



In 1905-1907, the Pacific Coast Borax Company constructed the Tonopah & Tidewater Railroad to transport borax from Death Valley, California, to coastal markets, and to reach the booming gold fields around Tonopah, Nevada. The T&T was constructed northward from the (SP-built) AT&SF mainline at Ludlow, California, through this location at Soda Lake (now Zzyzx), to the mining town of Gold Center, Nevada. From Gold Center the T&T reached Beatty, Rhyolite, and Goldfield, Nevada, via trackage rights with the Bullfrog Goldfield Railroad. The T&T reached neither Tonopah nor ocean "tidewater." From 1908 to 1914, the Bullfrog Goldfield Railroad was combined into the T&T, and then combined again in 1918 after the demise of the Las Vegas & Tonopah Railroad. The T&T owned and ran both lines from 1920 until 1928. Once the Tonopah boom ended, borax shipping accounted for the majority of its business, and when the borax operations were moved from Death Valley to Boron, California, in 1927, the line declined swiftly. After a flood in 1933, Ludlow was abandoned and operations ran north from Crucero, where the T&T crossed the San Pedro, Los Angeles & Salt Lake Railroad (by the then the LA&SL). By 1940 the entire line was out of service and the T&T was torn up in 1942.

Southward view of the T&T grade at Zzyzx, California. Water here comes from Soda Spring, a natural spring that percolates up along the normal fault along which the Soda Mountains rose to the west and the valley fell to form Soda Lake, a dry playa lake. The T&T grade is on the flat lakebed, which can be seen in the left distance, and the mountain is out of sight to the right, but a few outlying low hills are just behind the Zzyzx oasis. The U. S. Army garrisoned here at Camp Soda Springs from 1867 to 1870. The T&T came through here in 1906. The made-up name Zzyzx was given to the site by Curtis Howe Springer, a radio evangelist, claiming the name to be the last word in the English language. He established the Zzyzx Mineral Springs and Health Spa in 1944, two years after the T&T was abandoned, and used the springs to bottle water and provide mineral baths. He used Zzyzx until 1974, when the land was reclaimed by the government. Since 1976, the Bureau of Land Management has allowed California State University to manage the land in and around Zzyzx as its Desert Studies Center.



About the same location as previous, T&T grade in the foreground and Zzyzx in the right distance. Notice the flat lakebed on the left with sand dunes in the distance. The dunes are known as "Devil's Playground."



Southeast view of the T&T grade and old telegraph/telephone poles, just south of Zzyzx.



Southward view of the T&T grade and old telegraph/telephone poles, just south of Zzyzx.



Southward view of the T&T grade where it runs between two bedrock hills, just south of Zzyzx.



Westward view of the T&T grade, same location as previous just south of Zzyzx. Note the Soda Mountains, uplifted along a normal fault, creating a conduit for groundwater to percolate to the surface and allow palms to grow.



Northward view of the T&T grade just north of Zzyzx. Note the flat Soda Lake, which was a lush perennial lake during the Pleistocene ice ages. Note also that the grade is plenty wide for an automobile; after abandonment, this part of the grade was flattened and widened for auto use.



Eastward view of the T&T grade about a mile north of Zzyzx. Note the spring-fed wetland in the foreground and flat Soda Lake crossed by the T&T grade. Note also that the grade has a gate on it and the grade is higher to the north (left) of the gate than to the south (right) of the gate; that is because the grade was flattened and widened for auto use only south of the gate and the widening made the grade lower. The grade north of the gate most closely preserved the original T&T fill grade across Soda Lake.