



In 1905-1907, the Pacific Coast Borax Company constructed the Tonopah & Tidewater Railroad in order to cash in on the mining boom at Tonopah, Nevada, and to transport borax from Death Valley, California. The T&T NEVER reached the gold-mining town of Tonopah, Nevada, or ocean "tidewater." The T&T was a branch of the AT&SF, constructed northward from the SP-built AT&SF mainline (SP Mojave Branch [1883]) at Ludlow, California, northward to the town of Gold Center, Nevada, where the T&T connected with the Bullfrog Goldfield Railroad (1907). From Gold Center T&T trains reached the mining boom towns of Beatty, Rhyolite, and Goldfield, via trackage rights on the Bullfrog Goldfield Railroad. From 1908 to 1914, the Bullfrog Goldfield Railroad was absorbed into the T&T, and in 1918 the T&T absorbed the Las Vegas & Tonopah Railroad (1907). 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 Los Angeles & Salt Lake Railroad. By 1940 the entire line was out of service and the T&T tracks were torn up in 1942.

Northwestward view of the T&T (1907) near China Ranch, California. The wide, flat area to the left is the Amargosa River floodplain, which the T&T follows for about 50 miles. The orange foliage in the low area to the left of the grade is the Amargosa River. The ties on the fill grade were added after the abandonment to recreate a bit of railroad history.



Northwestward view of the T&T (1907) 2,000 feet northwest of the previous location. The ravine with orange foliage to the left of the grade is the Amargosa River. The color of the T&T fill grade changes at a breach in the fill to allow a side wash to flow through to the Amargosa River. Note the wooden posts at the other end of the breach; the posts once supported a small bridge.



Northwestward view of the T&T (1907) 1,000 feet northwest of the previous location. The Amargosa River is still to the left of the grade. In the distance, the alignment turns to the right through a cut grade in a low hill; the alignment turns north-northeastward after the curve to follow the river.



Waterfall on the Amargosa River near the previous location.



Southward view of the T&T (1907) fill grade from a point near the waterfall .



Closer view of the T&T (1907) fill grade near the same location as previous.



Now we've moved 3,000 feet south to the location of the first photo, looking southeastward at the T&T (1907) fill grade. Note the white dirt and woodwork on the bluff; this was a loading facility for the Morrison Siding, discussed below.



Southward at the base of the bluff in the previous photo; note the same white dirt in the foreground. Barley discernable in the left of the photo, just beyond the white dirt, is the T&T (1907) fill grade going into a wide turn to the right toward due south to follow the Amargosa River. The flat area to the left (east) of the grade is the floodplain of China Ranch Wash, which enters the Amargosa River where the grade is.



Morrison Siding was built in 1915; it was a one-mile ore-car track built to carry gypsum and talc ore from mines located up China Ranch Wash to the T&T for shipment. In this westward view at the top of the white-dirt-covered bluff we can see a shallow cut grade, ties, and a retaining wall for Morrison Siding. The trackage ended before the drop-off of the bluff, just beyond the retaining wall on the right. The white dirt is gypsum and talc ore that spilled incidentally during unloading of ore carts at this location and loading onto T&T ore cars down off the bluff just to the right of the photo.



Northeastward view of the grade for Morrison Siding, 2,500 feet northeast of the previous location. Note the curve to the left (north) in the distance and the relatively lush growth, including trees, to the right of the grade along China Ranch Wash; that growth is the beginning of the riparian area associated with the spring at China Ranch.



Southwestward view of the grade for Morrison Siding, 1,000 feet northeast of the previous location. The curve is the same curve seen in the distance of the previous photo and the relatively lush growth along China Ranch Wash is to the left of the grade. The Amargosa River and the T&T (1907) are at the far end of the riparian growth and just in front of the darker, higher hill in the middle distance.



Northward view of the grade for Morrison Siding, 300 feet north of the previous location. The grade appears to split; the overgrown Morrison Siding grade continues straight along the base of the slope to the far left and the split to the right is just the trail to the China Ranch parking lot.

China Ranch exists due a spring along China Ranch Wash. The first record of development was by Chinese man in the late 1800's who, after many years of work in the Death Valley borax mines, came to the spring and developed the water, planted fruits and vegetables, and raised meat for the local mining camps. It became known as Chinaman's Ranch. In 1900, a man named Morrison appeared and apparently ran the Chinese farmer off at gun point, claimed the ranch, and built his namesake ore-cart railroad in 1915. Morrison sold out and since then the ranch has had many owners and uses, including a fig farm, cattle ranch, hog farm, alfalfa farm, and others. A date grove was planted in the early 1920's by Vonola Modine, daughter of Death Valley area pioneers, and China Ranch (as it came to be known) was soon yielding from 100 to 300 pounds of dates in a season. In 1970, the property was purchased by Charles Brown Jr. and Bernice Sorrells, the son and daughter of area pioneer and long-time State Senator Charles Brown of Shoshone. It remains in these families today and is now operated as the China Ranch Date Farm, a remote oasis that serves date shakes and baked goods to Death Valley area tourists.



Southward view near the end-of-the line of Morrison Siding, 2,000 feet northeast of the previous location and one mile northwest of the loading facility at the other end of the line at the T&T (1907). Note the same white talc and gypsum from incidental spillage as at the other end of the line, and the ore cart on display. The date palms are on the China Ranch Date Farm.

MORRISON SIDING

In 1915 one mile of railroad track was laid up to this site from the Main Tonopah and Tidewater Railroad line a mile to the south. Gypsum and talc ore was loaded here, but the grade was excessively steep, making it a hazardous descent back to the main line. A run away loaded with ore from Morrison once derailed, killing the fireman badly burning the engineer.

China Ranch



Ramp for runaway ore carts, near previous location. These ties appear to be original.





Gypsum mine near of Morrison Siding.

The Gypsum Queen

The mines in this canyon were known collectively as the Gypsum Queen, and between 1915 and 1918 they produced about 100,000 tons of gypsum. The ore was shipped to Los Angeles on the Tonopah and Tidewater Railroad and used to produce plaster. The mines were closed in 1918 after 2 men were killed in a cave in about 200 yards downhill from here on left.

China Ranch