



In 1871, the Mormons commenced construction of the narrow gauge Utah Southern Railroad, which was to be built 70 miles south from Salt Lake City to York (south of Santaquin), Utah, to connect farmlands around Provo to Salt Lake City and, via the Utah Central Railroad, to the new transcontinental line at Ogden. In 1872, New York interests organized the American Fork Railroad to build a branch line from American Fork, on the projected route of the US, northeastward 20 miles into the Wasatch Mountains to the Sultana Smelter. The AF commenced construction from American Fork before the US arrived and in 1872 completed the line 16 miles to Deer Creek City, 4 miles below the smelter. At the same time, the US halted construction at Lehi, 28 miles from Salt Lake City and 3 miles short of American Fork. The US and the AF railroads came to an agreement, and the AF laid its track on the 3 miles of US grade to Lehi. This lasted until September of 1873, when the US resumed its southward construction; at this time the US removed the narrow gauge track it had laid and completed the standard gauge line to York in 1875. The US was acquired by the Union Pacific Railroad in the same year.

The AF was not a success; its 5.5 percent grade was too much for the AF's locomotive, so horses and mules were more often used to pull cars up the hill. The road was closed in winter and in the summer of 1875 ran only Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. With the failure of the mines, the AF was operated unprofitably for tourists for a few years and then was abandoned in 1878, only 6 years after it was built. The rails were used to build the Utah & Pleasant Valley Railroad in 1878-1879.

In 1883, the Denver & Rio Grande Western completed its narrow gauge line to Ogden parallel to the UP (former US) standard gauge line, and following D&RGW standard gauging in the 1890's, the D&RGW and UP began sharing track. The D&RGW line became the primary line and the UP (former US) route became a secondary route.

This southeastward view of the of the US (later UP) line at American Fork shows the 10,000-foot Wasatch Mountains, a Basin and Range normal fault, in the distance. There is a lot of railroad history here. This is where the AF commenced construction of a narrow gauge line near this location in 1872, in anticipation of the arrival of the narrow gauge US. When the US halted construction 3 miles north of here, the AF laid 3 miles of narrow gauge track northwest from here to connect with the US. When the US started construction again in 1873, it was a standard gauge road and, after standard gauging the 3 miles of narrow gauge AF track on the US grade, arrived here in September 1873 and continued south to York. I could find no evidence of the AF grade, which had to have had some sort of transfer siding and locomotive turnaround facility before it was abandoned in 1878. As the D&RGW and UP traffic shifted to the parallel D&RGW grade located a mile southwest of this location, the US route became secondary, as evidenced by the rusted bolted track. The small bridge behind the "American Fork" sign is the channel of American Fork Creek.