



In the late 1800's both the Southern Pacific Railroad and the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad had interests in building lines north from San Francisco to Humboldt County to transport logs south. As plans went forward it became clear that only one railroad would be profitable in the Eel River Canyon (including this location), so the SP and AT&SF entered into an agreement and in 1906 merged 42 railroad companies between Marin and Humboldt Bay to create one railroad line stretching from Schellville (just north of San Francisco) to Eureka. The two companies constructed the final stretch of railroad under the name San Francisco & Eureka Railroad through this location in the Eel River canyon and completed the SF&E in 1914 with a "golden spike" ceremony. The SP controlled the southern end of the line from Willits (at the junction with the California Western Railroad & Navigation Company line) south to Schellville, and the AT&SF controlled the northern end from Willits to Eureka (including this location). There were also dozens of miles of narrow gauge trackage in Marin, which were controlled by SP, and together these roads were operated as the Northwestern Pacific Railroad.

In 1929, the NWP became a full SP subsidiary. Freight service on the NWP picked up in the 1950's due to demand for lumber during the post-war housing boom. By 1980, freight was still running in the SF&E-built Eel River Canyon between Willits and Eureka (including this location), at that time the most expensive stretch of rail line to be operational and maintained in the United States. In 1983, the SP unsuccessfully tried to shut the line down and in 1984 sold the line north of Willits to Bryan Whipple, who ran it as the Eureka Southern Railroad but was bankrupt within several years. In 1989, the North Coast Railroad Authority was founded to save the NWP from total abandonment. In 1992, what was left of the Eureka Southern was sold to the NCRA, which operated it for a few years as the North Coast Railroad until 1995, when severe flooding of the Eel River washed out too much of the line to justify repairs.

Southeastward view of the SF&E (1914) bridge over the Eel River at South Fork, California. The South Fork Eel River comes in from the right (south) just to the right of the photo.



Another view of the SF&E (1914) bridge over the Eel River at South Fork. The following photos were taken at the south (far) end of the bridge.





Just south of the SF&E (1914) bridge over the Eel River at South Fork. The flat grade behind the redwood trees is the overgrown SF&E/NWP fill grade on the Eel River flood plain.





Same location as above, note the tie in the foreground and the fill grade behind it.





Closer view of the overgrown SF&E/NWP tracks on the fill grade, same location as previous.





The site of South Fork, a quarter mile south of the previous location and a half mile south of the bridge. The overgrown boxcar is on the SF&E/NWP main line.





Close-up of the SF&E/NWP tracks at South Fork near the overgrown boxcar.





The SF&E/NWP tracks have been removed from this cut grade at South Fork.