



During the late 1870's and early 1880's, the Denver, South Park, & Pacific Railroad built a narrow gauge line through the heart of the Rockies. The main line followed the South Platte River from Union Station in Denver up to South Park over Trout Creek Pass, down to the Arkansas River, then up over the continental divide through the Alpine Tunnel to Gunnison. A principal branch line went over Boreas Pass to Breckenridge, Climax, and Leadville.

The grade on the western approach to the Alpine Tunnel is now the road to the tunnel, as evidenced both by the constant grade of this dirt Forest Service road and by a water tower that serviced narrow gauge steam engines.



Fill and some track are present at a curve for a switchback needed to gain elevation toward the Alpine Tunnel. This is the only place the road leaves the railroad grade.



A rock retaining wall carries the DSP&P grade across the Palisade, a near-vertical granite escarpment, and a switchback out of sight in the distance, carries the grade lower down the slope. The switchback curve is the subject of the previous photograph.



The rock retaining walls were built to last.



Detail of the retaining wall across the Palisade.



The dirt road ends at the west end of the tunnel at Alpine Tunnel Station, the highest railroad station in the United States. The DSP&P had a turntable, a water tank, a two-story frame boarding house, and a stone engine house, which burned down in 1906 (ruins on left). The small station house is restored.



Authentic-looking switch.



The Alpine Tunnel facility include a turntable to turn helper engines. The turntable is being restored.





Unlike many railroad summits, the DSP&P did not go over the pass then later build a summit tunnel to lower the grade. Instead, the DSP&P's original grade included the Alpine Tunnel, which was "holed through" on July 26, 1881. At an elevation of 11,524 feet above sea level, this was the highest and most expensive tunnel built up to that time. The 1,825-foot-long bore is 500 feet (152 m) under Altman Pass (renamed Alpine Pas). The last locomotive passed through the tunnel on November 10, 1910.