



In 1902, the El Paso & Northeastern Railroad's subsidiary El Paso & Rock Island Railway met the southeastward-building Chicago, Rock Island & El Paso Railway at Santa Rosa, New Mexico, to complete a new transcontinental route from Chicago and Kansas City to El Paso and Mexico and, by way of the Southern Pacific, to Los Angeles. A key goal of the railroad was to access coal deposits, so work began immediately on the Dawson Railway. The Dawson Railway extended 132 miles northwest from a connection with the CRI&EP (1902) at Tucumcari (east of the Southwest Railroad History Map area) and headed northwestward into the SWRRH Map area and across the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway subsidiary New Mexico & Southern Pacific (1880) at a location called French; from French, the line continued northwest up the canyon of the Vermejo River to the coal fields at Dawson. To speed the construction, the EP&NE established a camp at French and the contractors' forces worked in both directions; thus in November 1902 a 19 mile segment of the Dawson Railway was completed and in operation from French on the NM&SP (1880) northwest through this location at Colfax to the coal mine at Dawson. In July 1903, the line connecting French and Tucumcari was completed and operations commenced. In 1905, all EP&NE properties, including the Dawson Railway, were merged into the El Paso & Southwestern Railroad, and in November 1924 the EP&SW was purchased by the Southern Pacific. The Dawson Railway became the SP Roy Branch, which was abandoned between Tucumcari and French in 1954 and between French and the end-of-track at Dawson in 1961.

In 1965, just four years after complete abandonment of the Dawson Railway (1903), the AT&SF constructed a branch line to the York Canyon coal deposit within the coal-rich Maxwell Land Grant. The line commenced at a connection with the AT&SF's NM&SP (1880) at French and headed northwest along the Vermejo River on the recently abandoned grade of the Dawson Railway (1903) and through this location at Colfax to Dawson. Beyond Dawson, the alignment continued northwestward up the valley of the Vermejo River on a new grade that required 23 bridges and reached its terminus at the York Canyon mine site in November 1965. The York Canyon mine closed during the 1990's, leaving no customers along the line. At Colfax (this location), the York Canyon Branch is still in irregular use by BNSF for car storage.

Southeastward view (toward French and Tucumcari) of the Dawson Railway (1903) at Colfax. Note the welded rail that the AT&SF installed in 1965 to build its York Canyon Branch on the grade of the Dawson Railway, which had been abandoned only four years prior. The switch in the distance leads to a siding for an abandoned facility.





Northwestward view (toward Dawson and the York Canyon mine) of the Dawson Railway (1903) at the same location as previous. I didn't realize it when I was there, but when I got back to the office I realized that the flat area in the immediate foreground, between the viewer and the gate across the tracks, is where the St. Louis, Rocky Mountain and Pacific Railway (1907) crossed the Dawson Railway (1903).

The St. Louis, Rocky Mountain and Pacific Company was incorporated in New Mexico in 1905 and almost immediately formed the Swastika Fuel Company in Raton, whose purpose was to mine coal and other minerals in the area. To assure competitive rail service for their coal and coke traffic the company formed the St. Louis, Rocky Mountain and Pacific Railway. Construction commenced in late 1905 and headed south from Raton, crossing the Dawson Railway (1903) at Colfax (this location) and arriving in 1906 at Cimarron, New Mexico, after having laid 50 miles of track. In 1907, the line was extended another 12 miles west from Cimarron to Ute Park, which became the western terminus of the SLRM&P. Also in 1907, SLRM&P built eastward from a point 7 miles south of Raton and ran 45 miles east to a connection with the Denver, Texas and Fort Worth (1888), which by 1907 was owned by the Colorado and Southern Railroad, at Des Moines, New Mexico (east of the Southwest Railroad History Map area).

The company sold coal under the Swastika brand and the railroad was known as the Swastika Route (note that the Swastika is an ancient Indian symbol and in the early 1900's had not yet been usurped by the Nazis). In 1913, after 6 years of operation, the company sold the SLRM&P (1907) to the AT&SF and in 1915 changed its name to the Rocky Mountain and Santa Fe Railway. Meanwhile, the St. Louis, Rocky Mountain and Pacific Company remained in the coal and other businesses and remained a major force in the coal development of the area until 1955, when it sold its holdings to the Kaiser Steel Corporation. All the SLRM&P (1907) trackage is now abandoned, a process that commenced in 1942 with abandonment of a 40 mile stretch of the SFRM&P (1907) that included this location at Colfax and continued at least through the 1970's as the various coal mines were abandoned. Much of the land today is incorporated into the 923 square mile Vermejo Park Ranch.