



The narrow gauge Denver, South Park & Pacific Railroad began construction south from Denver in 1873 and reached the mouth of the South Platte Canyon on in 1878, 20 miles from Denver. In 1879, the tracks crossed the summit of Kenosha Pass, on the drainage divide between the North and South Forks of the South Platte River, and reached Como. A mining boom near Leadville in 1879 resulted in a construction race between the DSP&P and Denver & Rio Grande, with both reaching Buena Vista on the Arkansas River in early 1880. Rather than both companies laying track to Leadville, Jay Gould pressured the two companies to make a deal, called the "Joint Operation Agreement." The D&RG would lay tracks to the north from Buena Vista to Leadville and the DSP&P would share equal traffic rights. Similarly, the DSP&P would build into the Gunnison Country, with equal traffic rights given to the D&RG. The D&RG reached Leadville in 1880 and the DSP&P reached Gunnison in 1882.

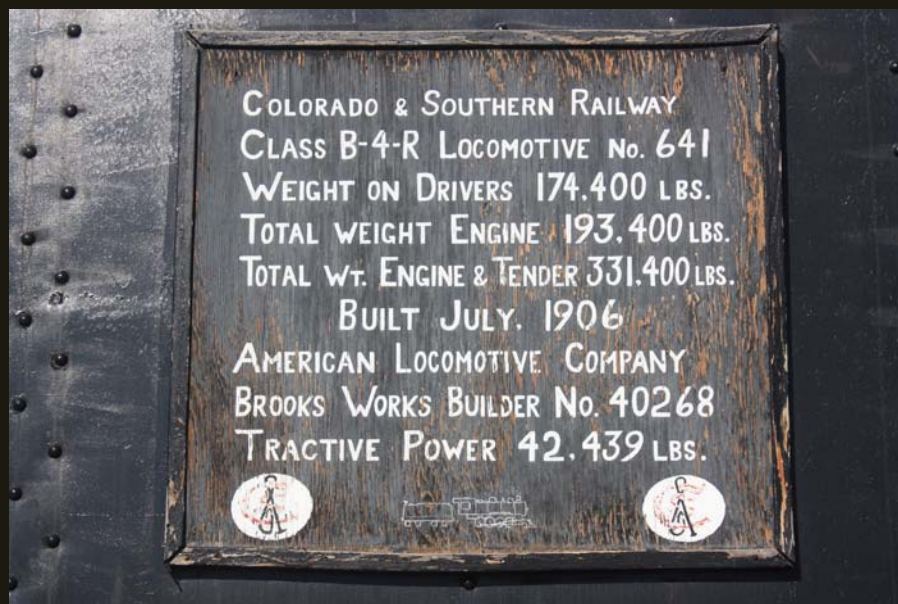
However, the D&RG completed its own line to Gunnison via Marshall Pass in 1881, and in 1884 the D&RG ended the Joint Agreement, which forced the DSP&P to build its own line to Leadville. The DSP&P "High Line" left the DSP&P mainline at Como across Boreas Pass to Breckenridge, then across Fremont Pass (not marked on map) to Leadville. This route was noteworthy for crossing the Continental Divide twice. In 1889, the DSP&P was sold at foreclosure to the Denver, Leadville & Gunnison Railway, a new railroad which was formed to operate the DSP&P lines. The DL&G went into receivership in 1894 and the Colorado & Southern Railway took over the former DSP&P lines in January 1899. The Colorado & Southern started dismantling in 1910 with the closure of the Alpine Tunnel, and the last freight and passenger trains between Denver and Leadville operated in April 1937. The DSP&P (C&S) was then abandoned, except for the line between Leadville and Climax, which was converted to standard gauge in August 1943 and connected to the D&RG Leadville Branch to complete a branch line to Climax. The standard gauge line between Leadville and Climax is operated today as an excursion railroad, the Leadville Colorado & Southern Railroad, but was disconnected from the D&RG.

This is the LC&S end-of-track in Leadville, and is at or near the original DSP&P Leadville Branch terminus. I found it difficult to find the builder of the current depot, the DSP&P, DL&G, C&S, or the LC&S, but for sure the DSP&P had some depot here and today's depot is operated by the LC&S.





C&S steam traction on display at the LC&S depot.





A LC&S consist just above Leadville.



The LC&S tracks just above Leadville's outskirts.



The LC&S spur just above Leadville's outskirts. The snowcapped peaks are on the Continental Divide near Tennessee Pass.



The LC&S consist pulls out of Leadville. The snowcapped peaks rise to 14,000-foot elevations on the Continental Divide west of Leadville.



The LC&S grade between Leadville and Climax, giving an idea of why this was called the "High Line."

There is some information indicating that the D&RG pushed a narrow gauge line from Leadville to Climax in 1881, three years before the DSP&P completed its High Line to Leadville. The D&RG line to Leadville and Climax was quickly supplanted by the DSP&P, which was five hours shorter to Denver. I could find no evidence of the 1881 D&RG grade between Leadville and Climax, which had to have run through this area.



The LC&S grade between Leadville and Climax, further up the line than the previous photo.





The D&RG reached Leadville in 1880. In this northward view 4 miles west of Leadville, the track in the right foreground and the branch to the right (east) together follow the general alignment of the 1880 D&RG narrow gauge Leadville Branch. The current mainline that disappears around the bend is the D&RG route that was completed over Tennessee Pass to Aspen in 1887. The floodplain of the Arkansas River is the green area in the left distance.



When the DSP&P (C&S) was between Leadville and Climax was converted to standard gauge in 1943, it was connected to the standard gauge D&RG Leadville Branch to complete a standard gauge branch line to Climax. Today, the D&RG (now UP) tracks end about halfway from the junction in the previous photo to downtown Leadville and the intervening grade is a rail-to-trail, shown here; thus, the LC&S is now disconnected from the rail network.