



The Pacific Railroad Act of 1862 promoted the construction of the transcontinental "Pacific Railroad" by offering land grants and 30-year government bonds to the Union Pacific Railroad and Central Pacific Railroad. The UP line started in Council Bluffs, Iowa, and completed only 40 miles of track by December 1865, but the pace picked up when UP converted several railroad cars to portable bunkhouses for the construction crews. As the UP line progressed across the Nebraska prairie in 1866, temporary "hell-on-wheels" towns accompanied the railroad; most faded away but some became permanent settlements. Hell on wheels referred to the itinerant collection of flimsily assembled gambling houses, dance halls, saloons, and brothels that followed the UP railroad construction crews westward. As the end of the line continually moved westward, hell on wheels followed along, reconstructing itself at each pause in construction. The UP route in Nebraska followed the Platte River Valley westward to the town of North Platte, Nebraska, at the confluence of the North and South Platte rivers, in December 1866. In 1867, the UP continued up the South Platte River to a tributary, Lodgepole Creek, which the UP route followed into what became Wyoming. About 20 miles into (current) Wyoming, the route leaves Lodgepole Creek and heads southwestward over a low rise to the Crow Creek drainage. Construction ceased when the line reached Crow Creek at the eastern base of the north-south-trending Laramie Mountains, while UP conducted surveying and heavy grading to cross the UP route's most formidable obstacle. The hell on wheels town of Cheyenne grew as work progressed slowly over 8,200-foot Evans Pass (also called Sherman's Pass) through the Laramie Mountains.

In the years following completion of the UP-CP transcontinental line, Cheyenne became the northern terminus of the Denver Pacific Railway and became a major railroad center and a base for helper locomotives and snowplows to keep trains moving over Evans Pass. As a railroad crossroad, Cheyenne became Wyoming's largest city and capital. In this series of photos, we'll explore the UP route through Cheyenne and the roads that later connected to or crossed the UP tracks at Cheyenne. We'll start 4 miles east of downtown Cheyenne, where the UP line serves a refinery for Wyoming crude oil, as seen in this westward view. Note that the topography is subdued but with more topographic relief than along the line farther east.





In 1887, the Colorado & Wyoming Railroad, a subsidiary of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad, constructed a line connecting Dewitt, Nebraska (east of map area) to Cheyenne, Wyoming. The section from Sterling, Colorado (east of map area) to Cheyenne was abandoned in the 1970s.

The double tracks are the UP mainline in this southward view taken at the same location as the previous photo, and the gravel road with two pickup trucks on it is the C&W grade. The gravel road is called Burlington Trail Road in honor of the CB&Q's former railroad.



The UP's Cheyenne Depot, now the Wyoming Transportation Museum, was built in 1886-1887 on the UP mainline and is self-proclaimed to be the most beautiful rail station in North America. The station is built from blocks of sandstone quarried and transported from Ft. Collins, Colorado, and stands directly down the street from the Wyoming State Capitol. He depot received major renovations in 1922 to lengthen the building and a redecoration in 1929.





An old industrial building across the tracks from the Cheyenne Depot.



The Treaty of Fort Laramie in 1868 closed much of northeastern Wyoming to settlers. As a result, the UP was reluctant to build a line north from Cheyenne. The defeat of the Sioux in the Great Sioux War of 1876-77 re-opened the region and was quickly populated by ranchers and settlers. Throughout the 1870's and 1880's, businessmen and politicians in Wyoming petitioned the UP to build a line to support the growing region. In 1886, the Wyoming Central Railway, a subsidiary of the Fremont, Elkhorn & Missouri Valley Railroad, entered eastern Wyoming north of the Southwest map area and commenced shipping cattle east through Nebraska instead of Cheyenne. Due to fears that the lingering dislike for UP would prevent the passage of a bond at support a UP line north from Cheyenne, the UP created the Cheyenne & Northern Railway in 1886 to build a line from Cheyenne into northern Wyoming and ultimately to the Northern Pacific line in Montana. In 1887, the line was completed 125 miles to Wendover, Wyoming, on the North Platte River, where construction ceased. UP took over the line in the same year (1887) and extended the line about 25 miles to Orin Junction to connect to the Wyoming Central line (just north of map area).

This northward view of the C&N wye in downtown Cheyenne is where the C&N started.





This southward view of the 1886 C&N wye in downtown Cheyenne shows the left branch (to the eastbound UP mainline) has been cut off, but the right branch (to the westbound UP mainline) continues to the UP mainline, visible in the distance.



There is a second wye on the C&N, located about a half mile north of downtown Cheyenne and the C&N connection with the UP mainline. Coming south toward Cheyenne on the C&N grade, the east branch of the wye is the line that continues south to downtown Cheyenne and the C&N connection with the UP, and the west branch of the wye connects to the Colorado Central Railroad.

In this southeastward view of the wye, the track in the foreground is the decommissioned connection from the northbound CC to the southbound C&N (the track in the distance) to downtown Cheyenne.





Just a few feet from the previous photo, a spur off the C&N services a salvage yard.





The C&N rails south of the north Cheyenne wye (to downtown Cheyenne and the C&N connection with the UP) are used for car storage.





Today, activity at the north Cheyenne wye is on the branch that connects the northbound CC to the northbound C&N, both of which were ultimately folded into the BNSF system. Here, a northbound BNSF train plies the north Cheyenne wye and passes a pile of old spikes and other discarded rail hardware.





A coal train on the C&N grade north of the Cheyenne wye.



About a mile west of downtown Cheyenne, a grade separation overpass carries a coal train on BNSF's CC-C&N route over the UP mainline. This is not the original crossing, and the C&N originally connected to the UP at a wye that became downtown Cheyenne (see above for photos and information).





In 1867, Colorado Territorial Governor John Evans, together with David Moffat and other Colorado business leaders, partnered with East Coast investors to form the Denver Pacific Railway to link Denver and the Colorado Territory with the national rail network at Cheyenne, where the UP arrived in the same year. The DP was immediately in competition the Colorado, Clear Creek & Pacific Railway (later the Colorado Central), formed by W.A.H. Loveland and other citizens of Golden, Colorado, with the intention of linking that city directly with Cheyenne and making Golden the hub of the Colorado Territory instead of Denver. Congress granted the DP land on the condition that the company build a line connecting the UP line with the Kansas Pacific, which then extended only as far west as central Kansas. The DP raised money by selling and borrowing against the land grants. The prospects for the DP further improved when the KP extended its line westward to Denver with \$6 million from German investors.

Racing to beat the Golden investors, the DP broke ground on May 18, 1868, at a spot near where the Denver Coliseum now stands. The event was cheered by a crowd of nearly 1,000 local citizens. The line followed the South Platte River through present-day Greeley an first train from Cheyenne arrived in Denver on June 24, 1870. Two months later, in August 1870, the KP completed its line to Denver and the first train arrived from Kansas. In the 1870s, investors of the KP acquired control of the railroad and in January 1880 merged with the KP and UP. The DP's rival, the CC line from Golden, did not reach Cheyenne until 1877. By this time, Denver had established its supremacy over Golden as the population center and capital city of the newly admitted State of Colorado.

About 5 miles south of Cheyenne, the DP (now UP) line is the overpass in the distance and the line that passes under it is the CC (now BNSF) line. Immediately to the right (north) of the overpass, the DP line connects to the 1918 UP single-track line at a wye. I think the overpass is of 1918 vintage and the DP line connected to the original UP line somewhere near downtown Cheyenne, but I'm not sure where that was. The line to the right with cars is a new (1980's?) spur (not shown on map) that extends 2 miles to the northeast in this southwestward view of the DP-CC grade separation.





Northeast view of the CC (now BNSF) line where it passes under Interstate 25, which follows the DP-CC-C&N corridor.





A BNSF train plies the CC route at same location as above.





Eastward view of the UP mainline 10 miles west of Cheyenne. The double track on the left is the UP mainline and heads down to Cheyenne on Crow Creek. The track to the right is a cutoff that heads up and southeast to connect with UP single track built in 1918 located about a mile to the south of this location; the 1918 track connects to the DP line south of Cheyenne.





Westward view from same location as above; the single-track cutoff converges with the UP double track, which continues up Sherman Grade to Evans Pass, the most significant grade on the UP mainline. The TV series "Hell On Wheels" spent an entire season in Cheyenne as Sherman Grade slowed UP construction in 1868.