



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 up 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 aptly named Grand Junction, Colorado, completing a narrow gauge mainline to Utah. In 1890, the D&RGW and Colorado Midland cooperated to build a standard gauge line, the Rio Grande Joint Railway, to complete a line to Grand Junction. That connection together with standard-gauging of the D&RG Leadville Branch (1880n) and Aspen Branch (1887n), which crossed the Continental Divide at Tennessee Pass and included this location at Dotsero, completed a new standard gauge line that supplanted 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 between Tennessee Pass and Dotsero (this location) became inactive in the late 1990's.

We will explore the Dotsero wye clockwise starting with this northward view of the D&RGW Dotsero Cutoff (1934). The overpass is I-70. This location is 900 feet north of the wye that connects the Dotsero Cutoff to the D&RG Aspen Branch (1887n). Note the well-used, shiny, welded tracks; this was the D&RGW's mainline through the Rockies since it was built in 1934 and is now a Union Pacific mainline, the only remaining active railroad that crosses the Rockies in Colorado.



Southward view of the D&RGW Dotsero Cutoff (1934) at the same location as previous. The north tip of the wye that connects the Dotsero Cutoff to the D&RG Aspen Branch (1887n) is barely visible in the distance. The stream that enters the photo from the left is the Eagle River, which flows into the Colorado River just above the center of this photograph. The D&RG Aspen Branch (1887n) follows the Eagle River all the way from Tennessee Pass to this confluence with the Colorado River and follows the Colorado River from here westward through Glenwood Springs all the way to Grand Junction.



Northward view of the D&RGW Dotsero Cutoff (1934) just north of the north tip of the wye. The bridge crosses the Eagle River, which flows into the Colorado River on the left.



Westward view of the D&RGW Dotsero Cutoff (1934) from the bridge in the previous photo. The Eagle River flows into the Colorado River in this view.



Southward view of the tip of the Dotsero wye a few steps south of the previous location. The Eagle River is on the far left and is diverted by the massive fill grade for the wye. The bolted rails on the east branch of the wye (on the left) connect to the part of the D&RG Aspen Branch (1887n) that goes to Tennessee Pass; that trackage has been inactive since the 1990's. The welded track on the west (right-hand) branch of the wye is today's UP mainline.



Northwestward view of the east branch of the Dotsero wye. The west branch of the wye is on the left, the Eagle River is on the right, and the same overpass for I-70 is in the distance. The derailing device at the switch may have been there since the 1990's to prevent trains from heading towards Tennessee Pass on unmaintained tracks.



Southeastward view of the east branch of the Dotsero wye 500 feet southeast of the previous location. The track in the upper right is the D&RG Aspen Branch (1887n).



Eastward view 200 feet southeast of the previous location. The D&RG Aspen Branch (1887n) is in the foreground. The east branch of the wye is to its left (north) and runs parallel to the Aspen Branch, like a siding, for 1,700 feet before joining the mainline to Tennessee Pass.





Westward view at the same location as previous. The east branch of the wye is in the foreground and the D&RG Aspen Branch (1887n) is to its left (south).



Northeastward view of the D&RG Aspen Branch (1887n) 600 feet west of the previous location. The east branch of the wye is visible in the left distance. Note the steep cliffs that bound the flood plains of Eagle Creek and the Colorado River upon which the railroads are built.



Westward view of the D&RG Aspen Branch (1887n) at the same location as previous. The west branch of the wye is visible across the photo in the distance and the two lines join in the left distance.



Southwestward view of the D&RG Aspen Branch (1887n) 500 feet southwest of the previous location. The west branch of the wye, which is the UP mainline, enters from the right and joins the Aspen Branch in the left distance, beyond which the mainline continues to Grand Junction and Utah.



Northeastward view of the D&RG Aspen Branch (1887n) 150 feet southwest of the previous location. The west branch of the wye -- the mainline to the Moffat Tunnel since 1934 -- is to the left.



Southwestward view west branch of the wye where it joins the D&RG Aspen Branch (1887n).



Northeastward view of the west branch of the wye 500 feet northeast of the previous location. The east branch of the wye converges with the west branch in the left distance.



Northward view of the west branch of the wye 300 feet north of the previous location, where it converges with the east branch in the left distance. The I-70 crossing of the D&RGW Dotsero Cutoff (1934) is in the left distance and this completes our clockwise tour of the Dotsero wye.