In 1905-1907, the Pacific Coast Borax Company constructed the Tonopah & Tidewater Railroad to transport borax from Death Valley, California, to coastal markets. The T&T reached neither the gold-mining boomtown of Tonopah, Nevada, nor ocean "tidewater." The T&T was a branch of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe, constructed northward from the SP-built AT&SF mainline (SP Mojave Branch [1883]) at Ludlow, California, to the 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 (1907). 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 (1905), which by 1933 was called the LA&SL. By 1940 the entire line was out of service and the T&T tracks were torn up in 1942.

In this southward view of the T&T (1907) 3 miles south of Shoshone, California, the Amargosa River is just out of sight to the left (east). The straight track traverses a very flat lakebed, one of several captured along the length of the Amargosa River. Note the white, rounded bluffs to the right (west) of the alignment -- these are fine grained lake deposits, which were deposited when this was still a closed basin and are now being eroded as the Amargosa River begins eroding the lake sediments.

The Amargosa River is the most developed drainage system in the T&T's region, although it takes a trained eye to recognize the Amargosa's mostly dry bed as a "river." The Amargosa River begins at springs in Nevada and runs south then west then north and terminates in the Death Valley playa. Over geologic time, rivers like the Amargosa connected the myriad playa lakes and evolved toward a classic dendritic drainage system (see the "Railroads and Geology" page).

Northward view of the T&T (1907), same location as previous. The grade in the distance required a small cut into the white lake deposits.

Westward view of the T&T (1907) at Shoshone, California. The track once ran through the open area in the foreground and is acknowledged by a railroad crossing sign. The white building on the left was a lunchroom on the T&T and is now the sheriff's office.

Northeastward view of the T&T (1907), same location as previous. The brushy area between the railroad grade and the distant bluffs is the Amargosa River. The flat-topped bluffs at the far side of the brushy area are lake sediments eroded by the Amargosa River.

T&T display at the Shoshone Museum.

The T&T runs north-south through several fault-bounded valleys of the Basin and Range Geologic Province and across several dry playas. The grade crosses a few low passes, which required some minor cut-and-fill work such as this cut (foreground) and curved fill grade (beyond the cut), located 5 miles north of Shoshone.

A wooden culvert on the T&T fill grade one mile north of the previous location.

Northward view of a concrete bridge buttress that once carried the T&T over the Amargosa River near a site called Evelyn, 14 miles north of Shoshone. Note the ripple marks in the lower left, formed when the river flowed during a wet winter or a summer monsoon. In the background, 3,800-foot Eagle Mountain is uplifted along a Basin and Range normal fault and consists of Cambrian (half billion years old) limestone and quartzite deposited along what was then the continental shelf of North America.