



During the westward push of the Union Pacific Railroad to complete the transcontinental "Pacific Railroad," construction slowed in 1867 when the line reached Crow Creek at the eastern base of the north-south-trending Laramie Mountains, the UP route's most formidable obstacle. The "hell on wheels" town of Cheyenne grew as work progressed slowly over 8,247-foot Evans Pass (also called Sherman Pass) through the Laramie Mountains. Evans Pass is about 20 miles west of Cheyenne and was discovered by the UP-employed English surveyor and engineer, James Evans, in 1864. The new route surveyed across Wyoming was over 150 miles shorter and had a flatter profile than the emigrant wagon route over South Pass, and also went closer to Denver and to the coalfields in the Wasatch and Laramie Ranges. The line over Evans Pass and down to the next hell on wheels town, Laramie, was completed in 1868.

Previously, in the first years following the passage of the Pacific Railroad Act of 1862, UP progress in eastern Nebraska ground to a halt after only 40 miles of construction, when financial support ended for Credit Mobilier of America, the construction company charged with building the UP. U.S. President Abraham Lincoln personally called upon Oakes Ames, a U.S. Representative from Massachusetts, to take control and get the project moving. Oakes Ames asserted near total control of UP construction and brother Oliver Ames became president of the UP in 1866. Lincoln reportedly told Oakes Ames that if he could get the transcontinental railroad built then he would be "the most remembered man of the century." The brothers were credited for connecting the nation by rail upon completion of the U.S.'s first transcontinental railroad in 1869, but in 1873 investigators implicated Oakes Ames in fraud associated with financing of the railroad. The Credit Mobilier scandal tarnished UP's reputation and Congress censured Oakes, who resigned.

The UP Board of Directors voted in 1875 to erect a monument to the Ames brothers, in part to help reclaim some of the company's luster lost during the scandal. In 1882, workers completed the pyramid on Evans Pass, 600 feet south of and 32 feet higher than the highest elevation of the original UP tracks. The Ames Monument is a four-sided, random ashlar pyramid, 60 feet square at the base and 60 feet high, constructed of granite. The pyramid features two 9 foot tall bas-relief portraits of the Ames brothers by sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens. President Rutherford B. Hayes underscored the importance of the transcontinental railroad and the Ames brothers by attending the monument's dedication ceremony.



The small town of Sherman arose at Evans Pass, where trains stopped to change engines on their transcontinental journey. The stop provided a roundhouse with five stalls and a turntable, two section houses, and a windmill with water tank. Several hundred people lived in Sherman, hunkered down upon a rocky, barren landscape interrupted only by a general store, post office, schoolhouse, two hotels, and two saloons.

This photograph is the general location of the original town of Sherman on Evan's Pass. The fill grade in the middle-ground is the original 1868 UP grade over Evans Pass and is now Ironhorse Road. Harder to see, the flat area in the right foreground is the east branch of the Evans Pass wye. The wye is visible on the ground and in satellite imagery on the north side of the east-west UP mainline and was used to turn helper engines once they were done helping a train up the grade.



In the decades after the UP connected with the Central Pacific, the UP upgraded its transcontinental route and the biggest changes were made over Evans/Sherman Pass. The first major change came in 1901, when about 10 miles of the highest part of the UP line over Evans Pass was abandoned and replaced by a new route to the south. Traffic over Evans pass declined and the tracks and town of Sherman were removed.

Beside the UP grade, wye, and monument, the only other railroad feature I could find on Evan's pass is this circular foundation. This foundation is within the wye, and satellite imagery shows grades fanning out from it, just like the fanned tracks between the turntable and roundhouse in the below photo. I believe this foundation was a turntable for the Sherman roundhouse, similar to the one pictured below at Jamestown, California, on the Sierra Railway.





The Hermosa Tunnel was the key element of the 1901 re-alignment of the UP mainline over Evans Pass. The new alignment involved about 10 miles of new grade located south of Evan's Pass; the new grade leaves the 1868 grade about 5 miles east of Evan's Pass, crosses the crest of the Laramie Mountains at the Hermosa Tunnel (about 5 miles southwest of the Evans Pass), and rejoins the 1868 grade about 5 miles to the west. The 1901 line lowered the maximum elevation to 8,015 and lowered the eastbound ruling grade from 1.9 percent to 0.8 percent between Laramie and the Hermosa Tunnel.

The 1901 Hermosa Tunnel is the "first" Hermosa Tunnel; the second tunnel was added in 1918 along with new grades on both sides of the tunnel and completion of double-tracking of the entire UP mainline. Both the 1901 and 1918 Hermosa Tunnels are represented in this view of the east portal.



Another view of the east portal of the Hermosa Tunnel, which crosses the summit of the Laramie Mountains in an area of subdued topography. I'm not a railroad engineer, but it sure looks like this crossing could have been a cut like that in the foreground instead of a tunnel, but I have not heard of any plans to daylight the Hermosa Tunnel.



Eastward view near east portal of the Hermosa Tunnel on the 1901 grade. Note that beneath the signal, there are switches from each track to a third track in the middle.



Eastward close-up view of the addition of a third track east the Hermosa Tunnel.



A UP consist crosses a significant fill on the 1901 grade over Dale Creek east of the Hermosa Tunnel, about two miles downstream (south) of the huge trestle crossing of Dale Creek on the 1868 grade.





The Evan's Pass area is topographically subdued because it is an "old" surface, meaning it developed prior to the uplift of the Laramie Mountains. The rock outcrops are granite, which in the geologic past weathered under the soil along fractures and then was partially stripped of the soil by the weak erosion at the top of the Laramie Mountains. Note triple track east of the Hermosa Tunnel.



Double-tracking east of the Hermosa Tunnel to Cheyenne began in 1900 and was completed to the First Hermosa Tunnel in 1917, followed by completion of the Second Hermosa Tunnel and double-tracking in 1918.

Eastward view of the UP mainline 2 miles east of the Hermosa Tunnel and immediately east of the 1901 Dale Creek crossing. The three tracks in the foreground and the two tracks that continue eastward to the left are on the 1901 grade that bypassed the original line over Evan's Pass. The double track to the left (north) joins the 1868 grade about 3 miles further east. The single track to the right was a new grade built around 1917 as part of the upgrade work; the single track extends from this point eastward all the way to Cheyenne, deviating up to 6 miles south of the 1868 grade and joining the Denver & Pacific route southwest of Cheyenne, which together enter Cheyenne alongside the 1868 double-track route.



West portal of the Hermosa Tunnel.



West of the Hermosa Tunnel, the double track becomes triple track as it does east of the tunnel. Note the subdued topography with outcrops of weathered granite and the snow-capped Medicine Bow Mountains in the distance.



West of the Hermosa Tunnel, the double track through the tunnel (out of sight in the distance to the east) becomes triple track as it does east of the tunnel.



Westward view at about the same location as previous photo. The left (south) track starts to descend in the distance and follows the 1868 grade to Laramie. The two tracks on the right follow a new grade completed in 1917 from this point to Laramie.



Near the same location as the previous photo, abandoned grades are visible north and east of current tracks. In this southeastward view, the active triple track is on the right, and an abandoned grade for a siding on the left is marked by a cut slope.



Abandoned fill grade, photo taken from active UP triple track west of Hermosa Tunnel; this is the 1868 mainline near where it intersects the 1901 re-alignment.





Abandoned cut for a siding.



Eastward view of UP triple track. The right (south) track is the 1901 re-alignment and descends and follows the 1868 grade to Laramie. The two tracks on the left follow a new grade completed in 1917 from this point to Laramie.



Westward view of UP triple track at same location as above. The left (south) track is the 1901 grade, which descends and joins the 1868 grade which it follows to Laramie. The two tracks on the right follow the 1917 grade to Laramie. The bare dirt area in the upper right corner of the photo is the abandoned 1868 grade, which crosses the double track and joins the single track in the upper left corner of the photo, just beyond where the single track disappears into a cut.