



In 1883, the Colorado Midland Railway was founded to build a standard gauge line across the Rockies to compete with the narrow gauge Denver & Rio Grande. 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; from Leadville, CM construction headed west through this location over the Continental Divide at Hagerman Pass, then down the Fryngpan River to the confluence with the Roaring Fork River at Basalt. At Basalt, CM 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) to reach Glenwood Springs in 1887, 2 months after the D&RG arrived. 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 Denver & Rio Grande Western 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.

Eastward view of the CM (1888), now a dirt road, where it plunges beneath Turquoise Lake, a reservoir 4 miles west of Leadville which was filled after the CM was abandoned. This location is 5 miles east of Hagerman pass as the crow flies but closer to 10 rail miles. The tracks, trestles, and trains are now gone, but the grade to Hagerman Pass and its two summit tunnels can still be explored.



The road to the left in this eastward view is the CM grade down to Turquoise Lake. The main road is Forest Road 105, which follows the CM grade west from this point toward Hagerman Pass.



Westward view of Forest Road 105 on the CM grade to Hagerman Pass and the Great Divide.



The CM built two summit tunnels for its crossing of the Continental Divide at Hagerman Pass. The first tunnel was the Hagerman Tunnel, completed in 1887 during the original construction of the road. In 1891, it was replaced by the lower and longer Busk-Ivanhoe Tunnel, whose east portal is shown here.



Groundwater flows out of the Busk-Ivanhoe Tunnel.



Forest Road 105 is built on the CM grade for another mile past the Busk-Ivanhoe Tunnel, at which point Forest Road 105 leaves the CM grade and becomes a difficult drive over Hagerman Pass. However, the grade can be walked from this point to the original 1887 Hagerman Tunnel, as explained in this sign.



The CM grade flooded with June melt-water and becoming overgrown with spruce on this wet slope.



The CM grade, cut in 1886, on its westward ascent to the Hagerman Tunnel.





A fill grade on the CM ascent to the Hagerman Tunnel.



Southeastward view across Busk Creek. The CM grade on the distance slope is Forest Road 105; it makes a U-turn to the right of the view, where the Busk-Ivanhoe Tunnel is located, then passes out of sight on the near slope below us, then makes another U-turn out of sight to the left, where it leaves Forest Road 105 and follows the rail-to-trail in the immediate foreground.



Westward view of a straight section of the grade on the CM ascent to the Hagerman Tunnel.



The CM grade is to the right. The black rock in the foreground is mining slag used for track ballast on the CM. The slag was likely brought in from Leadville smelters and later pushed off of the grade for the trail.



Southeastward view across Busk Creek. The CM grade on the distance slope is Forest Road 105; it makes a U-turn in the right distance, where the Busk-Ivanhoe Tunnel is located, then passes out of sight on the near slope below us, then makes another U-turn out of sight to the left, where the CM grade leaves Forest Road 105 and follows the rail-to-trail in the immediate foreground. In the foreground, note the black slag ballast.



The CM grade ends where a curved wooden trestle once carried steam-powered trains during 1887 until 1891, when the lower Busk-Ivanhoe Tunnel was holed through.

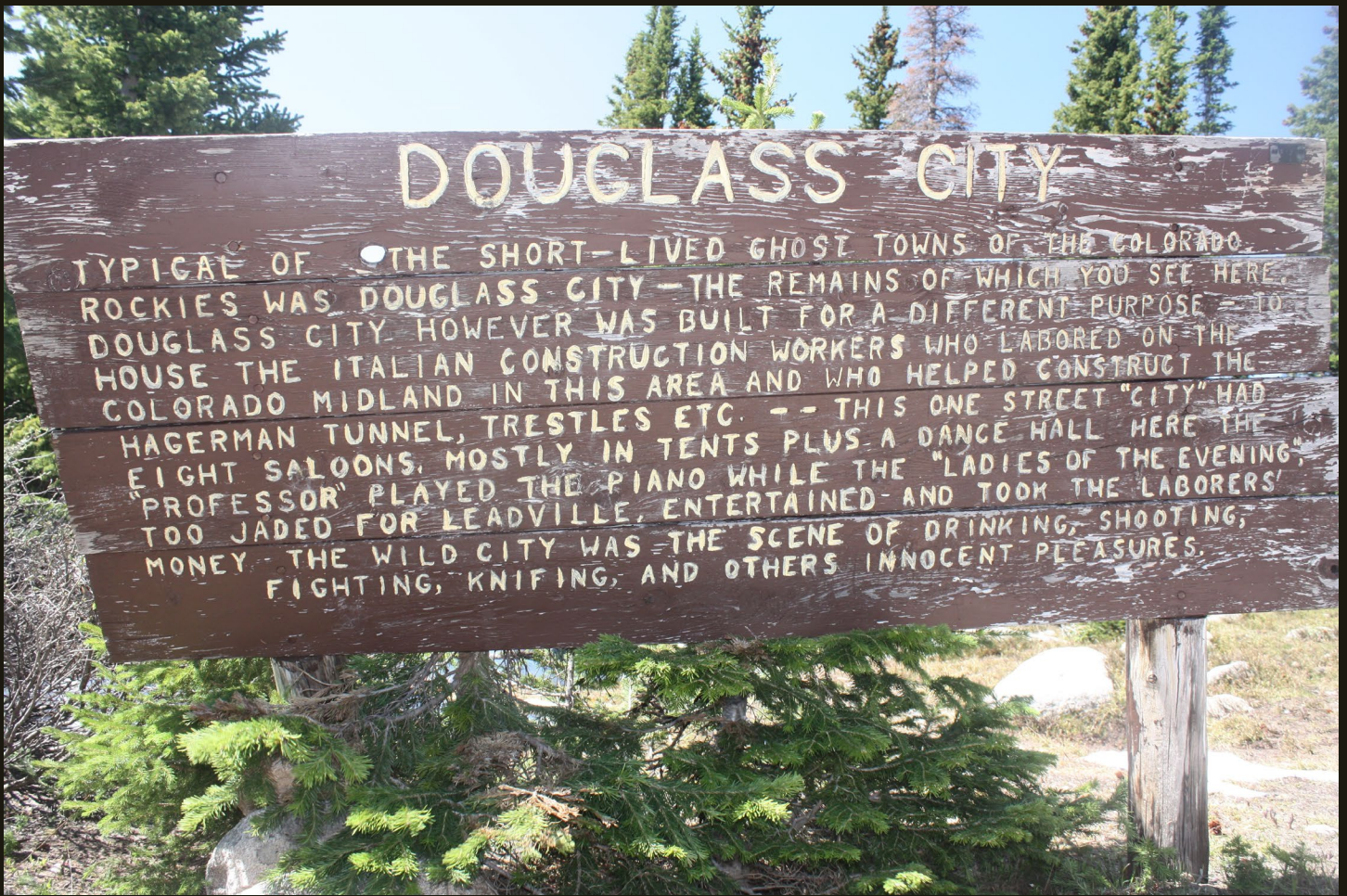


The CM grade above the location of the long-gone trestle.



Eroded fill grade on the CM.





A monument to Douglass City, a CM "hell on wheels" town at an elevation of about 11,000 feet.



Douglass City today.



The east portal of the Hagerman Tunnel is approached via a major fill grade above a tarn (alpine glacial lake). The tunnel entrance is at the left (west) end of the fill. The skyline is on the Great Divide. At an elevation of 11,530 feet, even in late June there was too much snow to walk up to the tunnel.