



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 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 Parkdale and reached Leadville in the same year of 1880. Seven years later in 1890, the D&RG Tennessee Pass Route through this location was converted to standard gauge. The Tennessee Pass Route became inactive in the late 1990's, but the segment from Pueblo through this location at Parkdale to a few miles further west is used for car storage and excursions trains through the Royal Gorge.

This location at Parkdale is at the upper (western) end of the Royal Gorge of the Arkansas River. The gorge formed over the past 3 million years when the Arkansas River captured the upper Rio Grande and diverted it to the present Arkansas River. The river rapidly cut through the granite rock at Royal Gorge. Poncha Pass is a "wind gap" that was formerly the Rio Grande but then dried up when the Rio Grande upstream of the pass was diverted into the Arkansas River. This downstream (eastward) view shows the gorge just starting to close in. Note the cholla cactus, indicative of the low elevation of the river amid the lofty surrounding peaks.





The D&RG Royal Gorge Route on the Arkansas River 2 miles upstream from the previous location. These are is the westernmost cars I've seen on the Tennessee Pass Route and are stored on the mainline, not a siding. In short, in 2015, this is the end of the line.