In 1880, a legal settlement with the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe gave the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad the right-of-way to build west from Pueblo up the Royal Gorge of the Arkansas River, which provided a steady grade to the Continental Divide and, co-incidentally, to the Leadville mining area, which had just been discovered the year before and had no rail service. The narrow gauge D&RG built quickly through this location at Texas Creek on the Arkansas River and reached Leadville in the same year of 1880. Also in 1880, the D&RG built a line west from Salida over Marshall Pass on the Continental Divide and in 1883 connected with the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad at aptly named Grand Junction, Colorado, completing a narrow gauge mainline to Utah. Seven years later in 1890, the D&RG standard-gauged the Leadville Branch (1880n) west of Pueblo and through this location at Texas Creek to Leadville and also standard-gauged its Aspen Branch (1887n) over Tennessee Pass to Grand Junction (with help from the Colorado Midland), supplanting the narrow gauge Marshall Pass Route as the D&RG mainline across the Rockies. In 1934, the D&RGW's Dotsero Cutoff was completed and the Tennessee Pass Route was supplanted by the Moffat Tunnel Route (Denver, Northwestern and Pacific 1913) as the D&RG mainline. The Marshall Pass Route was abandoned in 1955 and the Tennessee Pass Route became inactive in the late 1990's.

Northeastward view of the D&RG Leadville Branch (1880n) at Texas Creek. In 1883, this line became part of the D&RG's narrow gauge mainline to Utah via Marshall Pass, in 1887 became part of the D&RG's narrow gauge branch line to Aspen via Tennessee Pass, in 1890 became part of the D&RG's standard gauge mainline to Utah via shared line with the Colorado Midland, and in 1934 became a secondary line when it was circumvented by the Moffat Tunnel Route via the Dotsero Cutoff.

Southwestward view of the D&RG Leadville Branch (1880n) at the same location as previous. A siding splits off to the left (southeast). For future reference, note the side canyon in the distance just to the left of the projection of the tracks; that is Texas Creek (the creek, there is also a small town called Texas Creek). Note also the conspicuous cut grade halfway up the slope immediately to the left of Texas Creek.

Detail of the switch for the siding.

Southwestward view of the D&RG Leadville Branch (1880n) a few steps southwest of the previous location. The siding is splitting off in the foreground. The conspicuous cut grade halfway up the slope is the probable grade of the D&RG Westcliffe Branch (1890)(as discussed below).

Northeastward view of the D&RG Leadville Branch (1880n) 1,000 feet southwest of the previous location. The Arkansas River is out of sight on the right and flows down the Arkansas River Canyon (center distance), entering the Royal Gorge 12 miles downstream.

The D&RG Westcliffe Branch (1900) started from a junction with the D&RG Leadville Branch (1880n) at Texas Creek (this location). The story of the Westcliffe Branch begins in the late 1870's when silver and gold were discovered and the townsite of Silver Cliff was established 20 miles south of the location of the town of Texas Creek (which is the cluster of trees below the cut grade). The D&RG planned a narrow gauge branch line that started at just about the end of track of the D&RG (1874n) at Canon City at the west entrance of Royal Gorge. The branch line followed Grape Creek southwest from the Arkansas River/D&RG (1874n) mainline for 30 miles, all the way to the Silver Cliff area. But instead of building to Silver Cliff, officers of the railroad bought up land west of Silver Cliff and in 1881 completed the line to the new town of Westcliffe. There, land prices went up as businesses vied for locations next to the railroad terminus and the investors made a large profit. A storm in 1881 wiped out 33 of 35 bridges and 18 miles of Grape Creek track. After reconstruction, another heavy storm in 1889 meant abandoning the line and the valley was left without rail transportation until 1900. In 1900, the D&RG built its Westcliffe Branch southward about 20 miles from its newly standard-gauged D&RG Leadville Branch (1880n) at the town of Texas Creek (this location). Trains ran to Westcliffe until 1939 when the line was abandoned.

Southwestward view of the D&RG Leadville Branch (1880n) at the same location as previous. The mainline is on the right and the siding for the junction with the D&RG Westcliffe Branch (1900) is on the left. Satellite imagery shows a wye at the location of the two large trees just beyond where the tracks disappear. That wye appears on a 1959 topo map, connected to the siding, but I could find no topo maps old enough to show the Westcliffe Branch route beyond the wye, or even whether the wye was for the Westcliffe Branch. Nor do any of the existing topo maps show an "old railroad grade." The simplest explanation of the available information is that the wye is the start of the Westcliffe Branch, that just beyond the tip of the wye the alignment is now obliterated but must have turned 90 degrees to the right (requiring a crossing of the Arkansas River) to get to the canyon of Texas Creek, then turned 90 degrees left to enter the canyon. At this point, satellite imagery shows a grade on the west side of Texas Creek, which can be traced 2,000 feet south, then disappears, but at that point a new grade appears on the east side of Texas Creek that heads north to the conspicuous cut grade halfway up the slope visible in the upper left of this photo. In summary, to climb out of the Arkansas River Canyon, the D&RG Westcliffe Branch (1900) headed up Texas Creek for 2,000 feet, then made a horseshoe curve that included a crossing of Texas Creek and from there the alignment headed north to the cut grade halfway up the slope in this photo, where it made another horseshoe curve to head south to Westcliffe.

Northwestward view of the D&RG Leadville Branch (1880n) 700 feet southwest of the previous location. The ties in the foreground are the southwest branch of a wye, presumably for the D&RG Westcliffe Branch (1900).

Westward view of the same ties on the southwest branch of the wye for the D&RG Westcliffe Branch (1900). The wye once connected to the closer of the two tracks.

Northeastward view of the D&RG Leadville Branch (1880n) 1,000 feet southwest of the previous location. The mainline is on the left, the siding for the junction with the D&RG Westcliffe Branch (1900) is on the right, and the two large trees just beyond where the tracks disappear is the location of the presumed wye for the Westcliffe Branch. The flat topography used by the railroad is the floodplain of the Arkansas River.

Northward view 200 feet southwest of the previous location where a bridge carries the D&RG Leadville Branch (1880n) over Texas Creek Gulch (not to be confused with Texas Creek [no “Gulch”], which is on the other [south] side of the Arkansas River).

Southward view of the D&RG Leadville Branch (1880n); the bridge on the right is the same one as in the previous photo. The buildings are the town of Texas Creek, beyond which is the canyon of Texas Creek. Note the large rock outcrop in the center of the photo between the tracks and the buildings, and just above the outcrop these's a flat area near the base of the west slope of Texas Creek. That flat area is the inferred cut grade for the D&RG Westcliffe Branch (1900), which apparently makes a U-turn 2,000 feet up Texas Creek and continues to the conspicuous cut grade halfway up the slope visible in the upper left of this photo.

Westward view of the D&RG Leadville Branch (1880n) 100 feet southwest of the previous location. The 13,000-foot Sangre de Cristo Range, barely visible in the distance is not the Continental divide but does form the divide between the Mississippi and Rio Grande drainages.