

The Railfan's Guide to Cajon Pass By Al Bowen

Part Five: Alray and the Tunnel Area

This segment will cover the area just to the east of the freeway on all three tracks. To access this area we start from the interchange of Highway 138 and the Interstate. In the Northeast corner of the interchange, where the ramp to northbound I-15 begins, a dirt/gravel road runs parallel to the ramp, also heading north. This is the Baldy Mesa Road. It runs beside the freeway until the freeway begins its sweeping curve "up the hill" to the highway summit. In good weather it is possible to follow this road to its own 'summit' and out onto the desert in the area of the town of Phelan. We will only be involved with it in the area of the rail-lines. A short distance from the interchange, the Baldy Mesa Rd. crosses under the South Track just before the track crosses under the freeway. If you follow the access road to the east beside the rail line, there are several decent photo opportunities in a fairly short distance.

I don't recommend this particular section, simply because BNSF really frowns on using their access roads, and there are no alternative routes on this side of the 57 milepost. Besides, just across the freeway in the previous section, we described "Stein's Hill" where you can find a really great photo location overlooking the South Track than can be used legally and is easier to get to. But for those of you, who want to see it all, take a look at this section.

Continue up the Baldy Mesa Rd. and you will come into the Alray area. Just before crossing under the North Track, if you turn right onto the access road that runs beside the north track, just a couple of hundred yards from the main road you will see the entrance to Tunnel Number Two. It is possible to get some excellent photo's of the tunnel at this location. After crossing under the North track if you turn left onto the access road you will be in the Alray site. You will also be face to face with a BNSF Security post. If you are reasonably polite the guard may allow you to remain in the area for awhile to photograph some action on the North Track, but that is not always the way it works out.

Remember this is their turf, and your cooperation makes it possible for others to use the facility also. Instead of turning onto the access road adjacent to the North Track, continue north on the Baldy Mesa Rd. under the SP (UP) line then turn right and climb the slope to the access road that runs beside the north side of the SP line. From here you have a great view of the Alray Spur and if you move a bit downhill on the line, you can see the entrance to Tunnel Number 2. With a long lens on your camera or camcorder this becomes a really good shot following a train from the freeway to the tunnel or reverse. As I have mentioned before, the access road beside the SP line is open to public use, so as long as you observe reasonable safety you should have no problems here.

If you want a different perspective of the Mormon Rocks area, you can follow the SP access road down hill, under the freeway, and get some great views of the North Track and SP line in the Mormon Rocks from the north side. Staying on the access road in this direction, you will emerge at Highway 138 across from its intersection with the Lone Pine Canyon Road.

Most of you will prefer to work your way up the pass from the Alray site. To do this, turn right off of Baldy Mesa Road onto the access road that runs beside the SP line (on its north side.) Follow that access road carefully about 4/10th of a mile to a point where you can view the north track emerging from Tunnel #2, and proceeding into Tunnel #1. A short walk along the SP line will offer several great photo shots of the North Track tunnels. Continue up the SP access road and you will find a view of the eastern entrance to Tunnel #1.

***** NOTE*****

There are several maintainers' grade crossings over the SP line at various places in the Pas, including three in the area we are describing here. At this time (March 1998) most of these have been torn up and are NOT

useable. One of the UP MOW crews have told me that these crossings will be restored after track work in the area is complete. Meanwhile, what this means to us is that once you are on the north side of the SP line, you cannot drive across the track anywhere from the Baldy Mesa Road until you get to HYLAND / SUMMIT (Approximately 3 miles). For your information, a dirt road comes down the slope to intersect with the SP maintainers road at about the 57 milepost (BNSF). If they fix the crossing, this becomes the "Powerline Road" on the south side of the BNSF lines. We will use this road in the next section.

For you history buffs... This is the original road up the pass. It follows the route of John Brown's toll road. It was paved in 1911, long before anyone had thought of a "Highway 66". At the top of the Pass, it emerges right behind the Summit Inn, at the current highway summit for the Interstate. I use this road frequently to come down the Pass. Unfortunately, the grade crossing over the SP line is currently closed. We hope it will be repaired shortly. There are several shots of this location in the Cojones video.