



In 1858, asphalt deposits were noticed by a land survey party west of Bakersfield at the future site of the Sunset Oil Field. The Buena Vista Oil Company incorporated in 1864 and began refinery operations near modern McKittrick and produced over 4,000 gallons of kerosene by 1867. The field continued to grow, and in 1892-1893 the McKittrick Sunset Railroad was built from the SP mainline at Kern Junction in Bakersfield 50 miles west to McKittrick to service the oil industry as well as agriculture. The line was subsequently cut back about 15 miles to the current end-of-track at Buttonwillow, and the eastern half is still in use by the San Joaquin Valley Railroad, a subsidiary of RailAmerica.

Eastward view (toward Kern Junction/Bakersfield) of the MS (1893), 6 miles east of the end-of-track at Buttonwillow. The very flat topography reflects the bed of the once-extensive Kern Lake. Note the bolted track, which may be original 1892 rails.



Steps from the previous location. Piled ties are likely from abandonment of the west end of the MS.



A half mile west of previous location, eastward view of agricultural loading facilities along the MS (now San Joaquin Valley Railroad). The overpass in the distance is I-5.



Southwestward view, same location as previous, showing the MS tracks, agricultural fields, and the Temblor Range of folded and faulted sediments that trap huge oil reserves in the subsurface.



Eastward view of the MS (1893) at Buttonwillow. A tank car is stored on the main line and an agricultural siding is present on the left (north).



Northwestward view at same location as previous at Buttonwillow. The track is cut for the road crossing I am on and the track continues west. The road is McKittrick Highway (CA 58).



Southwestward view of the MS (1893), 2,000 feet west of previous location. The track is gone, some ties are still in present.



Northeastward view of the MS (1893), same location as previous. McKittrick Highway (CA 58) on the right.





Northeastward view of the MS (1893), 5 miles west of Buttonwillow. All trackage is gone, a fill grade remains.