

Carthage depot

by Robert Eveleth

What at first glance looks like a typical late-19th century photo of a short passenger train stopped at a remote depot is actually of great historical significance. The reason for this is two-fold. First, the depot in this view is at Carthage, NM, ca. 1884. Railroad historians have argued for years about the very existence of this depot. Most have concluded there was none, but the above photo is clearly marked in period handwriting that extends into the image on the lower right margin, to wit: *"Depot at Carthage, NM."*

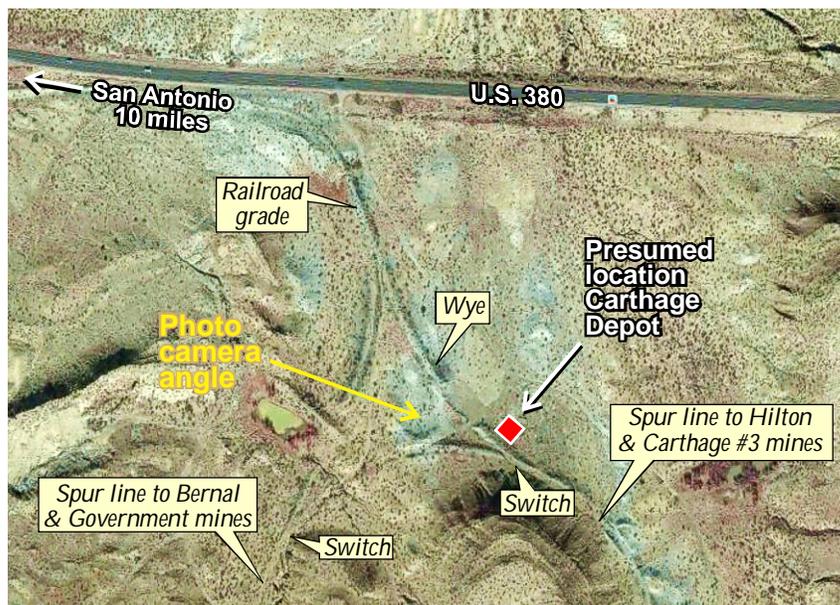
In addition, a handwritten manuscript in the archives of the Kansas State Historical Archives at Topeka, dated 1884, not only verifies the existence of such a depot (and gives the dimensions at 16' X 32') but also indicates the existence of a nearby 54' turntable and other amenities which are long-forgotten today. The AT&SF depot at La Joya, photos of which have been published, was identical, but until the discovery of this image, there was no way to compare the two.

The Carthage depot was doubtlessly located in the railyards near the "upper end" of the camp, but the exact location has never been pinned down. However, the photo contains a strong clue. The train and depot is located on a straight section of track, with a switch and curved track leading off from the fireman's side of engine. Examining the Carthage "Y" (or "wye"), there is only one location that matches this track arrangement – shown on the GoogleEarth image of today's Carthage remnants.

The second historical feature is the provenance of the locomotive that is equally remarkable and harks back to the "wars" fought between the Denver & Rio Grande RR (D&RG) and the Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe (AT&SF) for the rights-of-way through the Royal Gorge and over Raton Pass. After two years of armed skirmishes the railroads, in 1880, reached an out of court settlement known as the Treaty of Boston. The treaty granted the D&RG access to the Royal Gorge (Raton pass went to the AT&SF) but the "victory" came at great expense to the Rio Grande:



The only known period photo of the Carthage depot and train – engine no. 108. The track leading off to the right is part of the wye. SCHS is now co-owner of this rare photo.



The GoogleEarth image of today's remnants of Carthage, showing the "Y," where the trains were turned around for their return to San Antonio – and the likely location of the depot based on the photo.

since the first twenty miles of the Royal Gorge Route had been constructed by the AT&SF, the Rio Grande forked over a whopping \$1.4 million for this and other improvements.

AT&SF also took possession of five locomotives, four of which were 2-8-0 "Consolidations" (2 lead wheels, 8 drivers), plus many freight cars and passenger coaches. The four Consolidations were renumbered AT&SF 107 – 110 and rebuilt/converted to standard gauge probably at the Topeka shops. At least two of these, No's 108 and 109, were assigned to light branch line service in New Mexico and that is how Engine No. 108 was caught by the photographer at the Carthage depot so long ago.

More about Carthage, Tokay, Fraley, and a Railroad

With Bob's preceding article on the Carthage depot, it seems appropriate for a thumb-nail history on the area. The historic towns of Carthage, Tokay and Fraley, and the once bustling railroad, seems to be nearly forgotten.

The Carthage coal field is located 10 miles east of San Antonio and south of US 380. The coal was first mined in 1862 by soldiers from Fort Craig. This coal was used for heating and blacksmithing needs at Forts Craig, Stanton, Bayard and Selden, though remained a relatively small operation.

San Pedro Coal Co.

The interest in Carthage coal quickly changed in 1881 when the Santa Fe railroad extended its tracks south from Socorro. To fuel its fleet of coal-fired locomotives, the Santa Fe railroad formed the *San Pedro Coal and Coke Company* to mine the Carthage coal. The company also built extensive coke ovens at San Antonio for providing coke to Socorro area smelters. In 1882, the over worked wagon teams hauled 16,000 tons of coal to San Antonio.

New Mexican Railroad 1883–1897

To get more coal to the main line track and coke ovens at San Antonio more efficiently, Santa Fe railroad formed another subsidiary company called the *New Mexican Railroad*. In 1883, a spur line to Carthage was built, including a bridge across the Rio Grande at San Antonio. Over the next few years, the short line railroad allowed coal shipments to increase to over 50,000 tons per year.

The mines worked two shifts per day to meet this demand. Carthage grew into a sizeable company town to house the miners and their families, railroad workers, and merchants.

About a mile north of Carthage a limestone quarry and kilns were also developed for making bricks and mortar. This small town was called Fraley – and was also serviced by the New Mexican railroad.

With about 1,000 workers and residents, Carthage was now the largest coal producing district in New Mexico.

Panic of 1893

Manufacturing, mining, and railroading expanded greatly in the 1880-90s, mostly on borrowed money and bonds. A rash of defaults, a stock market crash, run on the banks, devaluation of silver, and a host of other factors,

crippled the U.S. economy in 1893 – including in Socorro with the closure of area mines and the Billings Smelter.

With little ore or goods moving to market, the railroads slowed to a crawl. Union Pacific, Santa Fe, and others filed for bankruptcy protection, unable to pay their loans.

Also by 1893, the “easy” coal had been extracted from the Carthage mines, leaving narrow veins that were labor intensive and expensive to mine. Combined with the faltering economy, the mines were also closed in 1893.

The Santa Fe railroad went into receivership, reorganized as the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe (AT&SF). Carthage was now an AT&SF company town with no coal being mined. Furthermore, the railroad decided it would be more economical to develop the coal reserves around Cerillos and Madrid. In 1895, the company town of Carthage was moved – lock, stock, and barrel – to Madrid. Thus, many of the structures in today’s Madrid were originally those in Carthage. When the town was moved, the spur line between San Antonio and Carthage was also removed. The New Mexican railroad was no more.

New Mexico Midland Railroad 1906–1931

The *Carthage Coal Company* was immediately formed by local investors to develop new mines further to the east of old Carthage. With no railroad, coal was again shipped to San Antonio by wagons. The company sought additional investors, which resulted in the creation of the *New Mexico Midland Railroad*. The short rail line between San Antonio and Carthage was rebuilt in 1906.

Around 1915, new coal deposits were located farther to the west and the town of Tokay was established near the Fite Ranch. The New Mexico Midland built a spur line to Tokay to service the Kinney and other area mines.

The Hilton and Bernal mines at Carthage were mined out by 1918. The Government and Carthage No. 3 mines continued until 1926, when the Carthage Fuel Company ceased all operations.

The Great Depression, combined with fuel oil replacing coal to heat homes, caused the demand for coal to plummet. Though coal continued to be mined, it was insufficient to support the railroad. The last train ran from Carthage to San Antonio on August 28, 1931. The New Mexico Midland Railroad was no more.

Today, Carthage and Tokay are all but forgotten. Once the home to hundreds of miners and their families, the towns are gone – literally. The headframes and mines were leveled by the recent Desert Restoration Program. Nothing is left.



Prior to the New Mexican railroad, Carthage coal was loaded into wagons for the ten mile trip to San Antonio.



Much of Carthage and Tokay are lost to history. The sites have been leveled and covered with fill dirt under the “Desert Restoration Program.”