



The Nevada–California–Oregon Railway had its origins in the Nevada & Oregon Railroad, which in 1880 planned a narrow gauge line from the Central Pacific transcontinental line at Reno, Nevada, to the Columbia River at The Dalles to service cattle ranches and farms in northeastern California and eastern Oregon. Survey and grading work began in December 1880 and reached only to Oneida, California, 30 miles north of Reno, in October 1882. Regular service between the two cities began a month later, but track construction stalled. In April 1884, a bank took full control of the railroad and spent the next few years improving lines and building up business. The name of the railroad was changed to the Nevada–California–Oregon in 1893, northward construction resumed in 1899, and after 13 years reached southernmost Oregon at Lakeview in January 1912. The plans to continue farther north into Oregon never occurred. The railroad's best year was 1913, but decline followed quickly and by April 1925, the Southern Pacific purchased the N-C-O. By 1928, the SP had converted the N-C-O track to standard gauge.

In 1929, the Modoc Northern Railroad, a non-operating subsidiary of the Southern Pacific, built 160 miles of track from the SP line at Klamath Falls, Oregon, to Alturas, California, where it connected to the N-C-O. The MN transported mostly timber products, but also transported perlite from the mine and mill at Lakeview, Oregon, using the former N-C-O line from Alturas to Lakeview. In the 1970's, SP abandoned the line south of Alturas south to a point near Oneida, California, where the N-C-O began its extension from the original N&O. Today, the Lake County Railroad owns the 54-mile section of the former N-C-O line connecting Alturas to Lakeview, and operates on Union Pacific's Modoc Northern line between Alturas and Klamath Falls.

This eastbound LC train is crossing under U.S. Highway 395 at the east end of the MN line and entering the Alturas wye with the former N-C-O line. The following photos show this train working the Alturas wye on its way to Lakeview.





The train curves left (north) onto the former N-C-O grade. Note that the second leg of the wye curves right (south) where the tracks are still in place for about 10 miles south of Alturas. Track oiling equipment is in the foreground.



Closer view of Alturas wye and empty hopper cars headed to Lakeview to fill up with perlite.





The train is on the northbound leg of the wye, with the southbound leg in the foreground.



This southward view of the former N-C-O grade shows the switch with southbound leg of the wye in the foreground and some sidings for rolling stock storage.





The LC train is now on the N-C-O grade and backing up to leave a few cars on the storage tracks south of the wye. The engineer is operating the train via remote control as he stands on the back of the train. Note the partially abandoned siding in the foreground.



The train has dropped off a few cars and is now heading north, still in the wye (note southbound leg of the wye to the right of the train). Engine #2809 is marked "Lake Railway," not "Lake County Railway," and I'm not sure why.





The northbound train approaches the northbound leg of the wye on which it first arrived.





Eastward view of the northbound train with both legs of the Alturas wye in the foreground.





Another view of the northbound train and the Alturas wye. Note the flat topography of the Modoc Plateau created by extensive lava flows.





Stored cars on the N-C-O/SP grade about a mile south of the Alturas wye. Shallow lakes and ponds are common on the Modoc Plateau.





Southward view of the N-C-O grade, which the SP upgraded to standard gauge in the 1920's, about 4 miles south of Alturas. The tracks end about 5 miles down the line.





The Southern Pacific Railroad Locomotive #2718 is on display in Alturas. It was built by Baldwin in 1904 and donated to Modoc County in 1956. This locomotive was utilized on the Alturas to Reno route after standard gauging in the 1920's. Note the oil (not coal) tender, typical of the SP steam fleet, which had plenty of access to coastal California oil but virtually no access to coal.





After leaving a few cars in Alturas, the consist led by LC #2809 is now about three miles north of Alturas and climbing toward the divide between the Pacific Slope and Great Basin.





The N-C-O grade follows the North Fork of the Pit River, a tributary of the Sacramento River, to the divide between the Pacific Slope and Great Basin.