

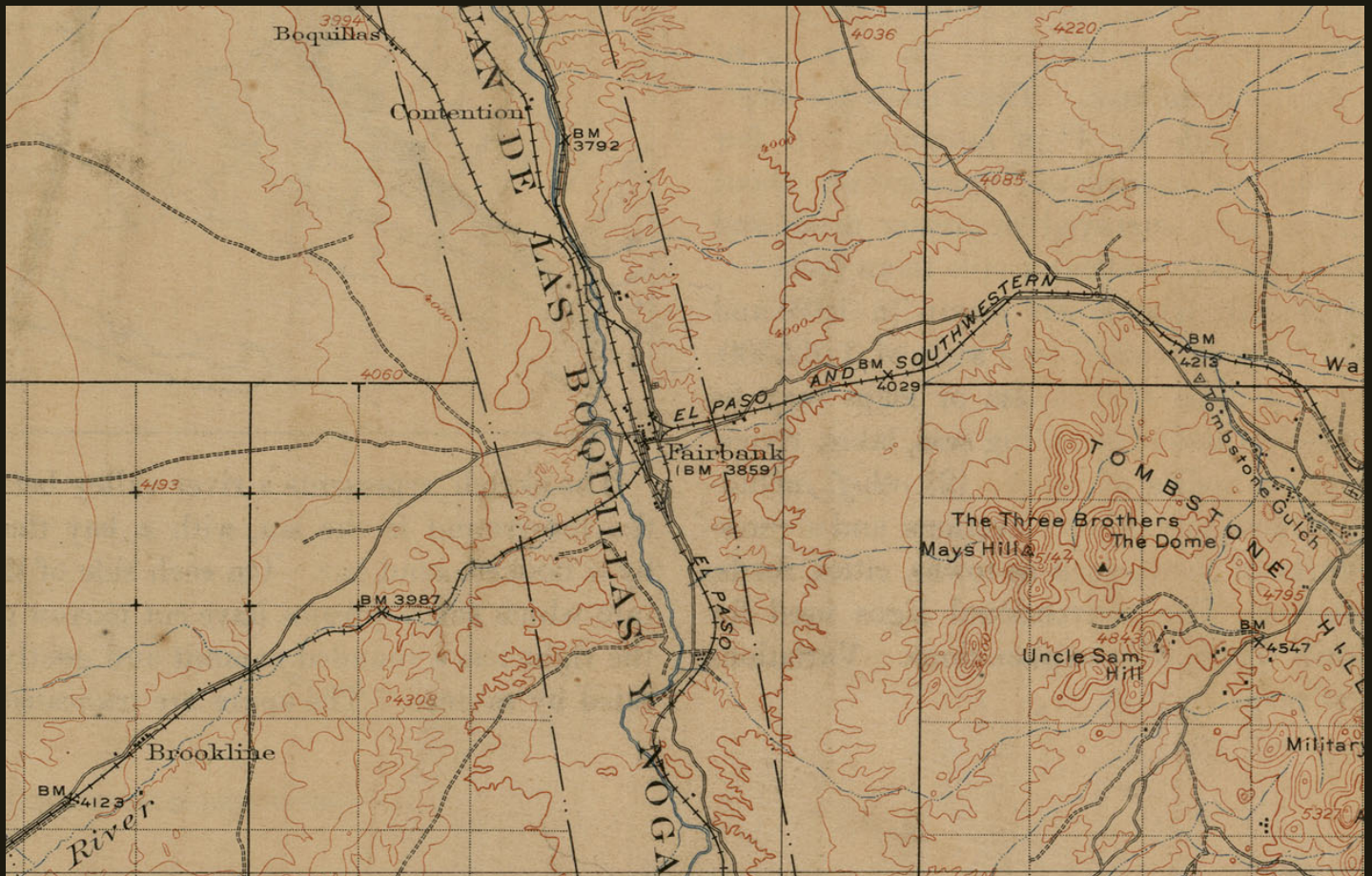


During the early 1880's, the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad rushed to compete with the Southern Pacific for Southwestern rail traffic. The AT&SF's first objective was to reach a Pacific Coast port, when the SP was already in Los Angeles and the SP-affiliated Central Pacific was already in the San Francisco Bay Area. The AT&SF first reached tidewater at Guaymas, Sonora, Mexico (south of map area), in 1882, via its New Mexico & Arizona Railroad (1882) (which went through this location at Fairbank, Arizona) and the AT&SF's Sonora Railroad (1882) in Mexico. The AT&SF built the NM&A southward from Benson, Arizona (on SP's Sunset Route, to which the AT&SF had trackage rights) along the San Pedro River to Fairbank (this location), then west up the tributary Babocomari River to grasslands at Sonoita, then over a low pass in the Conejo Hills to follow Sonoita Creek southwestward to its confluence with the Santa Cruz River at Calabasas (also known as Rio Rico), and finally south along the Santa Cruz River to Nogales, on the border with Mexico and the connection with the Sonora Railroad (1882). But even as it reached tidewater at Guaymas, the AT&SF was busy building to other Pacific ports. The AT&SF reached San Diego in 1885 (via its Atlantic & Pacific (1883) and California & Southern (1885) railroads), Los Angeles in 1887 (via the California Central (1887) and other lines), and the San Francisco Bay in 1900 (via its San Francisco & San Joaquin Valley (1900) and other railroads). The line through Fairbank (this location) to Guaymas became less important to the AT&SF and was ultimately abandoned.

Meanwhile, in 1888-1889, Phelps Dodge built the Arizona & South Eastern Railroad to connect its copper mines at Bisbee, Arizona, with the national rail network via the NM&A at Fairbank (this location). The A&SE expanded northward from Fairbank in 1894, parallel to and just west of the NM&A line to join directly with the SP Sunset Route (1881) at Benson. In 1901, the A&SE was renamed the El Paso & Southwestern Railroad, which extended the line east to El Paso in 1902 and to Tucson from Fairbank in 1912 to bypass the SP entirely between Tucson and El Paso. The worldwide collapse of copper prices after World War I severely affected the mines and the EP&SW, and in 1924 the SP leased the entire EP&SW. The SP re-configured the EP&SW trackage to supplement its Sunset Route (1881), which became the SP's North Line between Tucson and El Paso and the EP&SW became the SP South Line. The SP purchased the EP&SW from Phelps Dodge in 1955. In the early 1960's, the SP abandoned the South Line between Douglas and El Paso, leaving the trackage from Benson to Douglas and Bisbee. Around 1993, the SP sold the remaining EP&SW trackage, largely corresponding to the original A&SE trackage, to the short line San Pedro & Southwestern Railroad, which operated freight and excursions for a while but in the early 2000's abandoned the line almost all the way back to Benson.

Southward view of the NM&A grade, marked by the gravel ballast in the right-hand part of the photo, at the ghost town of Fairbank. From 1882 until 1888, Fairbank's only claim to fame was that it was the point on the NM&A where the alignment changed from due south, along the San Pedro River, to due west, towards Nogales and Guaymas. That curve to the west began about where the person is walking in the distance, which is also the approximate starting point of the A&SE (1889). Thus, A&SE trains used the grade visible in this photo through Fairbanks for 5 years, from 1889 until the A&SE built its parallel line to Benson in 1894. The A&SE (1894) alignment is 500 feet east of this location and joins the 1889 alignment just south of town. The A&SE (1894) crosses the NM&A and the San Pedro River about mile north of town and runs west of the NM&A north to Benson.





This topo map from 1915 illustrates the complexities of the various railroad re-alignments at Fairbank. First, let's review the lines coming into Fairbank. There are three lines coming in from the north, which from east to west are (1) the NM&A (1882), identified north of this section of the map as the Southern Pacific Nogales Branch, (2) the A&SE (1894) line to Benson, and (3) the EP&SW (1912) line to Tucson. The line that comes in from the west is the continuation of the NM&A (1882)/SP Nogales Branch, the line that comes in from the south is the A&SE (1889) line to Bisbee, and the line that comes in from the east is the EP&SW Tombstone Branch (1903).

North of Fairbank, just east of the letter "S" in "LAS" in "DE LAS BOQUILLAS," the NM&A (1882)/SP Nogales Branch crosses the A&SE (1894). Thus, at Fairbank, the NM&A (1882)/SP Nogales Branch is the central line through Fairbank, as seen in the previous photo and designated "Railroad Avenue" (below). When the SP&SW acquired the SP's remaining trackage around 1993, the active SP line was, from north to south, the A&SE (1894) alignment from Benson to "LAS," the EP&SW (1912) alignment from "LAS" to just south of Fairbank, and the A&SE (1889) alignment south from that point to Bisbee. All the other lines had been abandoned, and the now-abandoned SP&SW, which consists of segments of three different historical railroads, is the dominant and most obvious alignment on the ground and in satellite images.







Northward view of the SP&SW grade the on the A&SE (1889) alignment where it crosses a small wash about 500 feet southwest of Fairbank. Note the black slag ballast from the Bisbee mines, typical of EP&SW construction.





Southward view of the SP&SW/A&SE (1889) grade, same location as previous.





Southward view of the SP&SW/A&SE (1889) grade 600 feet south of the previous location and 1,000 feet south of Fairbank. A concrete bridge carries the grade over Walnut Gulch, which enters the San Pedro River a quarter mile west (right) of this location. The EP&SW Tombstone Branch (1903) generally follows Walnut Gulch from Fairbank to Tombstone.





Southward view of the SP&SW/A&SE (1889) grade 200 feet south of the previous location. The gravel behind the "19" is the NM&A (1882), which connected directly with the SP&SW/A&SE (1889) alignment at this location after the SP abandoned the NM&A north of this location (re-aligned SP Nogales Branch). Old foundations provide only a hint of what once existed at this important railroad connection (below).







Northward view of the SP&SW/A&SE (1889) grade at same location as previous. Arizona Highway 82 crosses over the grade in the distance, and Fairbank is just to the right (east) and north of that crossing. The gravel in the right foreground hints at a former yard and sidings and/or the northern continuation of the NM&A (1882).





More foundations where the SP&SW/A&SE (1889) crossed the NM&A (1882).







Southwestward view of the NM&A (1882), marked by gravel and wood debris, east of the SP&SW/A&SE (1889) alignment marked by the black ballast in the distance.