



In 1870, one year after the completion of the Central Pacific-Union Pacific transcontinental line, the Central Pacific-owned California Pacific Railroad completed a line connecting the transcontinental end-of-track at Sacramento with the San Francisco Bay port of Vallejo. Also in 1870, the California Pacific completed a 35 mile branch line north from its main line at Davis to Yuba City. In the middle 1870's, the Northern Railway, another Central Pacific subsidiary, commenced construction of a line north from Woodland, 12 miles north of Davis on the California Pacific, through this location at Willows in 1879, and finally reached Tehama in 1882, where the Northern tracks joined another Central Pacific subsidiary, the California & Oregon Railroad (1872). By 1888, the California Pacific and Northern Railway came under the control of the Southern Pacific and became known as the SP's West Valley Line. Since 1993, the California Northern Railroad has operated over SP's former West Valley Line.

Northward view of the Northern Railway (now California Northern) at the north end of Willows. Now let's check the excitement a few steps to the south.



The West Side & Mendocino Railroad was conceived in 1884 to build a railroad west from Willows to the Pacific coast of Mendocino County. It was anticipated that the railroad would haul redwood and sugar pine lumber from Mendocino County as well as local fruit along the route. A contract was awarded in October 1886 and grading to the coast was completed in April 1887. In March 1888, track laying began using Chinese labor and on July 1, 1888, the line was opened 17 miles to Fruto, where construction stopped. During construction, the Northern Railway/SP acquired the WS&M, so the 17-mile branch line to Fruto became known immediately as the "Mendocino Branch" of Northern Railway/SP. In 1951, the SP abandoned most of the branch line except for the first two miles west of Willows, which was left in place to serve the Johns-Manville Fiberglass Plant. Since 1993, the California Northern Railroad has operated over SP's former West Valley Line, including the remaining 2-mile portion of the WS&M/Mendocino Branch.

In this southward view at Willows, the Northern Railway (now California Northern) main line is in the foreground and the siding for the WS&M/SP Mendocino Branch (also now California Northern) is in the distance.



Northwestward view at same location as previous, the Northern Railway (now California Northern) main line is in the foreground and the siding for the WS&M (also now California Northern) is in the distance, curving to the west (left). There is no evidence there was ever a wye here, just the single junction to the southbound Northern Railway.



Southwestward view at Willows, the beginning of the WS&M is in the foreground and the Northern Railway main line is in the distance.



Northwestward view at same location as previous, the WS&M curving toward its due west course in the distance.



Westward view of the WS&M in corn fields one mile west of Willows. Note the foothills of the California Coast Range in the distance.



Westward view of the WS&M 2 miles west of Willows near the end-of-track. The gravel road to the left (south) of the track is the original WS&M grade. The existing tracks leave this grade just behind the viewer, and the tracks shown here to access the Johns-Manville Fiberglass Plant were likely laid in 1951, when the line west of here was abandoned. Note the curve to the right just beyond the siding; the end-of-track and plant access are 100 yards north (to the right) of that curve.



This change in track weight likely occurred in 1951, when the end-of-track was realigned to access the Johns-Manville Plant.





Eastward view of the WS&M re-alignment 2 miles west of Willows near the end of track, same siding and stored car as the photo before last. The end-of-track curve to the north is just behind the viewer.



Southward view of the re-alignment where it curves to the north and splits off a siding.



Slightly different southward view of the same curve and siding as previous. Now we are 100 yards north of the WS&M grade, which runs along the edge of the orchard in the left distance.



Same location as previous, the curve ends as the re-alignment runs due north along the side of the Johns-Manville Fiberglass Plant. The overgrown siding is to the right. End-of-track in the left distance.