



In 1881, the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad's narrow gauge San Juan Extension reached Durango, Colorado, and was completed to its final terminus at Silverton in 1882. In 1887, D&RG built its narrow gauge Ouray Branch, the terminus of which was only 15 miles as the crow flies north of Silverton, but the intervening San Juan Mountains were too formidable for a railroad directly connecting the two towns. To bridge this gap, in 1889 Otto Mears, who had built a toll road between Ouray and Silverton, founded the Rio Grande Southern Railroad to go around the most rugged part of the San Juan Mountains to connect Ouray and Silverton. Construction of the narrow gauge line began in 1890 from a connection with the D&RG Ouray Branch (1887n) at Ridgway and ran southwest then southeast through this location 5 miles east of Mancos, Colorado, to a connection with the D&RG San Juan Extension (1881n) at Durango. The RGS was completed and began operation in 1891 and enjoyed 2 years of robust traffic before the Silver Panic of 1893 closed most of the mines. In the 1930's, the RGS survived the Great Depression by developing internal combustion-powered "motor" railcars that came to be known as the "Galloping Goose." The first Goose was built in 1931 from the body of a Buick "Master Six" four-door sedan and ultimately seven railcars were built between 1931 and 1936. In 1950, the railroad lost its mail contract in favor of highway mail carriers and the Geese were converted for tourist operations, with seating and large windows, but that lasted only 2 years before the Geese were used to salvage the RGS (1891n) rails in 1951.

Eastward view of the RGS (1891n) grade on the south slope of the San Juan Mountains, once plied by the Galloping Goose. There is a trail from the target tree campground to this location.







Westward view at the same location as previous, where the RGS (1891m) required a deep cut to negotiate the topography.





Westward view of the RGS (1891n) at the west end of the deep cut in the previous photo.