



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 and northwest Utah, including this location at Wendover on the Utah-Nevada border.

Westward view of the WP (1909); the group of buildings is Wendover. The flat area in the foreground is the western edge of the Great Salt Lake Desert, more famously known in this area as the Bonneville Salt Flats. Until about 15,000 years ago, this area was under Pleistocene Lake Bonneville, of which the Great Salt Lake and Utah Lake are remnants. The salt flats encompass the area of modern high water. Wendover is built on bedrock at the south end of the Silver Island Mountains, which are mostly surrounded by salt flats to form an "island" or at least a "peninsula" within the salt flats. The two tall buildings are casino hotels on the Nevada border. The Toano Range is in the distance. The WP is double tracked for 3,000 feet east of this location and splits into several sidings to form a classification yard on the north side of the tracks. The cars in the left distance are on a spur that extends 1,600 feet due south from the WP mainline, then turns due east for 3,000 feet, then due north for 1,200 feet, where the track ends at an evaporite mineral facility just 400 feet south of the WP.



Southward view of the WP (1909) yard (now Union Pacific) east of Wendover. The cars are on the spur to the evaporite mineral facility. The curved section of the spur, beyond the 5 straight tracks in the foreground, was once the east branch of a full wye (the west branch has been abandoned). The closer cars on the right are on track that heads south and the more distance cars are on track that curves to due east in the far left distance.





Southeastward view of the WP (1909), 300 feet west of the previous location. The same cars are on the spur to the evaporite mineral facility, the southernmost WP track is in the foreground, and the abandoned west branch of a wye is evident between the two.



Now we've backtracked 2,400 feet to look southeastward at the WP (1909) in the foreground and the evaporite mineral facility at the end of the spur; the engine to the left of the building is at the end-of-track of the spur.



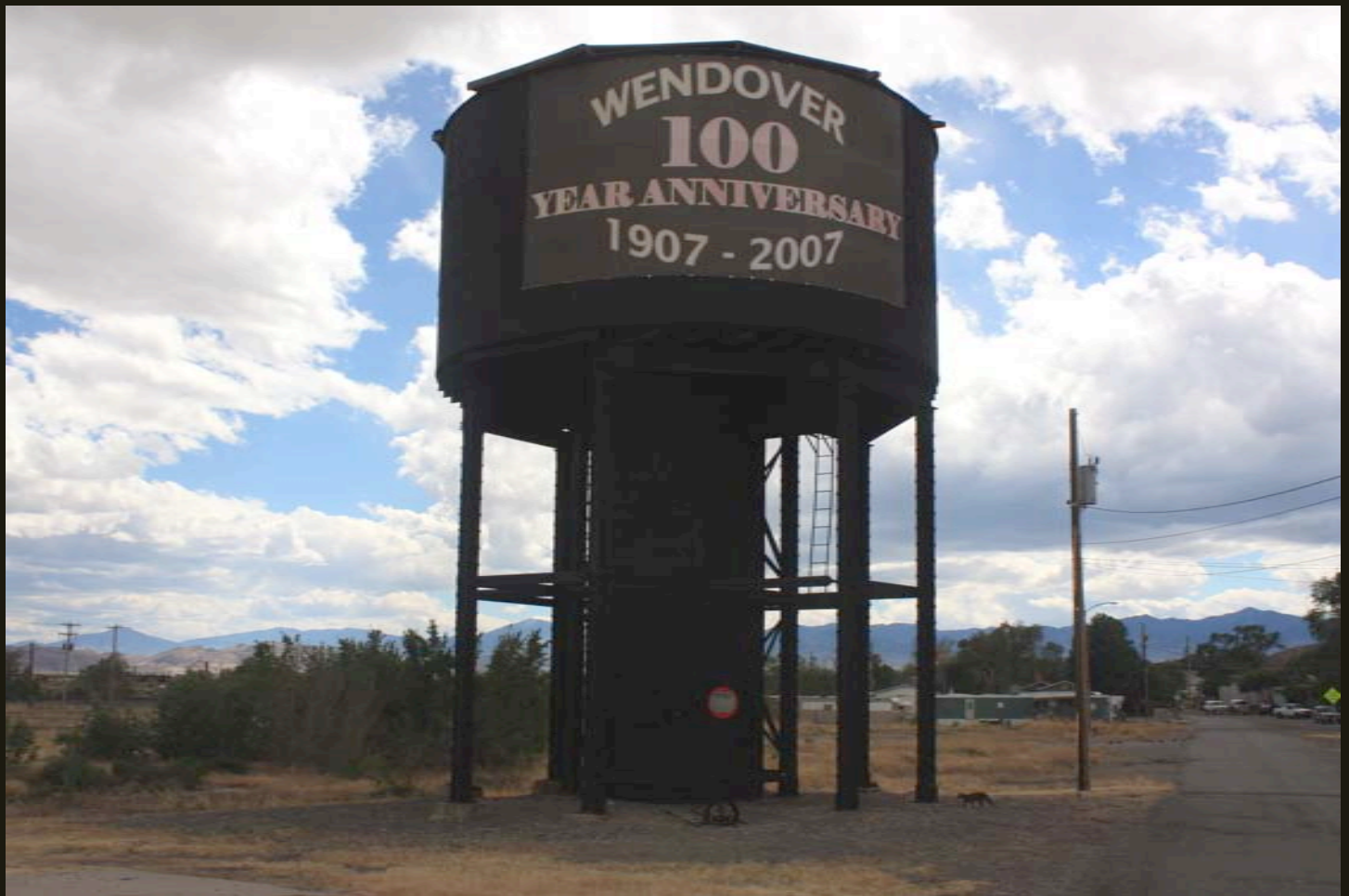


Now we're in Wendover, one mile west of the connection of the WP with the spur to the evaporite mineral facility, looking southwestward at the WP (1909). The double track goes to a single track in the distance. The siding with a concrete loading platform on the far right once extended to a roundhouse and water tank.

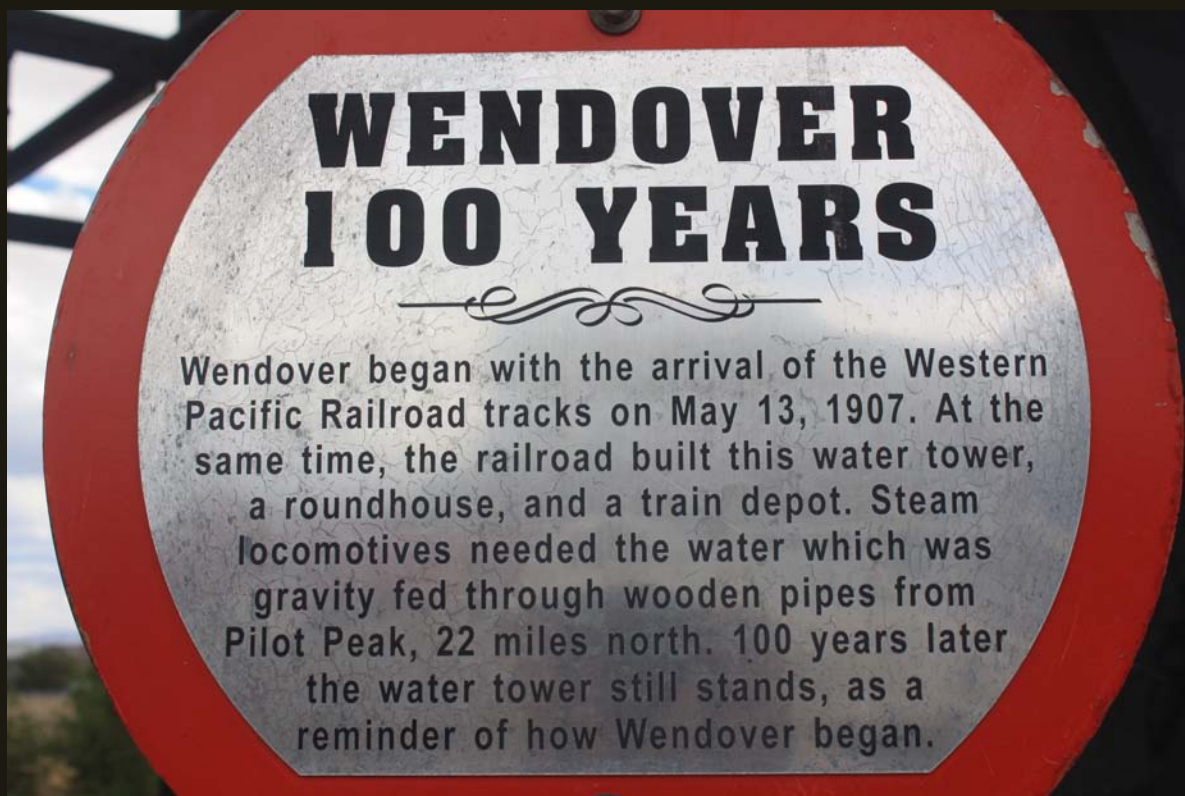


Northward view of the WP (1909) at the same location as previous. The location of the former roundhouse is just out of the image to the left and its foundations are still evident in satellite photos, but I didn't know to look there when I visited. I did manage to find the water tank.





Closer view of the Wendover water tank, which commemorates the WP.





In 1892, the small town of Gold Hill was established in the remote Deep Creek Mountains, 40 miles south of (future) Wendover, to support a brief gold-mining boom. The promise of a second boom surfaced in the 1910's with the development of copper-mining in the Gold Hill area as the advent of electricity created enormous demand for copper; Gold Hill's promoters hoped that its mines would realize the same success as the mines around Ely, Nevada, and Bingham Canyon, Utah. A railroad would be needed to support the copper production; the Deep Creek Railroad was supported by a group of investors that included a Utah senator and the president of the WP, and planning for the new railway began in 1916. Construction began in late 1916 at a connection with the WP at Wendover (this location), and headed straight south for 20 miles through the salt flats and only 30 feet east of the Nevada state line, then turned southeast and reached Gold Hill in 1917. The 45-mile line was inexpensively built with minimal earthwork and two second-hand locomotives to haul ore from the mines. In 1918, the DC became a subsidiary of the WP. The line carried tungsten and arsenic in addition to copper, all of which declined significantly in the early 1920's. The line survived on very light traffic until it was finally abandoned in 1939.

Northeastward view of the WP (1909), visible in the upper left. The DC (1917) connected to the WP in this vacant area, and the gravel road in the foreground may be the DC, but it's hard to tell.





Southward view a quarter mile southwest of the previous location. The viewer is just about on the state line and the fence on the right is 50 feet into Nevada. The paved area in the upper left is part of the Wendover Airport. The DC (1917) alignment is evident in the center distance, heading due south, and the snowcapped peaks of the 12,000+ foot Deep Creek Range -- another of the hundreds of normal-fault mountain ranges in the Basin and Range geologic province -- tower in the left distance.