



In 1911, the San Pedro, Los Angeles & Salt Lake Railroad started constructing its St. Thomas Branch from Moapa, which lies on its mainline between Salt Lake City and Los Angeles (SPLA&SL [1905]). In March 1912, construction was completed to St. Thomas (this location), a Mormon agricultural community established in the 1860's at the confluence of the Virgin and Muddy rivers. During the 1930's, following the construction of Hoover Dam (using the Los Angeles & Salt Lake Boulder City Branch [1931]; the SPLA&SL was shortened to LA&SL in 1916), the waters of Lake Mead rose and by the late 1930's St. Thomas was submerged. The last resident, Hugh Lord, left St. Thomas on June 11, 1938. In 1938 and 1939, the St. Thomas Branch track was removed from St. Thomas back to the agricultural community of Overton, on the Muddy River, where the track currently ends at a silica sand plant.

With the fluctuations of Lake Mead water levels, St. Thomas has arisen from the depths in 1945, 1963 and, most recently, in 2012. Today the town is still exposed and visitors can roam the roads and trails that were once a thriving town and search for the very subtle traces of the southern end of the SPLA&SL St. Thomas Branch (1912).

First well look around town, starting with this foundation and stairway.



These stumps are remnants of a tree-lined avenue in St. Thomas.



Old foundations in St. Thomas. Note the contrast in vegetation on the relatively verdant floodplain of Muddy River and the drier mountain slopes.



It took a while but I finally found the railroad, no thanks to the Park Service sign (below) that details the arrival of the railroad in 1912 but provides no hint as to where it was. The low hill in the right distance is the west bank of the Muddy River floodplain. Satellite imagery shows the railroad grade, marked by sparser shrubbery, as a straight northwest-southeast alignment on the west side of town. In this southeastward view, the sparser shrubbery is the rail alignment and the greener shrubbery in the distance appears to be the end of track. The cowpie-looking blob in the immediate foreground is oil, either from locomotive or track lubrication.

### The Train is Here!

In 1911, construction began on a spur line of the San Pedro & Los Angeles Railroad from Moapa to St. Thomas. Upon completion, trains arrived in the community pulling box cars filled with commercial goods and refrigerated cars filled with ice for household use. At last, perishable food could be stored for longer periods of time. Residents were able to replace their wood, wire and burlap desert coolers with ice boxes. Trains departed the valley with shipments of ore and salt from the outlying mining areas along with fresh cantaloupes, watermelons and other farm products for sale elsewhere.

'Christmas was looked forward to (by the residents). Mr. Peck, a railroad official, always brought cases of huge oranges, how we eagerly awaited that treat.'

Marva Rae Perkins Sprague

**Ceremonial Spike**  
(enlarged for detail)

St. Thomas hosted a giant celebration on the day the railroad was completed, June 7, 1912. A contest was held to name *The Most Popular Lady in Clark County*. The honor went to Mildred Anderson, who drove in the engraved ceremonial copper and silver spike donated by Grand Gulch Copper Company.



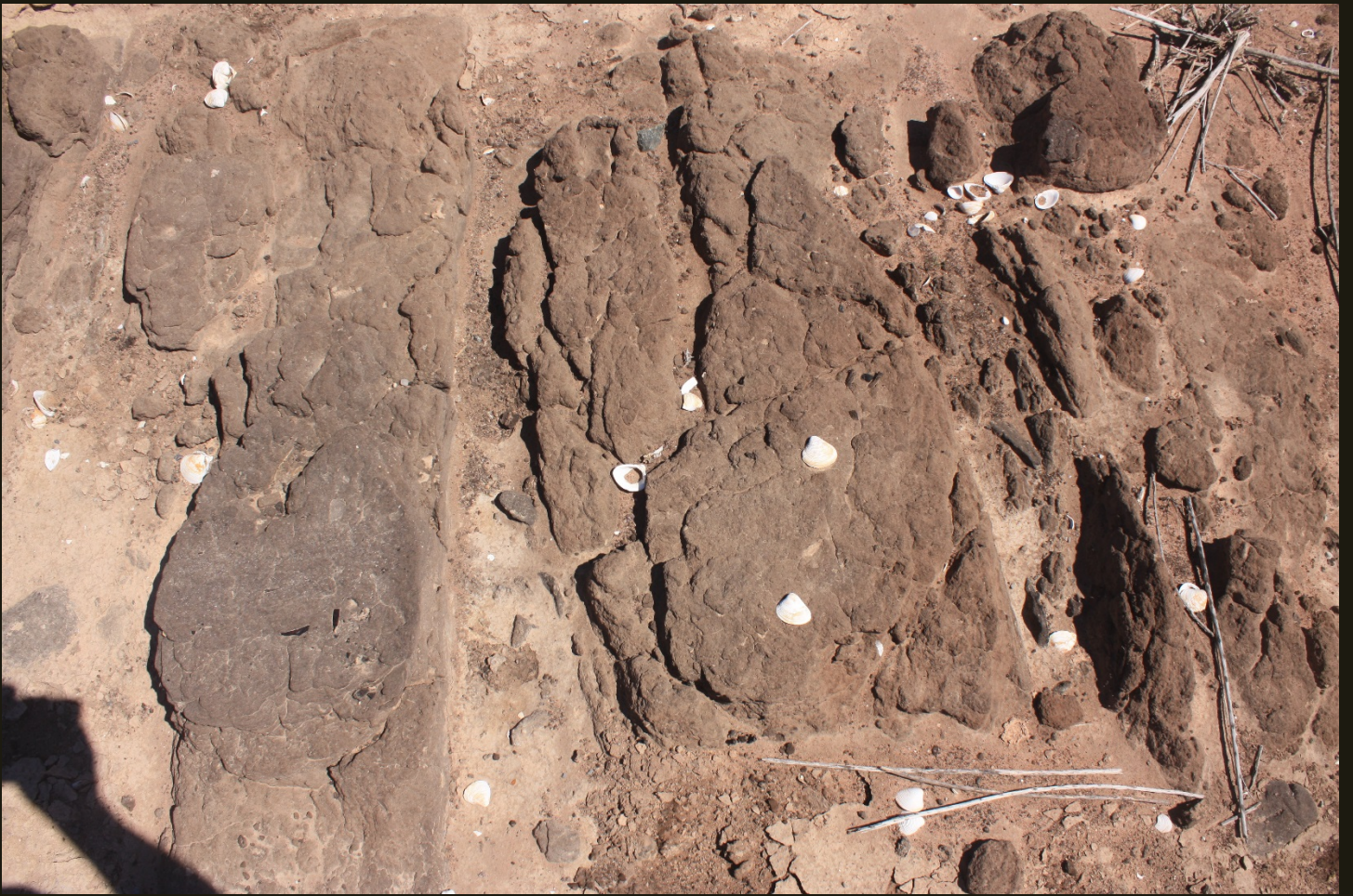
Closer look at the cowpie-looking blob of oil, same location as previous. It's amazing this was not buried by sediment from the aptly named Muddy River, which would have deposited its sediment load when it entered the standing water of the lake.



Northwestward view, same location as previous. The sparse-vegetation alignment continues to the left and this foundation is the only one along the railroad in St. Thomas. Note the darker ground on either side of the lighter bare ground to the left of the foundation.



Closer look at the darker ground to the left of the foundation. The darker ground is heavily oil-soaked soil. The closest dark ground appears to define several transverse ridges of dark ground with lighter ground in between. The lighter ground appears to be impressions of rail ties; this is the best direct evidence I could find that there was ever a railroad here.



Closer look at the darker soil. Note the freshwater clams left by the lake.





Eastward view of the same foundation and oil-soaked dirt. The darker dirt in the foreground has particularly convincing tie impressions.



A footpath follows the sparser brush of the SPLA&SL St. Thomas Branch (1912) northwest of the foundation.



Northeastward view of some wooden piles, 300 feet northwest of the foundation, the only other structure of any sort along the SPLA&SL St. Thomas Branch (1912) at St. Thomas.



Westward view of the SPLA&SL St. Thomas Branch (1912), 600 feet northwest of previous location. The sparse vegetation in the foreground is the railroad grade. The gravelly slope is the west bank of the Muddy River floodplain. Note the horizontal benches on the slope; these benches are wave-cut terraces that mark former shorelines of Lake Mead.