



The narrow gauge Denver & Rio Grande mainline over the Rocky Mountains, known as the “Royal Gorge Route” or “Marshall Pass Route,” was completed in 1883, when the D&RG building west from Pueblo, Colorado, and the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railway building east from Salt Lake City through this location at Helper, Utah, met at Grand Junction, Colorado. The line was converted to standard gauge in the 1890’s.

Northward view of the D&RGW (1883n) just north of Helper, Utah. The Price River, which the D&RGW (1883n) follows for 30 miles in central Utah, runs to the left of the tracks along the base of the cliff at the far left. The bridge in the foreground carries the grade over Willow Creek, which drains into the Price River just left of the bridge. This is the center of Utah coal country. A coal-fired power plant is just out of sight on the right.



One mile south of the previous location, the Utah Railway (1917) branches off the D&RGW (1883n) mainline, but that junction is difficult to access. The Utah Railway Company was incorporated on January 24, 1912, with the name of Utah Coal Railway, shortened to Utah Railway in May of the same year. It was founded to haul coal from the company's mines. The Utah Railway opened in 1917, with a 20-mile line to Mohrland, an abandoned 6-mile branch to Mutual, and an abandoned 10-mile branch to National (I assume the entire route was completed in 1917). Parent company Mueller Industries sold the Utah Railway in 2002 to Genesee & Wyoming Inc., a railroad holding company. Today's Utah Railway operates over 423 miles of track between Grand Junction, Colorado, and Provo, Utah, of which 45 miles are owned (the remainder operated under agreements). About half of the owned trackage is the original Utah Railway (1917) and the remainder is other, shorter branch lines. As of January 2017, the company no longer hauls coal.

Southwestward view of the Utah Railway (1917) where it crosses Spring Canyon, 2 miles southwest of the junction with the D&RGW (1883n). This is the 20-mile line to Mohrland; the junction with the abandoned 6-mile branch to Mutual is 250 feet behind the viewer.





Eastward view of the Utah Railway (1917) abandoned 6-mile branch to Mutual, 100 feet north of the previous location. The railroad grade was paved over and, in the middle distance in front of some big boulders, the paved road makes a tight turn to the right to get down the slope. The railroad alignment continues the gentle curve to the left to join the line to Mohrland, the tracks of which are visible beyond the boulders.



Another view of the bridge over Spring Canyon. The windy paved road in the lower right is the paved road up to the abandoned grade to Mutual, upon which the viewer is standing.



Now we are back in Helper looking northwestward at the D&RGW (1883n), 1.5 miles south of the junction with the Utah Railway (1917). In town, the sign for the City offices pays homage to the railroad history.

