

BUILDING THE SOUTHERN PACIFIC RAILROAD THROUGH ARIZONA

The Southern Pacific Bulletin, published monthly by the advertising department of the Southern Pacific Railroad System, has been publishing recently a series of articles giving "The Story of the Beginning of Southern Pacific." Chapter 34 of these articles, appearing in the October (1928) number of the Bulletin, tells of the advent of these lines into Arizona and New Mexico in the following:

"Construction of a bridge across the Colorado River and delay in reaching an agreement with military authorities for permission to lay tracks across the reservation at Ft. Yuma, held the railroad on the west bank of the river for four months and it was September 30, 1877, when the first Southern Pacific train crossed the boundary line of California and Arizona into Yuma, then a small village just across the river from the army post, which had been known as Arizona City before 1873.

Yuma remained the terminus of the railroad for about a year and a half, as well as being the end of the line for the stage coaches and freighting teams operating east into Arizona and New Mexico and west to San Diego. It was in the Southwest that the historic and romantic stage coaches made their last stand in the West as a mode of extensive transportation.

Early-day stage transportation through Arizona and New Mexico on the old transcontinental route lasted only about 22 years until replaced by the railroad. Though considered luxurious at the time, travel in the stage coaches presented many hardships and discomforts when thought of in the light of present-day travel, to say nothing of the constant peril of raids from Indians, particularly through the Apache country, and from bandits and other renegades along the route.

Mule Back Travel

An advertisement dated at San Antonio July 1, 1858, stated: "Passengers and express matter are forwarded in new coaches of the San Antonio and San Diego Stage Company, drawn by six mules, over the entire length of our line, excepting the Colorado desert of 100 miles which are crossed on mule back. An armed escort travels through the Indian country with each mail train. Passengers are provided with provisions during the trip, except where the coach stops at public houses along the line, at which each

passenger will pay for his own meal. Each passenger is allowed 30 pounds of personal baggage exclusive of blankets and arms."

On sections of the route less than 300 miles in length the travel usually was continuous day and night, in deference to mail contracts. A passenger within the lurching "thorough-brace" stages, caught a few winks of sleep by passing an arm through one of the leather loops hanging for that purpose from the side of the coach. There was slight break in the monotony of the desert road with only the prospect ahead of arrival at some desolate mud-built "station," where water, whiskey and the roughest food could be secured while the stage team was being changed.

First Stage Line

The first through stage line on the Southern route, which was south of the Gila River and later closely followed by the main line of the Southern Pacific, was that of the San Antonio and San Diego Stage Company, which inaugurated its service in 1857,^{31a} when three coaches made the journey from San Diego to Tucson in three days. On early stage lines through the Southwest, passenger and express service was subordinate to the mail contracts from which the running expenses were assumed to come. The first service was semi-monthly.

In 1858, over this same road, was operated the famous Butterfield Stage route on semi-weekly service. The first trip eastward started from San Francisco September 16, 1858. The eastern stage terminus was Tipton, Mo., end of the Missouri Pacific railroad, then 160 miles long. John Butterfield met with a big ovation when he stepped from the train at St. Louis with the first pouch of mail, having made the 2759-mile trip from the Pacific Coast city in the wonderful time of 24 days, 20 hours and 30 minutes. The service later became daily. The route with its 100 coaches, 1000 horses and 750 men was abandoned at the outbreak of the Civil War, for its military guards had to be withdrawn.

Indian Peril

In 1864 Sol Barth carried mail from Prescott to Albuquerque, subcontracting with Ben Block. The mail was carried weekly provided the carrier wasn't killed by Indians. Regular mail service from southern Arizona does not seem to have been re-estab-

NOTE 31a—In an early advertisement in the Tubac Arizonian on June 30, 1859, the San Antonio and San Diego Stage Company made the statement that their line had been in successful operation since July, 1857. Col. Jas. H. McClintock, in his book "Arizona, the Youngest State," relates that Silas St. John, one of the Company's employees, claims the first mail rider, Charlie Youmans, started from San Diego November 15, 1857. St. John took the mail pouch at Carrizo Creek and rode to Yuma (then Yaeger Ferry), 110 miles, in 32 hours without changing horses.

lished until about 1869. Daily service was established in 1875 with six-horse Concord coaches, these connecting with the Southern Pacific at each succeeding terminal as the rails were laid eastward.

In addition to the stage coaches for mail, passenger and express, were the freighting teams which did the heavy hauling between the mines and small communities in the Southwest. "The 'freighter' was a very important personage in the days before the railroad came," writes Col. Jas. H. McClintock in his history. "As a rule he was a professional closely allied to the stage driver, who cursed him for cutting up the road and for raising too much dust. Some of the freighting outfits of those days were awe-inspiring affairs. The team might be anything up to 24 mules driven by a 'jerk line' and handled with a skill marvelous to the uninitiated. The mule, without doubt, was the greatest traction factor in the upbuilding of the Southwest. Oxen at first were tried, but for the country was too hot and too dry. Horses, except in the Mexican 'rawhide' outfit, suffered much from the same disadvantages."

An effort was also made during 1856-7 to use camels in the desert country for transporting army supplies. Dozens of animals were imported by the Government from Smyrna, along with native drivers. But they, too, were found not fitted for the service and conditions of the country. Most of the animals were turned loose on the desert to shift for themselves. Some were later recaptured for circuses. Wm. Hood, chief engineer of the Southern Pacific, said he and his men frequently saw camels on the desert during the time the railroad was being built.

Trains of Wagons

The freighting wagons were especially built for this service at Yuma, Phoenix, Tucson, and Prescott. Some of the lead wagons had wheels fully eight feet high and capacity for a half carload of goods. Following a 16-mule team there were usually three or four wagons, diminishing in size toward the end vehicle, which was used for forage and for the bedding and food of the "freighter" and his "swamper." Both men were heavily armed, for outlaws, bandit Mexicans, and Apaches all found attractive loot in the cargo of the wagons. In the Apache country travel was made by wagon trains, following the custom used in crossing the plains. A score of teams were joined for mutual protection and at night would park in a circle.

At about the time the railroad reached Yuma final efforts were being made in Congress to get Federal aid in funds and in

lands for building the Texas and Pacific railroad via Tucson and Yuma to San Diego. The Southern Pacific stood ready to build the road east from Yuma without subsidy and this condition caused a remarkable contest in Washington between Collis P. Huntington, representing the interests of the Southern Pacific, and Tom Scott, then president of the Texas and Pacific. The issue was finally settled against the latter company and, on November 19, 1878, ground was broken at Yuma for continuation of the Southern Pacific eastward.^{32a} Unusually rapid construction followed and the 1,183 miles of track through the sparsely settled and mostly desert region was built and put in operation to San Antonio, Texas, in about 50 months, which was comparable to the best records of the earlier railroad building over the Sierra Nevada Mountains in California and across Nevada.

At that time there were no towns or settlements and only stage stations between Yuma and Tucson, about 252 miles, excepting at a short distance northerly there were the cross roads, store, blacksmith shop, etc., now known as Phoenix, and the small villages of Tempe and Florence. From Tucson eastward there were stage stations only as far as El Paso; about 311 miles, with the small towns of Silver City and Mesilla at a considerable distance north of the railroad route.

“Law West of the Pecos”

From El Paso eastward there were small villages in the first few miles of the Rio Grande River bottom and then nothing but stage stations and small military posts as far as what is now Marathon, 254 miles from El Paso, thence to Del Rio, 197 miles from Marathon, there was no one living. The country was entirely vacant southward from the Mexican boundary and northward for a great distance. It was in this region that a few years afterward, when a very few settlers had come in, “Law West of the Pecos” held sway. From Del Rio to San Antonio, 169 miles, the country was sparsely settled with a few very small towns, now grown beyond recognition.

Before the railroad reached Yuma practically all the supplies for the Southwest were shipped by steamer from San Francisco down the coast, around lower California and up the Gulf to Port Isabel, where the cargoes were shifted to light draft sternwheel boats and the journey continued up the Colorado River to points

NOTE 32a—Construction work across Arizona and New Mexico was carried on under the names of the Southern Pacific Railroad Company of Arizona, incorporated September 20, 1878, and the Southern Pacific Railroad Company of New Mexico, incorporated April 14, 1879. Both companies were consolidated with the Southern Pacific Company on March 10, 1902.

in Arizona. Many passengers preferred this water route to the shorter, but more tedious, stage journey in reaching points in northern Arizona. Most of this river traffic was carried on by the Colorado River Steamer Navigation Company, which was purchased by the Southern Pacific during 1877.

Constructing eastward from Yuma, the railroad crept up the bottom land alongside the Gila River to the station now known as Wellton, at that time Adonde Wells. This original line was washed away in 1892, when a dam in the Gila River gave way, and in the following year the present line was relocated on higher ground. Two surveys were made from Wellton. One maintained a light grade passing around the end of the Mohawk Mountain close to the Gila River and going into the present road near Aztec. The other route, and the one chosen, was over Mohawk Summit and thence by easy construction to Gila Bend, now the station of Gila. Beyond Gila a heavy climb brought the railroad to Estrella, from which the road dropped down to the station now known as Heaton and to which point trains first operated April 28, 1879.

Abandoned City

Heaton is now just a blind siding and little more than a whistling post, but early in 1879 it was a town of considerable size and importance. It was then called Maricopa, named after the famous stage station of Maricopa Wells located about seven miles north, which was the watering place for that part of the country. Being at the gateway for teaming to Phoenix and other points in the Salt River Valley, Maricopa seemed destined to become a large city. A special train was run from California carrying many home-seekers and real estate men who invested in property at the railroad terminus. The bubble burst as the railroad pushed on eastward and, by the summer of 1887, the railroad offices and name were moved four miles east to the present town of Maricopa.

Beyond the original Maricopa was constructed one of the longest, if not the longest, curve in the world, five miles in length, with a ten-minute curvature. East of this curve is a tangent 47 miles in length, being the longest piece of straight track on the Southern Pacific lines. Casa Grande was reached May 19, 1879, where work was held up during the summer season. The track reached Tucson March 17, 1880, and three days later the first passenger train entered that city.

Ancient Pueblo

Tucson then had about two thousand inhabitants. It had been surrounded by an adobe wall which was built many years before as a protection against the Indians and outlaws.^{33a} Arrival of the first train was celebrated with great enthusiasm and the banners of all nations were floated from the outer walls of the ancient and honorable pueblo. As the train approached the city limits a salute of 38 guns was fired by the military and the Sixth Cavalry band burst into a medley of patriotic airs. A silver spike, the driving of which marked the final completion of the railroad into Tucson, was presented to Col. Charles Crocker, president of the Southern Pacific. After speeches of welcome, the party of visitors was escorted to the banquet hall.

The "Arizona Star" devoted most of its edition that day to stories about the railroad, and in one article the editor wrote poetically, as follows:

"The railway comes booming across the desert a thousand miles from the Golden Gate to Asia, without a subsidy; without a land grant; without a mortgage on posterity, and is as welcome to Arizona as the fertilizing stream that makes the desert bloom like the rose. The name of the builder of the Chinese Wall is lost in the Asian mystery. Eleven acres of solid masonry has not served to preserve the name of the builder of the pyramid of Gizah. They were of no benefit to the human race. But the names of builders of roads are immortal. The Mongolian shepherd will show you the road which Genghis Khan made through the Nankou Pass. The Swiss peasant will guide you over the road traversed by Hannibal across the Alps. The veriest yokel in England watching his kine graze from the ruins of Stonehenge, will answer your question 'who built that road to the heights of old Sarum? Caesar!' The typical New Englander, in crossing this continent by the Southern Pacific Railroad a thousand years hence to visit the ruins of London, will stop at the Casa Grande and ask a descendant of the Pima Indians who built the citadel

NOTE 33a--The exact date of the founding of Tucson is uncertain. Some writers claim it was first located about the year 1555 and that it is the oldest city in the United States. Others claim that it was not a settlement until the latter part of the 17th century, when the missions along the Santa Cruz were established by Father Kino. Of one thing there seems to be no doubt, and that is that Tucson was the first and only walled city ever existing in the United States. The wall, rising about five feet above the flat roofs of the houses, afforded fine breastworks for the defense of the pueblo. The enclosure formed by this wall occupied area bounded as follows: Beginning at Washington Street, thence south to Pennington, up Pennington to about the middle of the Court House, thence north to Washington Street, and along Washington Street to the place of beginning. There were two entrances by immense doors made of heavy timber. One of these doors stood where Alameda Street enters Main and some of the old wall has been used in the later-day construction." (From "Arizona, the Youngest State," by Col. Jas. H. McClintock.)

of that name, and the gentle savage will reply in the softest dialect of his tribe, 'pimach' (I don't know); but ask him 'Who built the Southern Pacific Railroad?' and the child of the centuries will answer, 'Crocker.' "

One of the features of the celebration, and which gave birth to a story that has been told with many ramifications and has since taken a place in railroad classics, was the sending of telegrams from the banquet hall to all parts of the world. The telegraph, like the railroad, was an innovation and the leading citizens of Tucson decided to give it a thorough christening. Over the signature of Mayor Leatherwood, messages of greeting were sent to the President of the United States, to Governor Freeman, to the Southern Pacific Company, to the Mayors of San Francisco, Los Angeles and Yuma, and to His Holiness the Pope at Rome.

Message to Pope

In sending the message to the Pope, the Mayor was joined by the Very Rev. J. B. Salpointe, and it read: "The Mayor of Tucson begs the honor of reminding His Holiness that this ancient and honorable pueblo was founded by the Spaniards under the sanction of the Church more than three centuries ago and to inform your Holiness that a railroad from San Francisco, California, now connects us with the Christian world. Asking your benediction." Great excitement was created in Tucson a few days later by the delivery of what was thought to be a reply from the Pope. A very brief message, deciphered after some difficulty, expressed the appreciation of His Holiness, but asked laconically, "—but where the H— is Tucson?" Some wag who had attended the ceremonies, but who lived in another city, perpetrated the hoax.

From Tucson the road was built over the open mesa to Vail, 20 miles eastward, where it entered what is known as Cienega Canyon. The original location along Cienega Creek was subjected to bad washouts and nearly all of the line from Vail to Mescal had been rebuilt on higher ground by 1892, as had also a considerable portion of the line further eastward. From Mescal the grade dropped down to the San Pedro River at Benson, over which distance it was necessary to build about two miles of very crooked track. This series of sharp curves was later done away with by line changes which eliminated six ten-degree curves. The first train was operated to Benson June 22, 1880.

Apache Country

From the Dragoon Mountains, just beyond Benson, the road was extended across the Sulphur Springs Valley, passing over a point once occupied by the ancient Lake Cochise, where the prosperous little town of Wilcox now stands. For hundreds of years the Apache Indians held absolute dominion over this section of the country. Chief Cochise made peace in 1872, which was not violated until about two years after his death in 1876, when the greater part of the Indians broke from the reservation and went on the warpath later under the leadership of Chief Geronimo. It was during the heyday of this notorious Indian rebel that the Southern Pacific line was being built through that part of Arizona, but the construction force was never attacked. During a part of the time a military escort moved along with the railroad men for protection. Geronimo surrendered in 1886.

Emerging from the fertile valley, the road passed over the summit now known as Razo, then Railroad Pass, and from there down the hill to Luzena and Bowie, so named from Ft. Bowie, an old military post which lies several miles to the south of the present station. From this point the road extended across San Simon Valley and trains were operated into San Simon, 11 miles from the Arizona-New Mexico boundary line, on September 15, 1880.

Just beyond, the line climbed the Peloncillo Mountains to the summit of Steins, in the vicinity of which some of the scenes of Geronimo were enacted and where many mail robbers took their toll.

The first passenger trains were operated into Lordsburg on October 18, 1880; to Deming on December 15; and on May 19, 1881, the road reached the Rio Grande River and El Paso welcomed its first railroad train.