



The Denver & Rio Grande Railroad's original plan was to build a narrow-gauge line southward from Denver, across Raton Pass to El Paso, Texas, where it would connect with a Mexican counterpart. D&RG grading south of Pueblo started in 1874 and extended 200 miles south until reaching El Moro (sometimes spelled Elmore), Colorado (this location), in 1876. El Moro and the D&RG (1876) end-of-track were only 5 miles northeast of the coal-mining center of Trinidad, at the northern base of the climb to Raton Pass, when work stopped. Meanwhile, the Pueblo & Arkansas Valley Railroad, formed by the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe to construct its mainline in Colorado, was building southwestward through Colorado toward Raton Pass, gateway to Santa Fe, the Rio Grande, and ultimately El Paso, Mexico, and the Pacific Ocean. In 1878, the P&AV reached the New Mexico border, which ignited one of the most famous railroad "wars" between the AT&SF and D&RG for access to Raton Pass. Following physical and legal confrontations with the D&RG, the AT&SF gained the right to build over Raton Pass. The 40 miles of the D&RG (1876n) north of El Moro (this location) to Cuchara Junction, which was the starting point of the D&RG San Juan Extension (1878n), became a dead-end branch line.

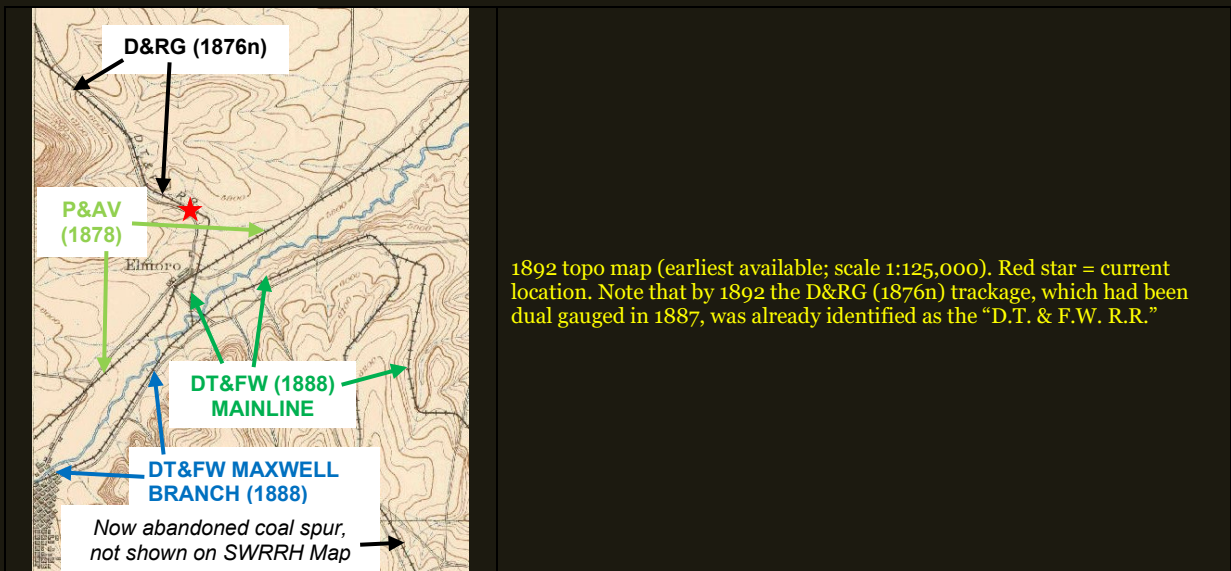
In 1887, the newly incorporated Denver, Texas & Fort Worth Railroad commenced construction of a line intended to connect the southern terminus of the stalled Denver & New Orleans Railroad (1882) at Pueblo, Colorado, with the Fort Worth & Denver City Railway, which was building northwestward in Texas to the New Mexico state line (east of SWRRH Map area). Instead of building a line parallel to the D&RG (1876n) south of Pueblo, the DT&FW worked out a trackage rights agreement with the D&RG that involved dual-gauging of the D&RG (1876n) from Pueblo to El Moro (southern terminus of the D&RG [1876n]). From there, the DT&FW built a new standard-gauge alignment south of El Moro then turned southeastward east of the edge of the SWRRH Map area and into New Mexico, where it met the northeast-building FW&DC at a location near Folsom, New Mexico, with a last spike ceremony on March 14, 1888 (east of SWRRH Map area).

In the 1890's, the Union Pacific was trying to access markets in Texas and the Gulf Coast from its UP (1869) transcontinental mainline in Wyoming and thus created the Union Pacific, Denver & Gulf Railway by purchasing the DT&FW (1888) and other railroads. The UPD&G invested in line improvements including, in 1895, the building of a new route from Trinidad to Walsenburg (Cuchara Junction) to circumvent the windy part of the dual-gauge D&RG (1876n) between Cuchara Junction and El Moro (this location). The parallel D&RG (1876n) was abandoned in parts from 1917 to 1936, including the trackage through El Moro (this location).

We'll explore Trinidad from north to south, starting with this northwestward view (toward Cuchara Junction) of the abandoned D&RG (1876n), which runs parallel to and just to the right of the fence, 4,000 feet north of El Moro. The D&RG laid narrow-gauge tracks through this location in 1876. A third rail was added in 1887 and the line carried standard-gauge DT&FW trains from Texas for at least 8 years, but that declined in 1895 when the parallel UPD&G (1895) was constructed a mile west of here. The dual-gauge tracks were removed sometime between 1917 and 1936.



Southeastward view of the abandoned D&RG (1876n), which runs right up this driveway, at the same location as previous. The guy who lives in this house knew that his driveway was once a railroad, which surprised me since tracks were removed in 1936 or earlier. According to an 1892 topo map, the D&RG (1876n) headed southeast from here for 2,000 feet, then turned due south to El Moro and crossed the P&AV (1878)/Purgatoire River 1 mile due south of this location and 4 miles northeast of downtown Trinidad.



1892 topo map (earliest available; scale 1:125,000). Red star = current location. Note that by 1892 the D&RG (1876n) trackage, which had been dual gauged in 1887, was already identified as the "D.T. & F.W. R.R."



Now we have moved south 1 mile and are looking northeastward at the P&AV (1878). The P&AV (1878) follows the Purgatoire River for 6 miles farther northeast and continues along the river to the southwest for another 7 miles, through Trinidad, always on the north bank of the Purgatoire River, before turning southward across the river toward Raton Pass. The Purgatoire River is 100 yards to the right (southeast) of this view and the small bridge visible in this view carries the P&AV tracks over an irrigation diversion canal from the river. This is the location of the crossing of the P&AV (1878) by the DT&FW (1888) south of El Moro (see above topo map), but I could find no evidence of the DT&FW (1888) grade on the ground or in satellite imagery. The DT&FW (1888) grade is probably under the road in the foreground and probably crossed the P&AV (1878) right here.

As we explore the complex railroad history of Trinidad, it is useful to remember the big picture: there are two crossing railroads in Trinidad. The first is the P&AV (1878), which runs northeast-southwest along the Purgatoire River. As far as I can tell, the P&AV (1878) has been on the same general alignment since it was built in 1878. This was the AT&SF's primary transcontinental line until 1908 when AT&SF transcontinental traffic shifted to the Eastern Railway of New Mexico (1908). The second railroad runs north-south north of Trinidad and northwest-southeast south of Trinidad. This route connected Denver and the Union Pacific with Texas and the Gulf Coast. There were two north-south railroads north of Trinidad, the D&RG (1876n) and its replacement the UPD&G (1895). Historically, these railroads crossed the P&AV (1878) and the Purgatoire River at three separate locations:

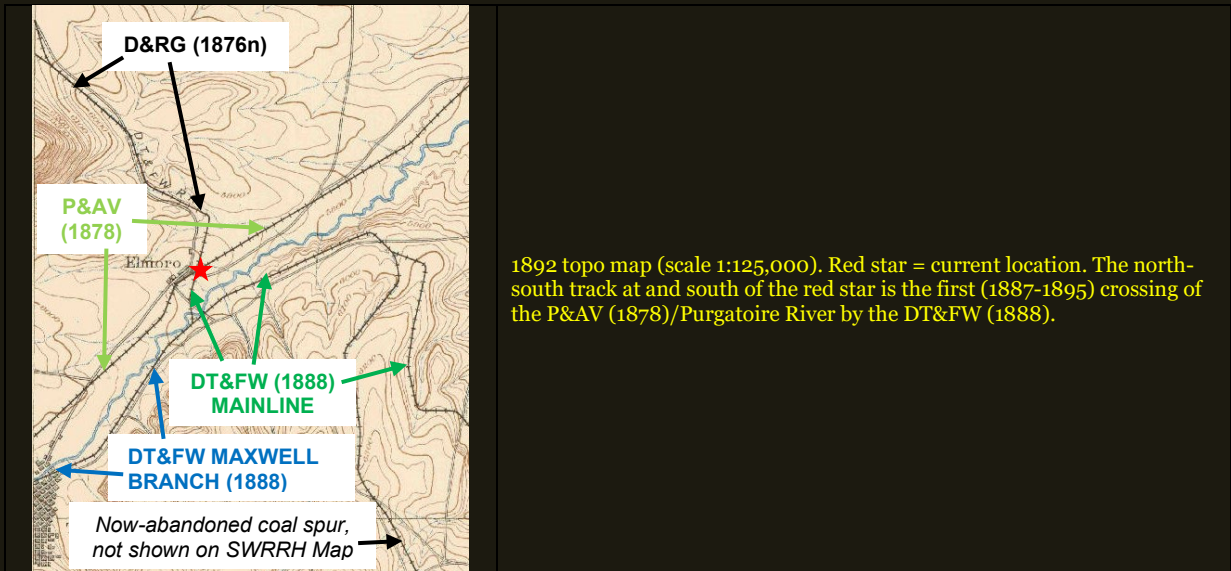
1887-1895 crossing: In 1887, the DT&FW dual-gauged the D&RG (1876n) north of El Moro and built a new standard-gauge alignment south from El Moro through this location and across the Purgatoire River. I could find no evidence in satellite imagery or on the ground of this crossing. On the south side of the river, the line joined a northeast-southwest line on the south bank of the Purgatoire River; this was the DT&FW (1888). The alignment that headed southwest was a coal branch, the Maxwell Branch, and the northeast line was the DT&FW (1888) mainline to Texas; this line follows the Purgatoire River for 3 miles to the northeast before making a 90-degree right turn to head southeast towards Texas.

1895-ca 2000 crossing: In 1895, the UPD&G (1895) was built parallel to and west of the D&RG (1876n) to circumvent the formerly narrow-gauge route. The 1895 alignment crossed the P&AV (1878) and Purgatoire River 3 miles southwest of the first (1887-1895) crossing. This second (1895-ca 2000) crossing was almost certainly the primary if not the only crossing after 1895; however, the earlier crossing (south of El Moro) was still present until at least 1897 (the date of a topo map that shows both crossings) and may have continued until the line was abandoned sometime between 1917 and 1936.

ca 2000-present crossing: The present crossing of the P&AV (1878)/Purgatoire River is a 180-degree curve that crosses the P&AV (1878)/Purgatoire River 2 miles southwest of the current location (first crossing) and 1 mile northeast of the 1895-ca 2000 (second) crossing. This realignment occurred prior to 2013, the date of a topo map that shows the new crossing. This crossing is not present on a topo map dated 1988 or in any earlier topo maps, so this third crossing was constructed sometime between 1988 and 2013, which we will call "ca 2000."



Southwestward view of the P&AV (1878) at the same location as previous. There is no sign of the 1887-1895 crossing of the P&AV (1878) by the DT&FW (1888).



1892 topo map (scale 1:125,000). Red star = current location. The north-south track at and south of the red star is the first (1887-1895) crossing of the P&AV (1878)/Purgatoire River by the DT&FW (1888).



Now we are 2,500 feet south of the previous location and have crossed to the south side of the Purgatoire River. We are looking northward at the DT&FW (1888) mainline. The right (eastward) bend barely visible in the distance is the beginning of a 90-degree turn in which the grade climbs out of the valley of the Purgatoire River and heads southeast toward Texas.

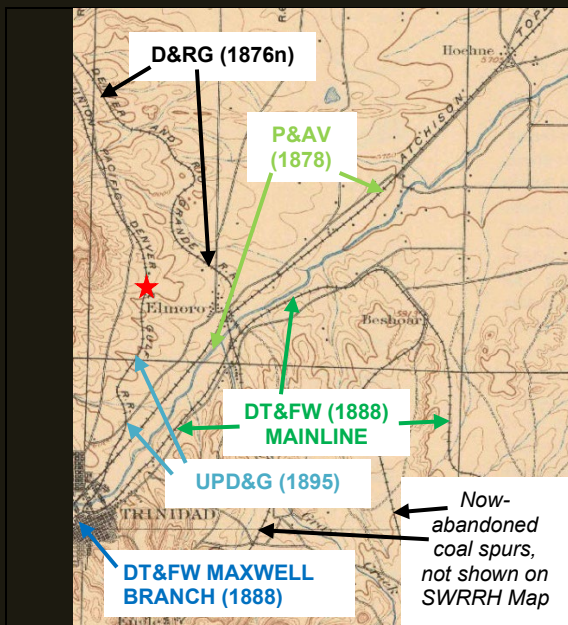




Southwestward view of the DT&FW (1888) at the same location as previous. The trees on the right are the riparian growth along the Purgatoire River and the flat ground on which the tracks are laid is the floodplain of the river. This was the starting point of the DT&FW Maxwell Branch (1888), which was built at the same time as the mainline to access coal deposits southwest of Trinidad. The Maxwell Branch extended 3 miles southwest from this location through Trinidad then another 5 miles southwest, remaining on the south bank of the Purgatoire River, to Sopris, Colorado, where the line turned more southerly up Long's Canyon another 9 miles to coal deposits. This track became the mainline in 1895 when the crossing of the P&AV (1878)/Purgatoire River moved southwest to Trinidad.



Continuing our explorations north of Trinidad, we have moved 1.7 miles northwest of the previous location (and 1.3 miles west of our starting point near El Moro) and are looking northward at the UPD&G (1895), which replaced the parallel D&RG (1876n) between Cuchara Junction and Trinidad. The last of the sidings in Trinidad converge to a single track in this view.



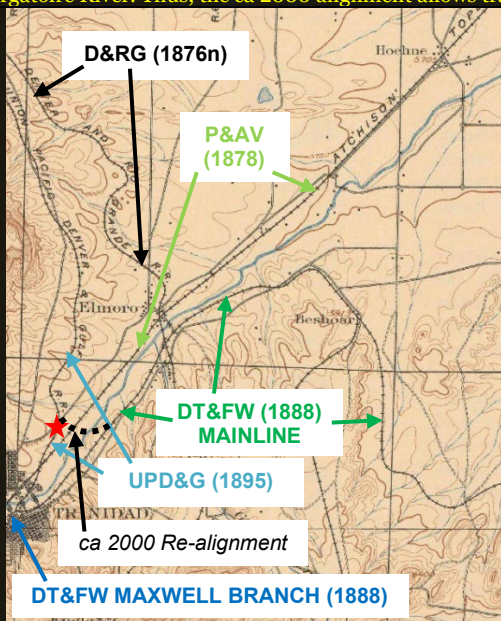
1897 topo map (scale 1:125,000). Red star = current location. The first (1887-1895) crossing of the P&AV (1878)/Purgatoire River by the DT&FW (1888) is still in place and connects directly to a now-abandoned coal spur. Interestingly, the D&RG (1876n) trackage, which had been identified as the "D.T. & F.W. R.R." on the 1892 topo map, has reverted to "Denver and Rio Grande R.R." on this 1897 topo map.



Southward view of the UPD&G (1895) at the same location as previous. Another siding splits off in the foreground and the outskirts of Trinidad are visible in the right distance.



Now we have moved 2 miles south along the UPD&G (1895) and are looking north. The track with wooden ties that connects in the distance to the concrete-tie track and that exits the image in the left foreground is the original alignment of the UPD&G (1895). Beyond the connection, the track with concrete ties is the original alignment of the UPD&G (1895). On our side of the connection, the track with concrete ties (which exits the image on the right) is a new (ca 2000) alignment which, out of sight to the right of the image, includes the third (ca 2000-present) crossing of the P&AV (1878)/Purgatoire River. Thus, the ca 2000 alignment allows trains on the UPD&G (1895)-DT&FW (1888) route to circumvent Trinidad.



1897 topo map (scale 1:125,000). Red star = current location.



Northeastward view of Colorado Highway 239 a few steps west of the previous location. The highway crosses the original UPD&G (1895) in the foreground and the ca 2000 re-alignment beyond.



Southward view of original UPD&G (1895) at the same location as previous. This line heads into Trinidad in the distance.



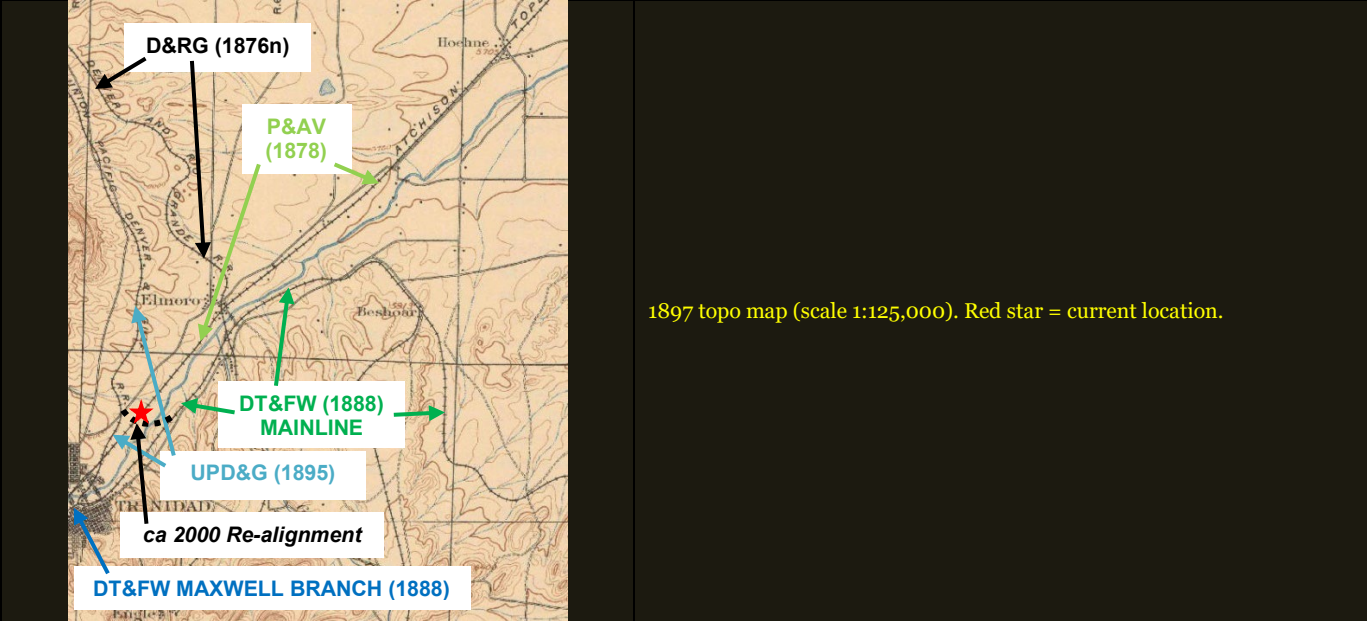
Southeastward view of the ca 2000 re-alignment of the UPD&G (1895) a few steps from the previous location. This line continues its 180-degree curve and just past the bend crosses the P&AV (1878) and the Purgatoire River to head northeastward and back onto the DT&FW (1888) alignment.



Now we are 400 feet southeast of the previous location looking northwest. The ca 2000 re-alignment of the UPD&G (1895) is in the foreground and the original 1895 alignment runs across the image in the distance.



Now we are 1,800 feet east of the previous location looking northward at the P&AV (1878) on the flat floodplain of the Purgatoire River.



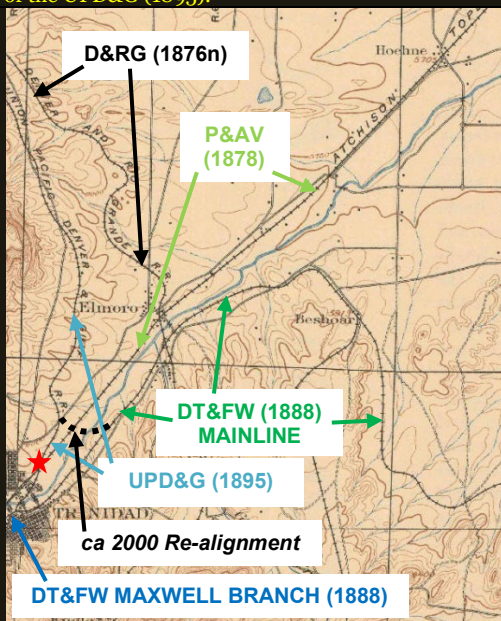
1897 topo map (scale 1:125,000). Red star = current location.



Southwestward view of the P&AV (1878) at the same location as previous. The overpass in the distance is the ca 2000 re-alignment of the UPD&G (1895) over the P&AV (now BNSF) tracks.



Now we have moved 4,400 feet southwest of the previous location and are looking northward. The straight track that disappears into the right distance is the P&AV (1878); the boxcar is parked on a siding and the mainline is to its left. A second siding splits off of the first siding on the other side of the boxcar and is visible to the right of the boxcar before it leaves the image on the right. Barely visible beyond the boxcar is the overpass for the ca 2000 re-alignment of the UPD&G (1895)(same overpass as in the previous photo). The track that winds toward the viewer in the upper left is the original alignment of the UPD&G (1895).



1897 topo map (scale 1:125,000). Red star = current location, at the second (1895-ca 2000) crossing of the P&AV (1878) by the UPD&G (1895).



Southeastward view a few steps northwest of the previous location. The track in the foreground is the original alignment of the UPD&G (1895) and beyond it are the P&AV (1878) mainline and the two sidings visible in the previous photo. The brick building appears to be a depot, presumably AT&SF, but I could find no information on this building.



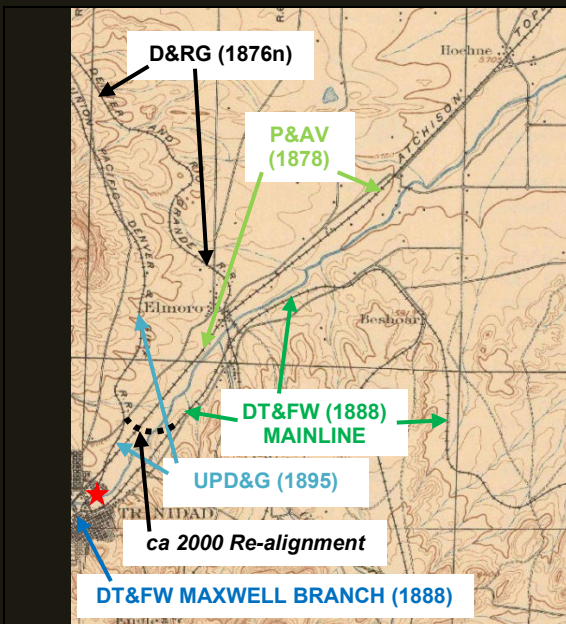
Southward view from the same location as previous. The track in the foreground is the original alignment of the UPD&G (1895) and beyond it are the P&AV (1878) mainline and two sidings visible in the previous photos. This is the second crossing (1895-ca 2000) of the P&AV (1878) by the UPD&G (1895). Topo maps from 1988 and earlier appear to show the UPD&G (1895) crossing, not merging with, the P&AV (1878) at this location. The crossing track may have been re-aligned to the present configuration when the overpass seen here was built; this overpass is for U.S. Highway 160 and is not present in topo maps from 1988 and earlier.



Southwestward view of the P&AV (1878) a few steps south of the previous location. Buildings in Trinidad are visible in the distance. The parked railcars are on the first siding, which is the track in the immediate foreground. The track on the far right that merges with the P&AV (1878) mainline via a switch is the UPD&G (1895), which in a 1988 (and earlier) topo map is shown to cross, not merge with, the P&AV (1878). 1,000 feet in the distance is a switch to the continuation of the UPD&G (1895) to the left (south) of the P&AV (1878).



Now we are 3,500 feet southwest of the previous location and we are looking northeastward at the UPD&G (1895) in Trinidad. At the previous location, the original alignment of the UPD&G (1895)-DT&FW (1888) route joins the P&AV (1878), which it follows for 800 feet to a switch to the original UPD&G (1895) route. The single track heads southwest from that switch and splits into sidings over a distance of 2,200 feet to this location, where the mainline and siding have been removed southwest of here.



1897 topo map (scale 1:125,000). Red star = current location. Note that the DT&FW Maxwell Branch (1888).



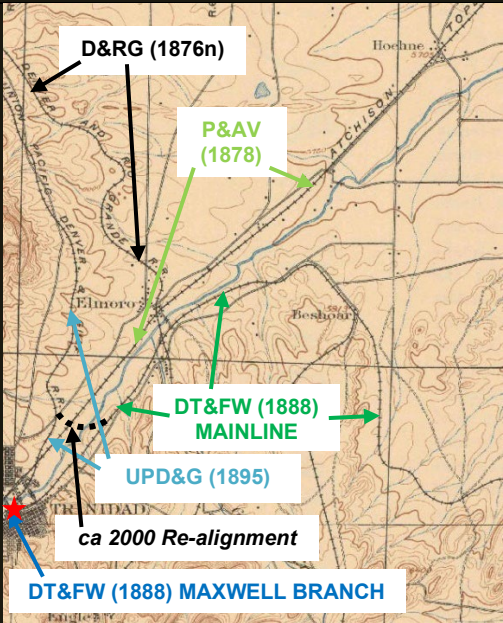
Northwestward view of the end-of-track of the UPD&G (1895) in Trinidad, same location as previous. AT&SF "Santa Fe" rolling stock is on the P&AV (1878), which runs almost parallel to the UPD&G (1895) line at this location. This UPD&G (1895) trackage was circumvented by the ca 2000 re-alignment of the UPD&G (1895).



Southwestward view of the end-of-track of the UPD&G (1895) in Trinidad, same location as previous. The tracks have been removed from this point to a location 1,500 feet in the distance; there, the UPD&G (1895) route crosses the Purgatoire River.



Northwestward view of the UPD&G (1895) crossing of the Purgatoire River in Trinidad, 1,500 feet southwest of the previous location. This is the second crossing (1895-ca 2000) of the Purgatoire River.



1897 topo map (scale 1:125,000). Red star = current location.



Northeastward view of the UPD&G (1895) second crossing (1895-ca 2000) of the Purgatoire River. The track splits on the viewer's side of the bridge; historical topo maps show that this is the north branch of a wye, which is also discernible in satellite imagery. The track on the right continues this curve to the right and is the mainline that continues to the DT&FW (1888) to Texas. This track became the mainline in 1895 when the second crossing of the P&AV (1878)/Purgatoire River moved west to this location. The track on the left continues southwest to the now-abandoned DT&FW Maxwell Branch (1888).

After 1895, this was the starting point of the DT&FW Maxwell Branch (1888), which was built at the same time as the mainline to access coal deposits west of Trinidad. The Maxwell Branch extended 3 miles southwest from this location through Trinidad then another 5 miles southwest, remaining on the south bank of the Purgatoire River, to Sopris, Colorado, where the line turned more southerly up Long's Canyon another 9 miles to coal deposits at Mayville (see below).



Closer view of the same location as previous.



Southeastward view of the UPD&G (1895) second crossing (1895-ca 2000) of the Purgatoire River. The nearer track is the northwest branch of the wye, which continues southwest to the now-abandoned DT&FW Maxwell Branch (1888), and the farther track is the mainline to the DT&FW (1888) to Texas. Note the red roofed building in the upper right of the photo; it looks like a railroad station.



Northeastward view of the building that looks like a railroad station. I could find no information on the history of this building.



Northward view of the building that looks like a railroad station (right) and the UPD&G (1895) second crossing (1895-ca 2000) of the Purgatoire River (red-and-white bridge in the left distance).



Westward view from the same location as previous. The current (2022) Google satellite image of this vacant lot is date May 2014 shows tracks still present and the entire wye is discernible, so these tracks were removed between 2014 and 2022. The 2.2 miles of DT&FW (1888) trackage that runs northeast along the south bank of the Purgatoire River between here and the ca 2000 crossing of the P&AV (1878)/(third crossing) has been completely removed without a trace – except for a railroad depot (next photo).

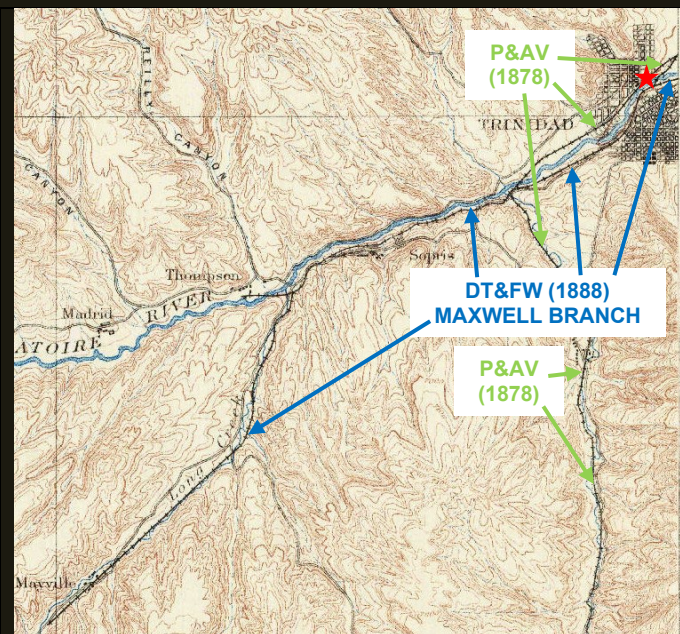


Now we are 900 feet east of the previous location looking eastward. Between here and the wye and the possible depot at the previous location, the UPD&G (1895) alignment has curved another 90 degrees and is now headed northeast, south of and parallel to the Purgatoire River, straight to this building which is obviously a railroad depot. I could find no information on the history of this building, so it could have been built by the DT&FW, UPD&G, or Colorado & Southern (most likely), and today is a pizza restaurant.





Now we've moved to a location 800 feet northwest of the UPD&G (1895) wye and crossing of the Purgatoire River and 2,000 feet northwest of the Sexy's Pizza/UPD&G depot. We've crossed back over to the north side of the Purgatoire River and are looking east at the P&AV (1878) tracks and the now-abandoned AT&SF depot. This is AT&SF (now BNSF) railyard in Trinidad; we can see 8 tracks. This is the downtown center of Trinidad.



1891 topo map (scale 1:125,000). Red star = current location. Note that the DT&FW Maxwell Branch (1888) ends at Mayville, which is within the huge and coal-rich Maxwell Land Grant.



Closer view of the AT&SF Trinidad depot. The cross-in-a-circle logo identifies this as an AT&SF depot, but I could find no information whatsoever on the history on this building.



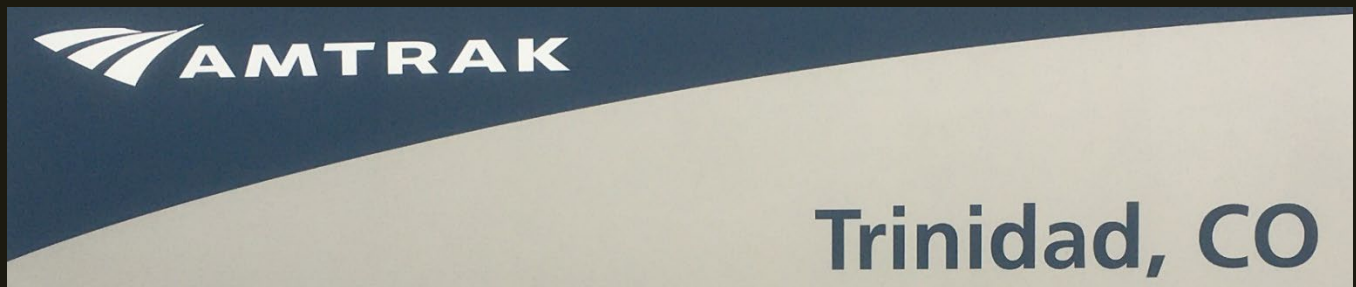
An even closer view of the AT&SF Trinidad depot.



Northward view at the same location as previous as an Amtrak train passes through Trinidad on the P&AV (1878).



Southwestward view of the P&AV (1878) 800 feet southwest of the previous location, as the same Amtrak train leaves the Amtrak depot. Note that the 8 tracks at the railyard have converged to only two tracks. The double track continues to the summit tunnel at Raton Pass.





A passenger rail car on display in downtown Trinidad. I could find no information on its history either here or online.



Colorado & Southern (UPD&G successor) steam engine on display in downtown Trinidad. The tracks are pretty much on the alignment of the DT&FW Maxwell Branch (1888).

THE LAST COAL BURNING STEAM ENGINE

Engine 638 was manufactured in 1906 and put into service with the Colorado & Southern R.R. for service at Trinidad for hauling coal, cattle, agriculture products and general merchandise.

Later the engine saw service in other areas of Colorado.

The last coal driven steam engine in service with the C & S, engine 638 was retired to this final location in dedication ceremony that was held on February 10, 1963.

638

C&S

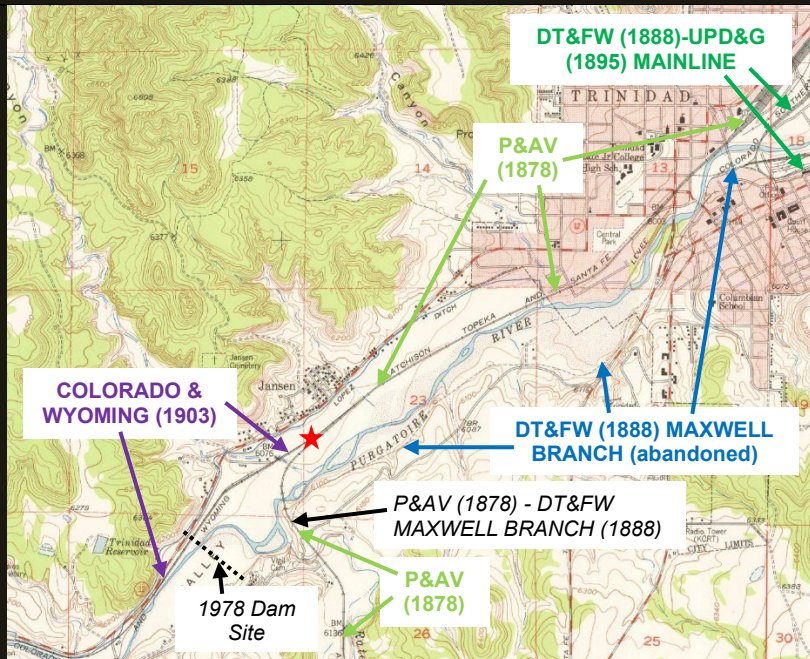


Now we have moved 2 miles southwest of the previous location in downtown Trinidad and we are looking northeast, back towards Trinidad. The two tracks on the right are the double-track P&AV (1878) line that continues to the summit tunnel at Raton Pass. The curve to the right in the foreground is the beginning of a 45 degree curve, from a northeast-southwest alignment parallel to the Purgatoire River to a north-south alignment to head toward Raton Pass.

The track on the left is the Colorado & Wyoming Railway (1903). This track joins the P&AV (1878) 1,800 feet in the distance, which is the starting point of the C&W (1903). The C&W (1903) once extended 26 miles west along the Purgatoire River to the town of Stonewall; the line was built to haul coal from deposits in the area. The C&W (1903) was abandoned in 2003, but the first 2.3 miles of track was left in place for car storage.



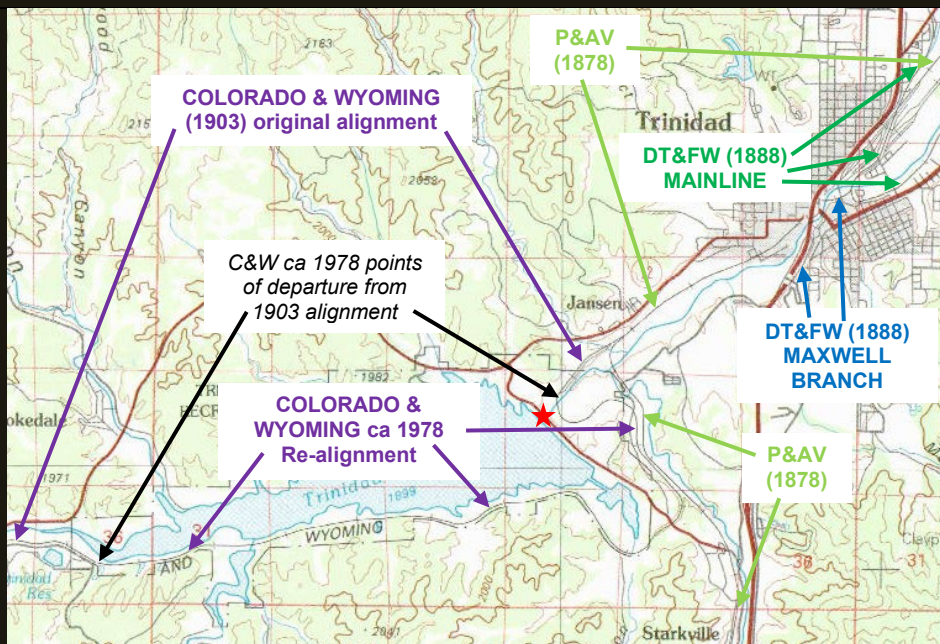
Westward view at the same location as previous. The double-track P&AV (1878) is on the left and curves to the left (south) toward Raton Pass. The track on the right is the C&W (1903), with the first in a line of stored coal hoppers on a siding.



1951 topo map (scale 1:24,000). Red star = current location.



In 1978, the US Army Corps of Engineers dammed the Purgatoire River and the resulting Trinidad Lake inundated part of the C&W (1903) right-of-way. In this northeastward view from the top of the dam, the line of hopper cars at the junction with the P&AV (1878) (previous location) are visible in the upper left. The left-most part of the loop in this view is the departure point of the original C&W (1903) from the ca 1978 realignment south of the lake.



1982 topo map (scale 1:100,000). Red star = current location.

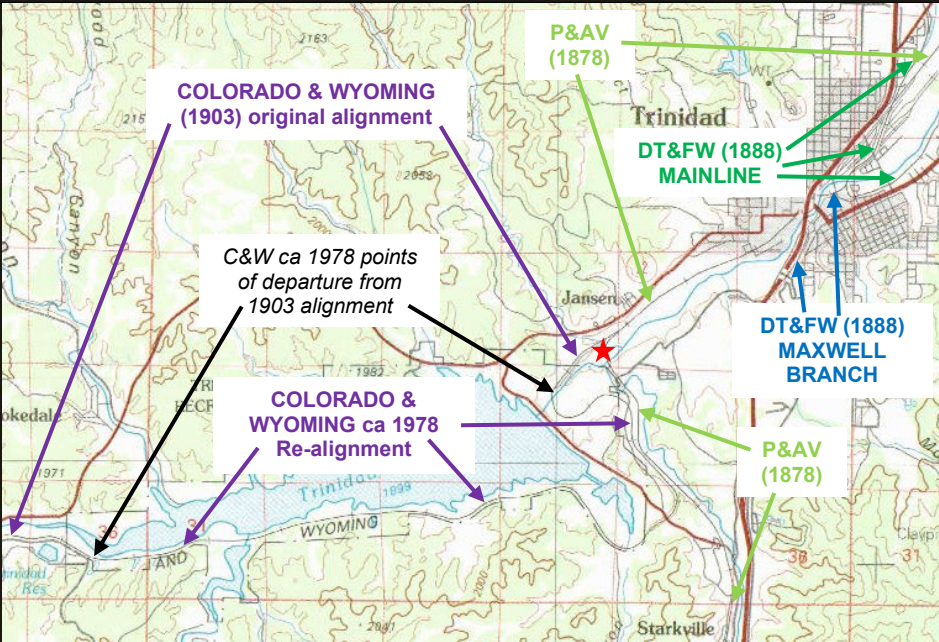


Now we have moved back to double-track P&AV (1878), looking northeastward within the 45 degree curve to head south toward Raton Pass. Barely visible in the upper left is the first in the line of stored coal hoppers on the C&W (1903).





Northwestward view at the same location as previous. The P&AV (1878) is in the foreground (double-tracked) and the line of stored coal hoppers is on the C&W (1903) in the distance.



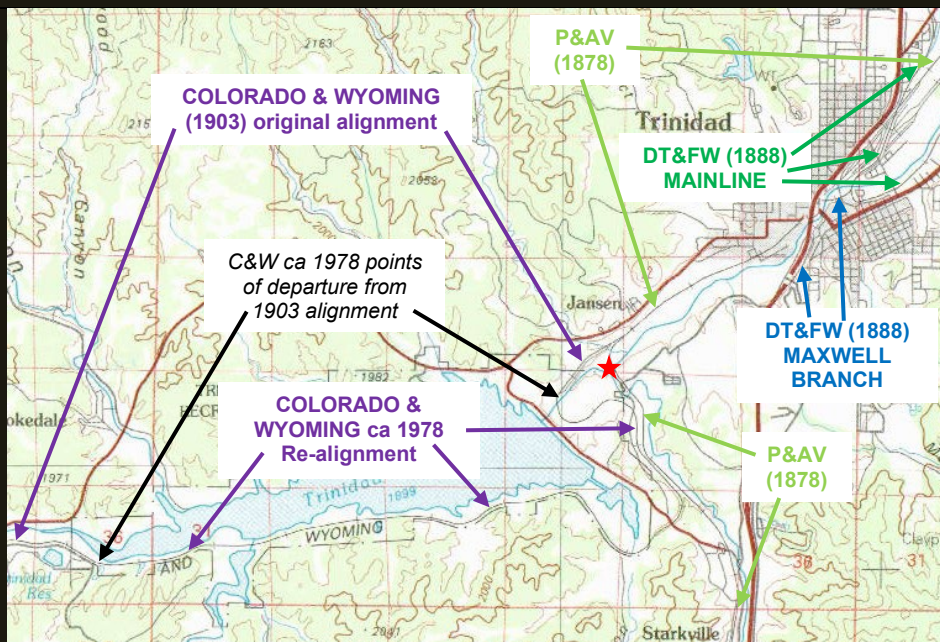
1982 topo map (scale 1:100,000). Red star = current location.



Southward view of the P&AV (1878) at the same location as previous. The 45 degree curve to head south toward Raton Pass continues and the bridge over the Purgatoire River is visible in the distance. Note the berm on the left; this could be an earlier alignment of P&AV (1878) or just a levy to contain the Purgatoire River.



Northwestward view 400 feet south of the previous location. The P&AV (1878) is in the foreground (double track), part of the north end of the bridge over the Purgatoire River is in the upper left, and the line of stored coal hoppers on the C&W (1903) is in the distance. Note the coal pile in the upper right and just to its left the low arch of a coal conveyor.



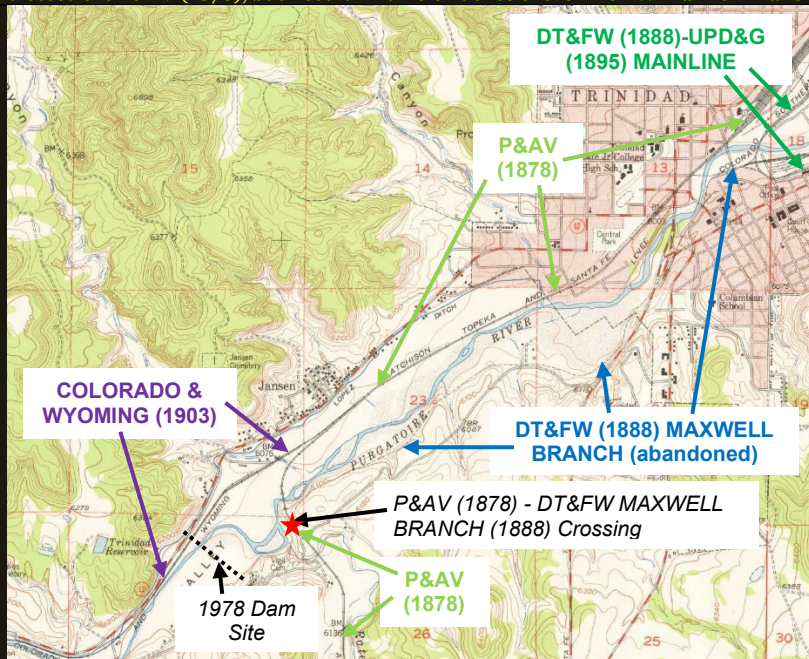
1982 topo map (scale 1:100,000). Red star = current location.



Eastward view of the south end of the bridge and the partially frozen Purgatoire River.



Northward view of the bridge that carries the P&AV (1878) over the Purgatoire River. The line of stored coal hoppers on the C&W (1903) is visible in the distance and the coal pile and part of the coal conveyor are in the upper left. This is just about the point at which the DT&FW Maxwell Branch (1888) crossed the P&AV (1878), but I could find no evidence of the DT&FW Maxwell Branch (1888) alignment on the ground or in satellite imagery.



1951 topo map (scale 1:24,000). Red star = current location.



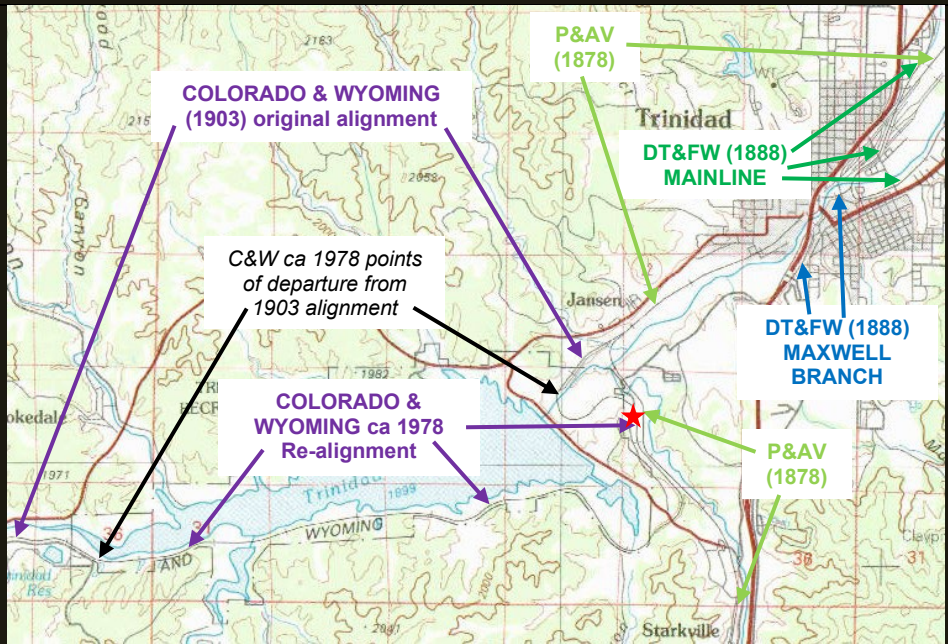
Now we have moved 900 feet southeast of the bridge over the Purgatoire River and are looking northwest at the P&AV (1878). Note the same coal conveyor visible in the center distance.



Southeastward view of the P&AV (1878) at the same location as previous. The line of trees in the left is riparian growth along Raton Creek, a tributary of the Purgatoire River that the P&AV (1878) follows all the way to Raton Pass.



We are now 1,500 feet south of the previous location looking northwestward at the C&W (1903); more precisely, we are looking at the part of the line that was realigned ca 1978.



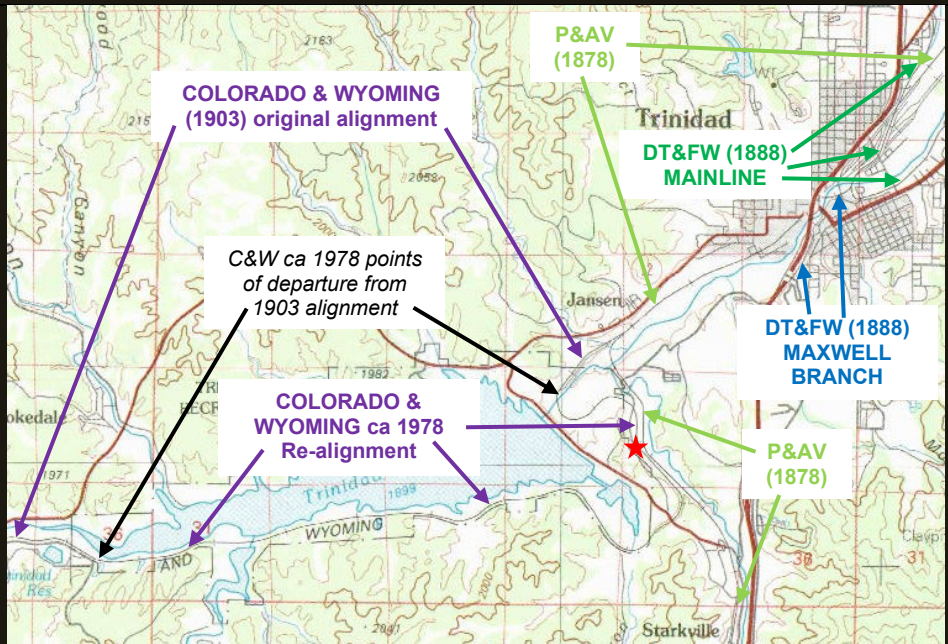
1982 topo map (scale 1:100,000). Red star = current location.



Southward view of the C&W (1903), as realigned ca 1978, at the same location as previous. The P&AV (1878) is out of sight 350 feet to the left (east) of this location.



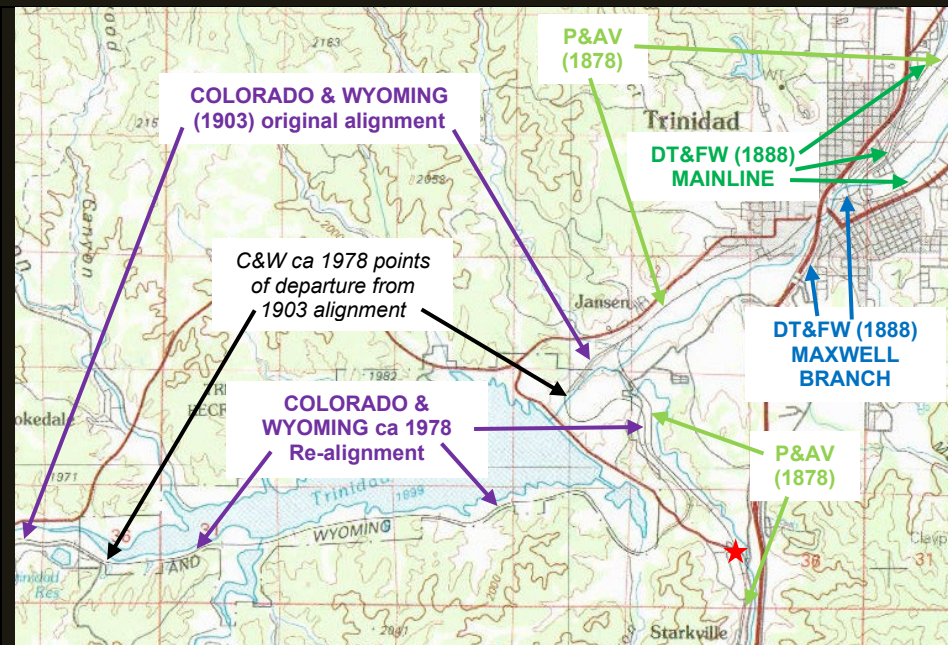
We have moved another 1,500 feet south of the previous location looking northward at the C&W (1903, realigned ca 1978) at the current (2021) end-of-track). The P&AV (1878) is out of sight 200 feet to the right (east) of this location.



1982 topo map (scale 1:100,000). Red star = current location.



Now we are 1.25 miles south of the previous location looking northward at the P&AV (1878), where it is crossed by County Road 18.3.



1982 topo map (scale 1:100,000). Red star = current location.



Southward view of the P&AV (1878) at the same location as previous. The double track continues for 10 miles before converging to a single track through the summit tunnel at Raton Pass.