



The Southern Pacific built its Santa Barbara Branch in 1887, building westward from its 1876 mainline at Saugus along the Santa Clara River and across its rich agricultural floodplains, including this location at Piru, to the coast at Ventura, then up the coast to Santa Barbara. In 1901, the SP completed the most difficult part of its coastal route and the SP Santa Barbara Branch (1887) immediately became the southern part of the SP's new coastal mainline. However, the importance of this line was short-lived, ending in 1904 when it was bypassed by a parallel route farther south, the SP (1904). In 1904, the coastal part of the SP Santa Barbara Branch (1887), from Ventura northward to Santa Barbara, became part of the coastal mainline, but the segment east of Ventura along the Santa Clara River was used only for local traffic. The SP continued to haul citrus from the Santa Clara Valley into the 1950's. In 1987, the segment from Piru east to Saugus (including this location just east of Piru) was abandoned due to storm damage and the remaining tracks from Piru west to the junction with the SP (1904) near Ventura became the SP Santa Paula Branch. In 1989, the SP's Santa Paula Branch was purchased by the Ventura County Transportation Commission. In 1991, Short Line Enterprises, a company that provided railcars for use in movie productions, came to Fillmore (located 7 miles west of Piru) to use the rail line for filming and tourist excursions under the name Fillmore and Western Railway. Today, the F&W operates on track owned by the Ventura County Transportation Commission between Santa Paula (15 miles west of Piru) and Piru, but in recent years has operated only on the 8 miles of track between Santa Paula and Fillmore. The majority of F&W rolling stock was acquired from four major studios: 20th Century Fox, Paramount, Warner Bros, and MGM.

Southeastward view of the SP Santa Barbara Branch (1887) 1,500 feet east of the current (2019) end of track in Piru.



Northwestward view of the SP Santa Barbara Branch (1887), same location as previous, showing the bridge over Piru Creek. The town and end of track are on the other side of the bridge.



Westward view of the overgrown SP Santa Barbara Branch (1887) bridge over Piru Creek.



Northwestward view of the SP Santa Barbara Branch (1887) bridge over Piru Creek.



Northward view of the SP Santa Barbara Branch (1887) Piru Depot, which is the eastern terminus of the F&W. The depot, built around 2006, is a replica of the SP's station in Piru. Apparently, there have been no F&W trains to Piru in many years. The track extends another 900 feet and the alignment continues through a curve of more than 90 degrees, turning from due north (here) to southeastward (previous photos). I could find no place in or near Piru to turn a train (no wye or turntable), so F&W (or other) trains running from Fillmore (and points west) to Piru must run in reverse either going to or coming from Piru.

