

Oregon and California Railroad

By Unknown

The Oregon and California Railroad (O&C) was the first railroad to connect Oregon with California. Construction of the line began in Portland during the spring of 1868. Under the leadership of transportation tycoon Ben Holladay, railroad workers, many of them Chinese, extended tracks to Oregon City in 1869, to Salem in 1870, and to Roseburg in 1872. After a long hiatus due to a lack of funds, the O&C line was finally extended to the California border in December 1887, by which time the railroad had been taken over by the California-based Southern Pacific Company.

As an incentive to foster development of the region, the state and federal governments granted the O&C a total of 3.7 million acres of land, scattered in a checkerboard pattern along a sixty-mile-wide strip of land that extended from Portland to the California border (dark squares on map). The grant required that the company sell the land to settlers for no more than \$2.50 an acre.

In 1903, the O&C announced that it had no plans to sell any more of their land, putting them in violation of the terms of the grant. The counties appealed to the federal government, and in 1916, the U.S. Congress reclaimed 2.4 million acres of unsold O&C lands.

Today, the Bureau of Land Management under the U.S. Interior Department manages most of the former O&C land. The checkerboard pattern of these lands makes management especially challenging since federal regulations and management plans do not apply to the private lands that are scattered among the former O&C holdings.

Although this map, probably drawn in the early 1870s, shows the proposed southern extension going through the Klamath Basin, when the line was extended to the border in the 1880s it went through Ashland before crossing into California.

Further Reading: Gano, John Tilson. "The History of the Oregon and California Railroad." *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 25, 1924: 236-83, 330-52.

Richardson, Elmo. *BLM's Billion-Dollar Checkerboard: Managing the O&C Lands*. Santa Cruz, Calif., 1980.

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