



In 1881 the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad began construction of its narrow gauge Creede Branch at Alamosa, Colorado, on its San Juan Extension (1878n). The branch followed the Rio Grande westward to the base of the San Juan Mountains and the end of the agricultural valley at South Fork and continued westward into the mountains along the Rio Grande to Wagon Wheel Gap (this location), where construction stopped in 1883, 9 miles shy of mining center of Creede. However, the D&RG was financially over-extended due to the rapid expansion during the early 1880's and so postponed further construction. David Moffat, president of the D&RG, realized Creede's mineral potential but was unable to convince the Board of Directors to push the rails west to Creede. In 1890, Nicholas Creede found a rich vein of ore that became the very productive Holy Moses Mine, which was immediately purchased by Moffat. Moffat resigned his position with the D&RG and formed the Rio Grande Gunnison Railway to build the 9 miles from Wagon Wheel Gap (this location) to Creede, where the narrow gauge tracks arrived in 1891. Operations on the new line were contracted out to the D&RG, and once construction costs were recouped (in only 4 months), the RGG (1891) was sold to the D&RG in 1892. The narrow gauge line was converted to dual/standard gauge in 1901-1902 and D&RG trains continued hauling ore out of Creede until the last mine closed in 1985, but the rails are still in place. The line passed to Southern Pacific in 1988 and then to Union Pacific in 1996. In 1999, the UP sold the South Fork-Creede segment (including this location) to the Denver & Rio Grande Historical Foundation. In 2003, the UP segment of the Creede Branch (Alamosa - South Fork), along with the rest of the San Luis Valley Lines, passed to the San Luis & Rio Grande Railroad, a shortline owned by RailAmerica. They continued the same basic operations as UP, never using the segment from Alamosa to South Fork except to deliver equipment to the D&RGHF. In 2005, the SL&RG was sold to Iowa Pacific Holdings and Permian Basin Railways, but operations remain largely unchanged.

Northwestward view of the Creede Branch where it crosses the Rio Grande 15 miles west of South Fork to negotiate Wagon Wheel Gap, where the D&RG Creede Branch (1883n) ended. The D&RG Creede Branch (1883n) probably ended before making this crossing, so this view probably contains the starting point of the 9-mile RGG (1891n) to Creede. Today, the D&RGHF's Denver & Rio Grande Railroad operates gasoline-powered rail cars over these tracks. The elevation here is about 9,000 feet and fir trees dominate.





Westward view of the bridge across the Rio Grande at Wagon Wheel Gap; it is apparent in this view that the bridge is made of stacked rail ties.