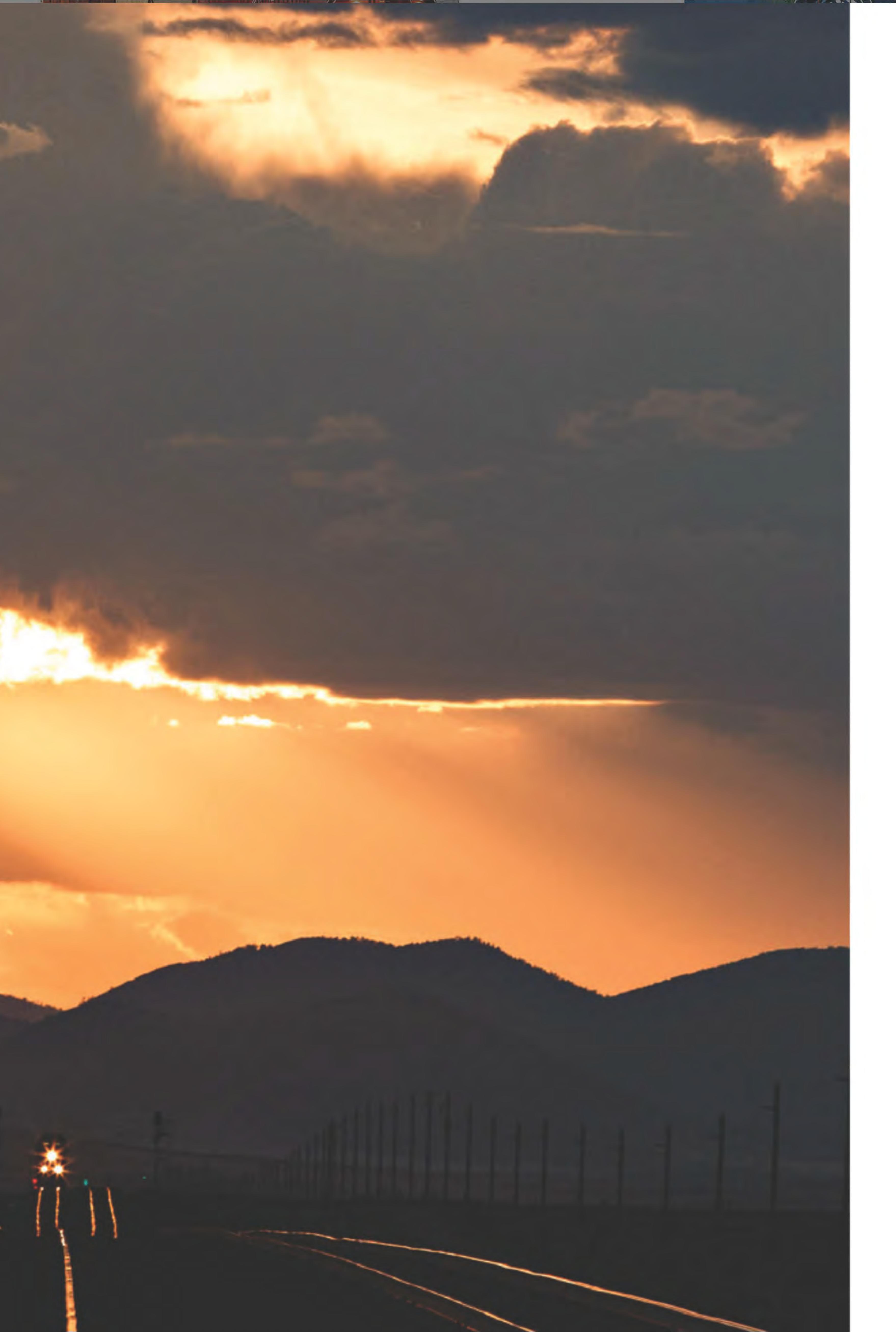
Remnants of a passing monsoon loom over the San Francisco Peaks as BNSF 3916 leads Train VRICCLO1-05 at Canyon Diablo on July 6, 2018. Monsoon season officially runs between June 15 and September 30 each year.



## ACROSS NORTHERN ARIZONA



#### BY RAY LEWIS/PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

RIZONA IS NOTHING MORE than an long before I was back on the Seligman youth that was, in fact, my per- about the line's history and to photoception of the Grand Canyon State. Prior graph BNSF's southern transcontinental to 1997, I had never left California and railroad in its entirety. my only exposure to railfanning was in the hills of Tehachapi. But after joining the Air Force that year, I was assigned to Luke Air Force Base near Phoenix, gan on December 3, 1881, following the where I was introduced to the BNSF Railway Seligman Subdivision and dis- the subdivision's easternmost point of covered Arizona was loaded with scen- Winslow, Ariz. The route west predomery that contradicted my youthful and inantly followed surveys completed by flawed perceptions.

scenery located along the higher eleva- stacle including wage disputes, weather tions, where the majestic San Francisco delays, labor shortages, management Peaks tower over the region and the vi- disputes, supply deficiencies, competibrant Ponderosa pines engulf the scen- tive blockades, and funding issues. These ery. As an added bonus, the silver and factors challenged the line's progress, yet red warbonnet locomotives were still the vision of a transcontinental railroad healthy in numbers, and the classic San- endured. ta Fe signal bridges still controlled train Construction continued at a respectmovements along the rails. The expe- able pace of one mile of rail per day for rience was quite the contrast to what I most of the railway's construction, but had become accustomed to growing up in slowed significantly during the erection Southern California.

jority of my time between Williams Junc- canyon floor, the completion of the bridge tion and East Darling. My infatuation across the gorge proved difficult and dewith the dense pine forests resulted in layed track laying westward. Regardless my missing out on hundreds of miles of of the challenges, nearly six months later what is arguably the Southwest's most the first train finally crossed the canyon diverse and photogenic landscape. For- on July 1, 1882. tunately, nearly 14 years later I was From here, A&P crossed over one direassigned to Luke AFB, and it wasn't vide after another, reaching Yampai

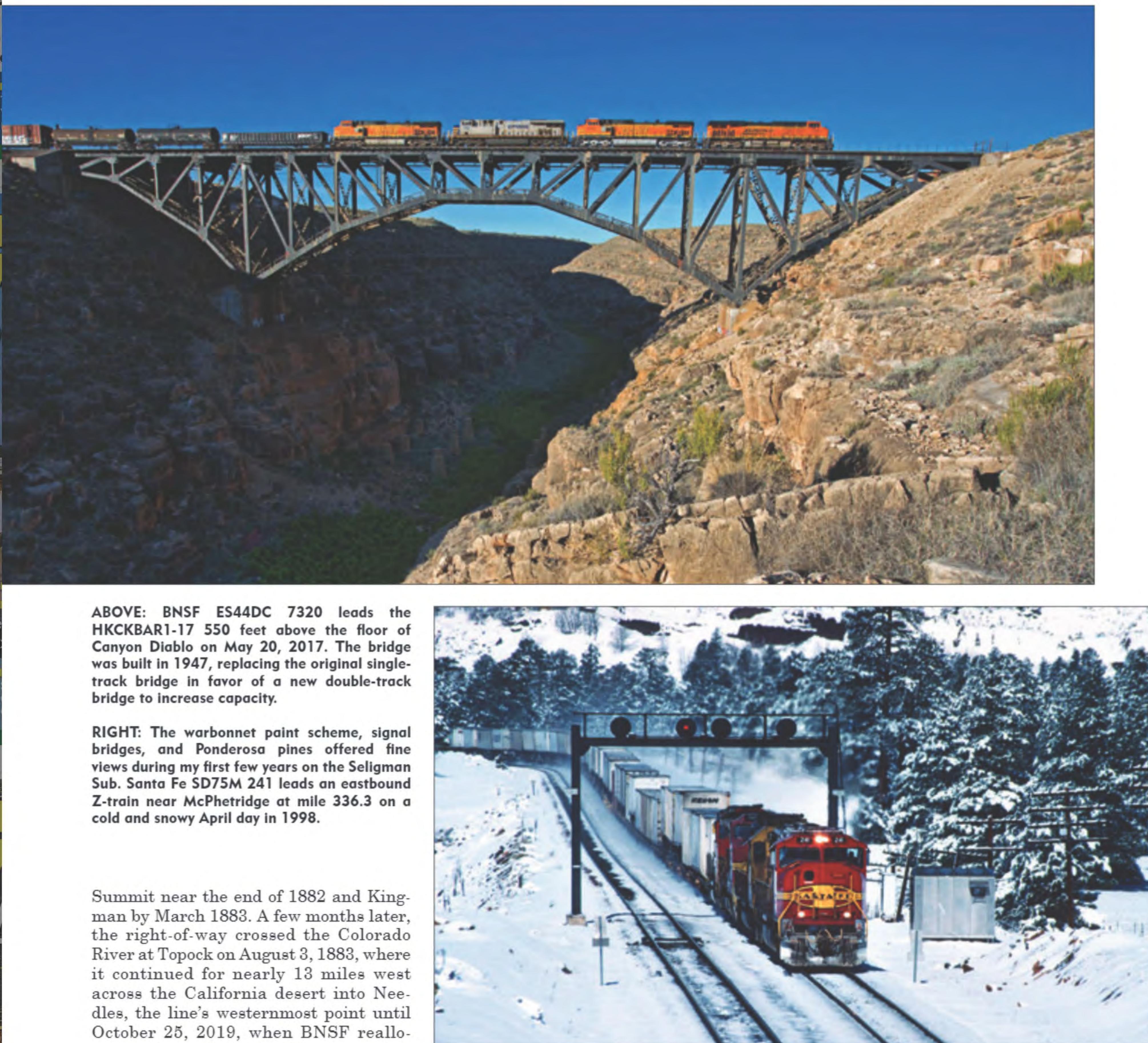
# BNSF Railway Seligman Subdivision

enormous desert... right? In my Subdivision, determined to learn more

#### The Quest to the West

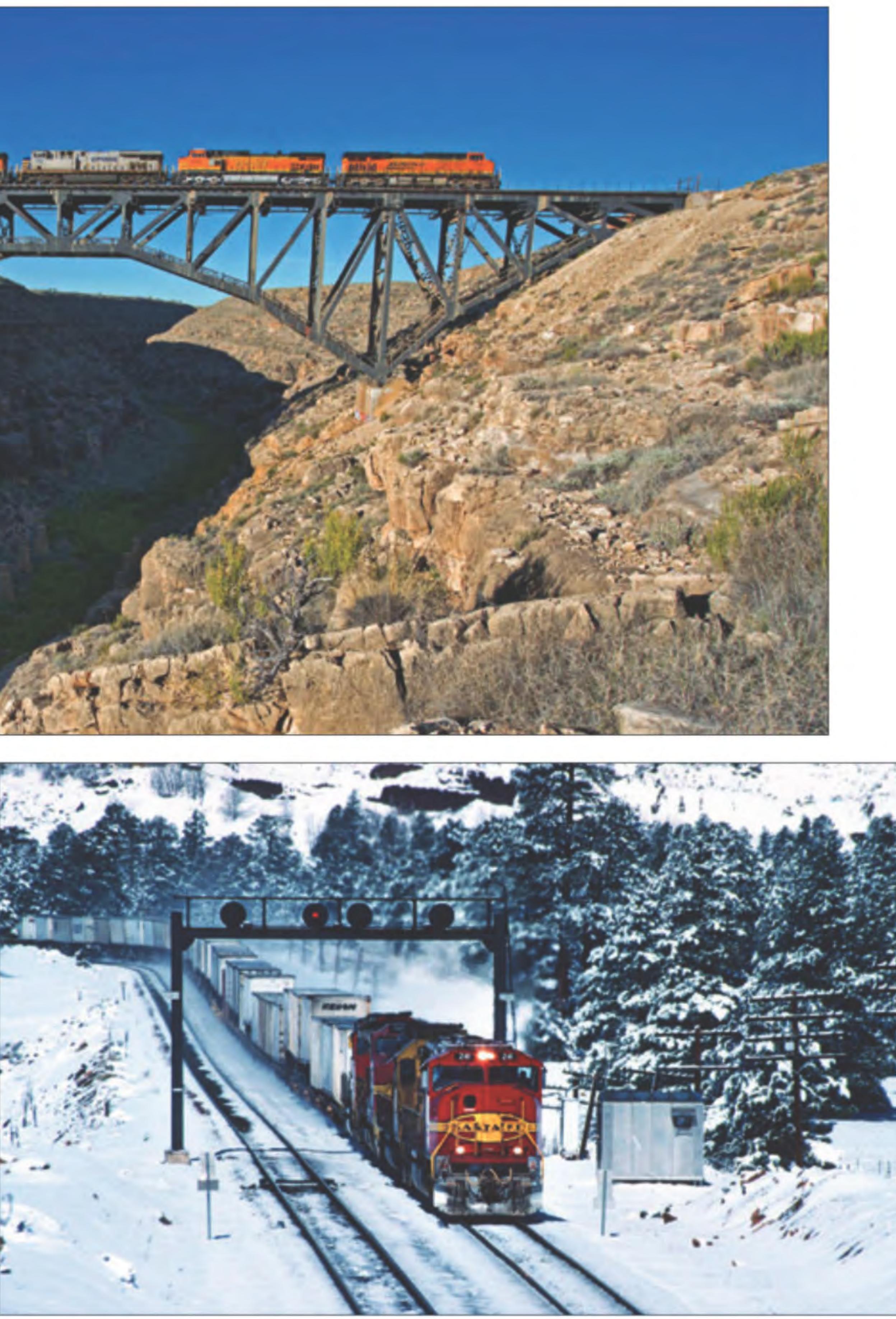
The Seligman Subdivision's story bearrival of Atlantic & Pacific Railroad at A&P engineer Lewis Kingman and en-I was immediately intrigued by the dured just about every conceivable ob-

of the bridge at Canyon Diablo. Measur-Somewhat regrettably, I spent the ma- ing 225 feet long, and 550 feet above the



cated mileage from the Seligman to the Needles Subdivision. The change estab- traffic and uncooperative SP manage- Seligman Sub was integral to the devellished mile 566.2 (just west of Topock) as ment. Atlantic & Pacific's threat to build opment of the West. By slashing shipthe Seligman Subdivision's new western a parallel line into California ultimately ping costs and transit time, the railroad termination point. While the arrival into resulted in its acquisition of the Needles facilitated the movement of bulky goods Needles was no small feat, the struggle line by lease effective October 1, 1884, in and out of Arizona, making it more for economic and transcontinental rele- which included trackage rights into San practical for native industries such as vance still loomed. After all, the railroad Francisco. These trackage rights, along mining to prosper and subsequently atstill had not accessed the booming re- with further expansion into southern tracting more migrants to the region. By gions of California.

power to keep competitors out of Califor- Angeles area. nia, including building east out of Mojave into Needles in an attempt to halt A&P's entry into California. While SP agreed to interchange at Needles, the partnership Stretched across the sparsely popu- passenger service. was far from successful due to low rail lated Northern region of Arizona, the Optimization efforts along the



California, created a transcontinental 1902, Santa Fe took full ownership of the Southern Pacific did everything in its route, complete with access to the Los A&P route. As traffic steadily increased

### Expanding Capacity and Increasing Efficiency

from new markets, congestion and delays prompted Santa Fe to increase capacity across the route in order to meet the emerging needs for both freight and



Mexico and California.

trains traditionally run left-handed, learn the county and forest roads that whereas west out of Winslow they run enable access to some of the less-photoopposite. The contrast in directional run- graphed and/or harder to get to locations. ning often creates a bottleneck, as both With that said, note that some land is not east- and westbound trains are forced to easily identifiable as private property. cross over while they change crews and At the eastern point of the Seligman transition through Winslow Yard. In late Subdivision, crews begin the ascent west October 2020, BNSF completed a nine- out of the town of Winslow at an elevamonth, \$29 million project that estab- tion of 4,850 feet. Trains traverse dips lished a fly-over at Truxton, just outside and sags along the right-of-way across the eastern entrance of Crozier Canyon. the wide-open spaces of the high des-The flyover allows trains to continue left- ert for nearly 41 miles to East Darling, hand running all the way to the Truxton where the subtle and brush-filled landflyover, which is projected to ease both scape becomes more mountainous and is congestion at Winslow and the transition overtaken by the junipers indigenous to back to right-hand running.

instrumental to drastic operating improvements on the Seligman Subdivision, which subsequently enhanced the entire transcontinental route. It took A&P 96-120 hours to deliver 20-car Humphreys Peak offers beautiful views as freight trains between Chicago and Los it towers over the upper elevations of the Angeles. Today, BNSF can move 100- to 150-car priority trains between the same two points in roughly 48 hours. Contrary to the early years when A&P hauled a modest 322,000 tons annually, today BNSF transports well over 94 million gross tons each year. With roughly just February 16, 2018. seven million of those tons terminating in Arizona itself, the current-day Seligman Subdivision continues to serve as a vital link between the Midwest and the Pacific Coastline some 137 years from the date of its inception.

#### Today's Seligman Sub

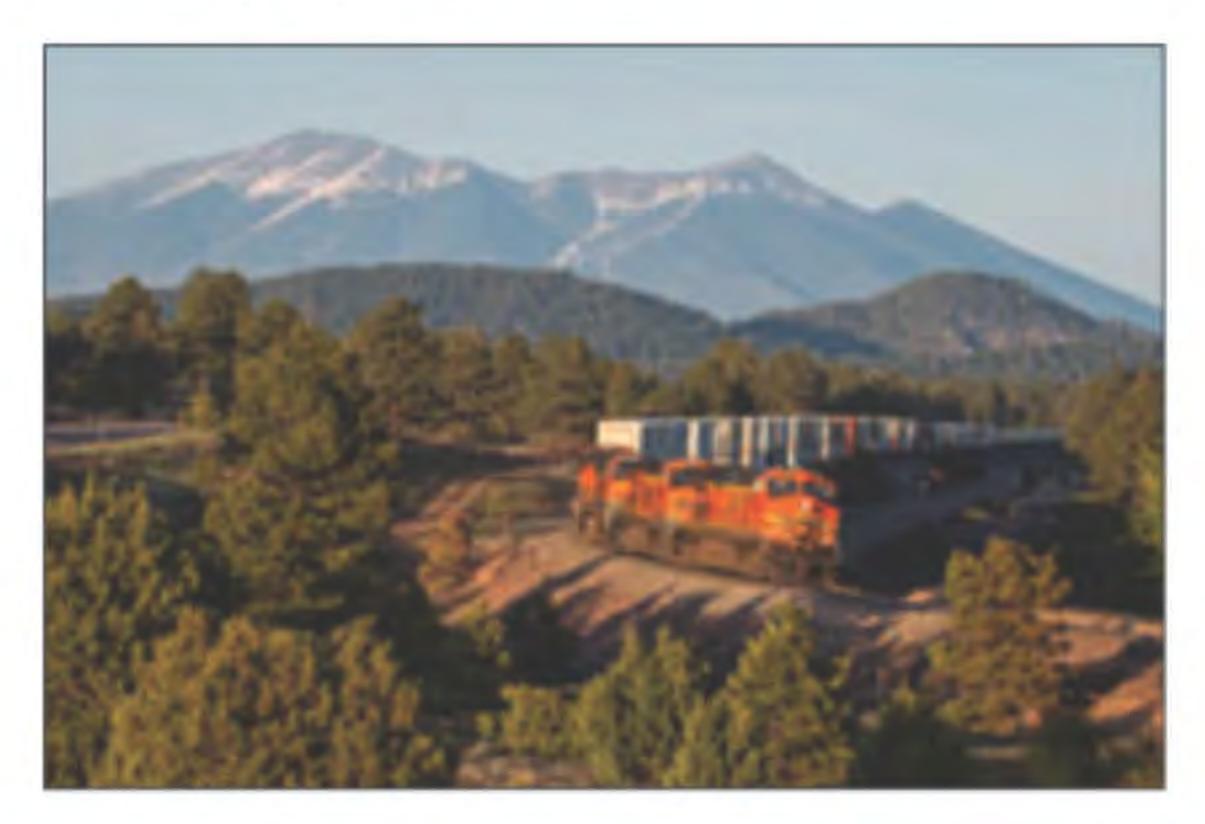
Encompassing 282.7 miles, the railroad passes through a variety of photogenic scenery. And although the route generally parallels historic Route 66 and

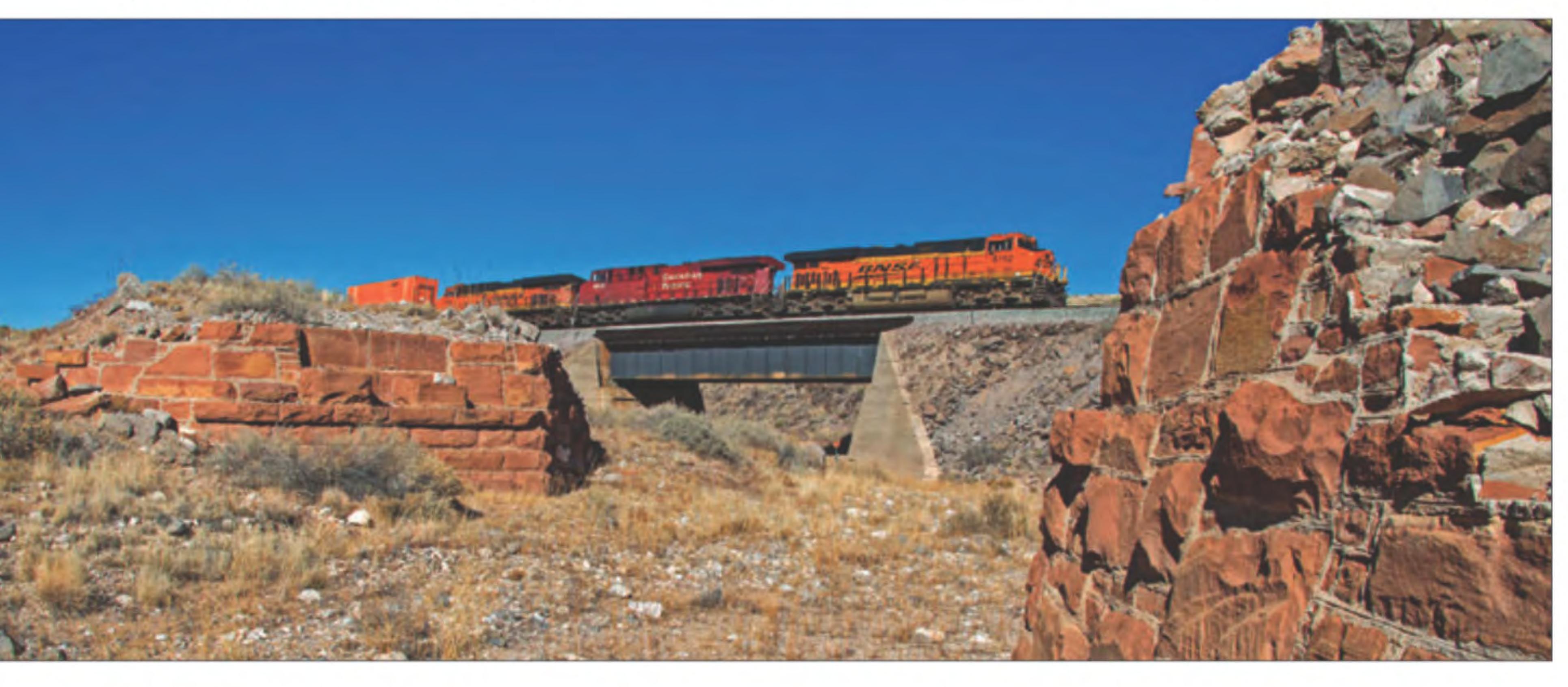
Interstate 40, with nearly 300 miles to East of Winslow on the Gallup Sub, cover, it is important to take the time to

the region. Moving west from Cosnino, The enduring vision of a transcon- the junipers slowly give way as Pondertinental railroad and progressive en- osa pines emerge, creating a mountain hancements over the line's history were railroading vibe. Through the pines and

> BELOW: At an elevation of 12,637 feet, Seligman Sub. On May 3, 2017, BNSF C44-9W 5489 leads a westbound Train ZNYCLAC9-01 through Maine, Ariz.

**BOTTOM: Bridge abutments built for the** original A&P alignment frame eastbound Train QLACATG6-16 led by BNSF ES44C4 8152 on







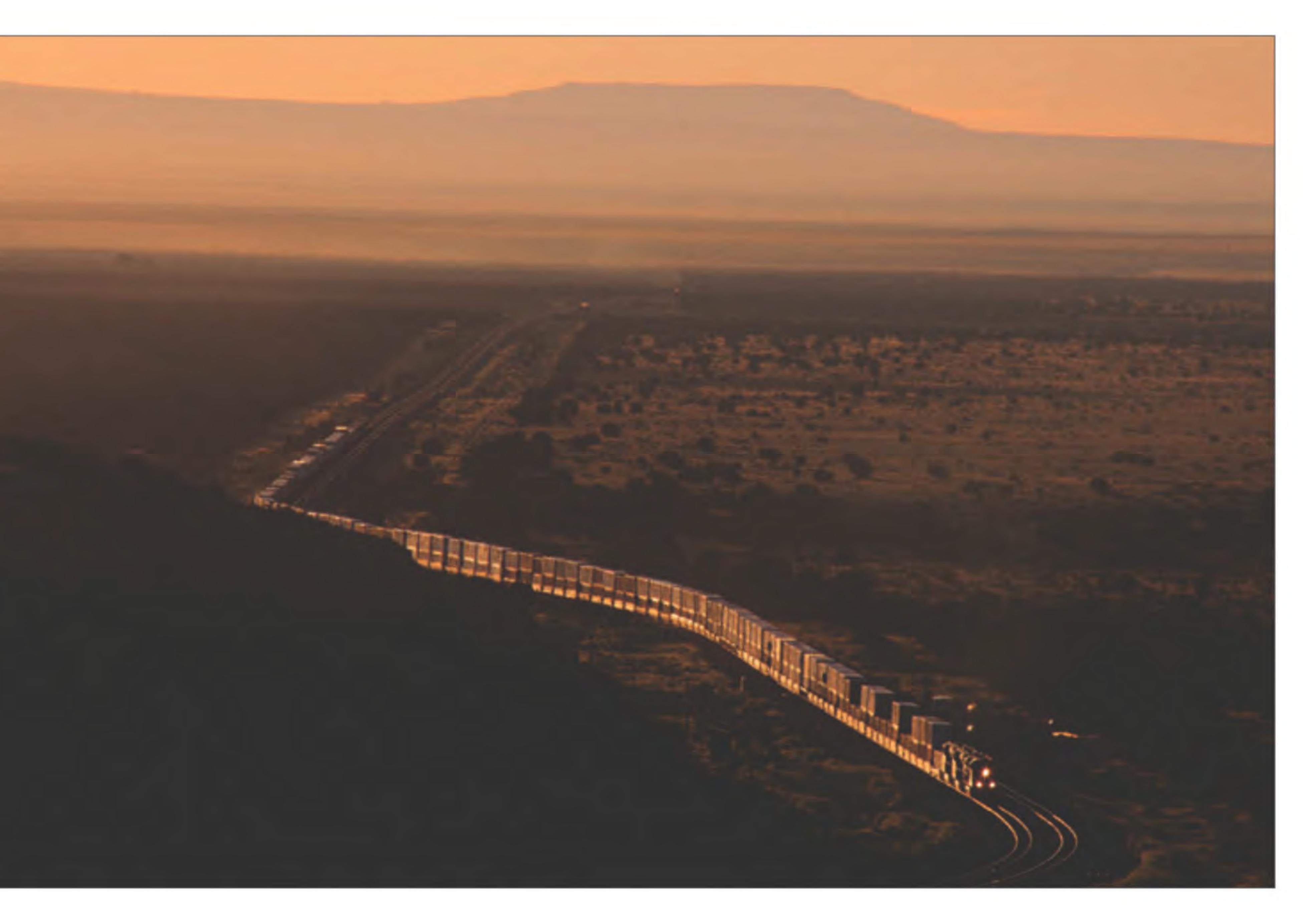


ABOVE: The rear end of an eastbound train passes through East Perrin on May 4, 2017. Perrin is part of the Crookton line change, known for its long, sweeping curves, that allowed Santa Fe to bypass the steep grades and sharp curvature that existed on the original right-of-way through Johnson Canyon and Gleed via Ash Fork.

LEFT: On October 24, 2004, a westbound BNSF train is framed by the photogenic, though soon-to-be-gone, signal bridges protecting the crossover at East Darling. The east end of the subdivision often offers great sunrise and sunset photos due to its wide-open spaces.

the city of Flagstaff, the climb continues on until milepost 351 (between West Flagstaff and East Bellemont) where trains plateau on the subdivision's highest point at more than 7,320 feet.

Pine trees continue to dominate the landscape on to Williams, until the junipers reappear near Perrin and the trains



ABOVE: A westbound train eases into East Darling on August 25, 2017, just after sunrise. Off in the distance, the headlight of a rearfacing DPU can be seen from an eastbound manifest.

**RIGHT:** Nearly 11 years since my last trip to the Seligman Subdivision, an eastbound train speeds through Canyon Diablo underneath a distant, but intense storm that produced lightning and one lucky photo on October 17, 2015.

speed through 44 miles of long, sweeping curves of rails laid during the construction of the Crookton Cutoff. From Crookton, the lush greenery dissipates for the next 26 miles as the rails drop into the town of Seligman and through Aubrey Valley, where sagebrush and wild grass blanket the landscape with the Aubrey Cliffs towering over the valley. Climbing out of the valley at Pica, the native junipers resurface while the railroad travels Hualapai Valley into the city of King- 566.2. Here, the route bottoms out at an 38 miles over the Yampai Divide and the man, through the scenic Kingman Can- elevation of 492 feet above sea level and terrain becomes more rugged through yon, and finally across the barren, yet transitions to the Pacific time zone as both the Yampai and the well-known intriguing, Sacramento Valley alongside trains cross the Colorado River and into Crozier canyons.

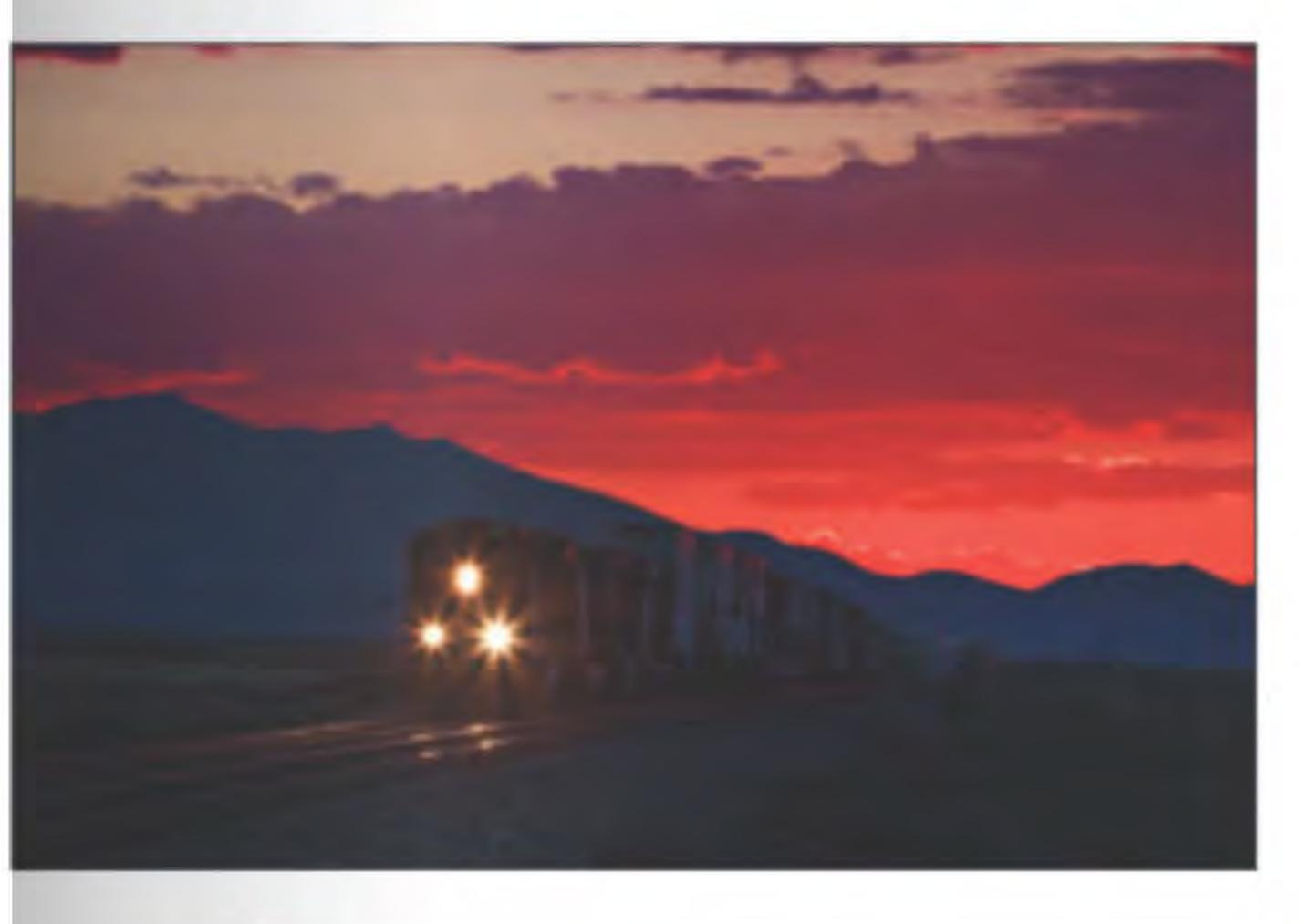


its namesake wash. Effective October California onto the Needles Subdivision.

The final 86 miles takes the right-of- 25, 2019, the Seligman Subdivision now way across a long stretch through the terminates just west of Topock at mile

#### Railfanning across Northern Arizona

upper elevations and often exceed 100 exhilarating skies that can generate ex-No matter where the location, weath- degrees Fahrenheit in the lower desert ceptional imagery, assuming the train er conditions along the route are just as regions. During the winter months, lows traffic cooperates, of course. diverse as its scenery. In the summer, can reach sub-freezing, which can result Train volume across the Seligman



LEFT: The setting sun and broken storm clouds create dramatic skies as BNSF C44-9W 4349 races across the high desert region at East Canyon Diablo on July 14, 2017.

**BELOW:** After crossing over and changing crews, BNSF ET44C4 3822 West begins its journey running right-handed on the Seligman Sub on July 1, 2017. Another westbound train, running left-handed, waits for the eastbound traffic to cross over and clear. The dissimilar operating procedures create a bottleneck in and out of Winslow.



the possibility of monsoon storms exists in measurable snow accumulation as low Sub is just as impressive as the terrain across the entire subdivision as tem- as Kingman (albeit not very common). In and weather in Arizona. Hosting an avperatures range from the mid-80s in the either case, the storm clouds can produce erage of 72 trains per day, there is no shortage of action. And despite the dip in traffic while the country hunkered down through the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, traffic levels seem to be gradually returning to normal. Mixed manifests, auto, and unit ethanol and grain trains are somewhat regular, while baretables and unit coal trains can be seen occasionally. However, the majority of the traffic traveling across Northern Arizona rails consists of both domestic and international intermodal traffic powered by what is seemingly an endless barrage of "Omaha Orange" General Electric locomotives.

> You'll find plenty of accommodations of varying quality and price along the Seligman Sub. While in Winslow, we prefer to stay at the Best Western, although La Posada is a former Harvey House and offers a very nice experience. In Flagstaff, there are endless food and lodging choices, but we prefer to stay at the Hampton East off Country Club Drive, then walk over to Oregano's Pizza Bistro to enjoy some great Italian food and ice-cold beer. The same goes for Williams — we choose a hotel in walking distance to the Grand Canyon Brewery. There we usually stay at the Holiday Inn, which also offers a great view of the Phoenix Sub.

> When in Seligman, make sure you stay at the Canyon Lodge, where guests receive a discount at Westside Lilo's Café. We also like to stay at the Hualapai Lodge in Peach Springs. If you do stay at the Hualapai Lodge, I would recommend a room on the north side, as the hotel is very close to a road crossing. Even for a train enthusiast, the horns can result in a frustrating night of sleep, although the lodge does offer free ear plugs. If you are there, you have to try a Hualapai taco at the adjacent Diamond Creek Restaurant. Kingman has plenty of lodging, but if you have time, check out the Kingman Chophouse for dinner.

> While classic warbonnet locomotives are all but gone and the signal bridges were dismantled more than a decade ago, the topography along the route still remains. Stretching across desert floors, negotiating through rugged canyons, and navigating dense forests, the route crosses just about every type of landscape imaginable.

Complemented by the spectacular sunrises and sunsets synonymous with Arizona, the nearly 283-mile journey along the Seligman Subdivision continues to offer exceptional vantage points of contemporary railroad operations.