



The story of America's first transcontinental railroad is legend. In 1853, Congress authorized surveys of potential routes for the "Pacific Railroad," which were completed in 1855 and identified a Northern Pacific, a Central Pacific, and two Southern Pacific routes. The 1862 Pacific Railway Act chose the Central Pacific route due to gold in northern California, silver in northern Nevada, and the absence of Southern Congressmen -- due to the Civil War -- to advocate for a Southern Pacific route, which would have been a much easier build. The Act specified two railroad charters: the Union Pacific Railroad would build railroad and telegraph lines west from the eastern shores of the Missouri River at Council Bluffs, Iowa, and would meet the Central Pacific Railroad and telegraph line built eastward from the navigable waters of the Sacramento River in California. On January 8, 1863, grading for the CP commenced at "K" Street at the waterfront of the Sacramento River and the first rails were laid later that year. The CP crossing of the Sierra Nevada required 15 tunnels, the most difficult being the summit tunnel at Donner Pass, and other engineering feats. The first train passed through the Donner Pass summit tunnel on June 18, 1868, and thanks to advance work, the first train arrived in Reno the next day. From Reno, the CP 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 Wadsworth, Nevada, and then through northwest Utah to meet the UP on May 10, 1869, at Promontory Summit, Utah, henceforth binding the nation. The CP was absorbed into the Southern Pacific over time, starting with a lease in 1885 and finally a full merger in 1959, and in 1996 the SP was absorbed into the UP.

The Southern Pacific-controlled Fernley & Lassen Railroad was constructed in 1912-1914 northwestward from Fernley, Nevada, where it connected with the SP (1902) re-alignment of the original Central Pacific (1869) mainline, through this location at Wadsworth, where it crossed the then-abandoned CP (1869) alignment, to its terminus at Westwood, California. The L&F was constructed to provide rail access for the Red River Lumber Company in Westwood. After the F&L's construction, it was used by other nearby lumber companies. After 1931, the F&L could not compete with Western Pacific's then-new Inside Gateway route. By 1934, passenger service had been discontinued, with freighting ending in 1956 and abandonment of the line in 1978.

The CP (1869) route follows the Truckee River from Donner Pass to this location at Wadsworth, where the Truckee River turns north and empties into Pyramid Lake, a saline terminal lake and a remnant of Pleistocene Lake Lahontan. The route crosses the river a few times before arriving at Wadsworth on the north bank. An older bridge at this location carried the CP eastward over the Truckee, flowing north at this location, and the CP continued east across dry lakes and marshland, all remnants of Pleistocene Lake Lahontan. The SP (1902) runs south of the river west of Wadsworth, is one mile south of this location, and continues east across Lahontan dry lakes and marshland well south of the original route for about 50 miles before rejoining the original alignment.

Northwestward view of the railroad bridge over the Truckee River at Wadsworth. This bridge was built in 1907 (see below) and replaced the CP's original 1868 mainline bridge. This bridge was built 5 years after the CP route was re-aligned one mile to the south to support local usage of old CP trackage around Wadsworth, which continued until 1913 when all the old CP alignments were abandoned. The bridge was reused by the F&L in 1912-1914, which used the bridge and one mile of CP (1869) alignments on either side of the bridge.



Westward view of the bridge over the Truckee River at Wadsworth. This bridge was built in 1907 (see below) and replaced the CP's original mainline bridge. The 1907 bridge was reused by the F&L (1914), which starts at the SP (1902) re-alignment, 1.8 mile southeast of this location.





Northward view from the abandoned bridge over the Truckee River at Wadsworth.



Eastward view of the CP/F&L grade from the bridge over the Truckee River at Wadsworth. Note that the grade curves to the right (southeastward) just in front of the big tree in the center distance. That curve is where the F&L alignment diverges from the CP alignment, which continues almost straight through the tree with just a slight curve to the right (not visible in this photo).



Northwestward view of the F&L (1914), 2,400 feet southeast of the bridge over the Truckee River, which is barely visible in the Truckee River's riparian growth just right of center. Some tracks are still present in a road crossing. The CP (1869) alignment is just steps to the right (northeast) of this location, but is completely obliterated.





Southward view of the F&L (1914), same location as previous. The Nevada Cement Company, visible in the distance, still uses the first 1.5 miles of the F&L, from the SP (1902) re-alignment to this point.



Northeastward view of the F&L (1914), 1,000 feet southeast of the previous location. There is a fill grade that runs across the entire photo, at the base of the telephone pole; the fill grade is breached just to the right (southeast) of the pole. I believe this is the CP (1869).



Eastward view of the F&L (1914), 2,000 feet southeast of the previous location, one mile southeast of the bridge, and 0.8 mile from the SP (1902) re-alignment. There is a major fill grade in the center distance and a tailings pile from the cement plant at the far right. The fill grade is not the CP (1869); instead, it is a temporary, one-mile-long connection from the CP (1869) to the SP (1902). It was built in 1902 and abandoned in 1906.





Southeastward view of the F&L (1914), same location as previous.



Northwestward view of the F&L (1914) at the north tip of the wye for its connection to the SP (1902) re-alignment. The cement plant is on the north side of the overpasses for Interstate 80.



Southward view of the F&L (1914), same location as previous at the north tip of the wye for its connection to the SP (1902) re-alignment at Fernley. The SP (1902) re-alignment is barely visible in the distance between the two branches of the wye.



Northwestward view of the SP (1902) re-alignment (now UP) at Fernley, just east of the F&L (1914) wye. The two straight tracks are the SP (1902). The branch in the left foreground leads to sidings south of the mainline. The first switch on the right-hand track leads to two industrial spurs and beyond that is the switch to the east branch of the F&L (1914) wye, which is barely visible, and beyond that is the west branch of the wye, which is even less visible. The 8,000-foot peaks of the Pah Rah Range, another Basin and Range normal fault, still have some snow in late May.



Southeastward view of the SP (1902) re-alignment at Fernley, same location as previous. The two straight tracks are the SP (1902). The track in the far right foreground is the same track that is in the left foreground of the previous photo; this track leads to sidings for the Celite Corporation, a current or recent rail customer. Note the very flat topography of the Lake Lahontan lake bed.



Eastward view of the SP (1902) re-alignment, sidings, and stored rails near the Celite Corporation facility (upper right).