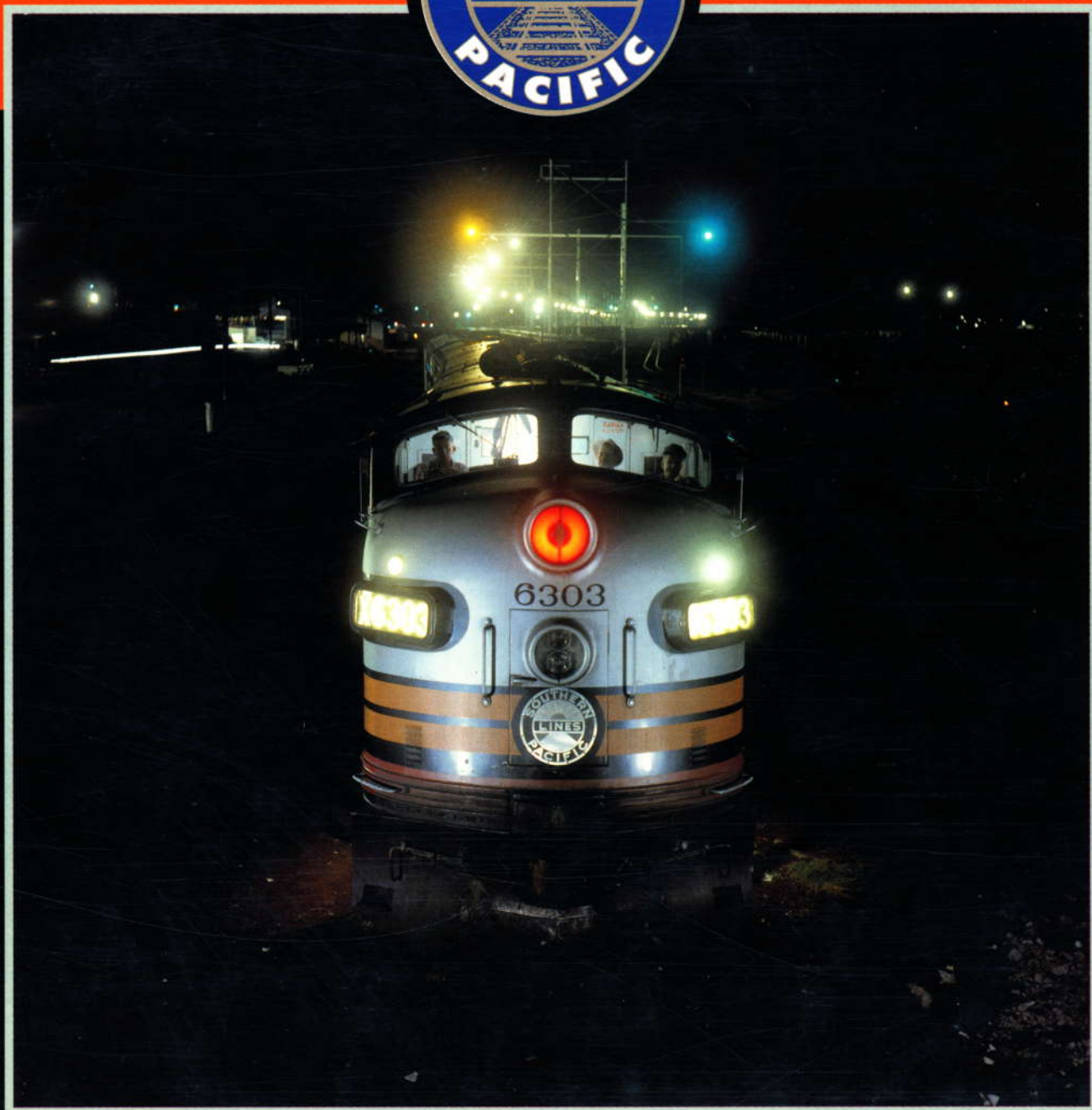


# Southern Pacific

## OFFICIAL COLOR PHOTOGRAPHY VOLUME 1

BY ANTHONY W. THOMPSON



# SOUTHERN PACIFIC

*OFFICIAL COLOR PHOTOGRAPHY*

*VOLUME 1*

BY ANTHONY W. THOMPSON



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PUBLISHED BY  
MORNING SUN BOOKS, INC.

9 PHEASANT LANE  
SCOTCH PLAINS, NJ 07076

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS  
CATALOG CARD No. 98-066811

FIRST PRINTING  
ISBN 1-58248-004-4

Color separation and printing by  
The Kutztown Publishing Co., Inc.  
Kutztown, Pennsylvania



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The photographs in this book were taken by generations of Southern Pacific company photographers, most of which remain nameless and not individually credited with particular images, though Chief Photographer Steve Edwards in the 1950s was certainly responsible for many of the photos in this book. In a few cases, the SP purchased the work of other photographers, and in cases where information of this kind has survived, it is credited in the photo captions.

I want to express thanks to Don Snoddy and the Union Pacific Railroad Museum, where the photo files of the Southern Pacific now reside. Don and the Museum have been unfailingly helpful to many researchers and writers over the years, and deserve serious appreciation from all rail historians and enthusiasts.

Many individuals have helped identify trains, locations and equipment in these photos (the company photo sleeves generally contain sparse or no information about topic, location or date), though of course any errors which remain in the captions are my responsibility. Among those who have helped are Steve Peery, Mike Jarel and Ken Harrison with passenger questions, and with other topics, John Signor, Paul Koehler, Clark Bauer and Bob Church.

Special thanks to Bob Yanosey, the head of Morning Sun Books who assembled the photos, developed the concept and provided the means to make this book a reality. Whatever the future, the images are now preserved in print.

Also of help through essential books about Southern Pacific were Guy Dunscomb (*A Century of Southern Pacific Steam Locomotives*), Joe Strapac (*SP Motive Power Annuals*), Don Hofsommer (*The Southern Pacific, 1901-1985*), Richard Wright

(*Southern Pacific Daylight*), Robert Hancocks (Appendix in Beebe's *Central Pacific and Southern Pacific*), and John Signor, through a number of his books about individual sections of the SP. Southern Pacific publications, including employee timetables, were also of value.

It is also appropriate to recognize the Southern Pacific Historical and Technical Society, which through its quarterly magazine, *Trainline*, its annual meetings, and its archive at the Sherman Library in Corona Del Mar, California, has established a body of knowledge and resources about SP history. Those wishing to know more about the Society can write to SPH&TS at P.O. Box 93697, Pasadena, CA 91108, or visit its Web site at [www.webcom.com/sphts](http://www.webcom.com/sphts).

## CONTENTS

Along the Espee .....	4
Passengers Behind Steam .....	9
Diesel Passenger Service .....	37
Passenger Pleasures .....	67
Around the Shops .....	84
Moving Tonnage .....	90
Espee Pride .....	128

# SOUTHERN PACIFIC

## OFFICIAL COLOR PHOTOGRAPHY VOLUME 1

Railroads accomplish their "official photography" for many reasons. One of the most important is to depict what is new: new cars and locomotives, new trains, new services. For this reason, many such photos present clean or newly painted equipment which may not be representative of the appearance of most equipment in operation. The subjects may also not be very representative of typical equipment, but may well show the unusual or the obscure (in the statistical sense).

Another reason for these photos is to illustrate current operations, for advertising or employee magazine use, and for the historian these are usually much more valuable. Employees at work, trains along the line, or equipment being loaded are all topics of great interest beyond the original rationale for exposing the image. On the other hand, for Southern Pacific in particular, the usual practice of not dating most photos reduces their historic significance, though in some cases internal references in the photograph may permit a good estimate of the actual date.

Another reason for photographs may be for use with passenger materials, both advertising and on-train brochures. These are often of great value to the historian in depicting contemporary locations as well as equipment.

None of these reasons is oriented to providing a representative or even accurate view of the railroad or its flavor in the period of the photograph.

Thus these images must be interpreted and used judiciously as historical information. That said, they remain a superb source of visual insight into the railroad, for the company photographer could go places and do things (such as pose a passenger train in the perfect photo location) not given to the ordinary photographer.

Southern Pacific began to make color photographs relatively early. There are large series of images from both 1939 and 1941, at a time when amateur color photography was scarcely possible, and the Technicolor laboratory, largely busy with Hollywood film, did much of the processing. The typical format of that day was the color transparency, on a sheet film stock which was stiff and thick,

compared to later film, and in sizes of 4 x 5 inches or somewhat smaller. A number of those images are in this book.

Before World War II, the ability to use these images was somewhat limited. Magazine use of color, in the form of photographs, was limited, and rotogravure sections in Sunday newspapers were the primary exposure of the public to such images. However, special printing such as brochures and posters for railroad use were readily prepared, and were probably the intended use of the photos.

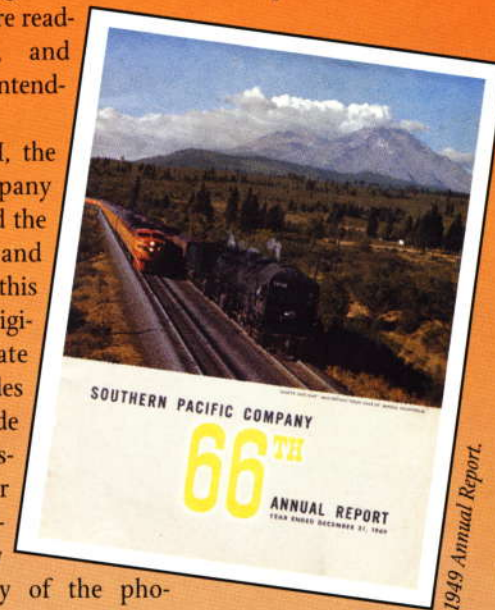
After World War II, the predominant company color method remained the 4 x 5 transparency, and most of the images in this book are from such originals. Only in the late 1960s did 35 mm slides assume a role alongside the large-format transparency in the color files. This makes possible, of course, ready enlargement of many of the photographs, and helps ensure their quality.

Some of the photos in this book have been published before. Although Southern Pacific was not known for its generosity in providing images for either amateur or professional use outside the railroad, access to the photo archives did occur on some occasions. The SP photography printed as the postcard images of the Lyman Cox company has been one source of material; some book authors have also gained access to photos. However, the general excellence of many images makes their inclusion here appropriate, as does the completeness of the railroad view in the archival material.

This book, then, should be seen as a cross-section not only of the Southern Pacific as it was, but also of the SP as the company wished to be seen. What was visible through the eyes of company photographers provides a strong complement to the work of talented amateur photographers published elsewhere, and enables us to perceive the history of the Southern Pacific with a broader view than would otherwise be possible.



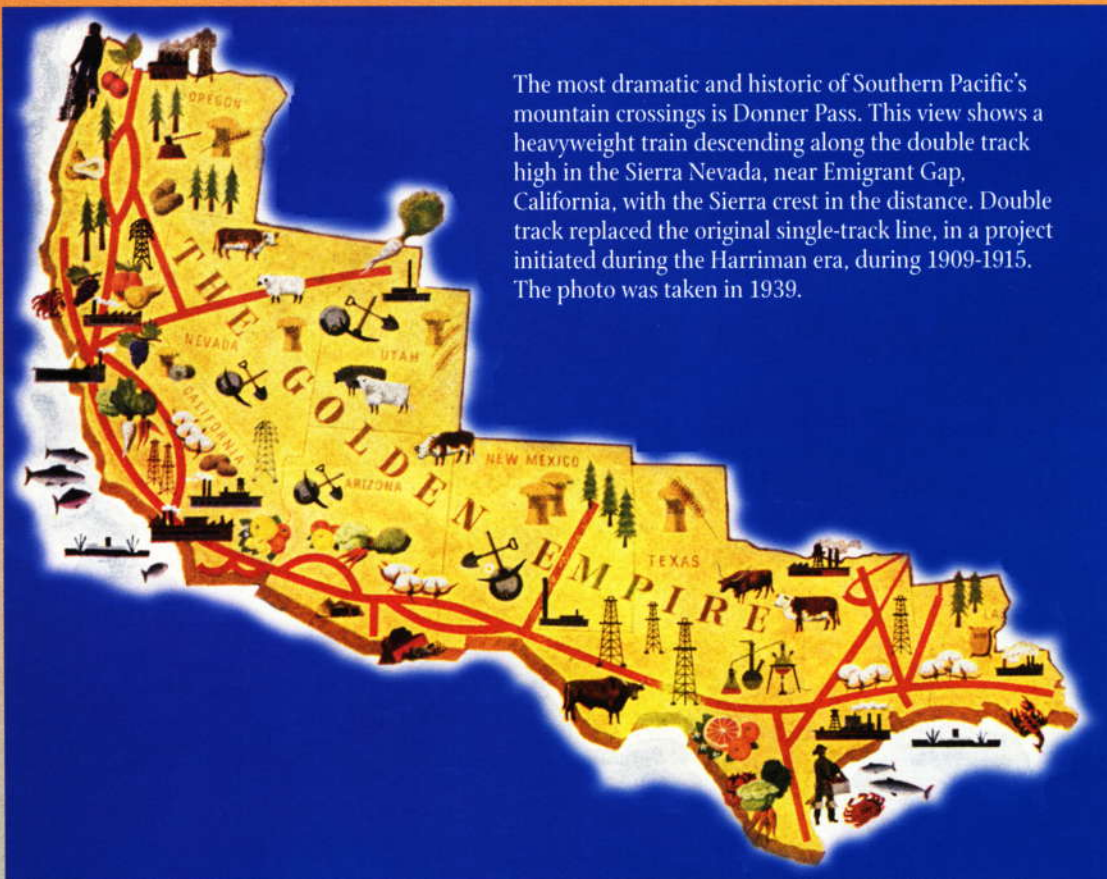
Trains Magazine, May, 1947 issue.



1949 Annual Report.



# ALONG THE ESPEE



The most dramatic and historic of Southern Pacific's mountain crossings is Donner Pass. This view shows a heavyweight train descending along the double track high in the Sierra Nevada, near Emigrant Gap, California, with the Sierra crest in the distance. Double track replaced the original single-track line, in a project initiated during the Harriman era, during 1909-1915. The photo was taken in 1939.



A classic Southern California image, used to entice tourists for decades, was the vision of citrus fruit trees with snow-capped peaks in the distance. This is one such image, from a 1941 SP publicity series. Presumably the attraction was the sheer contrast of semi-tropical orange trees with wintry snow, but the snow in this case lay some 9000 feet higher in elevation.



Though SP's trackage through Nevada traverses many wide, flat valleys, there are rugged portions of the line. This is one of them, alongside the Humboldt River in Palisade Canyon, located in eastern Nevada. Semaphore signals still guard the track in this view.



One of SP's major traffic categories was oil and petroleum products, a category which first became important during the California and Texas oil booms of the early twentieth century. This view was doubtless intended to evoke that thought, though the location is not known, and the drilling rigs do not look very active.



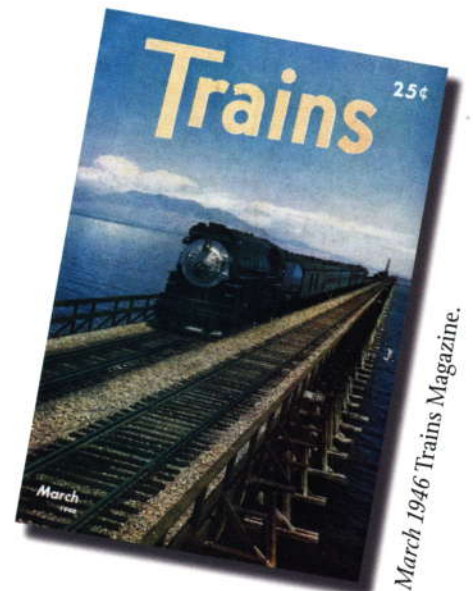
Even during the construction of the Central Pacific, the difficulties of clearing winter snows became very evident. But with the invention of the rotary snow plow, the railroad acquired a powerful weapon against deep snow. In this view, taken on a stormy day, a rotary shows its power, clearing snow from the double track of the Sierra mainline. It was typically possible to throw snow clear across an adjoining track and down the far hillside.



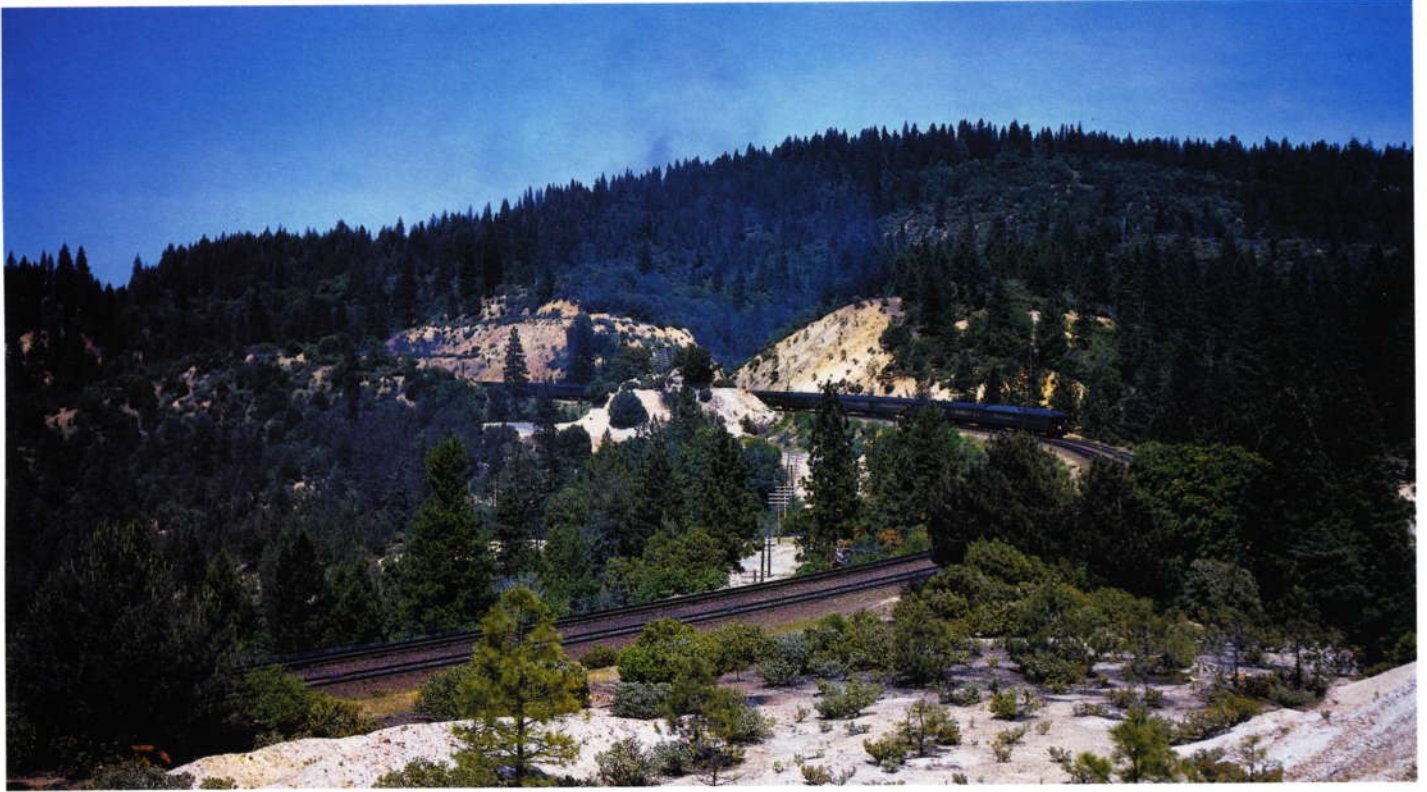
Among the most storied Southern Pacific routes was the Coast Line, hugging the Pacific Ocean shore for over a hundred miles. The most remote and attractive locations lie around Points Conception and Arguello, far from public roads and retaining much of the appearance today that they had before the coming of the railroad. This view is no exception, capturing as it does the unique qualities of this route.



An unmistakable place on the SP: Midlake Station on the trestle across Great Salt Lake, built in the Harriman era as the Lucin Cutoff. There was for many years a small depot here (out of sight to the right of this view), for the use of operators, not for any local traffic! The photo was taken in the spring of 1951 and looks east toward Promontory Point, Utah.







This heavyweight passenger train, eastbound in the Sierra Nevada, is immersed in the typical mountain scenery of this area. Mountain crossings abounded on all Western railroads, and not least on Southern Pacific, which had any number of high and steep passes to cross. Throughout SP's history, the demands of these grades dominated locomotive purchases and operation, and gave the railroad much of its character.



Most of the Coast Line's shoreline running lay atop coastal bluffs, with narrow beaches a stone's throw from the track (or a passing train), and the surf pounding on the shore could be seen and heard aboard the train. Much of this part of the line has changed little today, as the adjoining lands are part of the U.S. Air Force's Vandenberg Base, and remain undeveloped. Yet trackwork was neat and well-maintained in the 1940s when this photo was taken.

\$54.95  
ISBN 1-58248-004-4

