



In 1881 the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad began construction of its narrow gauge Creede Branch at Alamosa, Colorado, on its San Juan Extension (1878n). The branch followed the Rio Grande westward through this location at Del Norte, Colorado, to the base of the San Juan Mountains and the end of the agricultural San Luis Valley at South Fork and continued westward into the mountains along the Rio Grande to Wagon Wheel Gap, where construction stopped in 1883, 10 miles shy of the Creede mining district. However, the D&RG was financially over-extended due to rapid expansion during the early 1880s and so postponed further construction. David Moffat, president of the D&RG, realized Creede's mineral potential but was unable to convince the Board of Directors to push the rails west to Creede. In 1890, Nicholas Creede found a rich vein of ore that became the very productive Holy Moses Mine, which was immediately purchased by Moffat. Moffat resigned his position with the D&RG and formed the Rio Grande Gunnison Railway Company to build the ten miles from Wagon Wheel Gap to Creede, where the narrow gauge tracks arrived in 1891. Operations on the new line were contracted out to the D&RG, and once construction costs were recouped (in only four months), the extension was sold to the D&RG in 1892. The narrow gauge line was converted to dual/standard gauge in 1901-1902 and D&RG trains continued hauling ore out of Creede until the last mine closed in 1985. The line passed to Southern Pacific in 1988 and then to Union Pacific in 1996. In 1999, the UP sold the South Fork-Creede segment to the Denver & Rio Grande Historical Foundation. In 2003, the UP segment of the Creede Branch (Alamosa - South Fork), along with the rest of the San Luis Valley Lines, passed to the San Luis & Rio Grande Railroad, a shortline owned by RailAmerica. They continued the same basic operations as UP, never using the segment from Alamosa to South Fork (including here at Del Norte) except to deliver equipment to the D&RGHF. In 2005, the SL&RG was sold to Iowa Pacific Holdings and Permian Basin Railways, but operations remain largely unchanged.

Southwestward view of the D&RG Creede Branch (1883n) and the D&RG's Del Norte depot.





The Barlow and Sanderson Company operated stage lines in the area starting in the 1870s. Following the arrival of the railroad, the stages continued to carry passengers, cargo, and mail from railheads such as Del Norte to agricultural centers in the San Luis Valley and mining areas in the San Juan Mountains. This Barlow and Sanderson stage depot is just across the street west of the railroad depot (previous photo) and 60 feet south of the D&RG Creede Branch (1883n) tracks.

