



The Southern Pacific Railroad's Coast Line had its origin in the San Francisco & San Jose Railroad (1864). Some of the founders of the SF&SJ then organized the Southern Pacific Railroad Company, which was incorporated in 1865, and was authorized by Congress to build south through the San Joaquin Valley to the California state line at Needles, where it would meet the (future) 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 However, this line was superseded as the SP's mainline to southern California when the SP started constructing the SP (1876) line to southern California. 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. The line was completed 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 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 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 took 7 years to complete the 15 miles of track needed to reach San Luis Obispo, where the line arrived on May 5, 1894. Construction continued for 7 more years along the Pacific shore, including this location at Gaviota, providing a scenic route but offering many engineering difficulties in completing the line. In 1901, the line finally connected with the SP Santa Barbara Branch (1887), thus opening the SP Coast Line from San Francisco to LA.

Southeastward view is the SP (1901) at Gaviota. The trestle over the creek (to the left of the wharf) is one of many on the Coast Line.