



In 1915-1916, the Tucson, Cornelia & Gila Bend Railroad built a 44 mile branch line off of the SP Sunset Route (1881) at Gila Bend, Arizona (this location), to the copper mining center of Ajo. The TC&GB's planned extension from Ajo to Tucson was never built. The line saw considerable business, both freight and passenger, until the 1980's when copper production at the New Cornelia mine declined and the railroad ceased being profitable. The TC&GB closed in 1985, bringing to an end over 70 years of service. The line was re-opened temporarily in 1995-1998 so the smelter in Ajo could be dismantled and removed; the tracks have remained dormant ever since.

Our exploration of Gila Bend begins with this westward view of the double-tracked SP Sunset Route (1881), now Union Pacific, at the west end of the SP Gila Bend yard. The switch at the far right connects the mainline to the two remaining sidings in the SP yard, which is on the north side of the mainline. The TC&GB (1916) yard and junction are south of the SP line (out of view to the left).





Eastward view of the SP yard at Gila Bend; the tracks for the SP (1881) mainline and sidings are visible to the right, and the sidings and junction for the TC&GB (1916) lie beyond (south of) the SP. The tracks for the SP yard, which once ran near the water tower and loading facilities, have been removed. The old water tower will serve as a reference point in the following photos.



Northward view of ties are still visible in the SP yard, in front of the water tower, the base of which is in the center distance.





Westward view of the SP yard, the double track mainline is in the foreground and the two remaining tracks in the yard are between mainline and the water tower.





Westward view of the SP yard, the double track mainline is to the left and the two remaining tracks in the yard are to the right. The TC&GB (1916) yard is in the extreme left distance, a car stored on the TC&GB tracks is barely visible.





Eastward view at the same location as the previous photo, the double track mainline is to the far right and the ends of the two remaining tracks in the SP yard are in the foreground.

In the next photos we will take a few steps to the right and check out the junction with the TC&GB (1916).





Northeastward view of the junction between the SP (1881), which runs across the entire image in the distance, and the TC&GB (1916) in the foreground. This is the TC&GB's only connection to other roads and is clearly not usable – the TC&GB is cut off from the outside world at this location.





Eastward view at same location as previous. The TC&GB is in the foreground, with some rails removed, the SP (1881) double track mainline is to the right, and the two SP sidings and water tower are at the far right distance.





Eastward view of the junction of the SP (1881) and the TC&GB (1916) at the first split of the track entering the TC&GB yard.





Westward view of the first split of the track entering the TC&GB yard.





Eastward view of more switches that split the track into the sidings of the TC&GB yard at Gila Bend.





Westward view of the TC&GB yard. Note the stored cars in the left distance.





Northward view of the TC&GB yard. Note the wooden loading dock, the SP mainline, and the water tower in the distance.





Eastward view of the TC&GB yard, with stored cars on a siding.





Eastward view of the converging tracks at the west end of the TC&GB yard, same stored cars as before.





Eastward view of the converging tracks at the west end of the TC&GB yard, same stored cars and water tower as before. Note that the tracks are paved over.





Westward view of the converging tracks at the west end of the TC&GB yard, same location as previous. In the distance, the TC&GB (1916) converges to the single track that curves southward to Ajo. Because the TC&GB-SP junction is a single switch, shown here (rather than a full wye), and a turning wye was built 2,000 feet down the line.





Northeastward view, 2,000 feet southwest of previous location. Note the Gila Bend water tower in the distance for reference. The track to the right is the TC&GB (1916) mainline and the curved track to the left is the northern branch of a turning wye.





Southeastward view of the two branches of the turning wye near the tip of the wye.





Northeastward view of the switch at the tip of the turning wye; note the same water tower in the distance.





Southwestward view of the end of the turning wye, which is much longer than it would need to be to turn an engine and tender. The length of the wye and the berm to the right of the track suggest that the wye was used for loading.





Northeastward view of the end of the turning wye, same location as previous. Note the same water tower in the distance.





Northwestward view of the end of the turning wye, same location as previous. Note the container train on the SP (now UP) mainline in the distance.





Northeastward view of the TC&GB (1916) mainline in the foreground and the southern branch of the turning wye curving to the left.





Southwestward view of the southern branch of the turning wye (coming in from the right) and TC&GB (1916) mainline as it heads under Interstate 8 and on to Ajo.