



During the 1880's, the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad rushed to compete with the Southern Pacific for Southwestern rail traffic. The AT&SF's first objective was to reach a Pacific Coast port, when the SP was already in Los Angeles and the affiliated Central Pacific was already in the San Francisco Bay Area. The AT&SF first reached tidewater at Guaymas, Sonora, Mexico (south of map area), in 1882, via its New Mexico & Arizona Railroad (1882) and Sonora Railroad (1882). The AT&SF built the NM&A southward from Benson, Arizona (on SP's Sunset Route), along the San Pedro River to Fairbank, then west up the tributary Babocomari River to grasslands at Sonoita (this location), then over a low pass in the Conejo Hills to follow Sonoita Creek southwestward through the town of Patagonia to the Santa Cruz River at Calabasas (also known as Rio Rico), and finally south along the Santa Cruz River to Nogales, on the border with Mexico and the connection with the Sonora Railroad.

The AT&SF was busy building to other ports. The AT&SF reached the Pacific Coast at San Diego in 1885 (via its Atlantic & Pacific (1883) and California & Southern (1885) railroads), Los Angeles in 1887 (via the California Central (1887) and other lines), and the San Francisco Bay in 1900 (via its San Francisco & San Joaquin Valley (1900) and other railroads). The line to Guaymas became less important to the AT&SF. In 1910, the SP-controlled Tucson & Nogales Railroad completed a line south from Tucson to Calabasas and used the NM&A grade from there south to Nogales. In 1929, the segment of the NM&A (1882) between Calabasas and Patagonia was damaged by floods and abandoned, and the line from Benson to Patagonia became a branch line of the El Paso & Southwestern Railroad and then the SP, which was abandoned in the 1960's.

Southeastward view of the NM&A/EP&SW/SP grade, 2 miles west of Sonoita. Note the concrete culvert; also note the grassland typical of large areas of southeastern Arizona at elevations around 4,000 feet. This is near the high point of the line, on the divide between the Babocomari River (San Pedro River drainage) to the east and Sonoita Creek (Santa Cruz River drainage) to the west, all followed by the NM&A (1882).



Southeastward view of the NM&A/EP&SW/SP grade, 1 mile west of Sonoita. Note the high fill grade and former overpass.



I searched the NM&A grade in Sonoita for railroad vestiges, but all I could find was is this mini-storage whose name pays homage to the former railroad. I could find no railroad depot among the half dozen or so buildings in Sonoita or in online resources, but some local resident who opened a mini-storage apparently remembers the Sonoita depot.