



Beginning in 1868, with the construction of the Central Pacific Railroad, the Boca Lumber Company had been logging the lower watershed of the Little Truckee River and used river drives to move its logs to a mill on the CP line at Boca. In 1886, the Lewis brothers opened a sawmill 17 miles north of Boca and 9 miles south of the ranching town of Loyalton. They started by hauling their lumber from the mill to the CP using horses and wagons, then switched to steam traction engines in 1888. These huge machines weighed 29 tons and were basically steam locomotives on six foot diameter steel wheels. The steering was accomplished by a single front wheel and they hauled four to six trailers loaded with lumber behind them.

The narrow gauge Sierra Valley Railway, which ran east-west across the northern Sierra Valley and about 7 miles north of Loyalton, had been sporadically operating since 1881 but did little to develop the lumber industry. So in 1899, the Lewis's planned a standard gauge railroad to the Lewis Mill and the Sierra Valley. The Boca & Loyalton Railroad was incorporated in 1900; in early 1901 the railroad was complete from a connection to the CP (by then Southern Pacific) mainline at Boca to the Lewis sawmill and in the summer of 1901 reached Loyalton. 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 to Beckwourth, where it crossed the narrow gauge Sierra Valley Railway. Lawsuits and a physical confrontation occurred before the crossing was allowed, and spurs were built west to Portola and north up Grizzly Creek and the Clover Valley.

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 of its construction materials on the B&L during 1908-09. Once the WP was completed, freight traffic on the B&L dropped off between Boca and Loyalton and in 1917 the WP abandoned the line between Boca and Loyalton. Portions of the grade in the Sardine Valley (between Boca and Loyalton) were again used in the 1930's by the Hobart Estate Company for its logging operations.

The mills around Loyalton are now closed and trains are no longer present on the sidings in Loyalton.





The route between Beckwourth (on the WP) and Loyalton continued in use serving Loyalton's last sawmill until it closed in 2001. This southward view shows the current end of track at the sawmill on the south side of Loyalton. The original B&L route continues south into the hills to Boca.





The tracks between Beckwourth (on the WP) and Loyaltown were in use until 2001. Since that time, the tracks were paved over at two road crossings.