



On its eastward push to build the southernmost of the five 1855 Pacific Railroad surveys, the Southern Pacific reached Yuma, Arizona, in November 1878, Tucson in March 1880, and this location 25 miles southeast of Tucson a few months later, finally reaching El Paso, Texas, in May 1881. The line was completed as a transcontinental route in 1883, when the route east of the map area through Texas to New Orleans was completed. East of Tucson, the SP route leaves the Santa Cruz River and generally follows Pantano Wash (the stream at lower left of photo) to a summit at Mescal (13 miles east of this location) before descending to Benson on the San Pedro River.

Eastward view of the SP Sunset Route (1881) (now Union Pacific) near Pantano, Arizona. The stream at lower left is Pantano Wash, which supports Fremont Cottonwoods and other riparian growth. Note that the SP is a single track.



Southward view of the single-track SP Sunset Route (1881) near Pantano, Arizona. The stately saguaro was probably a youth when it oversaw the SP construction crews in 1880. The 9,000+ foot Santa Rita Mountains are in the distance.





In 1888-1889, Phelps Dodge built the Arizona & South Eastern Railroad to connect its copper mines at Bisbee, Arizona, with the national rail network via the AT&SF's New Mexico & Arizona (1882) at Fairbank. The A&SE expanded northward from Fairbank in 1894, parallel to and just west of the NM&A line to join directly with the SP Sunset Route (1881) at Benson. In 1901, the A&SE was renamed the El Paso & Southwestern Railroad, which extended the line east to El Paso in 1902 and from Fairbank through this location (overpass) to Tucson in 1912 to bypass the SP entirely between Tucson and El Paso. The worldwide collapse of copper prices after World War I severely affected the mines and the EP&SW, and in 1924 the SP leased the entire EP&SW. The SP re-configured the EP&SW trackage to supplement its Sunset Route (1881), which became the SP's North Line between Tucson and El Paso and the EP&SW became the SP South Line. The SP abandoned the EP&SW (1912) from Fairbank to the line crossing at Mescal, probably in the 1960's when much of the EP&SW was abandoned, and used parts of the EP&SW (1912) between Mescal west to Tucson, including the overpass at this location.

Westward view of the SP (1881), which is the single track in the cut grade, and the EP&SW (1912), which uses a huge overpass to cross Pantano Wash and the SP alignment.





Westward view of the SP (1881)-EP&SW (1912) crossover near Pantano. The EP&SW (1912) crosses the SP twice, once at Mescal (13 miles east of here) to cross over to the north of the SP alignment and again here to cross back over to the south of the SP alignment, where it remains all the way to Tucson. Both tracks became SP in 1924 and now together serve as the UP's double trackage in this area.





A UP container train uses the more gradual grade of the former EP&SW trackage (compared to the original SP alignment under the bridge).