



In 1880, the standard gauge Virginia & Truckee Railroad built the narrow gauge Carson & Colorado Railroad, which the V&T owners later realized was "either 300 miles too short or 300 years too early" and thus sold to the Southern Pacific Railroad in 1900. Shortly after the sale of the C&C, silver was discovered at Tonopah, Nevada, and the C&C became prosperous for the SP. The break in gauge between the narrow gauge C&C and standard gauge V&T at Mound House caused ore and supplies to back up at Mound House. So in 1905, the SP formed the Nevada & California Railroad to standard gauge the C&C as far as its junction with the Tonopah (1904n), which in the same year (1905) had changed its name to the Tonopah & Goldfield Railroad and standard gauged the line. The combined V&T, N&C (SP), and T&G formed a standard gauge line from the SP (original Central Pacific[1869]) mainline at Reno to the Tonopah mines. The N&C offered to buy the V&T but the price was too high. Instead, the N&C built its own line from Hazen, on the SP (1902) re-alignment of the original CP (1869), southwestward 28 miles to the C&C (1883n) at Fort Churchill (this location); the new Hazen Cutoff thus bypassed the V&T entirely.

In 1860, Indian conflicts led to the establishment of a permanent U.S. Army fort along the Carson River, named Fort Churchill for Sylvester Churchill, Inspector General of the U.S. Army. Construction on the fort was completed in 1861 to provide protection for early settlers and the the Pony Express mail route, and became an important supply depot for the Union Army during the American Civil War. The fort was abandoned in 1869 and the property is now a state park.

This northward view shows the southern end of the 1905 N&C Hazen Cutoff, about a half mile north of the juncture with the 1883 C&C grade, with Fort Churchill ruins standing vigil.



This westward view shows the southern end of the 1905 N&C Hazen Cutoff, about a half mile north of the juncture with the 1883 C&C grade, with the snow-capped Sierra Nevada (Pacific Crest) in the distance. Note leafless (winter) Fremont Cottonwoods on the floodplain of the Carson River.



Southwestward view of the N&C Hazen Cutoff, where it enters the leafless (winter) Fremont Cottonwoods that constitute the riparian woodland of the Carson River. The juncture with the abandoned C&C grade, which the SP had standard-gauged in 1904-1905, is on the other side (south of) the river.



Northeastward view of the N&C Hazen Cutoff about a mile northeast of Fort Churchill. Note the old loading dock and the cut bank of the Carson River.



Southwestward view of the N&C Hazen Cutoff at the same location as above. The ditch is an irrigation diversion of the Carson River for the fields on the cleared floodplain (left).