



In 1883, the Denver & Rio Grande completed a narrow gauge line west from Salida (on the D&RG Leadville Branch 1880n) over Marshall Pass on the Continental Divide and connected with the Denver & Rio Grande Western at aptly named Grand Junction, Colorado, completing a narrow gauge mainline from Denver to Utah. In the same year of 1883, the Colorado Midland Railway was founded to build a standard gauge line across the Rockies to compete with the narrow gauge D&RG/D&RGW route. The CM plan was to link Colorado Springs with the mines of Leadville and with the national rail network at Ogden, Utah, with standard gauge tracks, as the D&RG/D&RGW had done with narrow gauge. In 1886, CM construction started on two segments of the route. One segment started at Colorado Springs (where it connected with the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific 1888) and headed west over Ute Pass then down to the Arkansas River, where it crossed the tracks of the Denver, South Park & Pacific (1882n) and turned north to follow the Arkansas River and parallel the D&RG Leadville Branch (1880n) to Leadville, where the CM arrived in 1887. The other segment started at Leadville, using both DSP&P and D&RG trains to haul CM rails to Leadville; from Leadville, CM construction headed west over the Continental Divide at Hagerman Pass, then down to the Roaring Fork River at Basalt, Colorado. At Basalt construction headed in two directions: a branch line was built southeast along the Roaring Fork River and parallel to the D&RG Aspen Branch (1887n) to reach Aspen in early 1888, and the CM mainline was built northwest along the Roaring Fork River and parallel to the D&RG Aspen Branch (1887n) to reach Glenwood Springs. In the same year of 1887, the D&RG completed its narrow gauge Aspen Branch, which was built northward from the end of the Leadville Branch (1880n) over the Continental Divide at Tennessee Pass to the Colorado River at Dotsero, then west along the Colorado River to Glenwood Springs, where the tracks arrived on October 5, 1887, two months ahead of the CM.

In 1888, the CM continued westward from Glenwood Springs along the south bank of the Colorado River toward Utah for 10 miles, then crossed to the north side of the Colorado River to reach coal mines just west of New Castle. With the line only 12 miles west of Glenwood Springs the CM decided to not fund the route to Utah and the CM stopped building. The following year of 1889, D&RG built its own track westward from Glenwood Springs. With the CM on the south bank, the D&RG Rifle Extension (1889n) crossed to the north side of the Colorado River at Glenwood Springs then proceeded west to New Castle, at the CM end of track, and continued 15 miles west to the town of Rifle (this location). In 1890, the CM and D&RGW cooperated to build a standard gauge line, the Rio Grande Joint Railway, along the Colorado River west from Rifle (this location) to Grand Junction (where the D&RG had met the D&RGW in 1883). The CM negotiated trackage rights over the newly standard-gauged D&RG Rifle Extension (1889n) between New Castle and Rifle and standard-gauge CM trains arrived in Grand Junction in late 1890. This connection completed the D&RG Tennessee Pass Route, which was standard gauged in 1890 and supplanted the D&RG (1883n) Marshall Pass Route as the D&RG mainline across the Rockies. The Rio Grande Joint Railway (1890) connection also completed the CM's goal of reaching Ogden and the national rail network in Utah via the newly standard-gauged D&RGW (1883n).

In 1900, the D&RGW gained control of the CM, which was difficult to operate because it had little level track and crossed three summits with grades up to four percent. CM business dropped off toward the end of World War I so the CM ceased operations in 1919 and was scrapped in 1921. 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&RGW mainline.

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Westward view of the Rio Grande Joint Railway (1890) at Rifle. The D&RG Rifle Extension (1889n) arrived here in 1889 and it is not clear precisely where that track ended or where the Rio Grande Joint Railway (1890) started, and the standard gauging of the D&RG Rifle Extension (1889n) trackage the following year certainly included some realignment, but today this location represents that 1890 junction point. The bolted track on the left is a 1.25-mile siding that straddles the Rio Grande Joint Railway (1890) and the D&RG Rifle Extension (1889n).





Eastward view of the D&RG Rifle Extension (1889n) at the same location as previous. There is nothing to indicate the junction between this line and the Rio Grande Joint Railway (1890) and that has probably been the case since 1890. The CM used this line under D&RG trackage rights from here to just west of New Castle where the CM joined its own tracks. There was originally a D&RG depot here and it is now an Amtrak station.







Southwestward view of some old rails (foreground) and a train coming through on the Rio Grande Joint Railway (1890), which is now on the Union Pacific's mainline through the Rockies via the Moffat Tunnel and D&RGW Dotsero Cutoff (1934). A 1952 topo map shows a siding at this location but all evidence of its connection to the mainline has since been obliterated.