



In 1913, the American Trona Company incorporated the Trona Railway to connect its mining operations at Trona, California, to the SP's recently complete Jawbone Branch. The line was completed in 1914 and offered passenger service on a flat car with plank seats; later a steel coach was provided until passenger service was discontinued in 1937. The railroad has had various owners including Searles Valley Minerals (present), IMC Global, North American Chemical, and Kerr-McGee Chemical. The line is active and used to service the U.S. Navy China Lake Facility and mineral production at Trona at the end of the line.

This location on the Trona Railway is 13 miles east of Searles Junction, where the railway joins the SP Jawbone Branch, and 17 miles from the end of track at Trona. There is a siding and a spur to some small structures; I have no idea what the structures are, but they could be military as this is near the U.S. Navy China Lake Facility.



Closer view of the mystery structures at the ends of two spurs. Note the pinnacles in the distance. These pinnacles are present from here to Trona.



Southward view of the Trona Railway 18 miles from Searles Junction and 12 miles from the end of track at Trona. A small cut carries the grade over a low bedrock hill.



Northward view of the Trona Railway at same location as previous. Searles Lake (dry) is in the distance and is the source of minerals produced at Trona, which is too far to make out from this distance. The pinnacles to right are the famous Trona Pinnacles. The pinnacles consist of more than 500 tufa spires, some as high as 140 feet, rising from the bed of the now-dry Searles Lake. During the Pleistocene ice ages, the area was wetter and Searles Lake was part of a system of interconnected lakes that stretched from Mono Lake to Death Valley. Calcium-rich groundwater discharged into the alkaline lake water of Searles Lake to deposit tufa formations when this scene was underwater 10,000 to 100,000 years ago. Similar modern formations can be found today at Mono Lake to the north. The pinnacles occur in three groups that formed at three different times. Over thirty film projects a year are shot among the tufa pinnacles.



Just north of previous location, showing Trona Railway and Trona Pinnacles.



Southward view of Trona Railway and Pinnacles, 10 miles south of the end of track at Trona.



Eight miles south of the end of track at Trona, hopper cars are stored on a siding, with the Trona Pinnacles beyond to the southeast.



Northward view of hopper cars in previous photo, 8 miles south of the end of track at Trona. The buildings in the distance are the first of several mineral processing plants along the railway on the west shore of Searles Lake.





Same hoppers as above, showing the end of the siding and the main line to the left.



Northward view of the Trona Railway at Westend, the southernmost processing plant, 5 miles south of the end of track at Trona.



A wet part of Searles Lake with hoppers stored along the Trona Railway, 3 miles south of the end of track at Trona. The water is salt-saturated and salt covers the rocks other objects in the lake.



A little closer to shore near same location as previous. The red stuff is salt-tolerant bacteria. Searles Lake is one of hundreds of lakes that occupy the enclosed basins of the Great Basin.



A minerals processing plant along the Trona Railway in Trona.



A caboose on display in Trona.





The end of track of the TR is a big loop to turn around trains for the trip back to the start-of-track at Mojave. The switch just to the right of the end of the train splits the track into the two branches of the loop.



The big loop at the end of the TR.