



The Southern Pacific built its Santa Barbara Branch in 1887, commencing from its 1876 mainline at Saugus westward across the Santa Clara River (this location) and through the rich agricultural lands of the Santa Clara River Valley to the coast at Ventura, then up the coast to Santa Barbara. In 1901, the SP completed the most difficult part of its coastal route and the Santa Barbara Branch immediately became the southern part of the SP's new coastal mainline from southern to northern California. In 1898, in anticipation of the mainline status, the original Santa Clara River crossing west of Saugus was replaced by the current bridge (see date in inset below). However, the importance of this line was short-lived, ending in 1904 when it was bypassed by a parallel route farther south. In 1987, the segment from Fillmore to Saugus, including this location, was abandoned. A local tourist railroad, the Fillmore & Western, purchased the 8-mile segment from Santa Paula east to Fillmore. The part of the line from Santa Paula west to the junction of the 1904 route became a branch line, the Santa Paula Branch. The grade west of Saugus for about 3 miles, including this 1898 vintage bridge, is now a rail-to-trail.







Another view of the Santa Clara River bridge, 2 miles west of the start of the SP (now UP) mainline.



Westward view of Magic Mountain from the bridge over the usually dry Santa Clara River.





When the Southern Pacific laid its first tracks in the early 1870's and built southward from Sacramento through California's Central Valley then over Tehachapi Pass to southern California, its destination was El Paso, Texas, to build the southernmost transcontinental route identified in the 1855 Pacific Railroad surveys. Once over the Pacific Crest at Tehachapi Pass, the most direct route would have been to build southeastward to Cajon Pass then eastward over San Geronio Pass on the 1855 "Southern Pacific" transcontinental route. However, Los Angeles business interests persuaded SP to build instead a more difficult route southward over Soledad Pass to LA, then east to San Geronio Pass and El Paso. Construction proceeded southward from northern California and over Tehachapi Pass, and northward from LA through a 7,000-foot tunnel through solid rock to Saugus. The SP announced that the rails would be joined on September 5, 1876, at a point called Lang, 43 miles from Los Angeles, 10 miles east of Saugus on the Santa Clara River, and 440 miles from San Francisco.

Great plans for the event included officials and invited guests from San Francisco and LA, special trains, two of the CP's original "Big Four" (Stanford and Crocker), newspapers, a reception and banquet, and the entire working force of 4,000 mostly Chinese laying the final tracks at Lang. The San Francisco Chronicle reported: "The laying of the remaining 1,050 feet of track and the connecting of the through line was done as soon as the railroad officials and invited guests could alight from the San Francisco train and take their places. Charles Crocker superintended the work in person." The Los Angeles Star reported: "After the cheering had subsided and the crowd had been induced to stand back a short distance, Gov. Downey introduced L.W. Thatcher to Col. Crocker as the public spirited jeweler who had manufactured the gold spike and silver hammer to be used in the ceremonies ... This wedding of Los Angeles with San Francisco is not a ceremony consecrated by the hands of wedlock, but by the bands of steel. The speaker hopes to live to see the time when these beautiful valleys through which we passed today will be filled with a happy and prosperous people, enjoying every facility for comfort, happiness and education. Gentlemen, I am no public speaker, but I can drive a spike!" And thus began rail service between northern and southern California.

This sign commemorating the Golden Spike is just south of the Santa Clara River bridge, about 12 miles west of the actual location at Lang.