



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, 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 unstable Eel River canyon and was completed 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. 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, and in 1983 the SP unsuccessfully tried to shut the line down. In 1984, the SP 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, who operated it as the 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.

The NWP mainline, including this southward view of SF&E (1914) track at Longvale, has not seen traffic since 1995. Because the northwest California coast is the most humid area in the Southwest and the line north of Willits has been out of use for more than 20 years, the line is the most overgrown railroad in the Southwest.



Northward view of SF&E (1914) track and siding at Longvale.



Railroad scar across California Highway 162; the tracks in the previous photos are in the grass across the street and behind the viewer.