



In early 1881, the Bodie Railway & Lumber Company was established to supply the gold-mining town of Bodie with much-needed lumber from the Bodie Wood and Lumber Company's newly built sawmill at Mono Mills (this location). The narrow gauge railway route extended 32 miles south of Bodie along the eastern shore of Mono Lake to stands of Ponderosa Pines around Mono Mills. The line was completed and operational on November 14, 1881. Temporary spurs into timberlands were built in 1882. Initial operations proved so successful that plans were made to extend the rail line from the Warm Springs Station (about midway between Bodie and Mono Mills on the BR&LC [1881n]) to the narrow gauge Carson & Colorado Railroad, then under construction, at Benton, California. Consequently, the company changed its name to the Bodie & Benton Railway and Commercial Company. Construction on this extension was begun in 1882 and about nine miles were graded before construction ceased. No tracks were ever laid, apparently because the owners of the lumber company at Mono Mills feared that connection of this isolated railroad to the wider rail network would introduce unwanted competition. Although the extension was never completed, the railway kept the name "Bodie & Benton Railway." When the railway ceased to be profitable in 1918, due primarily to a decline in mining activity in Bodie, the rails and all valuable equipment were pulled up and sold.

Northward view of the remnants of lumber operations and the southern terminus of the BR&LC (1881n) at Mono Mills. Mono Lake is in the distance. Note the shallow depression with ruins in the center.




Closer view of foundations, discarded lumber, and the linear depression at Mono Mills.

THE RAILROAD AND THE FOUR ENGINES


CONNECTING
A 32-mile narrow gauge (3-foot) railway connected Bodie with the Jeffrey pine forest and allowed for the transportation of the lumber that Bodie needed in order to increase in size. Four steam engines were brought in for this operation.

THE FOUR ENGINES
Two of the four engines were made by Prescott Scott in San Francisco and were delivered by the Carson and Colorado Railroad to Hawthorne, Nevada. In Hawthorne, they were disassembled and hauled by mule-driven wagons to Mono Lake where they were reassembled. Some of the hauling was done in the winter when snow and ice created a track over which mules pulled the loaded sleds. The engines were named "Tybo," "Mono," "Inyo," and "Bodie." There were at least 32 flatcars constructed in Carson City, Nevada, and brought to Mono Mills to carry the lumber.


ISOLATED
The railway never connected to an outside line. It was not designed to carry passengers, so no tickets were issued and fees were not collected. However, the journey from the Mono Basin to Bodie by horse or mule was long and difficult, so the railroad was used on occasion to transport passengers riding at their own risk.



The Bodie, a Porter 0-4-2T engine, at Mono Mills sometime after the engine house was dismantled in 1915. Photo: Walt Young Collection.



The Tybo is shown here at Bodie in 1889. Photo: Mallory Hope Ferrell Collection.



The Mono on its way to Bodie with a load of wood makes an inspection stop at Warm Springs in 1907. The flat car had a hauling capacity of eight cords of wood. Photo: E.W. Bilek Photo Collection/Nevada Historical Society.

NEWSPAPER ITEM IN 1881 FOUND IN THE BODIE WEEKLY STANDARD

The builders of the proposed Mono Railroad are Seth and Dan Cook, Robert W. Graves and H.M. Yearington. It will be called the Bodie Railway & Lumber Co. The Bodie terminus will be on the ridge east of the old Bodie Works, the road passing the entire length of the mineral ridge, and after a zig zag descent and a series of loops, comes out at the eastern shore of Mono Lake on a 12,000 acre timber tract owned by the company. The road will be finished this summer in time for the fall wood business.

Newspaper article found in the Bodie Weekly Standard in 1881.



Photo: A.A. Forbes/Paul Thompson Collection

Contemporary photograph of the mill and railroad at Mono Mills. Note the cut depression in the ground, more subdued but still visible today. This photo makes it clear that the depression was dug to load finished lumber planks onto flat cars for transport to Bodie for building construction and mine shoring.

Below this kiosk are the remains of a sawmill that processed the wood brought in from the surrounding forest. Labels on the photo correspond to captions below.

A With at least four saws and a crew of 25 men, the mill was capable of cutting 80,000 board feet of lumber per day.

B Men working at the mill were paid \$1.25 per day and worked 7 am to 6 pm.

C Logs from the forest were unloaded on the west side of the mill, rolled into the mill, and placed on a carriage to be sawed into planks.

D As the trunks were squared off, the leftover portions, with bark attached, were tossed out the east side of the mill where they fell near the boiler area and were used to generate steam needed to run the mill.

E After the flat planks were cut and sent out of the mill, they were loaded by hand onto small rail carts. Men pushed these carts along the top of the skids and then slid the planks down the skids.

F After the planks were pushed down the skids, they were stacked for a period of time to dry, awaiting transport by flat car to the town of Bodie.