



The California desert part of the Southern Pacific mainline, between San Geronio Pass and Yuma, Arizona, follows the eastern shore of the Salton Trough. This topographic depression is a northward extension of the Sea of Cortez, where Baja California has rifted away from mainland Mexico to form new oceanic crust in between. The Salton Trough is more than 200 feet below sea level, but the delta of the Colorado River has formed a barrier to the Sea of Cortez, which would otherwise extend northward to around Palm Springs and has in the geologic past. When the original SP mainline from Los Angeles to El Paso was completed in 1881, the Salton Sea was a dry playa; during 1905-1907, the lake filled with water when an irrigation canal failed and the Colorado River flowed uncontrolled into the Salton Trough instead of into the Sea of Cortez. The new lake, the Salton Sea, inundated towns and business along with nearly 40 miles of the SP Sunset Route (1881). The SP contributed equipment and manpower to re-direct the flow and in 1906 re-routed its mainline a few miles east to higher ground. The lake level has since been maintained by irrigation runoff.

Southeastward view of the SP Sunset Route (1906), at Ferrum, California, on the east side of the Salton Sea (out of view to the right). Note the recently upgraded double tracks with concrete ties. Ferrum is the junction of the SP with the Eagle Mountain Railroad, built in 1948. The structure in the upper left distance is on the EM (1948), as it starts its climb east out of Ferrum, which is off the left side of the image.



Northwestward view of the double-tracked SP Sunset Route (1906) mainline and the Salton Sea beyond. The track in the foreground is the southern branch of a turning wye for the EM (1948), which once connected to a siding. Ferrum was the location of a five track yard that once existed in the dirt area between the SP mainline and the wye. As of 2016, all the sidings have been removed but the wye is still in place, as seen here.





Northward view of the Ferrum turning wye. The end of track in the foreground is the same as in the previous photo.



Westward view of the Ferrum turning wye. The abandoned SP Sunset Route (1881) is under water about 2 miles beyond the shoreline.





Southwestward view of the Ferrum turning wye.





Westward view of the Ferrum turning wye. Track is partly buried by erosion of the cut grade; heavy rusting in the foreground.



The switch at the tip of the Ferrum turning wye; note missing lever.





This westward view of the Ferrum turning wye was taken on a sunnier day and four years earlier (2012) than the previous photo; note the lever was in place (compare previous photo).





Northwestward view of the Ferrum turning wye.





Northeastward view of the Ferrum turning wye.





Northwestward view, the wye is just out of sight to the right. The track in the foreground is the EM (1948) mainline as it enters Ferrum and once connected to the sidings in the EM yard beyond this point.





Southeastward view of the EM (1948) mainline as it enters Ferrum, same location as previous.





Southeastward view of the EM (1948) mainline south of Ferrum; the structure in the distance is the same one visible in the first photo.