



The narrow gauge Sierra Valley Railway (1896), which ran east-west across the northern Sierra Valley (this location), had been sporadically operating since 1881 but did little to develop the lumber industry. So in 1899, the Lewis Brothers, who had been harvesting lumber north of the Central Pacific (1869) around the whistle stop of Boca, planned a standard gauge railroad to the Lewis Mill and the Sierra Valley (this location). The Boca & Loyalton Railroad was incorporated in 1900; in early 1901 the railroad was completed from a connection to the CP (by then Southern Pacific) mainline at Boca northward to the Lewis sawmill and in the summer of 1901 reached Loyalton at the southern edge of the Sierra Valley. Loyalton became a lumber boomtown with sawmills springing up at a rapid pace, and between Boca and Loyalton there were 15 rail spurs into the forest serving the logging camps of the various mills. The ranchers of the Sierra Valley shipped beef cattle, dairy products, sheep, wool, hay and grains south on the B&L. The northern extension of the B&L continued northwest across the Sierra Valley 12 miles to Beckwourth (this location), where it crossed the narrow gauge SV (1896), and west another 5 miles to Portola. Lawsuits and a physical confrontation occurred before the crossing of the SV (1896) track was allowed. Spurs were built north up Grizzly Creek and the Clover Valley to access lumber.

In 1905, the B&L was sold to a subsidiary of the Western Pacific Railroad, then planning to build its Feather River Route. The WP shipped all its construction materials on the B&L during 1908-09. The WP (1909) mainline used the B&L trackage between Beckwourth (this location) and Portola and in the process straightened the alignment. Once the WP was completed, freight traffic on the B&L dropped off between Loyalton and Boca (on the CP [1869]) and in 1917 the WP abandoned the B&L line between Loyalton and Boca. The B&L trackage between Beckwourth (this location) and Loyalton became the WP's Loyalton Branch.

Eastward view of the WP (1909) at Beckwourth, California. The straight track on the left and vanishing in the distance is the WP (1909) mainline as it traverses the flat Sierra Valley. The parallel SV (1896) alignment is somewhere nearby and to left (north) of the WP, but I could find no trace of it. The branch to the right (south) is the B&L (1901), later the WP Loyalton Branch. The WP used the B&L (1901) alignment from this location westward (behind the viewer) from here to Portola, whereas the WP alignment east of this location (the trackage that extends in the distance) is new (1908-1909) construction. This junction is called "Hawley" on topo maps.



Another eastward view of the same junction and siding.



Northward view, same location as previous. The tracks from nearest to farthest are the B&L (1901)/WP Loyalton Branch, the siding for the branch, and the WP (1909) mainline.