



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 the SF&SJ then organized the Southern Pacific Railroad Company, which was incorporated on December 2, 1865, and 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 in 1868 sold the SP along with the SF&SJ to the Big Four of the Central Pacific. 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 However, this line was superseded as the SP's southern main line when the SP started constructing the SP (1876) line to southern California from the the SP's Western Pacific (1869), which the CP had purchased from the SF&SJ in 1867. However, the SP line south of San Jose -- the future Coast Line -- was continued southward to access agricultural areas in the Santa Clara and Salinas valleys and to ultimately reach LA via a coastal route. On March 13, 1869, the line was opened to Gilroy (30 miles south of San Jose), to Pajaro (Watsonville Jct.) 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 1886, work finally resumed south from Soledad, and trains were operating to King City on July 20, to Paso Robles on October 31, and to Templeton on November 16, 1886, extending now 170 miles south of San Jose. During 1887, the line was continued another 15 miles south through the high valleys of Atascadero and this location 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. It is 8 miles as the crow flies from Santa Margarita across the Santa Lucia Mountains to San Luis Obispo, but to traverse that distance took six tunnels, a spectacular horseshoe curve, 15 miles of grade and trackage, and 7 years before the line was opened into San Luis Obispo on May 5, 1894. Then came 7 more years construction along the Pacific shore, providing a scenic route but offering many engineering difficulties in completing the line into 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.

Northward view of the SP Coast Line (1894) in the high (1,000 feet above sea level) valleys at the headwaters of the Salinas River, 3 miles north of Santa Margarita, where the SP built through in 1887.





Same location as previous, looking west at the green grass, leafless oak, and puddle of water characteristic of a California winter. By summer, the tree will be green, the grass will be yellow, and the puddle will be gone.



A few steps south of the previous location, where somebody lives in a log cabin and has an SP caboose in their yard along the SP Coast Line.





Eastward view of the SP (1894) and a siding, 2 miles north of Santa Margarita.



A nice masonry culvert on the SP (1894), 1 mile north of Santa Margarita.





Northward view of the SP (1894) and two sidings at Santa Margarita.



Southward view of the SP (1894) at Santa Margarita, with the Santa Lucia Mountains in the distance. In the 8 linear miles between here and San Luis Obispo, the line crosses the mountain and then drops about 1,000 feet to San Luis Obispo (at 230 feet above sea level).