



The railway that became the San Pedro, Los Angeles & Salt Lake Railroad began in 1871 when the Union Pacific-controlled Utah Southern Railroad began laying track southward from Salt Lake City. The US was completed in 1875 and a second UP subsidiary, the Utah Southern Railroad Extension, took up the work, completing trackage as far as Milford and the nearby mining town of Frisco, Utah, in 1880. By the end of the century, these and other lines had been absorbed into the Oregon Short Line Railroad, a larger UP subsidiary. Work on extending the Milford line southward began in 1889, but no tracks were actually laid, and resumed in 1899, when the route was completed as far as the Utah–Nevada border, with some grading completed into Nevada. In 1900, William Andrews Clark acquired the struggling Los Angeles Terminal Railway (not shown on map) and in 1901 reincorporated as the San Pedro, Los Angeles & Salt Lake Railroad. Clark's forces began construction work in Nevada, along an existing OSL/UP grade (this location), and a brief "railroad war" ensued before Clark and the UP called a truce in 1903. Their agreement called for Clark's railroad to acquire the existing OSL (US (1875) and USE (1880)) tracks south of Salt Lake City and UP received a 50% interest in Clark's SPLA&SL. Construction of the remaining line proceeded rapidly to Daggett, California, where it connected to the AT&SF (SP Mojave Branch (1883)), and Clark negotiated trackage rights from Daggett to Riverside, California, on AT&SF (original California Southern (1885)) tracks over Cajon Pass. The Salt Lake–Los Angeles line was opened on May 1, 1905. Nearly the entire route traversed rugged and largely unpopulated desert terrain, but triggered the phenomenal growth of the city of Las Vegas, thanks largely to Los Angelenos who rode the SPLA&SL to Las Vegas gambling halls. By 1921, the railroad's name had been shortened to the LA&SL and the UP acquired Clark's half of the railroad, after which the LA&SL was operated as part of the UP system.

The Caliente Railroad Depot was built by the LA&SL in 1923 to serve the railroad's division point on the mainline. The first floor held the passenger waiting room, station agent's office, and other railroad offices. The second floor was used as a hotel. The division point at Caliente served as a maintenance facility and was a base for helper locomotives, which pulled northeast-bound trains over the divide between the Colorado River drainage and Great Basin, located east of Caliente. As diesel locomotives replaced steam, the railroad no longer needed to use the Caliente site for turning helper engines, so diesel maintenance was moved to Las Vegas in 1948. In 1970, the Caliente Depot was turned over to the City of Caliente, which moved its municipal services into the building. The Depot is now the Caliente City Hall, library, and art gallery. The gravel area in the foreground was once full of tracks.



Eastward view of the Caliente Depot. Double track extends about 2 miles on either side of the Depot.



Westward view of the SPLA&SL/LA&SL/UP at Caliente, the Depot is in the left distance. The gravel area to the right was part of the rail yard.



Westward view of the SPLA&SL/LA&SL/UP at Caliente, a siding still serves the current rail yard.



Now we are a quarter mile east of the previous location, looking east. The siding in the previous photo has rejoined the mainline, and the switch in this view is the junction with the SPLA&SL's Caliente & Pioche Railroad (1907). In 1906, in an effort to develop traffic on its then-new mainline, the SPLA&SL built a standard gauge line from Caliente (this location) to the Pioche mines using some of the grades of existing narrow gauge roads around Pioche (which were not connected to the national rail network). All Pioche railroads, including the C&P (1907), were abandoned by 1985.

In this eastward view, the SPLA&SL (now UP) begins the climb up Clover Creek, which drains to the Colorado River, over Crestline Siding near the Utah border, and down Sheep Spring Draw, which drains to the Escalante Desert, a closed basin in the Great Basin. The remainder of this Geolink explores the C&P (1907), starting with the line in the foreground.



Westward view of the C&P (1907), same location as previous. Note the mainline double track to the left and the branch line siding in the right distance.



Eastward view of the C&P (1907), showing the switch and siding in the foreground. The junction with the mainline is in the left distance.



Southeastward view of the C&P (1907), showing its curve toward the north and Pioche.





Westward view of the SPLA C&P (1907) in the foreground and most of the current yard equipment in the center distance. There was likely another junction on the far side of the yard to make a complete wye, but I could find no direct evidence for that.





Northwestward view of the C&P (1907), same location as previous, showing the current end of track. The north tip of a wye may have once been present in this view.



Northwestward view of the C&P (1907) bridge over Clover Creek, 400 feet northwest of the end of track.



Another view of the bridge over Clover Creek.



Southward view of the C&P (1907) alignment, one mile north of Caliente. The green area is Meadow Valley Wash, which the railroad follows almost all the way to Pioche.



Northward view of the C&P (1907), same location as previous.



Southward view of a curve in the C&P (1907) alignment, 2 miles north of Caliente.



Northeastward view a quarter mile northeast of previous location, showing a small bridge over Meadow Valley Wash on the C&P (1907). The bridge still bears the scars of the rails and spikes that were removed in 1985.