



The Denver & Rio Grande Railroad's original plan was to build a narrow-gauge line southward from Denver, across Raton Pass to El Paso, Texas, where it would connect with a Mexican counterpart. D&RG grading south of Pueblo started in 1874 and continued through the future Cuchara Junction (this location) and in 1876 reached El Moro, Colorado, 5 miles north of the town of Trinidad (at the northern base of the climb to Raton Pass), which is as far as the line progressed (until 1887, see below). In February 1878, following physical and legal confrontations with the D&RG, the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway gained the right to build over Raton Pass, and in September 1878, the AT&SF reached Trinidad from the northeast and continued south over Raton Pass into New Mexico. Although the D&RG (1876n) did not become a mainline to Texas and Mexico, the line provided a starting point for a railroad to the booming silver mining districts of the San Juan Mountains in southwestern Colorado. The D&RG's narrow gauge "San Juan Extension" was built westward from the D&RG (1876n) at Cuchara Junction (this location), crossed the Sangre de Cristo Mountains at La Veta Pass to enter the Rio Grande drainage in 1877, and reached Alamosa on the Rio Grande in 1878. In 1881, the San Juan Extension was completed to Durango via Cumbres Pass and in 1882 reached its terminus at the silver mining center of Silverton.

In 1887, the newly incorporated Denver, Texas & Fort Worth Railroad commenced construction of a line intended to connect the southern terminus of the stalled Denver & New Orleans Railroad (1882) at Pueblo, Colorado, with the Fort Worth & Denver City Railway, which was building northwestward in Texas to the New Mexico state line (all east of SWRRH Map area). Instead of building a line parallel to the D&RG (1876n) south of Pueblo, the DT&FW worked out a trackage rights agreement with the D&RG that involved dual-gauging of the D&RG (1876n) from Pueblo to El Moro (southern terminus of the D&RG 1876n), including this location at Cuchara Junction. The DT&FW built a new standard-gauge alignment south of El Moro through Trinidad then turned southeastward beyond the eastern edge of the SWRRH Map area and into New Mexico, where it met the northeast-building FW&DC at a lost location christened "Union Park" with a last spike ceremony on March 14, 1888 (east of SWRRH Map area). In 1894, standard-gauging of the D&RG San Juan Extension (1878n) commenced from the D&RG (1876n) mainline at Cuchara Junction (this location) and extended west to Alamosa then south to Antonito, Colorado, where the D&RG's standard-gauging program ended in 1900.

In the 1890's, the Union Pacific was trying to access markets south of its Wyoming mainline (UP 1869) to Texas, and thus created the Union Pacific, Denver & Gulf Railway by purchasing the DT&FW and other railroads. The UPD&G invested in line improvements including, in 1895, the building of a new route from Trinidad to Walsenburg to circumvent the windy, originally narrow gauge D&RG (1876n), at least the part south of Cuchara Junction (this location). In 1911, to circumvent the part of the D&RG (1876n) north of Cuchara Junction, the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad (D&RG successor) and the Colorado & Southern Railway (UPD&G successor) jointly built a modern, double track mainline from Pueblo to Walsenburg, the "Southern Joint Line," shown on the SWRRH Map as the "D&RGW-Colo & So (1911)." At Walsenburg, both lines connected to their own rails. The parallel D&RG (1876n) was abandoned in parts from 1917 to 1936; at the same time, the first 5 miles of the D&RG San Juan Extension (1878n), between the D&RG (1876n) at Cuchara Junction (this location) and the new D&RGW-C&S (1911) Southern Joint Line at Walsenburg, was also abandoned.

The abandoned lines at Cuchara Junction are more apparent in satellite images than on the ground. The D&RG (1876n) runs north-south, parallel to and just west of Road 120. The wye in the center of the image is Cuchara Junction and the starting point of the D&RG San Juan Extension (1878n), which heads southwest from the wye and off the image on the left (toward Walsenburg). An 1894 topo map shows a full wye at Cuchara Junction and a 1900

topo map shows only the north branch being present (tracks removed from the southern branch). This change occurred following construction of the UPD&G (1895), which rendered obsolete the section of the D&RG (1876n) south of Cuchara Junction to Trinidad. In this image, the north branch seems to be the dominant and more recently used branch of the wye, consistent with the topo maps and railroad history.



Westward view of the south branch of the wye for the D&RG San Juan Extension (1878n); the wye branch is the curved fill grade in the middle distance of the photo. The tip of the wye and part of the north branch are in the upper right. The D&RG (1876n) is the bare ground in the foreground.



Northwestward view of the south branch of the wye 100 feet south of the previous location. The D&RG (1876n) is the bare ground in the foreground and its former connection with the wye is on the left side of the image.



Northward view of the D&RG (1876n) 1,000 feet south of the previous location. Here the grade is in a shallow cut to lower the tracks for a crossing of the Cucharas River, which is a quarter mile south of here (behind the viewer).



Southward view of the D&RG (1876n) at the same location as previous. Here the cut is a bit deeper and the broad valley of the Cucharas River is in the distance.