



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 D&RG quickly built its narrow gauge line along the Arkansas River through this location at Salida to Leadville, where the D&RG Leadville Branch arrived in 1880. At the same time, the D&RG started its mainline west from the Leadville Branch (1880n) at Salida (this location), over Marshall Pass on the Continental Divide to Gunnison in 1881, and in 1883 connected with the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad at aptly names Grand Junction, Colorado, completing a narrow gauge mainline to Utah. In 1887, the D&RG extended the narrow gauge line north from Leadville over Tennessee Pass to the Aspen mining area. The route was converted to standard gauge around 1890 and connected to Grand Junction (with help from the Colorado Midland), supplanting the narrow gauge Marshall Pass Route as the D&RG mainline across the Rockies. Salida became a transfer point between the standard gauge mainline, shown here, and the narrow gauge Marshall Pass Route, now gone but once existed somewhere on the left (west) side of the standard gauge tracks.

In 1934, the D&RGW's Dotsero Cutoff was completed and the Tennessee Pass Route (the line seen here) was supplanted by the Moffat Tunnel Route (Denver, Northwestern and Pacific 1913) as the D&RG mainline. The narrow gauge Marshall Pass Route west of Poncha Springs was abandoned in 1955. In 1956, the 5 miles of narrow gauge line west of Salida (this location) to Poncha Springs and the narrow gauge Monarch Branch west of Poncha Springs to the Monarch quarry were converted to standard gauge. Thus, commencing in 1956 when the standard-gauging of the Monarch Branch was completed, there was a standard gauge junction in this photo. The Monarch Branch hauled dolomite and limestone from Monarch through this location in Salida and down the Royal Gorge to Pueblo until 1982, when the blast furnaces in Pueblo closed (so dolomite and limestone were no longer needed). In 1984, the tracks were removed from the Monarch Branch all the way back to the D&RG Leadville Branch (1880n) at this location in Salida; there is no trace of the junction remaining. The Tennessee Pass Route, including this trackage in Salida, became inactive in the late 1990's.

Salida, Colorado, has lots of railroad history, but the only tracks that remain in place are those of the inactive D&RG Leadville Branch (1880n) Tennessee Pass Route, visible in this photo of the D&RG yard at Salida. The Tennessee Pass Route has declined since 1934 when the D&RG's Dotsero Cutoff was completed, and has been inactive since the late 1990's. The tracks were removed from the Monarch Branch in 1984 and its junction with the D&RG Tennessee Pass Route was completely removed, as seen (or rather not seen) in this photo. The Monarch Branch grade through Salida is a rails-to-trail, the "Monarch Spur Trail," located across the Arkansas River to the left.



D&RG Caboose No. 0576 is on display in Salida, just steps from the historical location of the Marshall Pass-Monarch Branch junction. The D&RG built this narrow gauge caboose circa 1886 with 0576 as its original number. The caboose operated over Marshall Pass until the narrow gauge line was abandoned in 1955.



Eastward view of the Monarch Branch grade at Poncha Springs, 5 miles west of Salida. I could find no evidence of the grade for the junction with the narrow gauge Marshall Pass Route, which was abandoned in 1955. The Monarch Branch tracks were removed in 1984.



Northward view of the D&RG Leadville Branch (1889n) 10 miles southeast of Salida on the Arkansas River. The bridge that carries the tracks across a tributary of the Arkansas River may have been built when the line was standard gauged around 1890.