



The Denver & Rio Grande built its San Juan Extension to serve the silver mining district of the San Juan mountains in southwestern Colorado. The San Juan Extension west of Antonito, Colorado, was never converted to standard gauge, and two segments of the narrow gauge road are preserved today as heritage railroads. One of the segments is the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad, which was originally constructed in 1880 and crosses 10,020-foot Cumbres Pass, the highest point on the San Juan Extension. With the repeal of the Sherman Act in 1893 and its devastating effect on silver prices, traffic over the San Juan Extension west of Antonito failed to warrant conversion to standard gauge. Over the ensuing decades the narrow gauge line became an isolated anachronism, receiving its last major upgrades in equipment and infrastructure in the 1920's. Operations dwindled and in 1969 the D&RG commenced abandonment its remaining narrow gauge main line, thereby ending the last use of steam locomotives in general freight service in the United States.

Most of the narrow gauge was dismantled around 1970, but through the combined efforts of railway preservationists and local civic interests, the two most scenic portions of the line were saved. Today the railroad is operated for the states of Colorado and New Mexico by the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad Commission. Care of the historic assets are entrusted to the Friends of the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad, a non-profit.

The west end of the C&T is at Chama, New Mexico, where C&T #488 and #489 fire up for the day's duty.



#489 huffs and puffs it's first few breaths of a crisp fall morning in the Chama yard.



The tender will be filled with coal and water for the day's climb up to Cumbres Pass.





Dumping yesterday's coal ash, which cooled overnight.



The end of the track in west Chama. West from here, the tracks are gone until Durango.





The narrow gauge tracks east of Chalma wind their way up to Cumbres Pass. Note the old road up the pass.