TRONA RAILROAD COMPANY, SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

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INTRODUCTION

This report is part of a research project that describes the relationships between mines and railroads in the Mojave Desert and southwestern Great Basin of southeastern California and southwestern Nevada. t

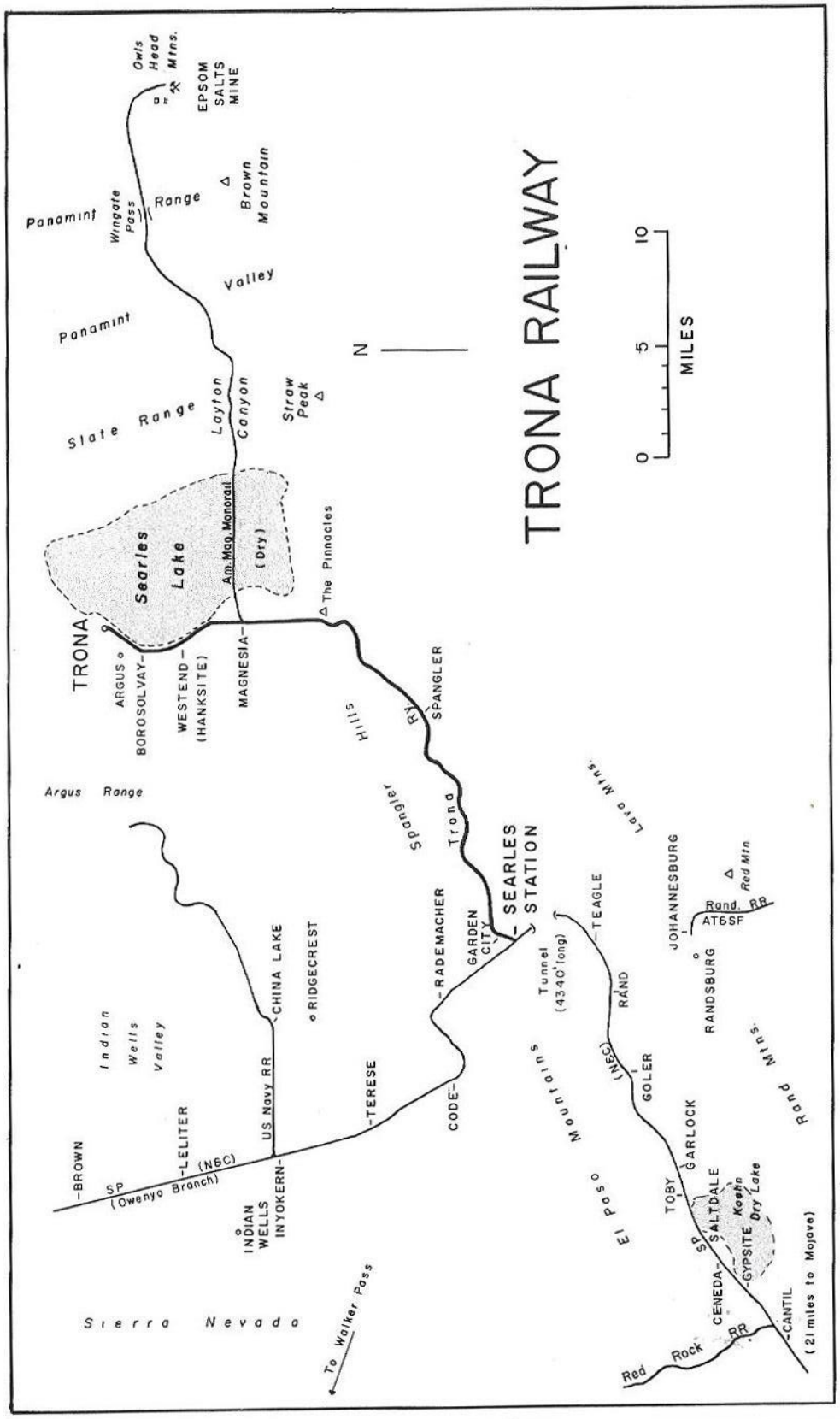
The collection can be accessed at
http://www.greggwilkerson.com/railroads.html

Italics indicate quotations.

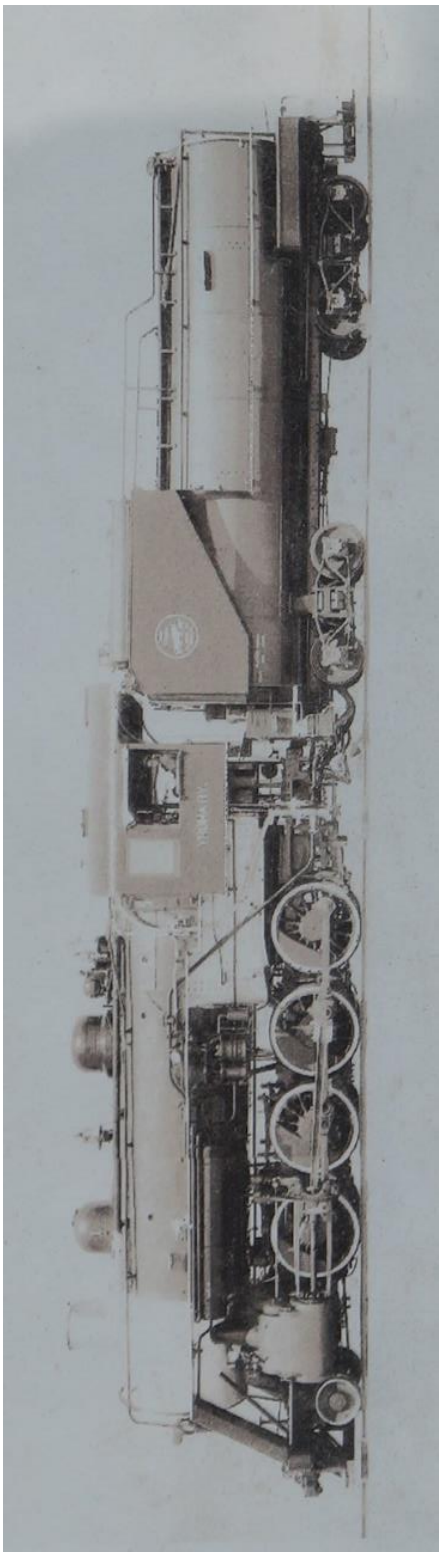
HISTORY

The Trona Railroad (TR) connected the mines of Searles Lake to the Nevada and California Railroad. The TR also serviced the Epson Salt Monorail railroad.

When John Wemple Searles arrived in the area in the 1860s, he was looking for gold and silver to mine. Instead, he found a white crystalline powder, borax, in the dry Searles Lake bed. In 1873, he went into production as the **San Bernardino Borax Mining Company** to mine borax. Long mule teams were used to haul borax in wagons to San Pedro, until the much closer settlement of Mojave was used after the Southern Pacific Railroad reached it in 1876 (Wickipedia, 2023c; Myrick, 1963:798-808).

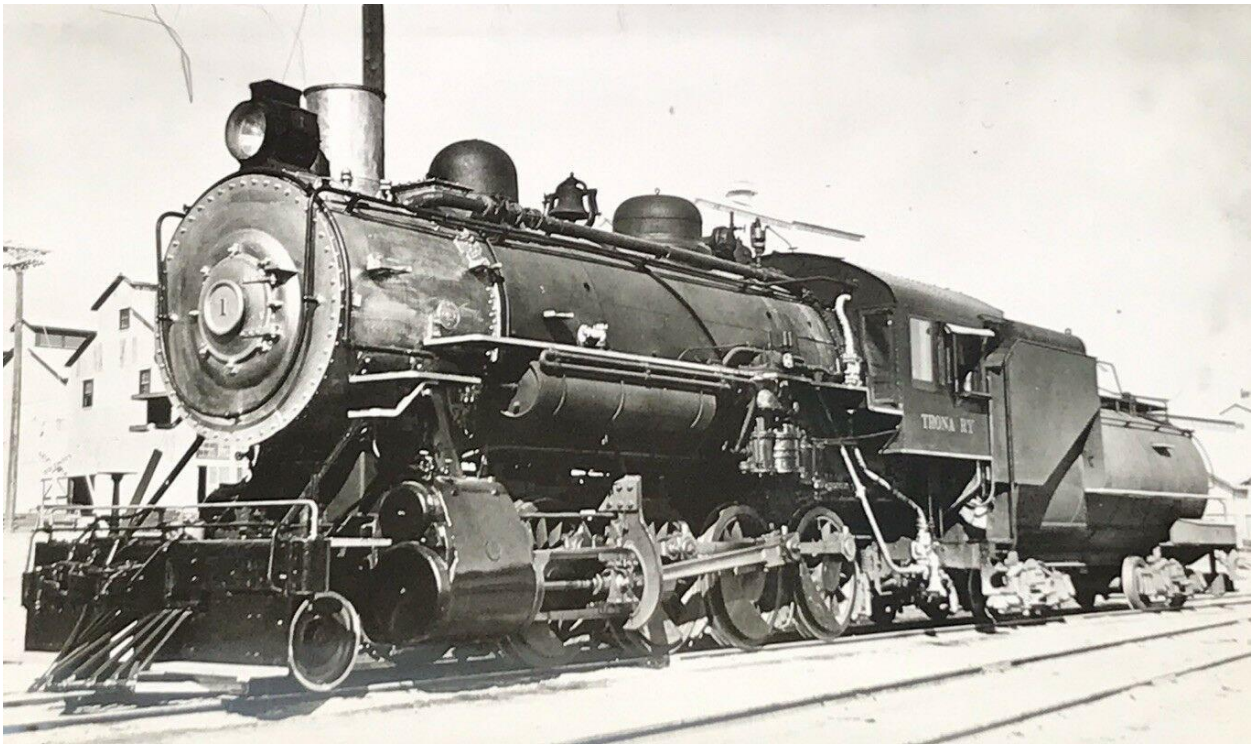


Caption: Route of the Trona Railway. From Myrick, 1963, p. 799.



Caption: Baldwin steam locomotive of Trona Railway. From https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Trona_Railway#Media/File:Baldwin_steam_locomotive_of_Trona_Railway_02.jpg accessed Nov. 14, 2023.

In 1895 The San Bernardino Borax Mining Company was sold by Searles to the Pacific Coast Borax Company, owned by Francis "Borax King" Smith. He shut down production at the company's section of Searles Lake the next year (Wickipedia, 2023c; Myrick, 1963:798-808).



Caption: Trona Railroad Engine No. 1. at borate processing facility. From the Larry Vredenburgh Collection.

The American Trona Company (ATC) was founded in 1913 by the British-owned Consolidated Gold Fields of South Africa company. The ATC was a self-contained company town operated by its resident mining company to house employees who were paid in company scrip instead of cash. The company also built a library, a scrip-accepting grocery store, a school, basic housing and minimal recreation facilities. In 1914 the Trona Railroad company (TRC) completed the Trona Railway line from Searles Station south to a junction with the Southern Pacific Railroad. Also in 1914, the American Trona Corporation established the company-owned town of Trona, named for crystals of soda ash formed by the evaporation of chemical-rich water commonly found in the lake bed. The production of potash began in 1915 (Wickipedia, 2023c; Myrick, 1963:798-808; Wright and others 1953:217-223). Potash was an essential material for making gunpowder which was in high demand during WWI.

In 1917, construction was completed on the American Trona Corporation Building in San Pedro, to process and store salt potash. In 1926, after becoming the American Potash & Chemical Corporation, it began producing borax, soda ash, and sodium sulfate. Production of these chemicals continued to expand until the 1980s as more and more wells were drilled to produce a variety of products from the Searles Lake brines. (Wickipedia, 2023c; Myrick, 1963:798-808). The Trona facilities extracts and ships 1.75 million tons of chemicals per year (Hughes, 2005). Divittorio (2020) has an interesting video documentary about Seales Valley Minerals.

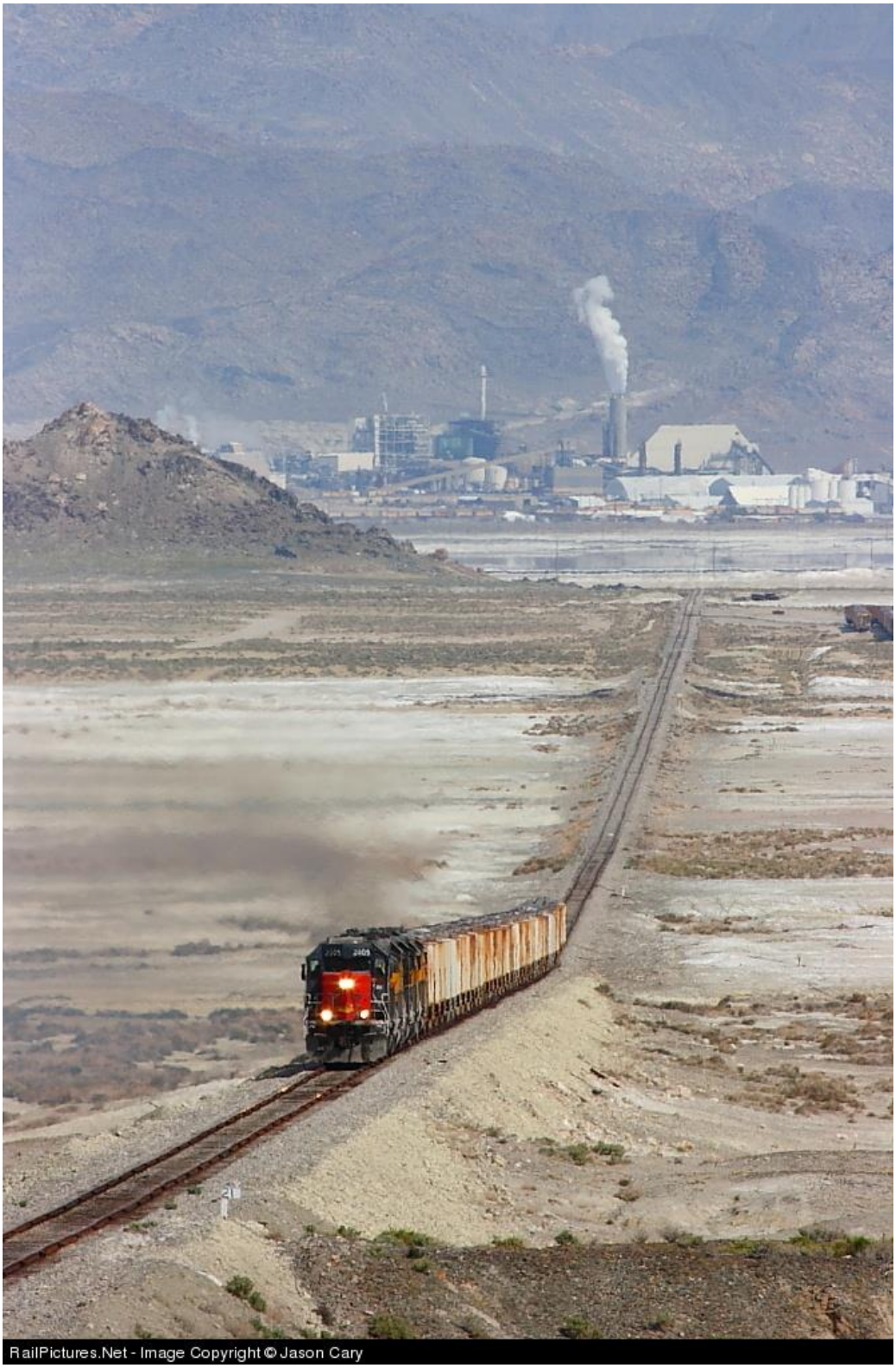
Caption: Trona Railway caboose #100. From https://www.american-rails.com/trona.html accessed Nov. 14, 2023.

Caption. Both of Trona Railway's rare DT-6-6-2000's can be seen here, acquired from Baldwin as new equipment in 1949. From https://www.american-rails.com/trona.html accessed Nov. 15, 2023.

Caption: Trona railway with four engines and bin cars. https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Trona_Railway accessed Nobv. 15, 2023.

Caption: Trona railway: Two engines with chemical cars. From https://www.railpictures.net/photo/532506/ accessed Nov. 15, 2023.

Caption: Trona railroad train and Searles Lake plant. From https://www.railpictures.net/photo/263537/ accessed Nov. 14, 2023.



Caption: Trona railroad train with Searles Lake plant in background. From https://www.railpictures.net/photo/374433/ accessed Nov. 14, 2023.

Caption: Trona railroad train with open ore cars at loading facility. From https://www.railpictures.net/viewphoto.php?id=503732&nseq=10 accessed Nov. 14, 2023.

Caption: Trona railway engine 2001 and Searles Lake plant. From https://www.railpictures.net/viewphoto.php?id=298967 accessed Nov. 14, 2023.

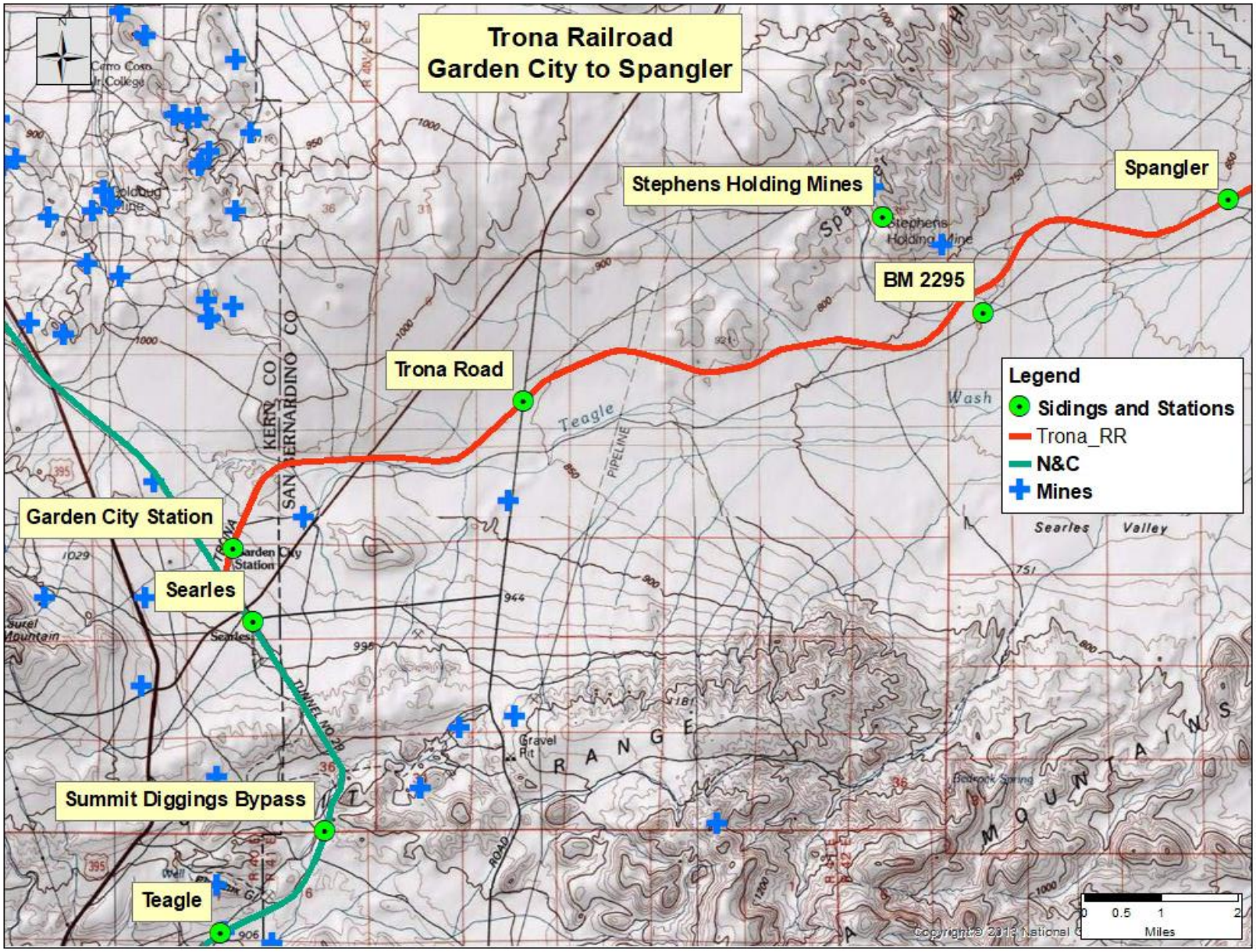
Caption: Trona train at the Trona Pinnacles formations. From https://www.railpictures.net/photo/397448/ accessed Nov. 14, 2023.

Caption: Trona Plant. From https://www.avoidingregret.com/2014/04/photo-essay-searles-valley-minerals_1.html accessed Nov. 15, 2023.

ROUTE DESCRIPTION

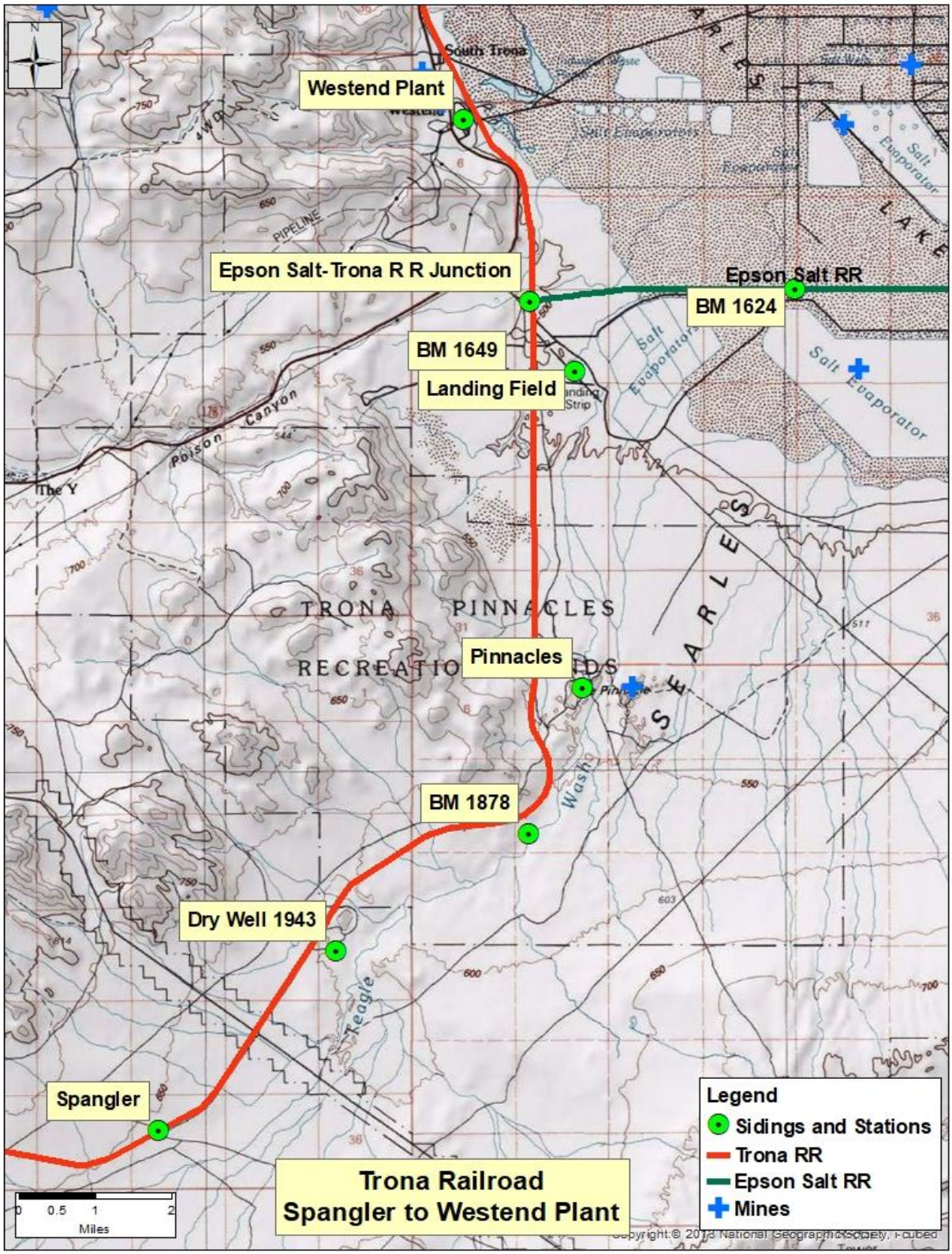
The Trona Railroad will be described from west to east.

From **Garden City Station** near the Nevada and California (N&C) Railroad, the Trona Railroad (TR) went northwest across Searles Valley to the Kern / San Bernardino county Line thence east along Teagle Wash to **BM 2986** at the Searles Cutoff Road. From there it went east and northeast to cross the **Trona Road** to the southwest tip of the Spangler Hills. From there the TR went east to **BM 2295** and then northeast along the southeast flank of the Spangler Hills to **Spangler siding.**

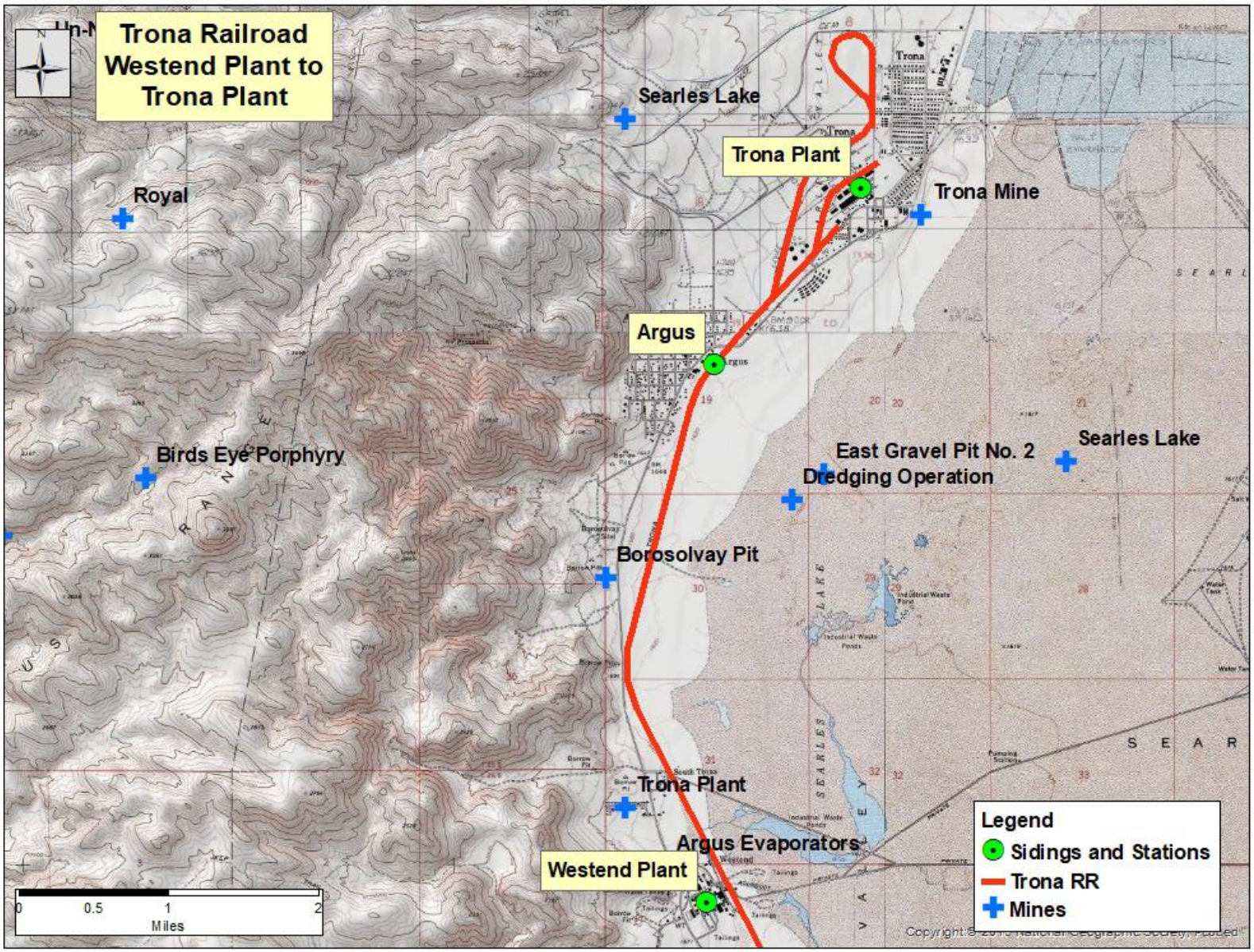

Trona Railroad
Garden City to Spangler
Stephens Holding Mines
Spangler
BM 2295
Trona Road
Garden City Station
Searles
Summit Diggings Bypass
Teagle
Legend
Sidings and Stations
Trona_RR
N&C
Mines
KERN CO
SAN BERNARDINO CO
Searles Valley
Wash
Teagle
PIPELINE
TUNNEL NO 2B
ROAD
RANGE
MOUNTAINS
Gravel Pit
Bedrock Spring
Stephens Holding Mine
Garden City Station
Searles
Surel Mountain
Cerro Coso Jr College
0 0.5 1 2
Miles

From **Spangler Siding**, the TR went northwest into China Lake Naval Weapons Center and past **Dry Well 1943.** From the area near Dry Well 1943, the TR followed the north bank of Teagle Wash past **BM 1878** where it turned north to past the **Pinnacles** rock formations. From the **Pinnacles** area, the TR went due north through the east end of the Spangler Hills and went into Searles Valley then past **BM 1649** and a **landing field.** To the east of the landing field are a series of salt evaporation ponds.

From the **BM 1649** and the **landing field**, the TR went north to the southeastern tip of the Argus Range and then north and northwest to the **Westend Plant**.


Westend Plant
Epson Salt-Trona R R Junction
Epson Salt RR
BM 1624
BM 1649
Landing Field
Pinnacles
BM 1878
Dry Well 1943
Spangler
Trona Railroad
Spangler to Westend Plant
Legend
Sidings and Stations
Trona RR
Epson Salt RR
Mines
Miles
0 0.5 1 2
Poison Canyon
PIPELINE
Salt Evaporator
LAKE
SEARLES
TRONA PINNACLES
RECREATIO IDS
Wash
Teagle
The Y
South Trona

From the **Westend Plant**, the TR went east to follow the east flank of the Argus Range and the shorelines of Searles Lake to **Argus**. From **Argus**, the TR went northeast to the **Trona Plant**.


Trona Railroad
Westend Plant to
Trona Plant
Searles Lake
Trona Plant
Trona Mine
Royal
Argus
Birds Eye Porphyry
East Gravel Pit No. 2
Dredging Operation
Searles Lake
Borosolvay Pit
Trona Plant
Argus Evaporators
Westend Plant
0
0.5
1
2
Miles
Legend
Sidings and Stations
Trona RR
Mines

REFERENCES

All references in this report are available at
http://www.greggwilkerson.com/iv-references.html