



In the late 1870's and first years of the 1880's, the Southern Pacific focused its resources on completing its southern transcontinental route through southern Arizona and New Mexico to El Paso and beyond. The SP was in no rush to build east from Mojave, California, until 1880, when the St. Louis & San Francisco Railway came to an agreement with the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad to jointly control the Atlantic & Pacific Railroad. The A&P would build west from the AT&SF mainline at Isleta, New Mexico, to meet the SP at Needles, California. A&P construction reached Kingman, Arizona, in 1882, which prompted the SP to begin building its branch from Mojave to Needles, where it met the A&P in August 1883. The AT&SF-controlled A&P leased the SP's new Needles Branch, and in 1885 the AT&SF-owned California Southern Railroad completed its line from San Diego over Cajon Pass to the AT&SF/A&P-leased SP Needles Branch at Barstow, completing a transcontinental route and giving the AT&SF access to the southern California coast.

Compared to railroads in Colorado and points north, the crossings of the continental divide in New Mexico are relatively easy. The easy crossings in the north part of the state are due to the Colorado Plateau and in the south because of the flat valleys of the Basin and Range province and the overall lower elevation. The A&P crossed the continental divide at a location now called, appropriately, "Continental Divide." The elevation is moderate by Southwest standards at 7,275 feet. This view of the A&P (now BNSF) track is taken from the Continental Divide gift shop parking lot, showing the flat topography and distant cliffs typical of the Colorado Plateau, as well as the following insightful explanation.





BNSF double tracks converge on a gentle slope, a few miles east of Continental Divide.



BNSF double tracks and scenic red cliffs, a few miles east of Continental Divide.



One the many BNSF container trains that ply the old A&P route daily, a few miles east of Continental Divide.



Another BNSF container train, a few miles east of Continental Divide.