



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. In 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 summit tunnel on June 18, 1868, and thanks to advance work 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 intervening flat valleys of northern Nevada, including this location at Palisade, and then through northwest Utah to meet the UP on May 10, 1869, at Promontory Summit, Utah, henceforth binding the nation.

During 1873-1875, the narrow gauge Eureka & Palisade Railroad was constructed between Palisade (this location) and the mining center of Eureka, Nevada, located 85 miles to the south. From a transfer facility next to the standard gauge CP (1869) at Palisade (this location), the E&P headed due south through one of the many north-south-trending normal-fault valleys in northern Nevada. The route follows Pine Creek, which flows into the Humboldt River at Palisade (this location), southward 58 miles to Garden Pass, where the alignment crosses a gap between the Sulphur Spring and Mountain Boy ranges, and into Diamond Valley, which the line follows the remaining 27 miles to Eureka. For several decades the railroad hauled millions of dollars in gold, silver, and lead, but like virtually every other mining railroad in the west, the line succumbed to the effects of flood, fire, competing road traffic, and dwindling amounts of ore. The rails and rolling stock of the last narrow gauge railroad in Nevada were removed in 1938.

Meanwhile, in 1885, the Southern Pacific leased the CP (1869) and eventually absorbed the line entirely. During the period 1901-1903, the SP re-aligned several stretches of the CP (1869) route, including this location at Palisade. In 1909, the Western Pacific Railroad's Feather River Route was completed between Oakland, California, and Salt Lake City, Utah, via a crossing of the Sierra Nevada at Beckwourth Pass, to compete with the SP's (original Central Pacific [1869]) route over Donner Pass. While significantly longer and more difficult, the WP's crossing of the Pacific Crest at Beckwourth Pass is about 2,000 feet lower than the CP (1869) crossing at Donner Pass (elevation about 7,000 feet) and, once over Beckwourth Pass, the WP, like the CP 40 years earlier, had relatively clear sailing across northern Nevada and into Utah. In central Nevada, both WP (1909) and CP (1869) follow the transportation corridor provided by the west-flowing Humboldt River. In 1959, the CP (1869) was completely absorbed into the SP, in 1982 the WP (1909) was absorbed into the UP, and in 1996 the SP was absorbed into the UP. Today, both lines are UP.

Although the Humboldt River flows almost due west across northern Nevada, in the area of Palisade the river flows south-southwestward and has many bends. Thus, in this south-southwestward, downstream view, the stretch of the Humboldt River in the foreground flows south-southeastward. The narrow gorge in the distance is the Palisades, where the river has cut through a north-south-trending normal-fault mountain range to form a water gap

between the Tuscarora Range to the north (right) and Cortez Range to the south (left). After following a route north of the CP (1869) from Sacramento, California, to the Palisades, the WP (1909) crosses the CP (1869) 2 miles southwest of this location, just around the bend from the steep slope in the distance. Thus, the WP (1909) is on the left (south, with the train crossing a bridge over the Humboldt River) and the CP (1869) is on the right (north). The less brushy area in the immediate foreground at the base of the bluff from which this picture is taken and with a barely visible fence on it is the E&P (1875n).





Southeastward view from the same location as previous. The grade with a fence line on it at the base of the bluff in the foreground is the E&P (1875n). Pine Creek flows into the Humboldt River at the bend but is not really visible from here, but the fertile floodplain of Pine Creek, used today for ranching, extends out of view to the left and is followed by the E&P (1875n) for 58 miles to Garden Pass.





Southwestward view 1,400 feet southeast of the previous location. The rancher uses an old SP boxcar for storage. The WP (1909) bridge over the Humboldt River (the same bridge as in the first photo) is in the right-center distance, the CP (1869) is barely visible to the right of the WP (1909), and both lines enter the Palisades in the right distance. The E&P (1875n) runs across the image behind the boxcar and just on our side of the thicker brush, but the alignment becomes obliterated as it enters the ranch area.





Now we've moved back to a location 300 feet northwest of the first location. The bridge over the Humboldt River on the left is the WP (1909) and the rustier bridge on the right is the present alignment of the CP (1869). Just out of sight on the lower right, each line enters a tunnel beneath the road upon which the viewer is standing. The grade on the closer bank of the river is the E&P (1875n), which crosses both tracks between the bridges and the tunnels. This section of the CP (1869) was realigned during the SP's realignment program of 1901-1903. The original, abandoned section of the CP (1869) is a fill grade that leaves the new (1901-1903) grade just below the top of the photo and runs to the right along the base of the canyon and exits the right edge of the photo just above the rusty bridge (which is on the 1901-1903 realignment, not shown separately on the Southwest Railroad History Map). Thus, the E&P (1875n) had no grade crossings when it was built; the crossing of the E&P (1875n) with the SP line was built by the SP in 1901-1903 and the crossing with the WP (1909) was built by the WP when it came through here in 1908.





Southwestward view 1,400 feet northwest of the previous location. The viewer is on the original CP (1869), which bends to the left with the Humboldt River; note the rock embankment on the left (east) side of the fill grade to prevent erosion of the embankment. Although there is no evidence today on the ground or in satellite imagery, the E&P (1875n) grade was across the river in the left part of the photo and ran toward the viewer on a bridge across the river and crossed the CP (1869) track just about where the viewer is standing.





Northwestward view from the same location as previous, where the E&P (1875n) crossed the CP (1869), looking at what is left of the town of Palisade. Palisade was home to those who worked at the standard-to-narrow-gauge transfer facility that once existed here.





Northeastward view of the abandoned CP (1869) from a location 100 feet east of the previous location. The CP (1869) grade is largely obliterated in this area but I think it is the fill grade on the right side of the low area in the center of the picture. A train is on the 1901-1903 SP realignment, which joins the original 1869 alignment just out of the picture to the left. This is the area of the standard-to-narrow-gauge transfer facility that existed from 1875 to 1938, but all evidence of it has been completely obliterated.





South-southwestward view 700 feet east-northeast of the previous location, at the same location as the locomotives in the previous photo. We are looking straight through the SP tunnel and all the trackage in this view is on the 1901-1903 realignment. The WP (1909) tunnel is to the left. The bridge in the foreground crosses to the northwest side of the Humboldt River, but the WP (1909) stays on the southeast bank.





Northeastward view 2 miles northeast of the previous location. The CP (1869) is on the far bank of the Humboldt River and the WP (1909) is on the near bank. The CP (1869) is on its original alignment in the left part of the picture, but the straight segment just beyond the first curve to the left originally curved farther left to follow the base of the slope; the SP straightened this segment during its 1901-1903 realignment program. Both railroads are now UP.