

THE BACK ROADS TO THE TEHACHAPI LOOP



(Photo courtesy of Steve Eshom)

The Tehachapi Loop is an engineering marvel. It attracts train fans from all over the world and is less than an hour from Bakersfield using Freeway 58.

But half the fun is watching these long trains climb from the valley floor up the grade of the Sierra Nevada to the Loop (or back down). It's a fascinating and historical side trip into the Sierra foothills through Bena, Caliente, and Bealville to see the trains snaking through narrow valleys and several tunnels.

On this driving tour to and from Bakersfield, there are historical sites, one of the newest national monuments in the National Park Service, and places to sample outstanding local produce. Depending on the season you will see snow, wildflowers, or grazing cattle . . . and lots of trains!



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WHAT IS THE TEHACHAPI LOOP?

This wording from the plaque at the site tells it all:

NATIONAL HISTORIC CIVIL ENGINEERING LANDMARK
TEHACHAPI PASS RAILROAD LINE
Constructed 1874 - 1876
Commemorated October 1998

In front of you is the world famous Tehachapi Loop which is about halfway up the grade to the Tehachapi Pass. This steep line averages 2.2% in gradient in its 28 miles of length. This feat of civil engineering genius was the crowning achievement of civil engineer William Hood of the Southern Pacific Railway Company. It is one of the seven wonders of the railroad world.

The Tehachapi Pass Railroad Line was cut through solid and decomposed granite by up to 3000 Chinese laborers from Canton China. They used picks, shovels, horse drawn carts and blasting powder. This line, which climbs out of the San Joaquin Valley and through the Tehachapi Mountains had 18 tunnels, 10 bridges and numerous water towers for the old steam locomotives. It was completed in less than 2 years time under the leadership of civil engineer J. B. Harris, Chief of Construction, a remarkable feat.

This line was part of the last and final link of the first railroad line connecting San Francisco to Los Angeles. It was a primary factor in the early growth of the City of Los Angeles and the State of California.

This single track line, essentially unchanged, is still in constant use today, 122 years after its completion. It passes an average of 36 freight trains each day. This attests to the superior job of both engineering and construction done by the two civil engineers and the Chinese laborers. This plaque is dedicated to them.

History & Heritage Committee
Los Angeles Section and Southern San Joaquin Branch
American Society of Civil Engineers

Find the Tehachapi Loop at No. 8 on the inside map.

HEADING BACK TO BAKERSFIELD

You can retrace your route, or take Freeway 58 back to Bakersfield. Consider exploring . . .

■ **CESAR E. CHAVEZ NATIONAL MONUMENT, KEENE.** (Exit 139) Created October 8, 2012, this is the nation's 398th national park site. It is on the historic property known as Nuestra Señora Reina de la Paz (Our Lady Queen of Peace), or La Paz. The new monument is the first site in the National Park System devoted to a contemporary Latino American. www.nps.gov/cech/index.htm (661) 823-6134

■ **BAKERSFIELD NATIONAL CEMETERY** (Arvin turn off/Route 223). Set in a beautiful, natural landscape, it is nestled amidst wide-open stretches, mountain vistas and rolling grazing land where both cattle and camels once roamed. The cemetery land was originally part of a Mexican grant that dates to Nov. 24, 1843, when Mexican Governor Manuel Micheltona gave the land to the original owners, Jose Antonio Aguirre and Ignacio del Valle. They called the property Rancho el Tejon. www.cem.va.gov/cems/nchp/bakersfield.asp

■ **MURRAY FAMILY FARMS** (Exit 127, General Beale Road). Owners Steve and Vickie Murray promise more free samples than Costco, and they deliver. You'll find whatever's in season. There are plenty of prepared foods, too, and fun activities for kids, such as jumping pillow, petting zoo, and hay rides. (Excerpted from Fodor's California 2015.) murrayfamilyfarms.com (661) 330-0100

■ **CALIFORNIA FRUIT DEPOT** (Exit 119, south on Edison Road then west on Redbank Road). One of California's smallest fruit packing facilities, California Fruit Depot specializes in growing and shipping premium quality oranges and Medjool dates. You will find fresh fruit, dried fruit, nuts, snacks, and free samples. Don't forget to try their date shakes! calfruitdepot.com (877) 366-6309

1) From Bakersfield, take Edison Highway east. Watch for trains on your left as Edison Highway parallels the tracks for many miles. Leaving Bakersfield, you will pass through vineyards and citrus groves.

DID YOU KNOW?

There are two main rail lines in Central California, the **Union Pacific (formerly Southern Pacific) and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe. Both lines meet in east Bakersfield and share trackage over the Sierra. Because of the steep grade over the mountains, watch for several engines in front of the train, a few in the middle, and more at the back.**

4) Soon you will see tracks on your left as both they and you near the town of Caliente. At the "T" Intersection you will see you are in the middle of a horseshoe of train tracks. The tracks on your left are headed back to Bakersfield. They loop around to the overcrossing immediately to your right. You might want to turn left and drive a few yards to park at the Post Office for a better view. Or you can turn right on Bealville Road.

2) At Tower Line Road, Edison Highway becomes Bena Road. The tracks will follow Bena Road for several more miles, then they will take differing routes and the grade begins to increase.

There are no services in Bena, Caliente, or Bealville. There is a restaurant in Keene, the Keene Café.

5) In about a mile, the tracks will again cross the road at the site of the former town of Bealville (noted by a historical marker on the south side of the tracks). While it has taken you only one mile, it takes a train five to climb the grade. Continue about one more mile to Route 58.

3) Turn left at Caliente-Bodfish Road. As you climb, watch for a glimpse of a tunnel and tracks on your right.

6) To continue your trek to the Tehachapi Loop, you will need to turn left. However, if the traffic on Route 58 does not allow you to turn left, simply turn right for a mile and a half to the turn off to Arvin (Route 223) then double back.

7) Exit at Keene, exit 139. Turn left, pass under the freeway, and then turn right at Woodford-Tehachapi Road. Soon you again will be driving next to the tracks as they make their way to the Loop.

8) Welcome to the Tehachapi Loop! Look for the set of markers on your left, then get out to watch the long train you saw in the valley make its way up the mountainside and cross over itself on its way further east.

Which way back?
Consider taking another route on your return to Bakersfield for more to explore! See back panel for details. ▶

HISTORICAL TRIVIA

This driving tour route - Edison Highway, Bena Road, Caliente-Bodfish Road, Bealville Road, and Woodford-Tehachapi Road—used to be part of U.S. 466 that linked Morro Bay, California with U.S. 66 in Kingman, Arizona.



MILEAGE:

- Between 2 and 3: 10 miles / 16km
- Between 3 and 4: 4.6 miles / 7.4 km
- Between 4 and 5: 1.3 miles / 2.1km
- Between 5 and 6: 0.7 mile / 1.1 km
- Between 6 and 7: 5 miles / 8km
- Between 7 and 8: 2.5 miles / 4 km

