



In 1887, the Denver & Rio Grande completed its narrow gauge Aspen Branch, which was built northward from the end of the D&RG Leadville Branch (1880n) over the Continental Divide at Tennessee Pass to the Colorado River at Dotsero, then west along the Colorado River to Glenwood Springs. The alignment then turned southeastward up the Roaring Fork River through Basalt, Colorado (this location), to the new mining center of Aspen, where the tracks arrived in late 1887. Meanwhile, in 1883 the Colorado Midland Railway was founded to build a standard gauge line across the Rockies to compete with the narrow gauge D&RG. The CM plan was to link Colorado Springs with the mines of Leadville and with the national rail network at Ogden, Utah. In 1886, construction started on two segments of the route. One segment started at Colorado Springs (where it connected with the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific 1888) and headed west over Ute Pass then down to the Arkansas River, where it crossed the tracks of the Denver, South Park & Pacific (1882n) and turned north to follow the Arkansas River and parallel the Denver & Rio Grande Leadville Branch (1880n) to Leadville, where the CM arrived in 1887. The other segment started at Leadville, using both DSP&P and D&RG trains to haul CM rails to Leadville; from Leadville, CM construction headed west over the Continental Divide at Hagerman Pass, then down to the Roaring Fork River at Basalt (this location). At Basalt CM construction headed in two directions: a branch line was built southeast along the Roaring Fork River and parallel to the D&RG Aspen Branch (1887n) to reach Aspen in early 1888, and a mainline was built northwest along the Roaring Fork River and parallel to the D&RG Aspen Branch (1887n) to reach Glenwood Springs in 1887, 2 months after the D&RG. In 1888, the CM continued westward along the Colorado River toward Utah but with the line only 12 miles west of Glenwood Springs the CM decided to not fund the route to Utah and the CM stopped building. In 1890, the CM and D&RGW cooperated to build the Rio Grande Joint Railway along the Colorado River to Grand Junction; using this shared line and trackage rights over newly standard-gauged D&RG tracks, the CM reached Ogden, Utah, via the newly standard-gauged Denver & Rio Grande Western (1883n).

In 1900, the D&RGW gained control of the CM, which was difficult to operate because it had little level track and crossed three summits with grades up to four percent. CM business dropped off toward the end of World War I so the CM ceased operations in 1919 and was scrapped in 1921. In 1995, all operations ceased on the D&RG Aspen Branch (south of Glenwood Springs), at Basalt (this location). Around 2006 the 42-mile grade from Glenwood Springs through Basalt (this location) to Aspen was converted into a rail-to-trail called the "Rio Grande Trail" in honor of the D&RG.

Northwestward view of a caboose on display at Lions Park in Basalt. The park is triangular, outlining the CM wye where the mainline from Hagerman Pass, having followed the Frying Pan River west to this location at the confluence with the Roaring Fork River, split into a branch line to Aspen and a mainline to Glenwood Springs (both following the Roaring Fork River). This location was originally known as Aspen Junction in 1894 changed its name to Basalt. Just like almost everywhere on the CM (1888), there are virtually no remaining vestiges of the grade that was abandoned a century ago.

BASALT HISTORY TOUR

Colorado Midland Railway



Colorado Midland Railway



Basalt Wye, circa 1915. Note the depot and hotel, still standing today

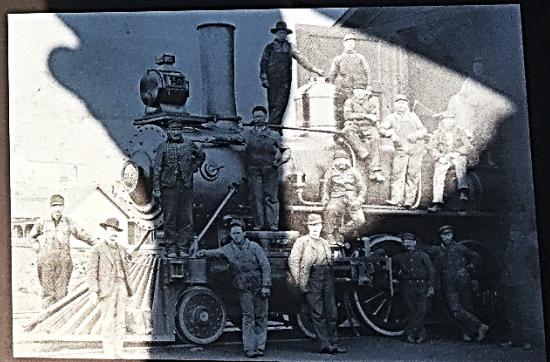
the trains were used less frequently, and by 1919 the Colorado Midland ceased operations.

In 1921 the railroad tracks were removed from the Wye and all the way up the Frying Pan River. The current Frying Pan Road was built on the railroad right of way, creating automobile access to Leadville. The glorious and exciting times of the Railroad were over and Basalt entered the quiet years.

In 1883, investors created the Colorado Midland Railroad and built track from Colorado Springs to Buena Vista. In 1885 the CMR began tunneling under Hagerman pass, on to Aspen Junction and then to Aspen and Grand Junction. This was the first great transportation route linking east and west Colorado. The railroad was constructed to serve the growing mining industry by shipping ore, coal, equipment, supplies and men far better than horse-drawn wagons and enabled farmers and ranchers to efficiently ship agricultural products.

The triangle of land you are facing was the original Wye, the nexus of Aspen Junction's lifeblood and prosperity. Illustrated best by the photo, a Wye is a triangular junction of three tracks where trains could be turned around. Here CMR trains could be turned, fueled and repaired before continuing up the Frying Pan, under Hagerman Pass (named for the President of the railroad) and on to Leadville, or down the Roaring Fork to Glenwood, or up the Roaring Fork to Aspen.

The boom times of Aspen Junction/Basalt started in 1886, but by 1893 the silver market had crashed, mining essentially ceased,



The Basalt Regional Heritage Society has several explanatory signs at Lions Park.



Northwestward view of the D&RG Aspen Branch (1887n), now the Rio Grande Trail, 4,000 feet southwest of the previous location. The line was standard-gauged in 1890 and converted to a rail-to-trail in 2006. In the area of Basalt, the CM (1888) ran on the east side of the Roaring Fork River and the D&RG Aspen Branch (1887n) ran west of the river, which is in the low area to the right of the trail.



Southeastward view of the D&RG Aspen Branch (1887n) at the same location as previous.