



In the late 1870's, the Southern Pacific pushed its transcontinental Sunset Route eastward past the southern outskirts of future Redlands, California (this location) to El Paso, Texas, and in 1883 to New Orleans, completing the southernmost transcontinental railroad in the US. At Redlands, the SP left the fertile alluvial valley and headed up San Timoteo Canyon (this location), a tributary of the Santa Ana River, and followed it east to San Gorgonio Pass (on the Pacific Crest) and the desert beyond.

In the spring of 1882, Mr. E. J. Waite of Wisconsin planted the first of many orange groves in the Redlands area and for almost 75 years Redlands was the center of the largest navel orange producing region in the world. The citrus industry declined in the area as agricultural areas were replaced by subdivisions and today only one packing house serving approximately 2,500 acres of citrus remains.

Eastward view of the SP Sunset Route (1881) in San Timoteo Canyon 8 miles southeast of downtown Redlands. San Gorgonio Pass, the SP (1881)'s crossing of the Pacific Crest, is just to the left (north) of 10,000-foot Mount San Jacinto, visible in the distance to the left of the train. A westbound Union Pacific (SP successor) container train hauls empties back to the Port of Los Angeles on a busy double-track line with concrete ties.



Northwestward view of the SP Sunset Route (1881) 7 miles northwest of the previous location, at the western entrance to San Timoteo Canyon, where the canyon opens up onto the fertile plains around Redlands. The houses on the bluff are the southern edge of Redlands and 10,000-foot Mount San Antonio ("Old Baldy") looms in the distance as yet another UP container train hauls empties back to LA.



The SP gained access to Redlands area traffic when it built its Redlands Branch in the 1880's or 1890's (online information is sparse and contradictory). The branch left the SP Sunset Route (1881) at Bryn Mawr, also known as Redlands Junction, 3 miles northwest of the previous location. From Bryn Mawr the line headed north for about a mile, then east through this location on the west side of downtown Redlands to the final terminus at Crafton, 6 miles northeast of the starting point at Bryn Mawr (the SP Redlands Branch is not shown separately on the SWRRH map). Most customers were orange packinghouses. The line was cut back starting in the 1960's and by about 2000 the line was gone.

This truss bridge over a small gulley near the intersection of Redlands Boulevard and Texas Street is the most notable landmark on the SP Redlands Branch.



In 1888, the California Southern Railroad, a subsidiary of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway, completed its Redlands Loop to serve the citrus groves east of San Bernardino. Heading clockwise, the line left the AT&SF San Bernardino Depot (on the CS 1885) and headed east through Highland and East Highland, then south across the Santa Ana River to Mentone and southwest to Crafton, where the line turned due west through Redlands (this location), then northwest across the Santa Ana River to rejoin the AT&SF at the San Bernardino Depot to complete the loop. At the turn of the 20th century, Redlands was an LA getaway and earned a reputation as the “Jewel of the Inland Empire,” with large Victorian houses, rose- and palm-lined streets, and a charming downtown centered at the Santa Fe Station, shown here. So beautifully kept was the area, with the dramatic mountain backdrops, that for several years the Santa Fe operated excursion trains along the loop. The trestle over the Santa Ana River north of Mentone was washed away in a flood in 1938 and never replaced, thus severing the east end of the loop and creating two branch lines (however, a 1954 topo map shows the line still crossing the river). Rail traffic was steady through the 1950’s, but as orange groves were replaced with residences, the need for trains decreased. The northern part of the loop was abandoned in the 1970’s and a few miles of the line south of Mentone was abandoned in the 1980’s. Only the Redlands to San Bernardino Depot segment still has tracks (including this location).

Eastward view of the CS Redlands Loop (1888) and the Redlands Santa Fe Depot. The track ends 1.5 miles east of this location. The Redlands Santa Fe Depot was established in 1888 and the current station building, a Classical Revival structure, was built in 1909 to replace the original depot. As of 2021, the track from here to the San Bernardino Depot is being upgraded for passenger rail.



Southward view of the Redlands Depot.





Eastward view of the CS Redlands Loop (1888) and the Redlands Santa Fe Depot, as seen in October 2021, several years after the other photos. Note the upgraded track and ballast for new commuter trains that run on the CS Redlands Loop (1888) between here and the San Bernardino Santa Fe Depot.



Eastward view of the CS Redlands Loop (1888) 1.5 miles east of the Redlands Depot. This is the current end of track, which is incorporated into a new rail-to-trail, the Orange Blossom Trail. At 11,000+ foot elevation Mount San Gorgonio is snowcapped in winter.



Northeastward view of the CS Redlands Loop (1888)/Orange Blossom Trail 2,000 feet east of the previous location. The trail goes around this wood-pile bridge over a small drainage and rejoins the original alignment in the right distance. I'm not sure if the concrete supports on the right were part of the railroad.





Northeastward view of the CS Redlands Loop (1888)/Orange Blossom Trail 400 feet northeast of the previous location.



Now we've jumped to a location 5 miles west of the Redlands Depot, where the loop makes its western crossing of the Santa Ana River. In this eastward view of the CS Redlands Loop (1888), the east end of the bridge over the Santa Ana River starts in the immediate foreground and a spur serves a possibly still-active customer.



Northwestward view of the CS Redlands Loop (1888) at the same location as previous, showing the switch to the spur and the bridge that carries the CS grade over the Santa Ana River. 10,000-foot Mount San Antonio ("Old Baldy") rises in the distance. The steel bridge is rusty and the Santa Ana River, which is the largest river in Southern California, is dry.

