



The narrow gauge Denver & Rio Grande mainline over the Rocky Mountains, known as the "Royal Gorge Route" or "Marshall Pass Route," was completed in 1883, when the D&RG building west from Denver, Colorado, and the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railway building east from Salt Lake City through this location in Colorado near Harley's Dome, Utah, met at Grand Junction, Colorado. In 1890, the D&RG and D&RGW completed a standard gauge route, the Tennessee Pass Route, which supplanted the narrow gauge Marshall Pass Route as the primary route from Denver to Salt Lake City. This new route involved a cooperative effort between the Colorado Midland Railway and D&RGW to build a standard gauge line, the Rio Grande Joint Railway, along the Colorado River west from Rifle to Grand Junction, Colorado, and involved standard-gauging of the D&RG Leadville Branch (1880n), Aspen Branch (1887n, which included the crossing of the continental divide at Tennessee Pass), and Rifle Extension (1889n), and the D&RGW (1883n) trackage in western Colorado and Utah. The standard-gauging of the D&RGW (1883n) was almost entirely just a matter of replacing the tracks, but there was a major realignment of the route along the Colorado-Utah border. The realignment extended from Mack, Colorado, where the 1883 narrow gauge route left the Colorado River to head west across the Utah desert to Salt Lake City, west to Whitehorse, Utah, in the desert 9 miles northwest of the Colorado River. The tracks for the narrow gauge route were removed during the 1890 standard gauging effort, including at this location between Mack and Whitehorse.

Northeastward view of the D&RGW (1883n) in Colorado, 1.6 miles east of the Utah border. Old U.S. Highway 6/50 is on top of the railroad grade at this location. Although the topography looks quite flat, this location is on the drainage divide between McDonald Creek on the east and Bitter Creek on the west (both of which flow south a few miles to the Colorado River). The bare ground in the foreground is the east branch of a turning wye to turn helper engines.





Westward view of the northeast branch of the turning wye at the same location as previous. Although it has been abandoned since 1890, the turning wye is quite apparent on the ground and in satellite imagery in this remote, undisturbed region.







Eastward view of the northeast branch of the turning wye from the southwest branch near the tip of the wye, which is just out of view on the left.





Southeastward view of the tip of the wye.





Northwestward view of the tip of the wye from the same location as previous.





Northward view of the southwest branch of the wye, 200 feet south of the previous location. The tip of the wye is in the far left corner and the northeast branch of the wye runs across the width of the photo in the distance.





Southward view of the southwest branch of the wye at the same location as previous. The vehicle is on Old U.S. Highway 6/50, which was built in the late 1920's on top of the D&RGW (1883n), which had been abandoned since 1890.





Southward view of the southwest branch of the wye and the D&RGW (1883n) mainline/Old U.S. Highway 6/50, 100 feet south of the previous location. In the distance, the topography drops off toward Bitter Creek. Note the lone tree next to the road.





Northward view 1,000 feet southwest of the previous location; the same lone tree is visible next to the D&RGW (1883n) mainline/Old U.S. Highway 6/50. The bare ground in the foreground is on the D&RGW (1883n) grade, which once joined the highway alignment somewhere between here and the tree. The rough dirt road that runs to the right of the highway is just that, it is not the railroad grade.





Southwestward view of the D&RGW (1883n) at the same location as previous. Old U.S. Highway 6/50, to the right of the railroad grade, is on a new (late 1920's) alignment.





Southward view of the D&RGW (1883n) 2 miles southwest of the previous location. To negotiate the steep topography in this area, the alignment turns to the south and makes a 180 degree bend to the north, then crosses Old U.S. Highway 6/50 at this location. This significant fill grade deals with local topography, and beyond the visible part of the grade the alignment turns left (east) and continues the curve to its northeastward alignment at the previous locations. The dirt track to the left of the railroad alignment is a dirt-bike path.





Northward view at the same location as previous. The bare ground in the foreground is the same fill grade on the D&RGW (1883n) as the previous photo. The grade alignment projects across Old U.S. Highway 6/50 to a dirt track, which is on the railroad grade, on the other side of the highway. The dirt track on the viewers side of the highway is not a railroad grade, but rather it is the same dirt-bike path as in the previous photo.





Northward view of the D&RGW (1883n) from a location just across Old U.S. Highway 6/50 from the previous location. Here, the railroad alignment is now used by dirt bikes.





Westward view of the D&RGW (1883n) in Utah, 2.5 miles west of the previous location (which is in Colorado). The significant fill grade here is well preserved. Old U.S. Highway 6/50 is visible in the upper left where it crossed the railroad alignment.