

TOWN OF GILA BEND SHAWMUT LOOP

For beginner to intermediate hikers

OVERVIEW

The Southern Pacific Railroad began building east from Los Angeles in 1877 with rails reaching Tucson in March, 1880 and then El Paso in May, 1881. It was quickly dubbed the "Sunset Route" and the Southern Pacific circular logo showing a setting sun over a railroad track became the company's trademark. Southern Pacific's premier passenger train on the route was named the "Sunset Limited." Copper deposits in Southern Arizona comprised most of the initial traffic, but by the mid 1890's affluent vacationers filled the passenger trains destined for winter resorts.

The steady 1% grade up out of the Gila Valley and through the Maricopa Mountains required "pusher" locomotives to assist trains through the pass. A series of "Y-spurs" off the main line allowed the engines to turn-around and get behind the next train. More powerful diesel locomotives made the pushers obsolete, but you can still see the abandoned Y-spurs between Maricopa Rd and the tracks.

The Shawmut Loop is not your traditional trail and has no formal markings, but you can see and follow an obvious route. Trainspotting is ideal along the ridgeline looking either east or west.

Best time to do hike:

November through early April

Average Time:

2 hours for hike, but you can make it an afternoon picnic for watching the trains.

How to get there:

From Gila Bend, take Maricopa Rd. (Hwy 238) east for about 13 miles (about 15 mins). From the turnout away from Maricopa Rd. on the south side, the trail begins as you take the wash under the tracks bridge. Immediately to the south is a small butte, the worn trail follows the base of this butte to the southeast and around to a small gap on the west side of the butte. The footpath goes up along the ridgeline and down back towards the tracks.

