



In 1902, the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad constructed its North Fork Branch, which was a 43 mile narrow gauge branch that ran from the Denver & Rio Grande (no "Western") (1883n) narrow gauge mainline (Marshall Pass route) at Delta, Colorado (this location), eastward up the North Fork of the Gunnison River to Somerset. The route was built to tap coal deposits around Somerset and to serve agricultural areas along the way. Since the D&RGW had already completed its standard-gauging of the route over Tennessee Pass (D&RG Aspen Branch 1887n and connecting lines), the North Fork Branch was laid on standard gauge ties and built to standard gauge standards, and indeed was converted to standard gauge only four years after construction, in 1906. The North Fork Branch was extended in 1929 another 2 miles up the North Fork of the Gunnison River to reach coal deposits there (not shown separately on the Southwest Railroad History Map). The D&RGW North Fork Branch (1902n) continues today as one of the most important parts of the former D&RGW system; the entire standard gauge line from Grand Junction to beyond Somerset is now Union Pacific's North Fork Branch.

Southwestward view of the D&RG (1883n) at Delta, which was standard-gauged in 1906. The track in the foreground and the right branch serve customers in Montrose and follow the original D&RG (1883n) alignment. The left branch is the D&RGW North Fork Branch (1902n), which was also standard-gauged in 1906 and continues to haul coal down the North Fork of the Gunnison River.





Northward view of the D&RGW North Fork Branch (1902n) 7.5 miles east of Delta, where a bridge carries the rails over the North Fork of the Gunnison River.





Northeastward view of the same bridge. This photo was taken in 2011 and recent (2021) satellite imagery shows that the bridge has been since redesigned including removal of the trusses.