



The original narrow gauge railroad through the Rocky Mountains was the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad's Royal Gorge-Marshall Pass Route, completed in 1883. In this photo, the cut grade on the far (east) side of Poncha Creek is the D&RG Marshall Pass Route grade 2 miles south of its junction with the former Monarch Branch at Poncha Springs. The narrow gauge line was abandoned in 1955, and this is the first location south of Poncha Springs where I was able to pick up the grade. The following photos explore the D&RG narrow gauge grade from this location up to the Continental Divide at 10,842-foot Marshall Pass.



Three miles up the grade from the previous photo, masonry abutments supported a narrow gauge bridge across Poncha Creek. The junction with the D&RG's Chili Line is between this location and the previous photograph but was obliterated by later grading.



The Marshall Pass Route follows Poncha Creek upstream from its confluence with the South Arkansas River at Poncha Springs for 9 miles to this point. Here the grade is used for Forest Road 200; the masonry bridge carried the narrow gauge line across Poncha Creek until 1955. In this southwestward view, the D&RG grade (now Forest Road 200) makes a big U-turn, climbing along the left (southeast) bank of Poncha Creek, then turning right across the creek here and climbing the slope northeastward (toward the viewer) above the creek to more switchbacks up to Marshall Pass. (The unpaved road heading up-stream on the right is not a railroad grade.)



Closer view of the wonderful masonry bridge across Pocha Creek.



Two miles up from the previous photo, where Forest Road 200 on the D&RG Marshall Pass grade makes another U-turn.



One mile up from the previous photo, where Forest Road 200 on the D&RG grade heads to Marshall Pass on the crest of the Sawatch Range, which is the Continental Divide.



A major cut through rock, 3 miles up-grade from the previous photo.



An old loading structure of some sort, a quarter mile east of Marshall Pass. Forest Road 200 on the D&RG grade is in the foreground.





Forest Road 200 on the D&RG grade on the eastern approach to 10,842-foot Marshall Pass, which is the deep cut in the distance.



The D&RG's crossing of Marshall Pass was the first crossing of the Continental Divide in Colorado by any railroad. Marshall Pass is a naturally broad pass, so a summit tunnel would need be very long to get relatively little lowering of the railroad summit. Instead, the line was built to the top of the pass with this modest summit cut.



The Marshall Pass summit cut, looking east.



West end of the summit cut.



Marshall Pass, Colorado, had a small settlement with a railroad station and "the U.S.'s smallest post office" according to Time Magazine. The population was 11 in 1948 when there were six buildings. These footings at the west end of the summit cut were part of the settlement.



More footings and a foundation at the settlement of Marshall Pass.