



The Denver & Rio Grande Railroad built its narrow gauge San Juan Extension to serve the silver mining districts of the San Juan Mountains in southwestern Colorado. The narrow gauge line was built westward from the now-abandoned D&RG mainline at Cuchara Junction (6 miles northeast of Walsenburg, where a replacement line was built in 1911). In 1877 the line crossed the Sangre de Cristo Mountains at La Veta Pass to enter the Rio Grande drainage, and in 1878 reached Alamosa. When grading southward from Alamosa began in 1879, the D&RG thought it was building to El Paso and by 1880 had completed track through La Jara, Colorado (pictured here) almost to Santa Fe, New Mexico, which became the Chili Line. The D&RG's original reason for building into the San Luis Valley was to reach the headwaters of the Rio Grande and then follow the river to El Paso, Texas. The route was built as an alternative to the main line that the D&RG hoped would reach the Rio Grande via Raton Pass, a hope that was in question in 1876 when the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe arrived in the area and was dashed in 1880 when the AT&SF won a legal battle for Raton Pass.

With agricultural commodities coming out of the Alamosa-Antonito area, a third rail was added 1901 for the 30 miles from Alamosa south through La Jara (pictured here) to Antonito. Dual gauge was maintained until the narrow gauge San Juan Extension was divested and abandoned west of Antonito in 1970 and the middle rail was removed, leaving the purely standard gauge track seen here. The line passed from the D&RGW to the Southern Pacific in 1988 and to the Union Pacific in 1996. In 2003, the La Veta Pass line, along with the rest of the San Luis Valley Lines including the Antonito line (pictured here), were purchased by RailAmerica and made into the San Luis & Rio Grande Railroad. In 2005, the SL&RG was sold to Iowa Pacific Holdings and Permian Basin Railways, but operations remain largely unchanged.

The two story building with the "La Jara" sign was likely the depot when narrow gauge and standard gauge trains plied the dual gauge tracks from 1901 to 1970.