



In 1887, the Denver & Rio Grande completed its narrow gauge Aspen Branch, which was built northward from the end of the D&RG 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. The alignment then turned southeastward up the Roaring Fork River through Carbondale (this location) to the new mining center of Aspen, where the tracks arrived in late 1887. Meanwhile, in 1883 the Colorado Midland Railway was founded to build a standard gauge line across the Rockies to compete with the narrow gauge D&RG. The CM plan was to link Colorado Springs with the mines of Leadville and with the national rail network at Ogden, Utah. In 1886, 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 Denver & Rio Grande 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, where 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 a mainline was built northwest along the Roaring Fork River and parallel to the D&RG Aspen Branch (1887n) through Carbondale (this location) to reach Glenwood Springs in 1887, 2 months after the D&RG. In 1888, the CM continued westward along the Colorado River toward Utah but 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. In 1890, the CM and D&RGW cooperated to build the Rio Grande Joint Railway along the Colorado River to Grand Junction; using this shared line and trackage rights over newly standard-gauged D&RG tracks, the CM reached Ogden, 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 1995, all operations ceased on the D&RG Aspen Branch. Around 2006 the 42-mile grade from Glenwood Springs through Carbondale (this location) to Aspen was converted into a rail-to-trail called the "Rio Grande Trail" in honor of the D&RG.

Northwestward view of the D&RG Aspen Branch (1887n) at Carbondale. The line was standard-gauged in 1890 and converted to the Rio Grande Trail in 2006.



Southeastward view of the D&RG Aspen Branch (1887n) at the same location as previous.

In 1888, the narrow gauge Aspen & Western Railroad was built southward from a connection with the D&RG Aspen Branch (1887n) at Carbondale up the Crystal River (a tributary of the Roaring Fork River) to reach coal deposits there. From 1893 until 1910, the line was extended up the Crystal River in phases by several railroads to reach the mining centers of Redstone and Marble. The line was converted to standard gauge in 1896 and was abandoned in 1943. I could find no evidence on the ground, in satellite imagery, or on historical maps of the location of the connection of this railroad with the D&RG Aspen Branch (1887n). However, a 1961 topo map, the earliest available, shows a 1,500 foot double siding centered on this location. Therefore, the connection with the A&W (1888n) was probably in this view or the previous view.



Southwestward view of the D&RG Carbondale Depot 150 feet south of the previous location. The depot was reportedly built by the D&RG in 1887 when the railroad arrived. In the mid-1960's, the abandoned building was in disrepair when Carbondale American Legion Post #100 bought the depot for exactly \$100. The building was moved just over 100 yards to its current location and the renovated lodge officially opened in 1969.





In the area of Carbondale, the Colorado Midland (1888) alignment was east of the D&RG Aspen Branch (1887n) alignment and on the opposite side of the Roaring Fork River. The CM (1888) grade has been completely obliterated but not forgotten, at least not at the Catherine Saloon. Catherine is 2 miles east of Carbondale and is on the CM (1888) alignment. The mural on the saloon depicts CM engine #33, with its tender clearly marked "Colorado Midland."

