

## Feather River Canyon

The Feather River Route is divided into the following subdivisions:

... Sacramento Subdivision from [El Pinal (Stockton) and] Binney Junction to Oroville

... Canyon Subdivision from Oroville to Keddie [and Portola]

The whole line is single-track, CTC, with searchlight-style signals all the way. The speed limit is 70 mph from Binney Junction to Oroville, 45 mph thence to Poe, and 25 mph all the way through the canyon. North of Binney Junction (MP 180.2), and all the way to Oroville, the ex-WP line continues to cross the lush agricultural bottomland of the Sacramento River valley. Heading just slightly east of north, the line passes through Tambo (MP 185.6) and the detectors near the same location. There is a 6,249 ft. siding at Craig (MP 192.4-193.6). After passing through Palermo (MP 199.5), the line shifts slightly further west as it enters Oroville. There is a 5,560 ft. siding adjacent to Oroville Yard (which is on the east side of the main line), from MP 202.6 to 203.7. The Sacramento Subdivision ends and the Canyon Subdivision begins at Mitchell Avenue (MP 204.5), where there is a 3,580 ft. siding. The former Oroville depot, now a restaurant, is on the west side of the line at MP 206.1. There is a road bridge overhead immediately north of the depot, followed by a second one. There are intermediate signals on the east side of the line, with the Feather River alongside to the west, south of a low dam on the river.

North (or perhaps east) of Oroville, the terrain changes as the line climbs into the yellow-grass covered Sierra Nevada foothills. Three forks of the Feather River drain a large section of the west slope of the Sierra Nevada, coming together near Oroville and joining the Sacramento River at Marysville. The original route of the Western Pacific utilized segments of the valleys of two of these forks in its climb from Oroville to the summit at Beckwourth Pass. The famous Feather River Canyon is on the Middle Fork (and later on tributary Spanish Creek), while the area from Spring Garden to Clio is on the South Fork. With the 1957 line relocation that moved the track out of the region to be flooded by the lake behind Oroville dam, the line now intersects the North Fork, as well.

At Quartz, north of Oroville, where the line used to turn east to enter the valley of the Middle Fork of the Feather River, it now turns a clockwise semi-circle across the combined rivers on a through girder bridge, passes and snakes its way generally north, curving back and forth to follow the contours of the slope up the west face of the foothills, surrounded by typical California yellow grass and widely-spaced oak trees, passing under a road bridge, and passing intermediate signals, a detector at MP 212.7, a 6,379 ft. siding at Kramm (MP 213.2-214.5), curving clockwise with extra track on each side for part of the siding, then curving back the other way after the siding ends. The line is replete with fills and cuts to keep the grade moderate. There are two more sets of intermediate signals, a small clockwise horseshoe on the hillside at MP 217.7, and a 6,478 ft. siding at Elsey (MP 219.3-220.7), with a road bridging overhead, and an extra track on each side.

This section of line includes two sets of intermediate signals, the second set just before the road bridge, a clockwise horseshoe curve around a bluff and through 2,410 ft. Tunnel 4 (MP 224.7), passing, crossing under state highway 70 twice within a quarter mile of highway, but almost two miles by the railroad line, reaching the 6,613 ft. siding at James (MP 225.3-226.7) before reaching the second highway bridge, with an extra track on the west side of the line at the siding. Here, the line has attained sufficient altitude to clear the level of the water behind the dam, and crosses a bridge over an arm of Lake Oroville corresponding to the North Fork. Passing through several tunnels (2,922 ft. #5 (MP 227.3), intermediate signals, 2,583 ft. #6 (MP 228.1), 4,406 ft. #7 (MP 229.5)), intermediate signals at Dark Canyon (MP 230.4), and 8,856 ft. tunnel 8 (MP 230.4)), the line emerges onto the lower deck of the through truss bridge, with highway 70 on the upper deck, at Intake (MP 232.1), across the Middle Fork, where the line rejoins the original route on a ledge above the south (east) side of the river, down in the Feather River Canyon, with a set of

intermediate signals just east of the bridge. The change in landscape across the last tunnel is breathtaking. To the west, the line is in yellow-grass foothills; to the east, it is in a deep canyon with mostly deciduous trees, but some pines and firs intermingled, covering the steep slopes.

There is a 6,859 ft. siding at Poe (MP 234.2-235.6), deep in the canyon. From Jarbo (MP 236.1), where there are intermediate signals, three short tunnels follow in succession (552 ft. #9 (MP 236.3), a west-facing intermediate signal, 250 ft. #10 (MP 237.0), an east-facing intermediate signal, a short through truss bridge on a gap in the ledge, 224 ft. #11 (MP 237.3), and more intermediate signals). After several miles on the south side, all the way from Intake, the line crosses to the north side at Pulga on a through truss bridge, at the same location that highway 70 enters the canyon and crosses the river in the other direction on a steel arch bridge high above the line and river. There is also a 6,091 ft. siding at Pulga (MP 238.9-240.1), with an extra track on the east/south side. For several more miles, dams, reservoirs, and hydroelectric power stations occupy the river, now not very far below the line, with the road on one side and the railroad on the other. There is a set of intermediate signals, a slide fence, more intermediate signals and a detector at Cresta (MP 243.5), more slide fencing on the west side of the line in two places, 196 ft. tunnel 13 (MP 245.0), intermediate signals, Grizzly (MP 246.1), 256 ft. tunnel 14 (MP 246.3) and a 3,683 ft. siding at Merlin (MP 247.2-248.0).

North of Rock Creek (MP249.1), the railroad crosses a side canyon on a curved deck girder bridge, following the main canyon's turn to the east as it does so, passes intermediate signals and through 3,118 ft. tunnel 15 (MP 250.1) and then, some way north of the intermediate signals at Storrie (MP 250.9), the railroad (on a big through truss bridge) and highway again trade sides of the river, and the railroad, now heading northeast, remains on the south side for the rest of the way to the famous bridged wye at Keddie. By now, the railroad is again almost at river level, after having been quite a bit higher further down the canyon. The river runs freely here, being between two dammed stretches of the canyon. There is a spur (or short siding) at Tobin (MP 253.1), just east of the bridge, and a 6,670 ft. siding at Camp Rodgers (MP 254.9-256.3) with a spur on the north/west side. A group of closely located tunnels along here is known as the 'Honeymoon Tunnels' (603 ft. #16 (MP 257.4), intermediate signals, 325 ft. #17 (MP 257.9), a slide fence on the east side of the line, 162 ft. #18 (MP 258.1), more slide fencing, 172 ft. #19 (MP 258.2), 294 ft. #20 (MP 258.3), and 405 ft. #21 (MP 258.9)). There is more slide fencing, a detector at MP 259.2, followed by the west-facing signals for Belden, 306 ft. tunnel 22 (MP 259.6), and a 4,573 ft. siding at Belden (MP 259.8-260.6), with a shed building on the west side of the line, where the line is heading almost due east, high above the river again.

At the intermediate signals at Howells, MP 262.0, another fork of the Feather River departs up a side canyon to the north. The line passes through 1,258 ft. tunnel 23 (MP 262.9), 616 ft. tunnel 24 (MP 263.9), Rich Bar (MP 264.5), 233 ft. tunnel 25 (MP 265.2), intermediate signals, more slide fencing, and a 9,810 ft. siding at Virgilia (MP 269.6-271.5), where there is a spur on the north/west side and a maintenance depot on the south/east side of the line. Next is 446 ft. tunnel 26 (MP 271.6), Gray's Flat (MP 272.6), where there is a road crossing, a detector at MP 273.5, a road crossing and short siding at Twain (MP 273.9), which has signals at the west end only, more intermediate signals, and a 3,857 ft. siding at Paxton (MP 276.9-277.7), high above the river again. Here, at the confluence of Spanish Creek and Indian Creek to form the Middle Fork, a highway is seen heading north along Indian Creek, not far above the river, and then a railroad line is seen high on the far wall of the canyon above highway 70 which is down near the river. This is the former-WP "highline", now the BNSF Inside Gateway, that heads north to Bieber (where the WP met the GN) and Klamath Falls. The main line now turns southeast, following Spanish Creek, passing intermediate signals, through 364 ft. tunnel 27 (MP 278.4), crossing a high trestle bridge along the canyon wall, passing through 609 ft. tunnel 28 (MP 279.0), 588 ft. tunnel 29 (MP 279.2), crossing another bridge along the canyon wall, passing intermediate signals, 538 ft. tunnel 30 (MP 279.6), intermediate signals, and 687 ft. tunnel 31 (MP 280.1).

At the east end of what seems like just another tunnel (595 ft. #32, MP 280.4), the line emerges onto Keddie Wye (MP 280.5), which comprises two high girder bridges over Spanish Creek, one curving south and one curving north, and a third line through a tunnel in the far hillside. The north line is the BNSF highline, and the south (east) line is the ex-WP mainline to Portola and Beckwourth Pass. Just east of the wye is the railroad maintenance base and (former?) crew base at Keddie (MP 280.7). There are yard tracks on the north side of the main line across from that depot building. The connection from the line east to the line north goes through the yard.