The town of Williams has a complex railroad history to untangle, so we'll explore Williams from east to west and chronologically, starting here at West Williams Junction (which is 3 miles east of downtown Williams). In 1880, the St. Louis & San Francisco Railway joined the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad to form the Atlantic & Pacific Railroad to build west from the AT&SF mainline at Isleta, New Mexico, to meet the Southern Pacific at Needles, California. The A&P reached Flagstaff, Arizona, in August 1882 and then built through Williams (this location) to Needles, where the tracks arrived in August 1883. The A&P (1883), together with the SP Needles Branch (1883), completed the northern of the two Southern Pacific transcontinental routes identified in the 1855 Pacific Railroad surveys (see tab Southwest Railroad Framework) and provided the AT&SF access to California.

In 1895, the AT&SF-controlled Santa Fe, Prescott & Phoenix Railroad was completed from a junction with the A&P (1883) located 20 miles west of Williams at Ash Fork, south to Phoenix via the then-territorial capital of Prescott.

In 1901, the AT&SF's Grand Canyon Railway was completed from a junction with the A&P (1883) at Williams, 3 miles west of this location, northward to the South Rim of the Grand Canyon.

In 1960, the AT&SF completed a major realignment to avoid the steep Johnson Canyon between Williams and Ash Fork. This realignment is what makes things complicated; the realignment entailed abandonment of 16 miles of the A&P (1883) west of Ash Fork to the west end of the AT&SF (1960) realignment (where the west end of the 1960 realignment rejoins the original A&P [1883] alignment), movement of the junction point of the mainline with the SFP&P (1895) 20 miles east to West Williams Junction (this location), construction of an overpass where the AT&SF (1960) crosses the GC (1901) one mile north of Williams, and abandonment of 4,000 feet of the A&P (1883) at West Williams Junction (this location).

Southeastward view of the AT&SF (1960) at the east end of West Williams Junction. I don't know why this is called West Williams Junction since it is 3 miles east of Williams. The track in the foreground is a siding; 800 feet behind (west of) the viewer this siding connects to the next track to the right, which is a 3,000-foot siding that connects to the mainline at both ends. The track to its right and higher up is the mainline, which is a double track (but only one track is visible in this view). For reference, note the fenced enclosure and tower at the top of the photo just left of center. This tower is about where the 1960 realignment leaves the original A&P (1883) alignment.

Westward view of the AT&SF (1960) same location as previous. The track in the foreground is the outer siding, the track to its left is the siding that connects to the mainline at both ends, and the higher track to its left is the mainline, which is a double track (but only one track is visible in this view).

Eastward view a few steps south of previous location. Note the same tower just right of center reference. The tracks are the two mainline tracks and to their left (north) is the siding that's connected to the mainline. The outer siding (foreground of previous two photos) is out of sight to the left. The dirt road in the foreground is on the A&P (1883) grade, which was abandoned during the 1960 realignment. It appears the 1960 realignment leaves the 1883 alignment at about the location of the tower.

Eastward view of the AT&SF (1960) 800 feet west of the previous location. Note the same tower in the upper right for reference. The tracks are, from right to left, the two mainline tracks, the siding that connects to the mainline, and the outer siding (foreground of first two photos). All these tracks are on the 1960 new alignment; the abandoned stretch of the A&P (1883) is out of sight 100 feet to the right (south).

Westward view of the AT&SF (1960) a few steps north of the previous location. The double-track mainline is on the left and the siding that connects to the mainline is behind and just to the right to the sign. Barely visible just beyond the switch for the siding is a junction with a track that curves to the left; that is West Williams Junction, which connects with the A&P (1883) for trains headed to Ash Fork to continue onto the SFP&P (1895).

Eastward view 400 feet west of the previous location; the sign for “West Williams Jct.” (previous photo) is just on the other side of the center of the three signals in the upper left. The tower is barely visible against the sky just right of center. The tracks on the left are on the AT&SF (1960) alignment and include, from right to left, the two mainline tracks, the siding that connects to the mainline at a switch just out of sight on the left, and the junction with the outer siding (near the signals). The dirt road on the right is the abandoned A&P (1883).

Westward view of the AT&SF (1960) 300 feet west of the previous location. The center track in the foreground is a crossover track for the double-track mainline. Just beyond the point where a switch connects the crossover track with the left mainline track, there is a second switch to a track on the left. That switch is West Williams Junction. That track was built on a new alignment in 1960 to connect with the A&P (1883) alignment, which was left in place (not abandoned) to connect the new (1960) mainline with the SFP&P (1895). Thus in 1960, the junction of the SFP&P (1895) with the AT&SF's mainline moved 20 miles east from Ash Fork (on the A&P [1883]) to this location (on the AT&SF [1960]).

Westward view of West Williams Junction 100 feet west of the previous location. The closer of the two switches is for the crossover track and the second switch is West Williams Junction, the 1960 connector to the A&P (1883) and the SFP&P (1895).

Eastward view 500 feet west of previous location. The dirt road in the right foreground and extending into the right distance is the A&P (1883). The double-track AT&SF (1960) is visible in a cut grade on the left at West Williams Junction; the switch to connect the 1960 mainline connector to the A&P (1883) and the SFP&P (1895) is barely visible in the closer of the two tracks.

Eeastward view 300 feet west of previous location, looking at the junction sign on the west end of West Williams Junction. The track in the foreground is the 1960 connector to the A&P (1883) and the SFP&P (1895).

Westward view, same location as previous. The track in the foreground is the 1960 connector to the A&P (1883) and the SFP&P (1895) and the two tracks on the right are the AT&SF (1960).

Westward view of the 1960 connector to the A&P (1883) and the SFP&P (1895) 700 feet west of the previous location. Note the curve to the right in the distance; that curve brings the 1960 track into alignment with the A&P (1883).

Eastward view of the A&P (1883) a few steps south of the previous location.

Eastward view 200 feet west of the previous location. The dirt road in the right foreground and extending into the right distance is the A&P (1883). The track on the left is the 1960 connector to the A&P (1883) and the SFP&P (1895).

Westward view, same location as previous. The dirt road in the foreground is the A&P (1883) and the track in the center distance is the 1960 connector, curving onto the A&P (1883) alignment in the distance.

Westward view 1960 connector 100 feet west of the previous location. The dirt road on the left is the A&P (1883) and the 1960 connector is curving into alignment with it.

Eastward view 100 feet west of the previous location. The 1960 connector is straightening out in the foreground, meaning it is just about on the A&P (1883) alignment and the dirt road to the right is a service road just off the 1883 alignment.

Westward view, same location as previous. The 1960 connector is straightening out onto the A&P (1883) alignment and continues west 3 miles to Williams and the junction with the GC (1901) (next photo) and another 17 miles to Ash Fork and the continuation of this track onto the SFP&P (1895) alignment.

Now we've moved 3 miles west to Williams. During the early 1900's, western railroads boosted passenger traffic by developing rail access and tourist facilities for western national parks. The AT&SF's national park was the Grand Canyon, which the AT&SF reached in 1901 via a branch line from the A&P (1883) at Williams (this location). Although the Grand Canyon is the most significant barrier to railroad construction (and to all forms of transportation) in the desert southwest, the grade from Williams to the South Rim is easy due to the flat Kaibab Plateau, which forms the canyon rim. The Grand Canyon Railway is still very popular and runs both steam and vintage diesel trains from Williams to the South Rim.

Southward view of the wye for the GC (1901) in Williams. The mainline in the distance is the A&P (1883). The AT&SF (1960) realignment, which lowered the grade on the west slope of the Kaibab Plateau, crosses the GC (1901) at an overpass one mile behind (north of) the viewer.