



An early version of the Pacific Railway Act of 1862, which authorized the first transcontinental railroad, included a branch north from the Central Pacific line into Oregon, but this was left out of the final law. Instead, an 1866 law offered land grants to build a railroad from the valleys of northern California to Portland, Oregon. The law specified grants to the California & Oregon Railroad of California and a company to be designated by the Oregon Legislature, which was ultimately the Oregon & California Railroad. In 1870, the CP acquired the C&O, which commenced construction north from Roseville, California, on the CP (1869) line about 15 miles northeast of Sacramento, then followed the flat Sacramento River Valley northward to Redding, at the north end of the valley, where the tracks arrived in 1872. Construction stopped at Redding due to the expense of building through the Klamath Mountains and because of difficulties experienced by the O&C in progressing to the state line from the north. The CP ran several surveys to find the best route to Oregon from Redding, and their favored route was a route through Klamath Falls. However, the C&O had an agreement to join up with the Oregon & California Railroad, which took the more direct route south of Eugene, Oregon (north of map area), via Siskiyou Pass. In 1887, the difficult construction through the Klamath Mountains was completed when the C&O linked with the O&C in Ashland, Oregon, about 15 miles north of the state line, and created the "Siskiyou Line," fulfilling the mandate of the 1866 law. By the time the railroad was completed in 1887, the C&O was merged into the O&E and these and the CP were merged into the SP.

In 1905, with the Siskiyou Line unable to handle the volume of traffic, the SP and Union Pacific started construction of three new lines, two built in Oregon north of the map area and a third – the California & Northeastern Railroad -- built northeastward from the Siskiyou Line at Weed, along the CP's original survey via Klamath Falls, Oregon, in May 1909, and reached Kirk, Oregon, north of the map area, in September 1912. Financial and legal issues delayed completion of the lines in Oregon, and finally in September 1926, the "Natron Cutoff" was completed to Eugene, Oregon (north of map area) and the Siskiyou Line became the secondary route between California and Oregon. Since 1994, the Central Oregon & Pacific Railroad operates the Siskiyou Line between Weed, California, over Siskiyou Pass to Eugene, Oregon, for local hauls of logs and lumber.

Let's explore Siskiyou Pass from north to south. This is a northward view of the C&O (now CORP) line, 6 rail miles north of the pass, but only 1.5 miles as the crow flies. There are two switchbacks, with a horseshoe bend at each, not a switch, between here and the summit tunnel. Amazingly, the road in the picture, "Old" U.S. Highway 99, has a loop to gain elevation, but the railroad doesn't. The photo is taken from the overpass over the looped road and the railroad.





Northward view at same location as previous.



Northward view of the C&O (now CORP) line, 4 rail miles north of the pass and one switchback closer to the pass than the previous location.





Northward view of the site of Siskiyou, at the north entrance of the summit tunnel.





Southward view at same location as previous, showing the abandoned site of Siskiyou. The tunnel is just around the bend.





Northward view of Siskiyou siding and C&O/O&C/CP/SP/CORP main line.





North entrance to the Siskiyou Summit Tunnel.





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North entrance to the Siskiyou Summit Tunnel. The Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail passes overhead.





A gravel road crosses the C&O (now CORP) 3 miles south of the summit tunnel at Colestin, Oregon.





Southward view of the C&O (now CORP) at Colestin.





Southward view of the C&O (now CORP) 4 miles south of the summit tunnel as it winds down toward California.





Southward view of the C&O (now CORP) 5 miles south of the summit tunnel, as the crow flies, at the California state line.