



During the 1880's, the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad rushed to compete with the Southern Pacific for rail traffic in the Southwest. The AT&SF's first objective was to reach a Pacific Coast port, when the SP was already in Los Angeles and the SP-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), south along the San Pedro River to Fairbank, then west up the tributary Babocomari River to grasslands at Sonoita, then over a low pass in the Conejo Hills to follow Sonoita Creek southwestward through this location along Sonoita Creek to its confluence with 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 (1882).

The AT&SF was also 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 its California Central [1887] and other lines), and the San Francisco Bay in 1900 (via its San Francisco & San Joaquin Valley [1900] and other railroads). Thus, 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 (1882) grade from there south to Nogales. In 1929, the segment of the NM&A (1882) between Calabasas and Patagonia (including this location) was damaged by floods and abandoned; following this abandonment, the line from Benson to Patagonia became a branch line of the El Paso & Southwestern Railroad and later of the SP, which later abandoned the line.

Northeastward view of the NM&A (1882), 8 miles southwest of Patagonia and 2,000 feet southwest of the dam for Patagonia Lake. The flat area visible behind the brush on the left is the floodplain of Sonoita Creek. The dam for Patagonia Lake was built across Sonoita Creek in the late 1960's and inundated the abandoned grade, which today emerges from the base of the dam 2,000 feet up the line from here.



Southwestward view of the NM&A (1882), same location as previous.



Northward view of the NM&A (1882), 500 feet southwest of the previous location. The fill grade of the first two photos is replaced here by a substantial cut grade to negotiate a narrow part of Sonoita Creek.