



The Denver & Rio Grande Railroad's original plan was to build a narrow-gauge line southward from Denver, across Raton Pass to El Paso, Texas, where it would connect with a Mexican counterpart. D&RG grading south of Pueblo started in 1874, ran 5 miles east of the town of Walsenburg (this location), and in 1876 reached El Moro, Colorado, 5 miles north of the town of Trinidad (at the northern base of the climb to Raton Pass), which is as far as the line progressed (until 1887, see below). In February 1878, following physical and legal confrontations with the D&RG, the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway gained the right to build over Raton Pass, and in September 1878, the AT&SF reached Trinidad from the northeast and continued south over Raton Pass into New Mexico. Although the D&RG (1876n) did not become a mainline to Texas and Mexico, the line provided a starting point for a railroad to the booming silver mining districts of the San Juan Mountains in southwestern Colorado. The D&RG's narrow gauge "San Juan Extension" was built westward from the D&RG (1876n) at Cuchara Junction through this location on the eastern outskirts of Walsenburg and 3 miles west of Cuchara Junction, then crossed the Sangre de Cristo Mountains at La Veta Pass to enter the Rio Grande drainage in 1877, and finally reached Alamosa on the Rio Grande in 1878. In 1881, the San Juan Extension was completed to Durango via Cumbres Pass and in 1882 reached its terminus at the silver mining center of Silverton.

In 1887, the newly incorporated Denver, Texas & Fort Worth Railroad commenced construction of a line intended to connect the southern terminus of the stalled Denver & New Orleans Railroad (1882) at Pueblo, Colorado, with the Fort Worth & Denver City Railway, which was building northwestward in Texas to the New Mexico state line (all east of SWRRH Map area). Instead of building a line parallel to the D&RG (1876n) south of Pueblo, the DT&FW worked out a trackage rights agreement with the D&RG that involved dual-gauging of the D&RG (1876n) from Pueblo to El Moro (southern terminus of the D&RG 1876n). The DT&FW built a new standard-gauge alignment south of El Moro through Trinidad then turned southeastward beyond the eastern edge of the SWRRH Map area and into New Mexico, where it met the northeast-building FW&DC at a lost location christened "Union Park" with a last spike ceremony on March 14, 1888 (east of SWRRH Map area). In 1894, standard-gauging of the D&RG San Juan Extension (1878n) commenced from the D&RG (1876n) mainline at Cuchara Junction and extended west through this location at Walsenburg to Alamosa then south to Antonito, Colorado, where the D&RG's standard-gauging program ended in 1900.

In the 1890's, the Union Pacific was trying to access markets south of its Wyoming mainline (UP 1869) to Texas, and thus created the Union Pacific, Denver & Gulf Railway by purchasing the DT&FW and other railroads. The UPD&G invested in line improvements including, in 1895, the building of a new route from Trinidad to Walsenburg (this location) to circumvent the windy, originally narrow gauge D&RG (1876n), at least the part south of Cuchara Junction. In 1911, to circumvent the part of the D&RG (1876n) north of Cuchara Junction, the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad (D&RG successor) and the Colorado & Southern Railway (UPD&G successor) jointly built a modern, double track mainline from Pueblo to Walsenburg (this location), the "Southern Joint Line," shown on the SWRRH Map as the "D&RGW-Colo & So (1911)." At Walsenburg, both lines connected to their own rails. The parallel D&RG (1876n) was abandoned in parts from 1917 to 1936; at the same time, the first 5 miles of the D&RG San Juan Extension (1878n), between the D&RG (1876n) at Cuchara Junction and the new C&S (1911) at Walsenburg, including this location 3 miles west of Cuchara Junction, was also abandoned.

Northeastward view of a cut grade for the abandoned D&RG San Juan Extension (1878n), 3 miles west of Cuchara Junction and 2.5 miles east of the intersection with the D&RGW-C&S (1911) at Walsenburg. The original narrow gauge rails were replaced with standard gauge in 1894, which were removed sometime between 1917 and 1936.



Southwestward view of the same cut grade for the D&RG San Juan Extension (1878n).



Northeastward view of the abandoned D&RG San Juan Extension (1878n), 2 miles west of the previous location and 0.5 miles east of the intersection with the D&RGW-C&S (1911) at Walsenburg. The ties in the foreground are remnants of the D&RG San Juan Extension (1878n), which was standard-gauged in 1894 and abandoned sometime between 1917 and 1936. The track in the left distance is the D&RGW-C&S (1911) Southern Joint Line.



Southwestward view of the abandoned D&RG San Juan Extension (1878n) at the same location as previous. The two sets of ties represent the mainline and a siding.



Northwestward view of the abandoned D&RG San Juan Extension (1878n) at the same location as previous. At this location, the D&RGW-C&S (1911) tracks are 250 feet from the of the San Juan Extension (as marked by the ties) and both lines converge slowly to the southwest (left) where they intersect and the D&RGW-C&S (1911) runs on the San Juan Extension alignment through Walsenburg.



Eastward view of the D&RGW-C&S (1911) at the same location as previous. The line in the foreground is a siding that connects in the distance to the double-track mainline via a switch and, barely visible to the left of the switch, a crossover track to the farther of the two mainline tracks.



Westward view of the D&RGW-C&S (1911) at the same location as previous. The line in the foreground is the double-track mainline and the siding is the more distant third track. Of the two nearer tracks, the nearest (foreground) track is now BNSF (C&S successor) and the second track is now UP (D&RGW successor). The D&RG San Juan Extension (1878n), as marked by the ties (a prior photo), is 250 feet to the left (southeast) of this photo and converges slowly in the distance until it intersects the D&RGW-C&S (1911) at just about the location of the distant overpass (for I-25). From that point westward the tracks are on the alignment of the D&RG San Juan Extension (1878n).



Now we are 1.5 miles southwest of the previous location and one mile southwest of the intersection of the abandoned portion of the D&RG San Juan Extension (1878n) and the D&RGW-C&S (1911); we are looking northeastward (toward the previous location). The trackage between the intersection and here is on the alignment of the D&RG San Juan Extension (1878n) through Walsenburg. In the one mile between here and the intersection, the double track of the D&RGW-C&S (1911) converged to a single track, which is the track in the right distance. The siding at the previous location split into four tracks (the Walsenburg railyard) then converged to a single track, which is the track in the left distance. Those two tracks converge to one track, which then splits into two tracks in the foreground. The shiny welded track on the right is the UPD&G (1895), now a BNSF line, and the rusty bolted track on the left is the D&RG San Juan Extension (1878n), now the San Luis & Rio Grande Railroad (which operates passenger excursions and the remaining freight on the standard gauge trackage of the San Juan Extension).





Southwestward view at the same location as previous. The welded rail of the UPD&G (1895) is in the foreground and the bolted rails of the D&RG San Juan Extension (1878n) run straight on the right. The abandoned building between the tracks is railroad-related, but I could find no information on its history.





Northeastward about 100 feet west of the previous location, with the same split of the UPD&G (1895) curving to the right and the D&RG San Juan Extension (1878n) running straight to the left (behind the railroad-related building with the red doors). From here we'll explore the UPD&G (1895) first.



Northeastward view of the UPD&G (1895) about 1,600 feet southwest of the previous location. The curved track in the distance is the location of the junction with the D&RG San Juan Extension (1878n). Note the transition from wooden ties to concrete in the foreground.



Southwestward view of the UPD&G (1895) at the same location as previous. The concrete ties continue to Trinidad.



Now we are back at the junction looking northeastward at the bolted rails of the D&RG San Juan Extension (1878n) in the foreground and the welded rails of the UPD&G (1895) curving to the right (south). The historical building on the right is the Huerfano County Courthouse.



Westward view 500 feet southwest of the previous location. The track off to the right is the D&RG San Juan Extension (1878n). The disheveled track in the foreground is an old siding that joins the mainline 950 feet in the distance and is the semi-permanent home for three tanker cars. The trackside building on the left is currently occupied by the Walsenburg Utilities Gas Shop.



Westward view 300 feet west of the previous location. The same three tanker cars visible in the previous photo are in the upper left and the siding that they call home joins the bolted track of the D&RG San Juan Extension (1878n) in the distance. The foundations of old trackside facilities are on the left.



Northeastward view 2,500 feet southwest of the previous location. The D&RG San Juan Extension (1878n) mainline is the second track from the right. Barely visible in the right distance are the three parked tanker cars and the Huerfano County Courthouse. Also in the distance, the mainline has split off one siding to the south (right) and two to the north (left), thus four tracks in this view.





Westward view of the D&RG San Juan Extension (1878n) 600 feet southwest of the previous location, where the four tracks of the previous photo converge to one track.

In 1888, the D&RG built its standard gauge Loma Branch from this location on its San Juan Extension (1878n) northward 18 miles to coal mines at Alamo. The branch line was abandoned in 1968. I could find no evidence of its junction with the mainline, but historical topo maps indicate the junction was in this field of view. The abandoned building in the distance may have been associated with branch line operations.



Westward view of the D&RG San Juan Extension (1878n) 800 feet southwest of the previous location with the same abandoned building to the right of the tracks. The D&RG Loma Branch (1888) joined the mainline right in here somewhere.