



In 1909, the Western Pacific Railroad's Feather River Route was completed between Oakland, California, and Salt Lake City, Utah, via Beckwourth Pass, to compete with the Southern Pacific's (original Central Pacific [1869]) route over Donner Pass. While significantly longer and more difficult to build, the WP's crossing of the Pacific Crest at Beckwourth Pass is about 2,000 feet lower than the SP/CP Donner Pass Route (elevation about 7,000 feet). Once over Beckwourth Pass the WP, like the CP 40 years earlier, had relatively clear sailing as it wound its way around the normal-fault mountain ranges and across the flat alluvial valleys of northern Nevada, including this location at Silver Zone Pass, Nevada, and then through northwest Utah to Salt Lake City.

Just as the WP's route over the Sierra Nevada was more difficult to build than the CP's route, simply because the CP was built first and chose the easiest (but still very difficult) route, the WP's route through northern Nevada and northwest Utah was also more difficult to build than the CP's route. The WP's more difficult route is manifested in two railroad features: the Hogan tunnel, needed to cross the crest of the Pequop Mountains (20 miles southwest of the current location), and the Arnold Loop, needed to negotiate the steep eastern slope of the Toano Range east of Silver Zone Pass (this location). The Arnold Loop is not really a loop in which the grade passes over itself (e.g. Tehachapi Loop). The Arnold Loop is actually like a switchback with a U-turn instead of a switch. From west to east, after crossing Silver Zone Pass to this point at the beginning of the "loop," the line runs northeast for 3.1 rail miles to the balloon-shaped U-turn, then 3.2 rail miles southwest, parallel to the upper track, traversing a total of 6.3 rail miles and accomplishing the needed elevation loss but having travelled only 0.6 mile as the crow flies.

Westward view of the WP (1909), toward Silver Zone Pass, at the beginning of the Arnold Loop, where the alignment changes from east-west around Silver Zone Pass to northeast-southwest on both legs of the loop.





Eastward view of the WP (1909), same location as previous. The drop-off in elevation to Pilot Creek Valley is evident in this view. The dark alignment behind the utility pole is the shadow of the fill grade for the lower arm of the loop.



Northward view of the same stretch of the WP (1909) as in the previous photo. Note the high fill grade followed immediately by a cut grade; a lot of earth moving.





Northward view of the WP (1909), 3,000 feet east of the previous location. The lower arm of the Arnold Loop is in the foreground and the upper arm is visible in the upper left. The two tracks joint at the U-turn located 3 miles distant.