



The Southern Pacific Railroad's Coast Line had its origin in the San Francisco & San Jose Railroad, which was opened between those two cities on January 16, 1864. Some of the founders of this company then organized the Southern Pacific Railroad Company, which was incorporated on December 2, 1865, and in the following year authorized by Congress to build south through the San Joaquin Valley to the California state line at Needles, where it would meet the AT&SF-controlled Atlantic & Pacific Railroad (ultimately completed in 1883). The original organizers did no construction, but sold the SP to the Big Four of the Central Pacific, who in 1868 acquired the SF&SJ (1964). Early in 1868, the SP started its first construction, which was a line south from San Jose to reach southern California via a route that would cross the Coast Range southeast of San Jose to reach the San Joaquin Valley. However, this line was superseded in 1869 when the SP started constructing the line to Needles and southern California from the its Western Pacific (1869), which the CP had purchased from the SF&SJ in 1867 and already connected San Jose to the San Joaquin Valley. The SP line south of San Jose, the future Coast Line, was continued to access agricultural areas in the Santa Clara and Salinas valleys. On March 13, 1869, trains were operating to Gilroy (30 miles south of San Jose), to Hollister on July 13, 1871, and to the terminus at Tres Pinos (50 miles south of San Jose) on August 12, 1873. The 7 miles of track between Hollister and the end-of-track at Tres Pinos was later abandoned.

The mainline that would become the SP Coast Line branched off of this line in agricultural fields at a junction called Carnadero (this location), located 3 miles south of Gilroy and 33 miles south of San Jose. The double track in this northeastward view is the SP (now Union Pacific) Coast Line, and the curve in the distance goes to a single switch (not a wye) with the line to San Jose (to the left/north) and Hollister (to the right/south). After reaching Gilroy in 1869, the SP built through this location to Pajaro (Watsonville Junction) on November 27, 1871, to Salinas on November 1, 1872, and to Soledad, 90 miles south of San Jose, on August 12, 1873. There the terminus remained for 13 years while construction forces concentrated on completing the SP (1876) and SP Sunset Route (1883). In early 1886, work finally resumed south from Soledad through King City and Paso Robles to Templeton on November 16, 1886, extending the line 170 miles south of San Jose. During 1887, the line was continued another 15 miles south through the high valleys of Atascadero to Santa Margarita, where further progress involved heavy construction on the crossing of the Santa Lucia Mountains, the most formidable obstacle on the Coast Line. The line finally opened to San Luis Obispo on May 5, 1894, then construction continued along the Pacific shore, providing a scenic route but offering many engineering difficulties in completing the line to Santa Barbara in 1901 (where the SP had completed a line from the south in 1887), thus opening the SP Coast Line from San Francisco to LA.



Southward view of the SP (1873), same location as previous, where a bridge crosses Uvas Creek.



Northwestward view of the SP (1873) Hollister Branch, 2 miles southeast of the junction at Carnadero (first photo).