



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 Shafter, Nevada, and then through northwest Utah to Salt Lake City.

The Nevada Northern Railway was built in 1906 to access the Nevada Consolidated Copper Company's porphyry copper deposits near Ely, Nevada. Construction began at the CP (1869) mainline (which was SP-owned in 1906) at Cobre, Nevada, and proceeded southward. The railroad's symbolic completion included a Copper Spike ceremony in Ely. The 140-mile line was an easy build because its course runs north-south, as do the valleys between the north-south-trending normal-fault mountain ranges. The NN used two valleys: Goshute Valley, which is the valley in this view, and Steptoe Valley farther south, which are separated by low hills at Currie that required just a few curves to negotiate. As a subsidiary of Nevada Consolidated, the primary purpose of the NN was the haulage of copper ore and mining equipment, but other freight traffic was also carried and the railroad operated a daily passenger train between East Ely and Cobre until 1941. The mines closed around 1980 and the NN suspended all operations in 1983. In 1996, the BHP Nevada Railroad acquired the NN and hauled copper ore concentrate from BHP's concentrator at Riepetown (a few miles west of Ely) to Shafter (this location), where the NN (1906) crosses the WP (1909). The BHP ceased operations in 1999. The NN tracks are still present, but the only usable trackage is several miles of track around Ely, which is used for today's Nevada Northern Railway heritage railroad, and a few miles of track south of Shafter (this location), where the Union Pacific (WP successor) stores some cars.

Southwestward view of the WP (1909), 5 miles northeast of Shafter. Note the line of cars barely visible in the distant part of the valley to the left (south) of the WP alignment. Those are UP cars stored on the NN (1906), and Shafter is located where that line of cars intersects the WP. The distant mountain range without snow is the Pequop Range, which the WP (1909) crosses via the Hogan Tunnel, and the snow-capped peak in the distance is 10,262-foot Spruce Mountain.





Southwestward view of the WP (1909), 2 miles northeast of Shafter, where the WP crosses the NN (1906). Note the two separate groups of cars stored on the NN south of Shafter (to the left of the WP alignment).



Northeastward view of the WP (1909), same location as previous.





Southwestward view of the WP (1909), where the first WP siding appears 1.2 miles northeast of Shafter. Note the two separate lines of cars on the NN south of Shafter.



Southwestward view of the WP (1909), 1,000 feet northeast of the WP-NN grade crossing at Shafter. The original grade crossing has been removed and the NN (1906) north of the crossing is disconnected. The siding to the far left connects the WP to the NN south of the crossing and may have been built in 1996 for the BHP Nevada Railroad. Satellite imagery shows an abandoned WP turning wye to the left (southeast) of the viewer.





Northeastward view of the WP (1909), 500 feet northeast of the WP-NN grade crossing at Shafter. The track in the right foreground connects to the NN south of the crossing.





Southwestward view of the WP (1909) and NN (1906) at Shafter. The original grade crossing was just past the WP signal, where the WP goes to one track. The NN is completely gone north of the crossing (to the right of the WP tracks). The curved trackage to the left connects to the NN south of the former crossing and the cars are on the NN (1906) alignment.





Northward view of the NN (1906) 120 feet north of the WP (1909). The removed rails are piled on the tracks.





Southward view of the NN (1906), same location as previous with the same removed rails piled on the NN track. In this view it is clear that the NN in the foreground (north of the WP) projects southward across the WP tracks to the right-most NN track with stored cars, which is the NN mainline, and the cars to the left are on NN sidings.





Southward view of the NN-WP grade crossing, which was right in the foreground of this image and is completely re-graded.





Northward view of the NN (1906) at Shafter. The switch in the foreground, which leads to the stored cars behind the viewer, is on the original NN grade, but beyond the switch the curved track is later (1996?) connecting track. The original NN went straight between the two buildings.





Southward view of the NN (1906), same switch as in the previous photo.





Southward view of the NN (1906), where the UP stores rolling stock.





Southward view of the NN (1906), 800 feet south of Shafter crossing, where a third siding splits off.





Northward view of the NN (1906), 1,000 feet south of Shafter crossing, showing stored UP rolling stock and old rusty stuff.





Southward view of the NN (1906), near previous location.





Southward view of the NN (1906), a quarter mile south of Shafter crossing, showing stored UP rolling stock. Note a dot on the horizon in the far upper left; that is a second group of stored cars on the NN, visible also in the first two and fourth photos.