset Western Railroad built 30 miles southwestward from a junction with the MS at Gosford, to the new oil fields. The SW headed due southward from the MS at Gosford to a 90-degree bend westward at Connor, then southwest through Pentland and another 2 miles to Hazelton, where the track ended in 1901. A portion of the line was built atop the existing grade of a former narrow-gauge line, the Buena Vista Reservoir Railroad (not shown separately on map). In 1904, the track was extended 2.5 miles northwest from Hazelton (end of track) to Maricopa. In 1909, the SW completed a 17 mile branch north from Pentland (2 miles northeast of Hazelton) through Taft (this location) and Fellows to a location called Shale, thereby completing the final extent of the line. The western half of the line was subsequently abandoned to a point just west of Levee Spur, and the eastern half is still in use by the San Joaquin Valley Railroad, a subsidiary of RailAmerica.

Southeastward view of the SW Taft Branch, built to this location at the south end of Taft, California, in 1909. The rail grade the is fill grade to the left (northeast) of the gravel road, which may have been the original road to Taft.



Northwestward view, same location as the previous photo, at the south end of Taft. The old bridge abutments are on the SW Taft Branch, with the fill grade beyond in pretty good shape. The derrick is part of the West Kern Oil Museum.



The SW Taft Branch is a rail-to-trail within Taft. The building appears to be the old Taft Station and is now Sunset Antiques, but I couldn't find any information about this building.





Another view of the SW Taft Branch rail-to-trail and the presumed Taft Station. The line extended 8 miles northwest from here to a location called Shale, but I could find no evidence of the grade north of Taft.

