



The Carson & Colorado Railway was incorporated in 1880 with plans for a 600 mile, narrow gauge line to connect the Carson and Colorado rivers and access the mining country along the route. The line started from a connection with the standard gauge Virginia & Truckee Railroad (1872) at Mound House, Nevada, and built southward through this location at the future site of Owenyo and reached the mining town of Hawley (now Keeler), California in 1883, at which point the owners realized they'd built "300 miles too far or 300 years too soon." The C&C hung on for 20 years and then sold to the Southern Pacific. The sale was well timed for the SP; only months later there was a mineral strike at Tonopah, Nevada, allowing the SP to quickly recoup its investment. In 1905, the SP-controlled Nevada & California Railroad standard-gauged the line from Mound House to Mina, Nevada.

In 1910, the SP completed its standard-gauge Jawbone Branch, aka Lone Pine Branch, which extended 90 miles north from the SP (1876) mainline at Mojave, California, through Owens Valley to this location at Owenyo where, in 1910, it reached the N&C narrow gauge line (former C&C). The Jawbone Branch was built to support construction of the Los Angeles Aqueduct as well as to provide a southern outlet for traffic on the narrow gauge N&C.

In 1943, the N&C abandoned its former C&C narrow gauge trackage from Mina to Laws, California. This reduced the narrow gauge line down to 70 miles between Laws and Keeler, including this location at Owenyo, detached from the rest of the former C&C; it survived for 17 years on sparse local traffic and transfer of ore and cargo with the outside rail network via the SP Jawbone Branch (1910) at Owenyo (this location). In April 1960, the last train ran from Keeler to Laws, and in 1961, both the remaining narrow gauge trackage and the northern part of the standard gauge Jawbone Branch trackage were removed. Owenyo (this location) was abandoned.

Northward view of the C&C (1883), a half mile south of Owenyo, marked by the greener shrubs in the left distance. The snowcapped Sierra Nevada is visible to the left (west) and the Inyo Mountains are on the right – both are normal faults, the westernmost in the Basin and Range geologic province. Although this grade is right in the middle of the most extreme topography in the Southwest, with Mount Whitney (highest point in lower 48) to the west and below-sea-level Death Valley (lowest point in North America) to the east, the Owens Valley graben is a very linear valley with about the straightest railroad alignment in the Southwest map area.





Northward view of foundations for the Owenyo Transfer Trestle, built in a basin at the south end of Owenyo. The standard gauge SP Jawbone Branch (1910) ran through the un-vegetated area on the far side of the basin and the narrow gauge C&C/N&C/SP ran just to the right of the photo. The trestle was used to transfer freight standard- and narrow-gauge rolling stock.





Southeastward view of the Owenyo Transfer Trestle. The standard gauge SP Jawbone Branch (1910) ran on the right (west) side of the basin and the narrow gauge C&C/N&C/SP ran to the left.





Westward view of abutments for a small bridge on the standard gauge SP Jawbone Branch (1910) grade at the south end of Owenyo. The snowcapped Sierra Nevada rises above the nearer, lower Alabama Hills.





Northwestward view of the SP Jawbone Branch (1910) at the south end of Owenyo, where two ties remain in place. Again, the greener shrubs in the distance are at "central" Owenyo, where a standard gauge turning wye, a hotel, office, and other facilities once existed.





Remains at Owenyo. Note the salty soil, remnants of a lake that filled the valley during the Pleistocene ice ages.





Remains at Owenyo. A turning wye for the SP Jawbone Branch end-of-track is visible in satellite images on the west side of the alignment, but the wye is difficult to discern on the ground.



More Owenyo foundations and features.





Southeastward view of the narrow gauge C&C/N&C/SP fill grade, a half mile north of Owenyo, marked by the greener shrubs in the distance.





Northwestward view of the C&C/N&C/SP fill grade north of Owenyo, same location as previous.





Westward view of the narrow gauge C&C/N&C/SP fill grade north of Owenyo, near the same location as previous. There is a breach in the grade where two different types of fill meet, darker on the left (south) and lighter on the right. Mount Whitney, the highest point in lower 48 states at 14,495 feet above mean sea level, is directly above the breach but is hard to tell from other nearby peaks. The low hills are the Alabama Hills, which are the same granite bedrock as the higher Sierra Nevada but are on the down-dropped side of the normal fault that is the eastern scarp of the Sierra Nevada. The greener area at the base of the hills is Lone Pine and the Owens River.





Southeastward view of the C&C/N&C/SP grade, 4 miles northwest of Owenyo.





Northwestward view of the C&C/N&C/SP grade, same location as previous 4 miles northwest of Owenyo.





Now we have moved 4 miles due south of Owenyo on the SP Jawbone Branch (1910). This is the SP's Lone Pine station, the last stop before Owenyo and the former C&C narrow gauge line. The station is now a private residence. The mainline ran along the right (east) side of the building, in front of the goat. The station is 1.5 miles northwest of central Lone Pine as the crow flies, but the drive there is bit longer due to the bends in Lone Pine Narrow Gauge Road (see below). It's hard to believe, but many classic-era movie stars arrived at Lone Pine station to film in the nearby Alabama Hills, most famously Cary Grant, Douglas Fairbanks, Sam Jaffe, and others in 1939's "Gunga Din." A movie museum is located in Lone Pine.







The SP Jawbone Branch brought movie stars to Lone Pine to film in the weathered granite outcrops of the Alabama Hills, with 14,495-foot Mount Whitney as a backdrop.