



In the late 1870's and first years of the 1880's, SP focused its resources on completing its southern transcontinental route through southern Arizona and New Mexico to El Paso and beyond. The SP was in no rush to build east from Mojave, California, until 1880, when the St. Louis and San Francisco Railway came to an agreement with the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad to jointly control the Atlantic & Pacific Railroad. The A&P would build a new AT&SF Western Division from the AT&SF mainline at Isleta, New Mexico, and head west to meet the SP at Needles, California. A&P construction reached Kingman, Arizona, in 1882, which prompted the SP to begin building its branch east from Mojave through this location to Needles, where it met the A&P on August 9, 1883. The A&P leased the Mojave-Needles line through the Mojave Desert from the SP in 1884, and in 1885 the AT&SF-owned California Southern Railroad completed its line from San Diego over Cajon Pass to the SP's Needles branch at Barstow, giving the AT&SF access to the southern California coast.

The SP-built Needles Branch crossed the southern California desert, now plied by BNSF trains. This southeastward view is taken from historic U.S. Highway 66, which parallels the A&P-SP line from Albuquerque to Barstow, and then parallels the California Southern over Cajon Pass into the Los Angeles basin.





Southwestward view from the same location as previous. A BNSF container train on the SP-built, A&P/AT&SF/BNSF main line is almost lost in the vastness. The gravel and sand in the foreground that extends to the track is an alluvial fan on the south flank of the Bristol Mountains. The flat sandy area beyond the track is dry Bristol Lake. The black conical mountain in the upper right is Amboy Crater, a basalt cinder cone that last erupted 10,000 years ago. A layer of black basalt lava extends east from the crater and out of sight to the left. The mountain range beyond the lava flow is the Bullion Mountains. The snowcapped peaks in the upper left are the 11,000+ foot San Bernardino Mountains. The photo below is the same scene, showing one of two statues erected by desert dwellers!







Southwestward view of the BNSF double-tracked main line, a siding, and Amboy Crater. The BNSF line is the Southern Transcon, the busiest railroad in the Southwest.



Northward view of a BNSF container train from the Amboy lava field. The Bristol Mountains are in the distance.





Under a desert moon, a BNSF consist delivers empties back across the southern California desert to LA ports on the SP-built Needles Branch (1883) route. The sparsely vegetated foreground is the edge of Bristol Lake, one of the hundreds of playa (dry) lakes in the Great Basin.