



In 1905, the San Pedro, Los Angeles & Salt Lake Railroad was constructed over east end of Cima Dome in the California Mojave Desert. Cima Dome is one of more than a dozen topographic domes in the Mojave Desert, all formed on granite and all older than the dominant normal-faulted mountain ranges. Cima Dome is the best developed such dome and is about 10 miles across. The SPLA&SL (1905) completed a direct route between Los Angeles and Salt Lake City, which provided the Union Pacific access to southern California and spawned Las Vegas.

Eastward view of the SPLA&SL (1905) at Cima, California. The mainline runs northeast-southwest at Cima and today is plied by a container train, probably carrying empties back to L.A. The train is just finishing the climb up the gentle grade northeast of Cima and is about to start the steeper downhill run southwest of Cima. The track in the foreground is the north branch of the Cima wye.





Northwestward view the tip of the Cima wye. The wye was used to turn helper steam engines after assisting the haul up the Cima Grade, which is the steep grade southwest of Cima. There's a lot in this photo. First, note the gentle slope in the distance; this is the Cima Dome, the summit of which is in the left distance. The low hills in the distance are inselbergs, remnants of the granite above the dome surface that have yet be worn down to the dome surface. Note also the Joshua Trees, indicative of the 4,175-foot elevation. Next, note the concrete foundation to the left of the track, apparently the remains of a trackside loading facility. Finally, note that there is a pile of gray gravel, partially obscured by brush, directly behind the switch lever. That gravel is continuous with the gravel ballast beneath the track. Satellite imagery shows that the gray gravel continues 2,000 feet north-northeast into the desert and is obviously an abandoned grade. At first blush it appears there is nothing left of the switch to that former trackage or even any evidence as to whether there ever was a switch; it is possible that the original wye had only the track that curved to the right just beyond the wye switch and that the straight track was extended (to the concrete foundation and beyond) when the 2,000-foot track was removed (thus, no switch have been needed). However, closer inspection in the following several photos reveals that there was a switch.





Northwestward view of the straight track just past the tip of the Cima wye. The same concrete foundation is to the left of the track and the same gray ballast gravel is to the right of the track. Note the two long ties in the foreground, indicative of a former switch lever at this location. Beyond the switch lever ties, the track ties become progressively longer in the distance. These ties were beneath the track that curved to the right past the switch lever. Thus, the track that once extended north-northeast 2,000 feet from this location was connected to the wye via a switch, which is completely removed except for the ties.





Southwestward view of the two long ties for the former switch lever.





Slightly closer view of the progressively longer ties for the former switch. Note also the gray gravel, in this view more clearly curving to the right.





Even closer view of the longest of the progressively longer ties for the former switch. In the foreground, there are four long tracks, then the more distant ties are short and all the same length as far as we can see on the straight track. The first "normal" tie beneath the 2,000-foot track was the tie, now removed, beyond the longest tie; this would have been first tie that did not extend beneath the straight track and thus could be removed. In other words, all the trackage for the switch was removed and the straight track was rebuilt on the old (switch) ties.





Southward view of the progressively longer ties for the former switch. The longest of the “shared” ties is in the foreground.





Northeastward view of the 2,000-foot abandoned spur. In this view, the curved alignment from the former switch at the wye is in the right side of the photo and we're looking directly down the 2,000-foot straight alignment. There is a linear berm to the left, with Joshua Trees on the other side; this berm could pass for a fill grade but it's more likely intended to divert surface runoff away from the track (gray gravel).





Southeastward view from the same location as previous. In the immediate foreground is concrete debris from former facilities and just beyond it is the gray gravel of the abandoned spur. The SPLA&SL (1905) runs across the photo in the distance. From this vantage it is clear that the SPLA&SL (1905) follows the low point on the Cima Dome. The ground on our side of the SPLA&SL (1905) is on the southeast flank of the dome and is sloping down toward the railroad and the ground beyond the track rises toward the New York Mountains.





Now we're back at the Cima wye looking southward; the gray gravel of the abandoned spur is visible in the left middle distance. Southeastward view at Cima, which is now a ghost town. The SPLA&SL (now UP) mainline is in the distance beyond the buildings, which constitute the ghost town of Cima. Cima was founded in 1905 when the railroad was constructed and in the same year H.C. Gibson established the store and post, both now closed, to service the ranches and mines of the area as well as railroad business.





Southeastward view of the end of the Cima wye; the same concrete foundation as before is on the right.





Eastward view just south of Cima; the train is just beginning its descent down the Cima Grade.





Northward view of the SPL&SL (1905)(now Union Pacific) about 5 miles southwest of Cima as a train coasts down the Cima Grade. Note the absence of Joshua Trees, indicative of the significant decrease in elevation since Cima. The Cima Grade carries the railroad from its low point at Soda Lake, which is the terminal lake for the Mojave River, up the southeast flank of Cima Dome from Kelso Depot to the summit at Cima. The tracks rise 2,000 feet in 20 miles, which is the steepest part of the line between Los Angeles and Las Vegas.





Southward view of the SPLA&SL (1905), same location as previous. This was uninhabited desert when the SPLA&SL construction crews came through in 1905 and nothing has changed since.