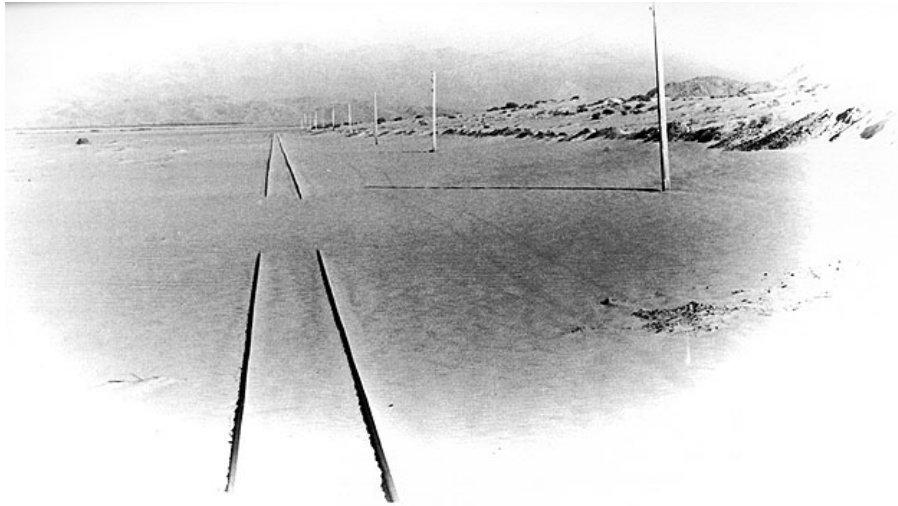


Ghost Rails to Oblivion

by George Turner



Surely as the desert sands will shift, so did the rails of the "Slim Princess." Changes in the national economy coupled with related local conditions quite naturally fathered alterations in the right-of-way. Although the Carson & Colorado operated on a course of continual decline, it never experienced an abandonment during its corporate existence.

After transfer to Southern Pacific ownership, the inevitable plague of all narrow gauge roads set in . . . "Dismantling Fever" . . . the first victim being the 7.3 miles of rail comprising the Cottonwood Branch, south from Hawthorne, Nevada, in 1902. Ironically, this was the only 'expansion' the C&C had ever established.

**The N. G. #9 is scheduled to be hauled dead to
Laws, Calif. on APR 25 1960
account reported donated to the city of Bishop.
The last run of the N. G. will be on APR 29 1960
when all cars will be brought in from
KEELER, CALIF. and Laws, Calif.
and the line abandoned.**

R. E. Cartt
Southern Pacific Co.
R. E. Cartt - Agent
Owens, Calif.

1-905 proved to be a banner year for changes. In order to overcome the freight tieup problems at Mound House due to gauge differences, the rails to Tonopah Junction were widened. Included was the addition of 28 miles of track connecting Churchill to the S.P. main line at Hazen, Nevada. Thus, through rail service on standard gauge track was provided, eliminating the services of the Virginia & Truckee for such service. In turn, the town of Hawthorne was completely by-passed

during the broad gauging and the slim rails were removed. Further south, the Candelaria Branch also fell in the 1905 'wave' of abandonments. Not that such action wasn't warranted, as Candelaria was practically a ghost town by the turn of the century. Both the Hawthorne and Candelaria passenger stations were razed in 1905. The Hawthorne freight depot still continued to do business with wagons to Bodie, and today houses the local Elks Club. To round out the 1905 realignments, three-rail track was laid between Mina and Tonopah Junction. This enabled the dwindling S.P. narrow gauge to provide through service for the newly established Tonopah R.R. with connections at Mina.

After enjoying a thirty year period of operations in a casual manner when the majority of the nation's slim rails had become memories, the "fever" struck again. By now, the remaining 168 miles were an easy target for abandonment. With the country in the depth of a depression, who needed the extra expense of an obsolete division connecting two large sandpiles?

The first section of rail to be abandoned in 1934 was the seldom-used track between Mound House and Churchill. Candelaria proved to be much harder to get rid of . . . this branch was "reabandoned" in 1931 but the rails were not finally taken up until 1934. Intermittent mining activity in the Candelaria mountains had called upon the services of the railroad occasionally, even though it was "officially" abandoned in 1905. In 1936 the track was dismantled from Mound House to Churchill.



The "Grand Old Lady," engine No. 9, rides a free pass on her last trip. Having failed to pass an I.C.C. boiler inspection earlier, No. 9 was deprived of making her last run by her own power.

The rails from Tonopah Junction, Nevada to Benton, California followed suit in abandonment during 1938. Actual removal of the light iron did not take place until the abandonment of the Benton to Laws trackage in 1943.

Had the Southern Pacific delayed the final abandonment and last run of the narrow gauge by just 11 days, the road would have been able to celebrate its eightieth birthday. In startling contrast to all of the previous liesurely abandonments, the ink was hardly dry on the last train orders of April 29, 1960, when the first rails were uprooted. Bulldozers were busy in Keeler that morning clearing a roadway for asphalt pavement. Truck service was replacing the rail service at one end as spike-pulling ceremonies were being formulated at the other, in Laws.

So swift was action taken that the rail was removed across the road at Zurich by the Highway Department before the salvage equipment was assembled. This condition required the contractor to forego the use of the train for normal rail removal between Laws and Zurich.

Today, scattered ties, numerous spikes, water tower foundations and tie plates can still be found along the right of way south from Mina. The Mt. Montgomery tunnel is still accessible and can be reached by automobile. Stone linings of the engine house pit and turntable are in evidence at Candelaria. A mixed consist coupled behind engine #9 deteriorates at the Laws station under the guise of a County Park. This is little enough to mark the four score years of gentle achievement and casual accomplishment of one of America's true Bonanza Railroads . . . the setting sun will never rise again to the sound of steam blowing through the desert sands in the wake of the Slim Princess.



Shown is a portion of the ties removed as a result of the abandonment of the Tonopah function to Benton section during 1943.

Text excerpt from "*Slim Rails Through the Sand*"
by George Turner

Picture credits: Ghost rails – George Turner
Hauled dead ticked – George Turner
No. 9 in tow – George Turner
Railroad tie removal – Dick Datin Collection