



In the late 1870's and first years of the 1880's, the Southern Pacific focused its resources on completing its transcontinental route through southern Arizona and New Mexico to El Paso and beyond. The SP was in no rush to build east from Mojave, California, until 1880, when the St. Louis & San Francisco Railway came to an agreement with the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad to jointly control the Atlantic & Pacific Railroad. The A&P would build west from the AT&SF mainline at Isleta, New Mexico, to meet the SP at Needles, California (this location). A&P construction reached Kingman, Arizona, in 1882, which prompted the SP to begin building its branch from Mojave to Needles, where it met the A&P on August 9, 1883, at this location in Needles. The AT&SF-controlled A&P leased the SP's new Needles Branch, and in 1885 the AT&SF-owned California Southern Railroad completed its line from San Diego over Cajon Pass to the AT&SF/A&P-leased SP Needles Branch at Barstow, giving the AT&SF access to the southern California coast and completing the northern of the two "Southern Pacific" transcontinental routes identified by the 1855 "Pacific Railroad" surveys. The first A&P bridge across the Colorado River was built at Needles (this location) in 1883, but was washed away. In 1890, the AT&SF/A&P rerouted the line about 10 miles south to Topock and built the Red Rock Cantilever Bridge, which was replaced in 1945.

A BNSF container train approaches the Needles yard, with numerous sidings visible under the parked tank cars in this northward view. There is a wye at the farthest siding, which is on or near the original 1883 A&P alignment across the Colorado River.





Northwestward view east of the Needles sidings (previous photo). Note the wye with the maintenance vehicles. This wye is at or very near the location of the original 1883 A&P alignment across the Colorado River.





Eastward view of the Needles wye, same location as previous. This wye is at or very near the location of the original 1883 A&P alignment across the Colorado River, which is a quarter mile to the east (just beyond the trees in upper right).





Eastward view of the Needles wye, a few steps east of previous location. Note the curve to the left; there is no obvious reason for this curve, but a 1904 topographic map shows a single switch at Needles going to a curved track on the same alignment and may be on the original 1883 A&P alignment.







End of track at the east end of the Needles wye.



Needles station at the northwest end of the Needles yard. The wye is in the left distance, but not really visible.







Vintage AT&SF rolling stock near the Needles station and yard.



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In 1890, the AT&SF rerouted its A&P main line about 10 miles south of Needles to this location at Topock and built the Red Rock Cantilever Bridge, which was replaced with the current bridge in 1945. In addition to the two railroad bridges, the narrow, hard rock gorge where the river crosses the Chemehuevi Mountains was the site of the 1919 Old Trails Arch Bridge for U.S. Route 66, which today supports a pipeline, and Interstate 40.

In this westward view on the California side of the river, the A&P (now BNSF) alignment curves from southward in the distance to eastward (toward viewer) in the foreground, as it approaches the Colorado River bridge built in 1945. Note the flat, soft sediments traversed by the railroad grade. These are lake sediments deposited when the Chemehuevi Mountains blocked the flow of the Colorado River about 2 million years ago. The river finally broke through, creating a water gap for the Colorado River and a narrow gorge for the railroad and other transportation routes to cross. The lake sediments are eroded by the Colorado River and its tributaries. Note the container train in the right distance, one of many on this busiest of transcontinental routes.





Same view as previous, after the container train has progressed a bit.





Southwestward view of the 1945 AT&SF bridge across the Colorado River, as seen from a tumbleweed-covered field in Arizona on the Colorado River floodplain; the Chemehuevi Mountains are on the California side. When this bridge replaced the 1890 Red Rock Cantilever Bridge in 1945, U.S. Highway 66 was rerouted onto the Red Rock Cantilever Bridge; the railroad-turned-automobile Red Rock Bridge was dismantled in 1978 and I could find no trace of it.





Westward view of the 1945 AT&SF bridge over the Colorado river at Topock.





Another view of the 1945 AT&SF bridge over the Colorado River at Topock, looking westward from Arizona.



Eastward view of from the same location as previous. This is a new grade built in 1890 and slightly re-aligned in 1945 to access the new bridges at those times.