

The Railfan's Guide to Cajon Pass

By Al Bowen

Part Four: Mormon Rocks & Highway 138

Access to this section is easy and close to the freeway. The interchange of the I-15 is undergoing considerable development at the time this is being written, with an Econo-Lodge motel, Denny's and McDonald's food stands, and additional fuel facilities either open or under construction.

At the end of the exit ramp, turn left and cross over the freeway. You will see the rock formation known as Mormon Rocks in front of you on the north side of Highway 138. This formation was named for the campsites occupied by the early Mormon settlers who had been sent from Utah to colonize the San Bernardino Valley as part of Brigham Young's expansionist plans for a road to the sea from Salt Lake City.

The original Mormon Trail came from the Oro Grande crossing of the Mojave River to West Cajon, then worked its way down the canyon following what was later to become the South Track alignment. Later groups followed the Mojave River to its headwaters in Summit Valley then crossed near the rail summit and came down into Cajon Canyon near the current Cajon Station Site.

Just west of the freeway you will cross the South Track. A hundred yards or so from that overpass a connection driveway, on the right side, links the new highway with a section of the old #138. Drop down onto the old road and turn back to the east (to the South Track). You can park right next to the track or follow the gravel road north from that spot. It crosses Cajon Creek bed and climbs "Stein's Hill". There is a parking space big enough for 2 cars on the top of the hill or you can continue over the top of the hill and down the north side. This is the location of the 1996 wreck, and the spot is marked with a memorial and crosses for the victims of the accident. The traffic on the South Track is mainly "downhill" so photography from Stein's Hill is quite good most of the day. Retrace your steps to the old 138 road and proceed west to the North Track.

Once again, you can park right next to the track and shoot trains coming under the Highway, from either side of the track, or follow the dirt road that runs beside the track to the north. Cross the Cajon Creek Bed, and there are several photo locations where you can get the exotic rock formations as a backdrop for photo's of trains coming through the area. If you follow this dirt road further to the north you will find a large sweeping curve to the right about a mile from the highway. The dirt road is on the "inside" of the curve in the tracks, a perfect place for sweeping shots of trains going either up or down the Pass. Retrace your ride to the new highway and proceed west to where highway 138 intersects with the Lone Pine Canyon Road. Directly across the highway from this intersection there is a dirt road that heads north away from the highway to the SP maintainer's road. Follow this road beside the SP line and you will come to several possible photo sites that overlook both the SP line and the North Track.

**** CAUTION ****

The cuts that the SP line uses are fairly narrow and a 'tight squeeze' for vehicles and trains. They also are a bit soft after any bad weather, so be alert to current conditions and traffic and use common sense when approaching any restricted clearance area's.

It is possible to go all the way up to and under the freeway on the North Track or SP maintainer's road. However, on the east side of the freeway the BNSF has a full-time Security Post at the Alray siding. These folks do not take kindly to 'civilian's' using the BNSF maintainer's road, if you must go up the Pass on these roads be sure to use the SP line NOT the BNSF. The several grade crossings over the SP line at various locations going up the Pass have been torn up by the MOW crews. They are real slow about restoring these crossings, So if you are on the SP maintainer's road, plan on staying on that side of the tracks for quite a distance as you go up the Pass.

