



The Southern Pacific Railroad's Coast Line had its origin in the San Francisco & San Jose Railroad, which was opened between those two cities on January 16, 1864. Some of the founders of the SF&SJ then organized the Southern Pacific Railroad Company, which was incorporated on December 2, 1865, and authorized by Congress to build south through the San Joaquin Valley to the California state line at Needles, where it would meet the AT&SF-controlled Atlantic & Pacific Railroad (ultimately completed in 1883). The original organizers did no construction, but in 1868 sold the SP along with the SF&SJ to the Big Four of the Central Pacific. Early in 1868, the SP started its first construction, which was a line south from San Jose to reach southern California via a route that would cross the Coast Range southeast of San Jose to reach the San Joaquin Valley. However, this line was superseded as the SP's southern main line when the SP started constructing the SP (1876) line to southern California from the the SP's Western Pacific (1869), which the CP had purchased from the SF&SJ in 1867. However, the SP line south of San Jose -- the future Coast Line -- was continued southward to access agricultural areas in the Santa Clara and Salinas valleys and to ultimately reach LA via a coastal route. On March 13, 1869, the line was opened to Gilroy (30 miles south of San Jose), to Pajaro (Watsonville Jct.) on November 27, 1871, to Salinas on November 1, 1872, and to Soledad, 90 miles south of San Jose, on August 12, 1873. There the terminus remained for 13 years while construction forces concentrated on completing the SP (1876) and SP Sunset Route (1883).

In 1886, work finally resumed south from Soledad, and trains were operating to King City on July 20, to Paso Robles on October 31, and to Templeton on November 16, 1886, extending now 170 miles south of San Jose. During 1887, the line was continued another 15 miles south through the high valleys of Atascadero and to Santa Margarita, where further progress involved heavy construction on the crossing of the Santa Lucia Mountains, the most formidable obstacle on the Coast Line. It is 8 miles as the crow flies from Santa Margarita across the Santa Lucia Mountains to San Luis Obispo, but to traverse that distance took six tunnels, a spectacular horseshoe curve, 15 miles of grade and trackage, and 7 years before the line was opened to this location at San Luis Obispo on May 5, 1894. In 1895, the line reached Pismo Beach, 12 miles south of San Luis Obispo and the first place the "Coast" Line actually reached the coast, and another 4 miles to this location at Oceano, where the line was already cutting back inland. Then came 6 more years of construction along the Pacific shore, providing a scenic route but offering many engineering difficulties in completing the line into Santa Barbara in 1901, where the SP had completed a line from the south in 1887, thus opening the SP Coast Line from San Francisco to LA.

The track in the foreground of this northward view is the SP (1901), built through this location at Oceano, California, in 1895. The Oceano Depot was originally built in 1896 as the main passenger and freight depot for the Oceano-Grover Beach-Pismo Beach area. The station burned and was replaced in 1904 with the current 2-story building. I doubt the depot was originally built on this hill, but I could not find (during a brief internet search) any record of the building's move, most likely from along the siding that extends out of view to the right (see below).





Closer view of the Oceano Depot, now a museum.





Southward view at the same location as previous. The SP (1901) mainline is on the right, several sidings are on the left. I believe the depot was once in the flat area to the left (east) of the sidings, just beyond the eucalyptus trees.





Northward view of the sidings at Oceano.





Easternmost of the Oceano sidings. The depot had to be in that flat, undeveloped area on the other side of the track.



Amtrak station along the SP (1901), now Union Pacific, at Grover Beach, 2 miles north of Oceano.







Northward view of the SP (1901) at Pismo Beach, the first place the SP Coast Line actually reached the coast, 4 miles north of Oceano. These tracks are visible under the welcome sign.

