



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 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, over Marshall Pass on the Continental Divide through this location 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 on the Continental Divide 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. In 1934, the D&RGW's Dotsero Cutoff was completed and the Tennessee Pass Route was supplanted by the Moffat Tunnel Route over the Continental Divide (Denver, Northwestern and Pacific 1913) as the D&RG mainline. The narrow gauge Marshall Pass Route west of Poncha Springs, including this location 8 miles east of Gunnison, was abandoned in 1955.

Eastward view of the D&RG (1883n) 8 miles east of Gunnison. The railroad grade has been re-graded as a road. The flat ground upon which the railroad was built is the flood plain of Tomichi Creek, which the D&RG (1883n) follows from here to Gunnison.



Westward view of the D&RG (1883n) at the same location as previous. Here the grade has not been re-graded as a road.



The narrow gauge Denver, South Park & Pacific Railroad began construction south from Denver in 1873 and reached the mouth of the South Platte River Canyon in 1878, 20 miles from Denver. In 1879, the tracks crossed the summit of Kenosha Pass, on the drainage divide between the North and South Forks of the South Platte River then crossed the Continental Divide via the Alpine Tunnel and through this location to reach Gunnison in 1882. In 1889, the DSP&P was sold at foreclosure and in 1899 was acquired by the Colorado & Southern Railway. The Colorado & Southern started dismantling in 1910 with the closure of the Alpine Tunnel, and the last freight and passenger trains between Denver and Leadville operated in April 1937. The DSP&P (C&S) was then abandoned, except for the line between Leadville and Climax, which the Denver & Rio Grande Western converted to standard gauge in 1943.

Eastward view of the DSP&P (1882n) 1,200 feet north of the previous location. The slight fill grade is just to the left (north) of the fence. Both the DSP&P (1882n) and the Denver & Rio Grande (1883n) follow the flood plain of Tomichi Creek from here to Gunnison.



Northwestward view of the DSP&P (1882n) a few steps south of the previous location. The fence is built on the fill grade.



The D&RG (1883n) reached Gunnison in 1881 and continued building both westward to complete its mainline to Utah and northward to reach the mining center of Crested Butte, which was reached in 1881. The DSP&P (1882n) reached Gunnison the following year in 1882, entering town from the east on an alignment parallel to and 900 feet north of the D&RG alignment. The DSP&P crossed the tracks of the D&RG Crested Butte Branch (1881n) and continued due west for half a mile and there, in west Gunnison, the DSP&P continued northward to the mining center of Baldwin, located 7 miles southwest of Crested Butte; the DSP&P reached its end of the line at Baldwin in 1882. By 1937 the DSP&P had been abandoned and the D&RG was gone by 1955.

I could find no evidence of either railroad in Gunnison, the rights-of-way of both having been completely redeveloped. This eastward view of aptly named Rio Grande Avenue in South Gunnison was the former location of the east end of the D&RG (1883n) railyard. The wye for the D&RG Crested Butte Branch (1881n) was located toward the end of the part of Rio Grande Avenue visible here.





Westward view Rio Grande Avenue, formerly the D&RG (1883n), at the same location as previous. According to a 1954 topo map, the oldest I could find, the railyard had two sidings in the area of this view.



Eastward view of aptly named Railroad Avenue at the former location of the west end of the D&RG (1883n) railyard.





Eastward view of San Juan Avenue 1,600 feet north of the previous location. San Juan Avenue was built on the DSP&P (1882n) grade. The crossing of the the D&RG Crested Butte Branch (1881n) was at the far end of the visible part of San Juan Avenue and the former turn to the north to head to Baldwin was located about 1,000 feet to the west of (behind) the viewer.







The Gunnison Pioneer Museum in northeast Gunnison is not on any railroad alignment but does have this wonderful historic D&RG locomotive on display along with some other rolling stock.

