

David Wilkins has had a life-long interest in photography and the advent of digital photography re-energized his interest in photography. He spent 30 years as a chemical engineer and is now retired. He has held various positions with the Lancaster Photography Association. He was newsletter editor for three years, vice president for two years, and president for the years 2012-2013 and 2013-2014. Active in Southern California Council of Camera Clubs (S4C), David is a board member, and was secretary for two years and was the S4C president for the years 2015-2017 and 2020-2022. He has been a commentator in one of the PSA digital study sections since 2011. He and his wife like to indulge their passion for photography and travel. Landscapes, travel and wild animals feature prominently in his images. He has a special interest in star trails and night photography.



Tehachapi Loop Illuminated by Train Light

Tehachapi Loop

I think the inner child in each of us is fascinated by trains. What could be more exciting than a train that crosses over itself while going in a circle or parts of the train traveling in opposite directions! Welcome to the Tehachapi Loop where all these things can happen. The Tehachapi Loop is located in the Tehachapi mountains as they rise from the central valley of California to the high point in Tehachapi. The loop is west of Tehachapi, California, just off

Highway 58. The loop is marked by a historical marker at the Keene exit from highway 58 and is three miles up the Woodford-Tehachapi Road. There is a pull-off area and a viewing platform at this location.

The loop was built to keep the track grade at a reasonable rate as trains climb from the Central Valley, near Bakersfield, to Tehachapi on the way to the Mojave Desert. The loop accomplished this



Tehachapi Loop Blur Motion

by going in a circle and using a tunnel to pass under itself. For more information on the Tehachapi Loop, see Wikipedia.

The tunnel under the loop is single track, but many areas above and below are double track. The Union Pacific and the BNSF railroads both use this track. This is a heavily used train route. On a recent day, I

was there and watched three trains going down in a one-hour period. Trains going down are obviously faster than those going up. Just watching the trains going around the loop can be entertaining. Trains longer than 3800 feet will go under themselves when they exit the loop via the tunnel and even longer trains can be seen going in opposite directions after the leading parts of the train have exited the tunnel and can be seen going on down the mountain.

Various photo opportunities are present. This a good spot for taking a video of the train going around the loop. If a train happens to be present at sunset, then there can be good color in the sky. A neutral density filter can be used to blur motion of the train, or the low light near sunset can be used. There is enough room to pull off the road near the tunnel exit, to get a



Train Exiting Tunnel

shot of the engine exiting the tunnel while other parts of the train can be seen on the track above the tunnel.

To get the entire loop and the tracks leading into the loop one will need a wide-angle lens on the order of 14-18 mm focal length. The loop itself can be taken in with a 24 mm lens. Highway 58 is just to the north end of the loop and will be included in any shots that show the entire loop.

One of my favorite places to view the loop is to drive up the road to just before the crest of the hill where there is room to park off the road on the north side of the road. There is a dirt lane that can be walked for a great view to the west of the entire loop.

Since the tunnel is single track, sometimes trains will stop part way around the double track parts of the loop to let a faster train pass. One can be going up while the other is going down or all can be going down or up.



Train Passing Under Itself

Some other interesting sites in the area: The Bakersfield National Cemetery is 10.7 miles from the Tehachapi Loop Overlook. Take the Woodford-Tehachapi Road back to highway 58 and go west to the highway 223. This is a left exit, and the cemetery is less than a mile up the road.

There is also a railroad museum in Tehachapi. The route between Bakersfield and Tehachapi is classic old California with oak trees and either golden or green backdrops, depending upon the season.



Two Trains on Loop