



In 1902, the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad constructed its North Fork Branch, which was a 43 mile narrow gauge branch line that ran from the Denver & Rio Grande (no "Western") (1883n) narrow gauge mainline (Marshall Pass route) at Delta, Colorado, eastward up the North Fork of the Gunnison River through Paonia (this location) to Somerset. The route was built to tap coal deposits around Somerset and to serve agricultural areas along the way. Since the D&RGW had already completed its standard-gauging of the route over Tennessee Pass (D&RG Aspen Branch 1887n and connecting lines), the North Fork Branch was laid on standard gauge ties and built to standard gauge standards, and indeed was converted to standard gauge only four years after construction, in 1906. The North Fork Branch was extended in 1929 another 2 miles to reach coal deposits there (not shown separately on the Southwest Railroad History Map). The D&RGW North Fork Branch (1902n) continues today as one of the most important parts of the former D&RGW system; the entire standard gauge line from Grand Junction to Somerset is now Union Pacific's North Fork Branch.

Southwestward view of the D&RGW North Fork Branch (1902n) at Paonia, which was standard-gauged in 1906. The North Fork of the Gunnison River is 2,000 feet northwest (to the right) of this location, which is 13 miles from the end of track near Somerset.





Northeastward view of the D&RGW North Fork Branch (1902n) at the same location as previous.





This southwestward view of the D&RGW North Fork Branch (1902n) at Bowie, located 6 miles northeast of Paonia and 7 miles shy of the end of track near Somerset, shows hopper cars lined up for coal conveyed from mines higher up the mountain.





Westward view of the D&RGW North Fork Branch (1902n) at the town of Somerset, 5 miles east of Bowie and 2 miles shy of the end of track. The line splits off a siding for coal loading to the east.

  
AIRS Point: 0510007/399 - Mine Site

**OXBOW MINING, LLC**  
**ELK CREEK MINE**

**P.O. BOX 535, 3737 HWY. 133**  
**SOMERSET, COLO. 81434**

**970-929-5122**





Eastward view of the D&RGW North Fork Branch (1902n) at the same location as previous.





Westward view of the D&RGW North Fork Branch (1902n) 100 yards east of the previous location in the town of Somerset. This picture, taken in 2011, shows the original coal loading facility in Somerset; this facility was completely gone in 2021. This is the location of the end of the 1902 narrow gauge line; the standard gauge line was extended another two miles east in 1929.





Eastward view of the D&RGW North Fork Branch (1902n) 1 mile to the east of the town of Somerset (previous location) and 1 mile shy of the end of track. The facility is for loading coal conveyed from mines higher up the mountain. Note the coal incidentally spilled along the tracks. There are no coal facilities past this point, just 1 mile of track to line up hopper cars for loading at this facility.