



The Colorado Midland Railway was founded in 1883 to build a standard gauge line linking Colorado Springs with the mines of Leadville and the national rail network at Ogden, Utah. The election of John Hagerman as president in 1885 got construction underway on the initial, isolated Leadville-Aspen-Glenwood Springs segment. At the time, Leadville was served by two narrow gauge carriers, the Denver & Rio Grande and the Denver, South Park & Pacific, both of which doubled their rates to haul CM rails to Leadville. Construction commenced in 1886 with the grade over the Continental Divide at Hagerman Pass via the Hagerman Tunnel and separate construction from Colorado Springs. The first trains reached Leadville in 1887, Aspen in early 1888 via a branch line parallel to the narrow gauge D&RG Aspen Branch (built the prior year), and to the end of CM rails at Newcastle in late 1888. The coal mines of Newcastle are on the Colorado River, 12 miles west of Glenwood Springs, where the D&RG Aspen Branch via Tennessee Pass leaves the Colorado River and heads south to Aspen. In 1890, the CM and D&RGW built a standard gauge connection along the Colorado River east from Grand Junction (where the D&RG met the D&RGW in 1883) to the CM end-of-track at Newcastle. This connection completed the D&RG Tennessee Pass Route, which was standard gauged and supplanted its Marshall Pass Route, and connected the CM to the national rail network in Utah via the D&RGW. Also in 1890, the CM was sold to the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway, which operated the railroad as a subsidiary.

The Midland (as it was colloquially known) was difficult to operate, because it had very little level track and harsh winter conditions. The line crossed three summits: Hayden Divide (west of Colorado Springs), Trout Creek Pass, and Hagerman Pass on the Continental Divide. The approaches to these summits were severe with grades up to four percent. The D&RGW gained control in 1900. After the inauguration of the United States Railroad Administration in late 1917 to manage the nations railroads for the war effort, the USRA redirected much of the trans-Colorado traffic onto the Midland. The volume of traffic overwhelmed the CM and the USRA redirected all traffic elsewhere. Business dropped off precipitately, the CM ceased operations in 1918, and the line was scrapped in the early 1920's.

The CM is the linear grade at the far end of the pond, 2 miles west of Hartsel, Colorado. Note the break in the grade at the far end of the pond, where remnant wood piles are all that remain of a bridge that once carried the CM over the water. In this northwestward view in South Park, the DSP&P grade is out of site 5 miles beyond the pond, and 10,568-foot Black Mountain is another 7 miles beyond that.



Closer view of the CM grade through South Park, same location as previous.





The CM grade 4 miles southwest of previous location, with a long fill and a small cut.