

The Railfan's Guide to Cajon Pass By Al Bowen

Part Six: Tunnel #1 to Summit

This segment covers the area from the tunnels to the Summit of the Pass. For each of the three tracks, this is a more 'open' area with several excellent viewing areas for the photographer. It is possible to view action on all three lines at the same time from several of these points, something that is hard to describe until you actually see it. My particular favorite location for viewing and photographing trains is in this section.

To reach many of the viewing points along the tracks, retrace your steps to the interchange of Highway 138 and I-15. Travel east on Highway 138 approximately 2.3 miles to a road referred to on many maps as 'Powerline Road'. This road angles off to the left at a rather dangerous curve in #138. Turn left using more than the normal caution with oncoming traffic. This is the road I described in the previous segment that leads up the Pass to the Summit Inn. It is still partially paved. Before you cuss the broken and rough pavement, take a moment to remember that this was put down almost 90 years ago. (1910-11). You are literally riding on history at this point. Follow the partially paved road to it's crossing of the South Track (about 1/2 mile).

Turn left on the dirt road just south of the South Track grade crossing and climb the hill west of that junction to an excellent overlook of the South Track coming up the Pass. You can also get a good view of the other two tracks from this point. Then, return to the intersection of the Powerline Road.

If you cross the South Track and go under the North Track bridge, then turn left, you can follow the access road alongside the North Track back to the area of Tunnel #1 (about 1 1/2 miles). Return to the Powerline Road and it's crossing of the South Track.

If you cross the South Track, then turn immediately to your right on the access road that runs east along the north side of the South Track for about 3/10th of a mile it will bring you to the point where the two BNSF tracks converge before they enter the Summit area. At this point there is a small knoll in-between the tracks. It has excellent access for about 2 vehicles (more if you are willing to park at the bottom and walk the few feet to the top of the knoll. This is THE PLACE for me. Sitting on this knoll trains pass on the South Track on one side, on the North Track on the other side, and on the SP/UP line a few hundred feet away. Coming up the Pass you can see them coming for a couple of miles. Coming down, the warning blasts of the horn at the Summit tell you that something is about to round the corner about 1/2 mile above you. For a slightly different perspective, or if the knoll is occupied, follow the access road that runs on the north side of the North Track to the area right across the track from the knoll. The view here is almost as good, and there is parking room for bunch of cars. This access road is smoother than the one beside the South Track.

DO NOT ATTEMPT TO USE THE ACCESS ROAD ON THE BNSF LINES TO GO DIRECTLY INTO THE SUMMIT AREA. The Security Post in Summit has instructions to cite anyone who does this. If the grade crossings on the SP line are open, cross the SP line and continue into Summit. If they are not open (they are closed now) retrace your steps to the Powerline Road and follow it back to Highway 138. Turn left on #138 and follow it through the 'twisty-turnies' to the overlook just above Summit. There is a parking area on the north side of Highway 138 and you can stand on the edge of that area looking east at Summit or down and west at the BNSF line entering Summit from the west. Continue east on 138 to the intersection with the Summit Truck Trail (about 1/4 of a mile.) Turn left on this dirt road and it will bring you up into the Summit area. Security is very active here, with a full-time post and fencing and 24 lighting, etc. As long as you don't get close to the tracks here no-one will bother you. If you want to shoot some of the old alignment or area away from the current mainline, go ahead. If you want to get trains entering or leaving the current mainline, I suggest you make your request of the guard on duty. How much leeway you are allowed seems to vary with the person on-duty. However, as long as you aren't trying to stand in the or on the tracks, most are willing to allow some photography.

I personally don't spend much time at Summit anymore, as I don't think the Security measures help make good photos. But, it is easy to get to, and has such a historical significance, that visiting it, takes on an almost religious attitude. It is in this area that we see the SP line begin to go its own way, moving away from the BNSF lines. If you want to follow it, climb the Summit Truck Trail out of Summit, cross the SP grade crossing (Hyland) and turn right onto the access road running beside the tracks. This will eventually bring you out on Ranchero Rd. in Hesperia (about 4 miles). To continue following the BNSF, return to Highway 138, turn left and head east into the desert.