



In 1880, a legal settlement with the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe gave the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad the right-of-way to build west from Pueblo up the Royal Gorge of the Arkansas River, which provided a steady grade to the Continental Divide and, co-incidentally, to the Leadville mining area, which had just been discovered the year before and had no rail service. The narrow gauge D&RG built quickly through this location at Cotopaxi, Colorado, on the Arkansas River and reached Leadville in the same year of 1880. Also in 1880, the D&RG built a line west from Salida over Marshall Pass on the Continental Divide and in 1883 connected with the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad at Grand Junction, Colorado, completing a narrow gauge mainline to Utah. Seven years later in 1890, the D&RG standard-gauged the Leadville Branch (1880n) west of Pueblo and through this location at Cotopaxi to Leadville and also standard-gauged its Aspen Branch (1887n) over Tennessee Pass to Grand Junction (with help from the Colorado Midland to build the Rio Grande Joint Railway [1890]), supplanting the narrow gauge Marshall Pass Route as the D&RG mainline across the Rockies. In 1934, the D&RGW's Dotsero Cutoff was completed and the Tennessee Pass Route was supplanted by the Moffat Tunnel Route (Denver, Northwestern and Pacific 1913) as the D&RG mainline. The Marshall Pass Route was abandoned in 1955 and the Tennessee Pass Route became inactive in the late 1990's.

Southeastward view of the D&RG Leadville Branch (1880n) at Cotopaxi. In 1883, this line became part of the D&RG's narrow gauge mainline to Utah via Marshall Pass, in 1887 became part of the D&RG's narrow gauge branch line to Aspen via Tennessee Pass, in 1890 became part of the D&RG's standard gauge mainline to Utah via the Rio Grande Joint Railway (1890), and in 1934 became a secondary line when it was circumvented by the Moffat Tunnel Route via the Dotsero Cutoff. The closer of the two tracks is a siding and the more distant track is the D&RG Leadville Branch (1880n) mainline. The Arkansas River is in the low area between the tracks and U.S. Highway 50 (which has a red car on it). Note the long ties projecting towards the viewer from the siding, indicative of a former switch at this location.



Eastward view a few steps west of the previous location. The D&RG Leadville Branch (1880n) mainline and siding of the previous photo are overgrown with sagebrush. The tracks in the foreground are former sidings that once connected to the main siding at the former switch noted in the previous photo; the long ties for that switch are barely visible in the upper left.



Southward view a few steps north of the previous location, showing two long ties for a former switch on the detached siding.



Westward view at the same location as previous, showing the detached siding leading to a former loading ramp.