

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received **JL 20 1983**  
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic ~~Site of the Completion of the~~ Northern Pacific Railroad, <sup>Completion Site</sup> 1883  
and/or common Milwaukee Road right-of-Way (abandoned)

**2. Location**

street & number Off I 90 n/a not for publication  
city, town Gold Creek  vicinity of  
state Montana code 030 county Powell code 077

**3. Classification**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	n/a	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name L. B. Foster Co. (R.A. Schaefer, V.P., Rail Products) 412-262-2900  
street & number P.O. Box 2806  
city, town Pittsburg n/a vicinity of state Pennsylvania

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Office of the Clerk and Recorder, Powell County  
street & number Courthouse, Missouri Avenue  
city, town Deer Lodge state Montana 59722

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title none has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no  
date  federal  state  county  local  
depository for survey records  
city, town state

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

**Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance** The 2.5 acre site where the eastward and westward construction crews of the Northern Pacific met on August 22, 1883, and thus marked the completion of this transcontinental line is located fifty-nine miles west of Helena, Montana on what is now the Burlington Northern Railroad's main line. It is on the south bank of the Clark Fork River at its confluence with Independence Creek (site of the first gold discovery in Montana), in a small, grassy valley. The valley is dotted with deciduous trees and scattered evergreens. The site on the south side of the river remains relatively unchanged, except for the presence of the roadbed of the former Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway Pacific Coast Extension, which runs parallel to the earlier Northern Pacific (now Burlington Northern) tracks. The last spike site is marked with a wooden sign, approximately 12' tall and visible from Interstate 90. The sign reads: "Last Spike of the Northern Pacific Railroad Driven Here September 8, 1883". It was erected by the Northern Pacific Railway Company a number of years ago.

The Clark Fork river parallels the rails at this site, at a distance of approximately 150 feet to the east. From the railroad bridge at Independence Creek, one has a full view of the site of the completion of the Northern Pacific Railroad to the West.

Access to the site is presently accomplished only by foot, approximately 3/4 mile south-eastward along the rails from the bridge over the Clark Fork river. Access to this bridge is gained by taking the Interstate 90 Phosphate exit ramp from either southbound or northbound lanes.

The 2.5 acre site includes the portion of the rail line where the final spike for the completion of the Northern Pacific Railroad transcontinental route was driven as well as the land area upon which the pavilions were constructed for the September 8, 1883 celebration. The rural setting contributes to the significance of this site; no modern intrusions exist within the 2.5 acre parcel which would detract from the visual integrity of the property. The surrounding terrain and general vegetative cover remains much as it was at the time of the "Last Spike" ceremonies in 1883. Portions of the Clark Fork river and Independence Creek run through the nominated land area. Because the courses of these waterways are subject to seasonal variation and perennial alteration, they are not suitable natural landmarks to use as verbal boundary reference points. The nominated 2.5 acre square parcel is centered upon the sign mentioned above which marks the exact location of the driving of the last spike.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1883                      **Builder/Architect** n/a

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**                      This property is significant because it includes the site of the completion on August, 22, 1883, of the Northern Pacific Railroad, first of the northern transcontinental railroads. A major celebration also occurred at this site on September 8, 1883, commemorating the completion with a ceremonial driving of the "Last Spike". In the Nineteenth Century, railroads were lifelines for isolated communities, and the presence of a rail line often assured the survival of a town. The Northern Pacific permitted settlement and development of the states and territories through which it ran. Within seven years of the line's completion, Montana, North Dakota, Idaho, and Washington all became states. Without the railroad that process would have been considerably delayed.

The completion of the Northern Pacific was viewed as an event of international significance, and a lavish celebration was planned at Gold Creek, (now named Independence Creek) where the tracks from the East and from the West were joined ceremoniously on September 8, 1883. Arriving in four special trains were three hundred officials and dignitaries from England, Germany, and the United States. The crowd was addressed by railroad president Henry Villard and other dignitaries. After the oratory, 300 men quickly laid the rail and drove the spikes on the last thousand feet of track. (this 1000 feet of track actually was laid on August 22nd, but was taken up and relaid on September 8, 1883 to dramatize the completion celebration.) The ceremonial "last spike"--not gold--was driven by Henry Villard, President U.S. Grant, and former railroad official H. C. Davis. It was the same spike used thirteen years earlier to mark the beginning of construction of this northern line to the Pacific Ocean, near Carlton, Minnesota.

Joining the rails at Gold Creek marked the first through route from Lake Superior to the Pacific Coast. It was the fulfillment of the age-old dream of a "Northwest Passage" to the Orient. Large quantities of goods could now move rapidly from coast to coast with relative ease.

The Northern Pacific is now gone, absorbed in the giant, Burlington Northern, Inc. There is little left to remind us of its historical significance. Depots, once common, are nearly all gone; from the Nineteenth Century there is very little remaining. This site is the point at which the rails joined and represents perhaps one of the most significant events in Montana's history.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Renz, L.T., The History of the Northern Pacific, Fairfield, WA: Ye Galleon Press, 1980  
The Construction of the Northern Pacific Mainline, Walla Walla, WA 1973

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreege of nominated property 2.5 acres

Quadrangle name Garrison, MT

Quadrangle scale 1:62500

### UTM References

A 

1	2	3	5	7	4	2	5	5	1	5	6	2	7	5
Zone			Easting					Northing						

B 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

C 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

D 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

E 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

F 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

G 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

H 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

**Verbal boundary description and justification** The nominated property includes the portion of the railroad track where the last spike was driven to complete the Northern Pacific Railroad's transcontinental line in 1883 and the land area at the confluence of Independence Creek and the Clark Fork river where the pavilions were constructed for the September 8, 1883 com-

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	n/a	code	county	code

state	code	county	code

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Ed Nolan/historian and Chas. V. Waldron, Coordinator, Last Spike Centennial Comm.

organization Powell County Museum and Arts Foundation  
300 Main Street

date July 5, 1983

street & number P.O. Box 149

telephone 406-846-1004

city or town Deer Lodge,

state Montana 59722

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Marcella Sheffer

title Deputy SHPO

date 7-6-83

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Linda McClelland  
Keeper of the National Register

date 8/19/83

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior  
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Continuation sheet Verbal Boundary

Item number 10

Page 1

pletion celebration. This parcel of land is described as: SW $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 9,  
T9N, R10W.