



The California Pacific Rail Road Company was incorporated in 1865 at San Francisco, California, and was renamed the California Pacific Railroad in 1869. The Cal-P, as it was later known, commenced construction at Vallejo (this location) on the north shore of San Francisco Bay, where ferries connected to San Francisco. Grading began on Christmas Eve 1866 and rails began to be laid on April 10, 1868. The track was completed from Vallejo via Napa Junction to Suisun (now Suisun City, which became a suburb of Fairfield) on June 24, 1868. Building continued to Davisville (now Davis) where the line split. One line, the mainline, continued west to Sacramento, where tracks arrived January 15, 1870, and operation of the Cal-P began. The other line was built north from Davisville (Davis) then turned northwest to Marysville, where tracks arrived on February 15, 1870.

Even as the Cal-P was being built and before the transcontinental line to Sacramento was completed, the Cal-P route offered the most direct connection between Sacramento and San Francisco Bay to complete the transcontinental route. When the golden spike of the "Pacific Railway" was driven on May 10, 1869, the Central Pacific's only connection with the Bay was the much longer Western Pacific (1869) route to Oakland via Stockton. The Cal-P and Vallejo became busy as soon as the Cal-P was completed. However, in December 1871, flooding caused damage to the line between Knight's Landing and Marysville and financial hardship for the Cal-P. In 1876, the Cal-P was sold to the CP, but continued operating under the California Pacific moniker, and the damaged Knight's Landing-Marysville line was abandoned in 1877. Also in 1877, the CP began construction of a line from the Cal-P at Suisun southwest across Suisun Marsh to Benicia, located on the Bay 8 miles southeast of Vallejo. The 17 miles of track took 2 years to build because of the unstable subgrade through the marsh, requiring tons of crushed rock. A railroad ferry was established between Benicia and Port Costa (on the south shore of the Bay on the Southern Pacific's newly completed San Pablo & Tulare [1878]), thus circumventing the Cal-P line to Vallejo.

The Cal-P was caught up in the absorption of the CP into the SP; in 1885 the Cal-P was leased to and operated by the SP, in 1888 the Cal-P was a non-operating subsidiary of the SP, and in 1898 the Cal-P was finally purchased by the SP. In 1930, the SP completed a railroad bridge over the Carquinez Strait between Benicia (CP [1879] end-of-track) and Martinez (on the SP&T [1878]), thus replacing the railroad ferries and further marginalizing Vallejo as a rail center. Today, Amtrak's Capitol Corridor follows the original Cal-P Line from Sacramento to Suisun (Fairfield) on its way to Oakland and San Jose, and the Cal-P from Suisun to Vallejo (this location) is now part of the short-line California Northern Railroad.

Southward view of the Cal-P (1870), now CN, at Vallejo, one mile north of the port and end-of-track. The rusty track indicates that CN trains have not come this far south in a while.



Northward view of the Cal-P (1870) at the Port of Vallejo, where the tracks split off into many sidings to accommodate rolling stock of the once-busy port.



In 1869 and 1870, the Port of Vallejo grew to become the largest flour-shipping port in California, shipping to Asia, South America, and Europe. During WWI the port shipped tons of flour to Europe as part of the wartime relief effort and employment at the mill increased from 125 workers in 1915 to 360 in 1919. A bit of trivia: just after WWI, the mill hired a young, out-of-work Boris Karloff as a truck driver. On August 30, 1934, a fire destroyed a large portion of the mill, including two marine elevators, 21 bins of grain, and 500,000 grain bags. A large part of the plant was rebuilt but ultimately closed in 2004; since then the tracks have rusted, as seen in this westward view of the yard tracks.

The waterway is the Napa River. During the Pleistocene ice age, when water levels were 200 feet lower, the Sacramento River flowed to the Pacific Ocean through the Golden Gate, a water gap through the Coast Range. When the glaciers started melting 15,000 years ago and sea level rose, the lower Sacramento River flooded to form the north arm of San Francisco Bay, and the river's tributaries, such as the Napa River, became inlets, such as this one which became a port.



Northward view of the southern part of the Cal-P/CP/SP/CN yard. The track in the foreground continues south of the yard to the last operating mill, which closed in 2004.



Close-up of a switch at the Vallejo yard.



Northward view, 800 feet south of the previous location, of the single track that continues south of the yard.



Southward view at the same the same location as previous. This is the flour processing/shipping plant that closed in 2004, the CN's last customer on the Cal-P line in Vallejo.