

A self-guided automobile tour of THE PACIFIC COAST RAILWAY (PCRY), as it went through San Luis Obispo County, California during the years from 1876 until 1942.

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INTRODUCTION

This material is motivated by a desire to locate, in modern terms, the remnants of the railway described in the excellent resource " The Pacific Coast Railway by Kenneth E Westcott and Curtiss H Johnson".

It was found that for the most part that the references cited there were to locations no longer on current county road maps. Our effort has been to tie the path of the railway to roads and locations that currently exist in a manner that would allow interested persons to use current roads to follow the path of the railway from San Luis Obispo (SLO) to Arroyo Grande (AG). The results of our investigations have been summarized in this itinerary, which contains the following sections:

- THE AUTOMOBILE TOUR
 - DESCRIPTIONS - There is a description of each of the eight stops on the automobile tour, what to see there and the way to move from one stop to another.
 - MAPS - One Google map will serve as the OVERVIEW of the tour and also a detailed street map of each STOP.
 - PICTURES - Nineteen pictures (Pics) of the eight STOPS are provided to help identify each location so that you will know that you are in the right place. They also point out certain significant features at that site.
- THE APPENDIX
 - A list of references and resources used in this presentation.
 - Comments by those who heard of our work and gave us personal or family experiences
 - Information about the authors

THE AUTOMOBILE TOUR

From these resources, our frequent excursions to the area and discussions with local landowners who have studied the railway and whose families were participants in granting the original rights-of-way to the railway company, we have compiled an automobile tour which identifies all of those locations where there are sufficient remnants visible from public highways, to warrant a stop and look.

You must remember that these sites are all on private land and at no time are you permitted to trespass.

AN OVER VIEW OF THE TOUR

The tour starts in San Luis Obispo Ca. (SLO) and proceeds southeast to Arroyo Grande (AG) via Broad Street which becomes state highway 227. From AG it turns back northwest on Corbett Canyon Road and ends at "Narrow Gage Road", a side street off of Corbett Canyon Road. The Google Map OVERVIEW can viewed by entering the following path into your internet browser. You will have to copy the path and then enter it into your second browser window.

<https://mapsengine.google.com/map/edit?hl=en&authuser=0&mid=zL85id47Z5As.kU8NXapWs6SE>

The initial view is the OVERVIEW. The detailed street map for each site emerges when you do the Google zoom-in (hit the + sign). Make sure you review the map for the next site before you leave the current one.

Since the rails were all removed for scrap for the war effort in 1942 and the ties were all dug up for fence posts or the like, about all that is left is the raised roadbed and several cuts through hill sides. These are enough however to locate the path of the former railway which is just what this tour is trying to show.

If you have a copy of the reference book it would add a new dimension to your enjoyment of the tour. One could be borrowed from either the SLO museum or the local library.

The details of the tour

For each of the following stops, we provide detailed information on what to see there, and one or more pictures of the STOP to assure that you are at the right place. You should have the maps and pics of the next STOP handy before you leave the previous one. To get the detailed map for STOP 1 go to the Table to the left of the OVERVIEW map and scroll to highlight STOP 1 which will zoom you to the map where the streets appear..

STOP 1

The tour starts at the intersection of South Street with Broad and Santa Barbara Streets in SLO. Zoom in on the Google map to bring up the street map for STOP 1 The pictures, (Pics) 1 and 2 for STOP 1, are embedded into these directions

There is a monument on the sidewalk in front of the fire station, which describes some history of the railway. See Pic 1 for STOP 1.



[Although not on the tour I recommend a visit to the railway museum just off Santa Barbara Street where you can see on the street side of the building two narrow gage boxcars on some narrow gage track . Then cross to the rear of the building to compare track sizes and spacing with the full size Southern Pacific (SP) rails and spacing. The Museum and its narrow gage cars are shown in Pic 2 for STOP 1.



Now on your way to stop 2 . Have your STOP 2 map and pics handy as you start to proceed.

STOP 2

From STOP 1 you travel about 2 miles south on Broad street to a left turn onto Tank Farm road and then a right turn onto Poinsettia. See the Map for STOP 2.

What to see;

Go about 200 yards on Poinsettia to a site on the right where the raised track bed is visible. See the Pic 1 for a view of this STOP.



It is OK to exit your vehicle here and proceed into the site where you will see where the roadbed crossed a deep ravine. The raised bed is outlined in red in Pic 2.



This is the least impressive site but it will provide the observer with an indication of what to look for at the other sites.

Remember now is the time to get the Map for STOP 3 from the Google OVERVIEW map which shows the location of your stop.. The indicator "Hadley Crossing" shows the location of the crossing.

STOP 3

From there proceed south on Broad Street, as it becomes State Route 227, to a right turn onto Price Canyon Road towards Pismo Beach.

Proceed about 1/4 mile on Price Canyon Road to the overpass over the Southern Pacific (SP) Railway tracks. Note the path of those tracks as they proceed to the left under the overpass toward Pismo Beach.

What to see

At about 70 yards past the centerline of the overpass you will see the remnant of a road leading off Price Canyon Road at about 30 degrees to the left. It is thought that the PCRY passed in the same direction but just to the left of this road and to the right of the line of trees which indicate the presence of Pismo creek.

. Obviously the former road was built up to accommodate the current overpass
It is too dangerous to stop here, so proceed on for several hundred yards to oil company gate 4 on your left where you can park on either the right or left shoulder.

The Map for STOP 3 provides a layout of this stop.

See Pic 2 for a view of Gate 4.



This stop is called Hadley Crossing. Unfortunately we cannot get closer to it, but we can provide some good pictures and information as to what went on there.

Hadley Crossing is about 3.000 ft distance at about 30 deg to your left from where you are parked. It would be 300 feet past the tall metal electrical tower you see there, see Pic 3.



As the GPRY approached those steep hills beyond the Hadley Crossing, it turned to the left and followed the creek along the base of those hills toward STOP 4.

To assure yourself that you are really at Hadley Crossing, look behind you, away from the tower, to see some hills. You should see something like Pic 1

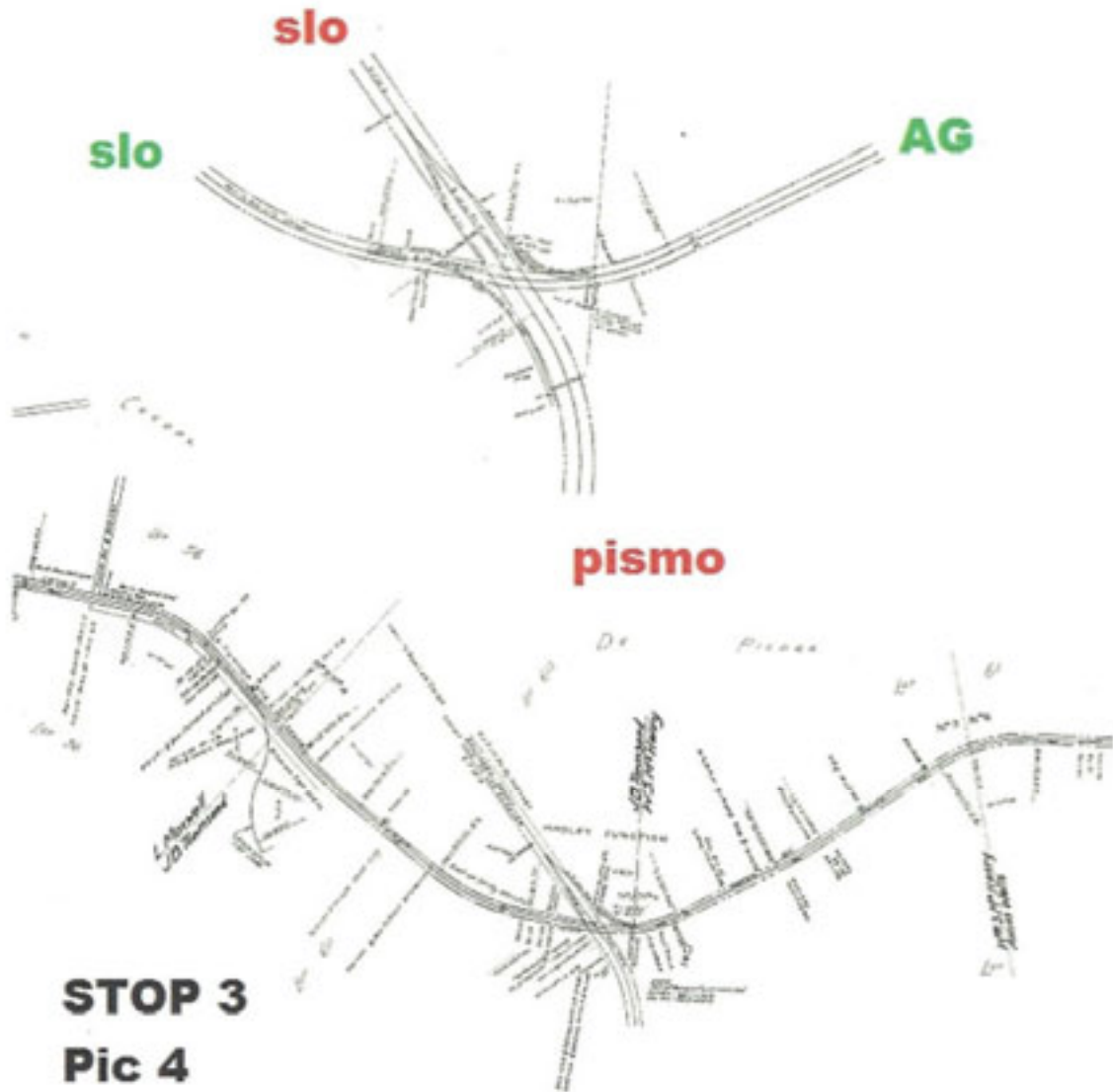


Compare those hills with the hills in Pics 5 which is actual photo taken from Hadley Crossing in the 1800's. This association gives you your first sure site location.

Now the view from the 1800's photo. Note the liquid asphalt company located there.



This next picture is taken from the surveyor's map showing distances and radius of various curves used to lay out the track around Hadley Crossing.

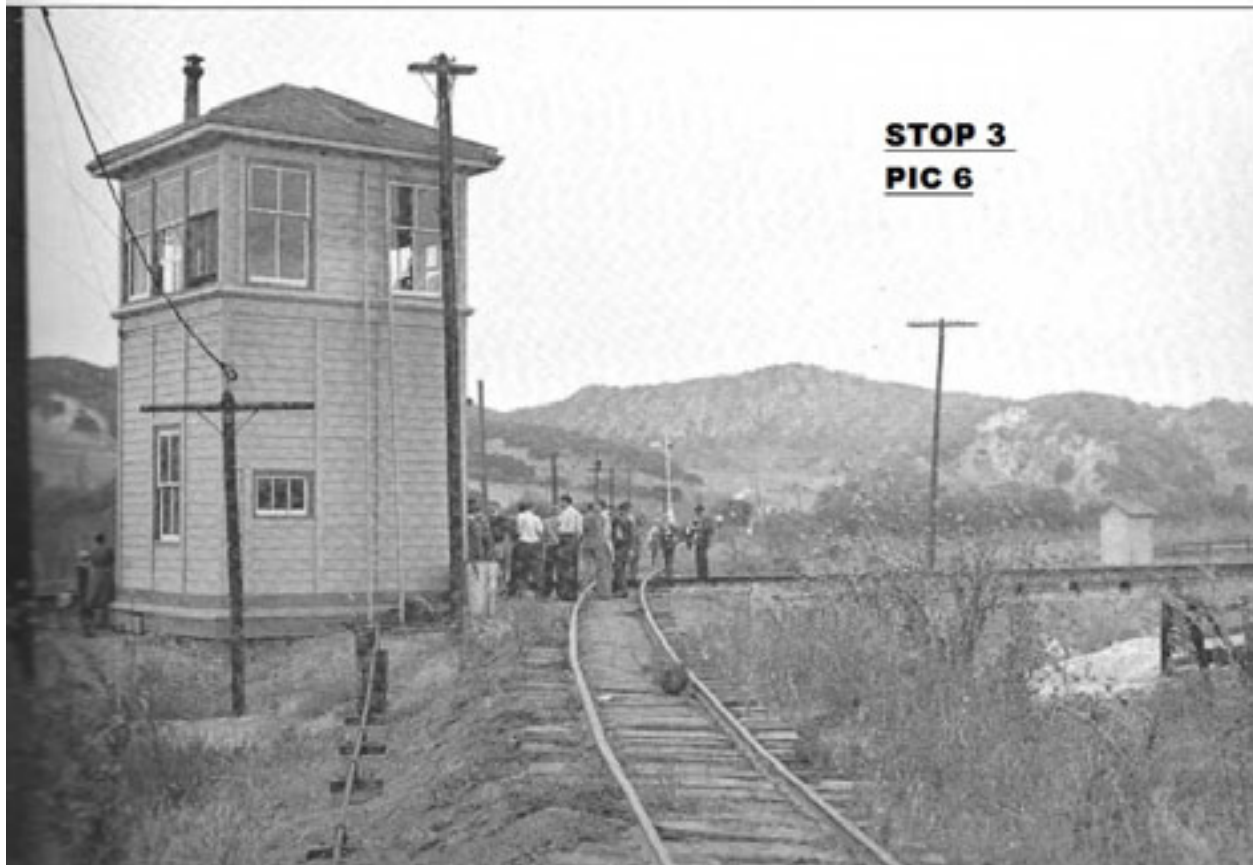


It shows the path of the PCRY, colored green, as it arrives at Hadley Crossing from the northwest, from SLO, and then turns southeast towards AG. Note how the Southern Pacific

(SP), colored red, arrives from SLO from about the same direction but turns to the south at Hadley towards Pismo Beach.

Since the PCRY was already there first, around 1878, and the SP came later in 1890, the SP had to chose a path that would cross the PCRY to get to Pismo Beach. To insure no collisions, the SP built a manned station there, Hadley Crossing, and installed a derailer on the SP line, which would derail a SP train if it happened to arrive at Hadley at the wrong time. The derailer was moved to the PCRY line sometime later.

This picture shows the tower at Hadley crossing and the crossing tracks. You are looking up the GPRY tracks with the SP crossing them.



This next picture shows an expanded view of the entire complex with some text from the reference. Note the SP train approaching Hadley Crossing from SLO on its way to Pismo Beach

STOP 3
PIC 7

This photo clearly shows the spot where the Southern Pacific crossed the PC. The SP's Hadley interlocking tower is in the center of the photo. The California Liquid Asphalt Company is visible to the left of the tower, and the oil refinery of the Ensign Baker Company is on the right. Bitamina was on the hillside in the left background.
VERGIL HODGES PHOTO, COURTESY BENNETT-LOOMIS ARCHIVES.



Now on your way to STOP 4. Have your Map ready

STOP 4

Return to Route 227 turn right and Proceed 2.0 mi SE to this stop.

While traveling along 227 to stop 4, look to the right and down the hill to the base of the steep hills. The PCRY passed just this side of the creek at the base of these hills.

The pic for STOP 4 is the view of the STOP from the location where Patchet Road enters 227 from the left. Note the markers for the warning horn and one for the bridge



STOP 4 is anywhere you can park near the warning horn.

What to see

The 36 inch high, 6 feet wide roadbed is visible on both the left and right sides of the road. The one on the left side is at a point 100 ft N of the power company warning horn. The roadbed meets the road from the left from a forward angle of about 45 deg. As you view the bed to the left, look up the valley a long way along the creek as it winds its way toward Corbett Canyon and STOP 8. The roadbed is 30 feet to the right of this creek.

The roadbed crosses 227 from the right at a point 250 feet south of the center of the bridge. As you view this roadbed look down the valley a long way along the creek as it winds its way toward Hadley Crossing STOP 3 which you just came from. The roadbed is 30 feet to the left of this creek.

View the map for STOP 5

Stop 5

Proceed 4.5 mi SE on 227 toward Arroyo Grande which you will enter from the east on E Branch Street.

Just prior to AG notice where Corbett Canyon Road joins the 227 from the left. You will return here when you have completed STOP 5.

What to see

Map 5 will assist you as you navigate to the exact location of this stop.

On the right as you enter town there is an old wooden structure, 415 E Branch Street, with a sign out front CHAMELEON STYLE. See Pic 5a.



This building, with slight modifications, served as the original GPRY mill and loading dock for the AG area. There was a spur there to allow the main track to remain clear while the cargo was being loaded to and from the mill.

Be sure to stop in the shop and discuss the railway with the owners, Camay or Win, who will be glad to fill you in on the details of the building as they found it and what renovations they have made.

The main track proceeded across Branch Street to a passenger depot which is no longer there. It then crossed the creek on its way SE toward Nipomo. This is as far south as this tour will take you.

While at this stop, cross Crown Hill Street to the kiosk located there which displays several GPRY items along with items of general AG history. See Pic 5b.



STOP 6

Now go back to the junction of 227 and Corbett Canyon Road and proceed NW on Corbett Canyon Road toward SLO.

Pic 6 is a view of what you will see looking up hill from Verde Road just before STOP 6 which is at the crest the hill.

The map for STOP 6 shows the trenches to the right of the road.



What to see

Proceed up the hill to the zone marked as STOP 6 . The location of the trench, on the right of the road, runs for about 400 yards. There is room there to stop and view the trench, but use care.

The information for STOP 7 will explain why the trenches(cuts) were dug.

STOP 7

Proceed along Corbett Canyon Road for 0.7 mi to a cross street from the right called "Narrow Gage Road".

What to see

Refer to the OVERVIEW map to locate STOP 7 and where we point out the entry and exit points of the railway as it makes its way through the famous "horseshoe turn". Later in the text we will provide an explanation for this unusual design.

As you face "Narrow Gage Road" look to your left to notice a flat area about 200 feet wide which is shown in Pic 1.



This is the area where the railway crossed the current location of Corbett Canyon Road on its way to the "horseshoe turn" which it made out of view behind the hills.

Pic 2 shows the path of the exit from the "horseshoe" turn as the GPRY headed toward the crest of the hill, STOP 6, which you just came from on its way to AG. It shows the branch (the path of the cut) on the hill side as it looks today just above the reddish-colored bushes above t



he gray trash cans.

Pic 3 shows a train as it heads towards AG at some time in the past, at the same point on the branch as shown in Pic 2,



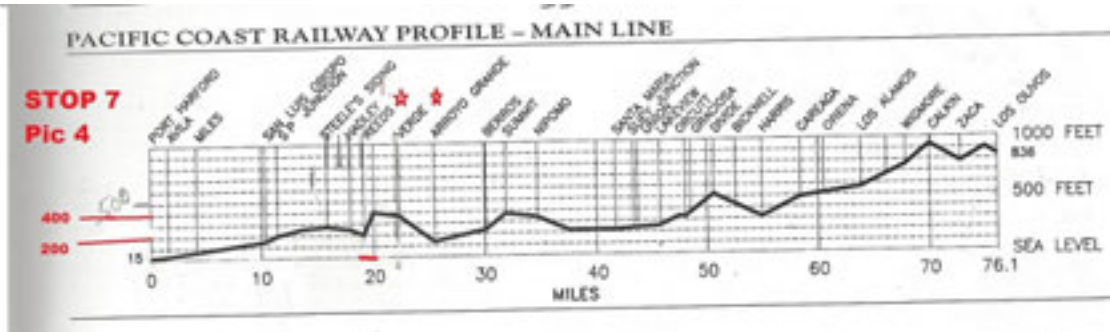
This next picture shows you what the GPRY was doing behind those hills



SO WHY THE HORSE SHOE???

THE BEFORE

Pic 4 for STOP 7 provides the motive for the extra effort required to crest the the top of the hill which you visited at STOP 6.



Notice that the total elevation change over the first 19 miles of the GPRY was 200 feet or a grade of $200 \text{ feet} / (19 \times 5280) \text{ feet} = 0.2 \%$. This grade was easy to handle.

But notice, the elevation change over the last mile from Reeds, at mile 19, to mile 20 the grade was $200 \text{ feet} / 5280 \text{ feet} = 3.8 \%$ grade, which is much greater than acceptable for reasonable railways. Such steep grades are difficult to climb going up and even more difficult to brake your speed as you come down the grade.

The following are timely comments from the "Pacific Coast Railway" reference which describe the unacceptable operational conditions and congestion, caused by this 3.8 % grade.

A railroad official complained to Goodall Perkins and Co. about the need to "double up" at the hills. "Half the cars would stand while the locomotive took the others up the grade and then return to get the first half".

Which was followed by "at the present time running mixed trains we can have ten loads without having to double; by cutting down this grade we can haul 18 loads without doubling. It would save us very often from running extra trains and give better satisfaction to the traveling public as we sometimes are obliged to double and have our passengers wait for 30 minutes of standing 1 8/10 miles from their destination."

THE AFTER

To reduce the grade, the engineers laid out a "horseshoe" turn where the railway would gain about 30 feet from entry to exit. Since this was not quite enough reduction, they dug a 10 foot cut at the top of the hill, the trench you saw at STOP 6, to reduce the height of the roadbed there. Those combined efforts reduced the change of elevation for the last mile of roadbed from 200 feet to 160 feet or a grade of $160 \text{ feet} / 5280 \text{ feet} = 3.0 \%$ which is about the upper limit of good railway planning. Trains now could pass over the top of the hill without stopping and unloading

Whether to 1] make deeper cuts or 2] make longer horseshoes or 3] choose a different route is just the type of job that you hire railway engineers to do.

STOP 8]

Now look in the opposite direction of the horseshoe, to the other side of Corbett Canyon Road, down a dirt lane leading to a house. This lane was a segment of the old Corbett Canyon Road. The Map for STOP 8 identifies this lane as Dairy Lane an identity contested by long time-owners of near by properties.

What to see

If you look just a little to the right of this lane you will notice a line of trees. See the Pic for STOP 8.



Those trees mark the location of the same creek you saw as you looked up to the left at stop 4]. The roadbed is about 30 feet to the left of this creek.

This ends your automobile tour. We hope you have enjoyed your day and learned something about a part of our County history, which is slowly slipping away.

APPENDIX

References and resources

"The Pacific Coast Railway" by Kenneth E Westcott and Curtiss H Johnson. This book was the inspiration for this effort. It contains the most pictures and descriptions of the PCRY that we are aware of. We appreciate the assistance given this project by C. Johnson for providing the needed consents and his suggestions on how to improve the pictures and directions.

Maps of the original deeds which granted rights-of-way to the railroad Company.

Original railway surveyors' maps.

Discussions with land owners over whose property the PCRY passed over.

Discussions with those who remember the railway as little children.

Comments by those who heard of our work and gave us personal experiences.

1. A person who recalls that her parents rode the train some time in the 1930's from Los Alamos to SLO to get married in the "big" city.
2. An 80 year old lady remembers hiding in the grass as the train approached and jumping up and waving to get the engineer to blow the horn.

Information about the authors

Michael Maurer is a retired Professor of engineering.

Elliott Marshall is a retired avionics engineer.

They both enjoy the exploration and resolution of a mystery