

The Denver, South Park and Pacific Railroad

Organization

The Denver, South Park and Pacific (DSP&P or South Park) was incorporated on 1 October 1872 with the stated goal of building a railroad line from Denver to the San Juan mining region of southwestern Colorado. John Evans, a physician and former governor of Colorado, was the principal incorporator of the line. Evans had been involved in the successful effort to build the Denver Pacific Railroad in 1870, which provided Denver with a rail link to the Union Pacific line in southern Wyoming. Joining Evans in the DSP&P effort were banker David H. Moffat, attorney Bela M. Hughes, financier Walter S. Cheesman, civil engineer Leonard H. Eicholtz, and other prominent Denver businessmen.

The route of the South Park line was surveyed by Eicholtz, who served as the engineer for the line. The route extended southwest from Denver up the North Fork of the South Platte River, over Kenosha Pass, across South Park, over Trout Creek Pass to the Arkansas Valley at Buena Vista, and thence northward over D&RG tracks to Leadville. Mosquito and other passes were considered as shorter alternatives to Trout Creek, but the latter was selected as lower and more practicable. While an initial objective of the railroad was Fairplay, railroad historian M.C. Poor concluded that the line was projected on the general principal "that there was wealth in the mountains and that it would be found."

Mainline Construction

The railroad separately organized the Denver Railway Association and, later, the Denver Railway and Enterprise Company to actually construct the railroad. Grading commenced in August 1873, and the laying of track began in May 1874. The initial construction on the line proceeded southwest from Denver to Morrison. Trains began running on that segment in June 1874, and Morrison became the terminus for Spotswood and McClellan stages to Fairplay and points west. The DSP&P cooperated closely with the stage line, and the stage traffic, freight, and local traffic to Morrison helped the South Park survive the slow economic times following the Panic of 1873.

Construction on the line halted at Bear Creek Junction and did not resume until October 1876, when new capital was raised. Progress was slow until the Leadville silver discoveries of 1878 gave the railroad a relatively close and profitable objective. The Rio Grande-Santa Fe conflict in the Royal Gorge stymied those railroads and gave the Denver, South Park and Pacific Railway time to enter the race for Leadville. As the line advanced up the North Fork of the South Platte River, wagon and stage lines extended from the railhead over Mosquito Pass to Leadville. The tracks reached Bailey's Ranch in October 1878, Grant later that fall, and Hall's Valley (Webster) in January 1879. Construction to the top of Kenosha Pass involved a horseshoe curve at Webster, side hill cuts, heavy rock work, curves, and 3.9 percent grades. The summit of the pass, fifty miles to the east of Leadville, was attained in May 1879, and a

connection with the Mosquito Pass Wagon Road was established. The railroad began to do a highly profitable trade in Leadville traffic, drawing freight away from wagon road routes into the booming silver camp.

The DSP&P had originally planned to proceed through Hamilton and Fairplay, but the desire to reach Leadville as quickly as possible led the railroad to choose a more direct and simpler alignment. From Kenosha Pass, track laying continued in a southwesterly direction across South Park, to Jefferson in late May 1879 and Como in June. The tracks proceeded in a southerly direction east of Red Hill to Garo (or Garos), Weston, and thence southwesterly past Platte River Station (west of Antero) to Hill Top (Bath) at the summit of Trout Creek Pass. The line proceeded down the west side of the pass, pushed northward up the Arkansas Valley, and reached Buena Vista, thirty-five miles south of Leadville, in March 1880.⁴⁸ Poor noted that "with the exception of the entrance to and exit from the Park, the territory was for the most part a fairly level region and did not present any great difficulties to the engineers."

M.C. Poor characterized the DSP&P roadbed as "primitive and unfinished," with little grading and minimal ballast. Over years of operations, layers of cinders built up along the roadbed on steep grades, but only in Denver and the larger division points were slag or cinders installed as ballast between the ties. The wooden ties were red spruce, yellow pine, or cedar, installed at a rate of 3,000 per mile on the mainline and 2,800 per mile on branch lines and spurs. The first rails used on the line were thirty-pound iron rails; during the early 1880s, the DSP&P began to replace these with heavier steel rails.

The Breckenridge Branch

The years immediately preceding the completion of the joint rail link to Leadville were the most profitable for the Denver, South Park and Pacific. The DSP&P-wagon road link constituted the most direct route between Denver and the Leadville mines and one the South Park did not have to share with another railroad. Even though the DSP&P gained direct access to Leadville via the D&RG track, the arrangement was less profitable as it then divided the traffic with the D&RG.

In April 1880, the DSP&P management determined to build a line northwest from Como over the Continental Divide to Breckenridge in Summit County. After considering a number of alternative passes, the DSP&P selected a route using 11,438 foot Boreas Pass. Two miles of grading from Como had been completed by November 1880, and, by June 1881, workers were close to the summit of Boreas Pass. After suspending work during the winter, grading was completed down the west side of the pass, and track was laid to Breckenridge on 2 August 1882. Extensions were completed to Dillon and Keystone by the end of 1882 to serve the Montezuma mining district.

The line included trestles, long wooden snow sheds, and snow fences on both sides of Boreas Pass. A large, stone engine house at the summit was 57' X 155' and featured a 49.5 foot diameter wrought iron turntable. The snow shed at the summit was 957-feet-long. The engine house burned in 1909 and the snow shed in 1934.

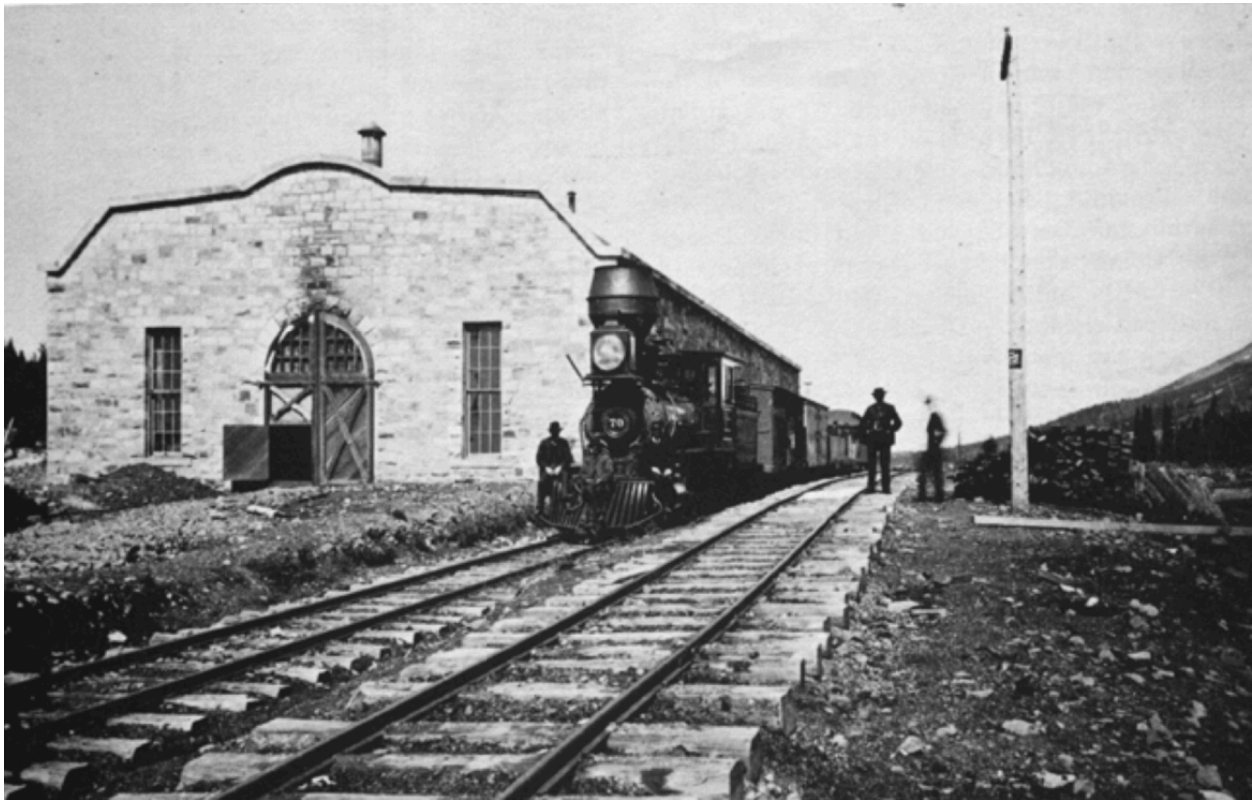


Figure III-6. When the Denver, South Park, and Pacific Railroad constructed a branch line over Boreas Pass to Breckenridge in 1880- 82, this impressive stone engine house with a turntable inside was erected at the summit. SOURCE: Chappell, Richardson, and Hauck, *The South Park Line*,

Leadville High Line

Relations between the Rio Grande and the Denver, South Park and Pacific under the joint operating agreement rapidly deteriorated. In 1880, Jay Gould acquired a controlling interest in the DSP&P, and, in 1881, the line was operated as the South Park Division of the Union Pacific Railroad. Dependence on the D&RG segment of track between Buena Vista and Leadville led to the South Park's 1883 decision to build its own line into the Cloud City. Rather than paralleling the D&RG line from Buena Vista, the new South Park linkage approached Leadville from the north, extending the line built over Boreas Pass to Breckenridge. The line stretched from Dickey (9,004 feet) southward over Fremont Pass (11,320 feet) and dropped down to Leadville (10,208 feet). The rationale for the selection of the High Line route remains unclear, although the Denver-Leadville distance was shorter over the High Line than via the Arkansas Valley. In addition, the DSP&P management may have been concerned that the D&RG could raise legal objections over South Park's use of the Buena Vista-Leadville right of way. M.C. Poor, historian of the DSP&P, could provide no definite answer to the perplexing question of why the South Park chose the more difficult and expensive High Line route over the Arkansas Valley alternative.⁵³

Construction of the South Park "High Line" extension to Leadville began in August 1883, with Carlisle and Corrigan of Pueblo the contractors for the project. The extension started from Dillon and followed Ten Mile Creek southward, recrossed the Continental Divide over Fremont Pass, and descended to Leadville. In addition to the difficulties of construction, the D&RG raised legal objections over the DSP&P's access to right of way along Ten Mile Creek. While the first South Park train arrived in Leadville in February 1884, severe winter weather, which severely damaged the newly-built line, and additional legal obstacles raised by the Rio Grande delayed the start of regular service over the route until September 1884.

The distance between Denver and Leadville over the South Park was shorter than that of the D&RG, but the Rio Grande route had more moderate grades and was easier to maintain in winter. The arrival of the South Park in Leadville on its own tracks was hailed by the local press. The Daily Herald concluded that the DSP&P arrival meant "competition in freight and passenger rates to Denver, and through Denver to all the east. It opens up a new territory to the trade and enterprise of this city, and sets the business of Leadville free from the chains which virtually bound it to one road in the past."

According to railroad historian Robert W. Richardson, the High Line district of the DSP&P required the most motive power and crews of any of the railroad's districts, due to the operating problems attendant to the heavy snow and winds, high altitudes, and steep mountain passes.⁵⁶ Long wooden snow sheds were constructed to shelter the most vulnerable sections of the line and large rotary plows were used in efforts to keep the line open.

Operations and Facilities

Mining-related traffic was the most important element of early Denver, South Park and Pacific operations. Mining equipment and supplies and ore were hauled to and from Leadville, first via the wagon road connection, later on the joint track with the D&RG, and finally over the Leadville High Line. Other metallic mining areas, such as the London Mine and Horseshoe District west of Fairplay, were also served by the DSP&P and branches. Coal from the King and Lechner mines near Como was shipped to other points and also provided fuel for the line's steam-powered locomotives.

The DSP&P was also important to Park County's agricultural interests. Hay and livestock from local ranches were hauled in DSP&P trains. Sheep were hauled to grazing lands near Gunnison in the summer and transported in the fall to Denver, where they were transshipped to trains bound for eastern Colorado. Sheep and cattle from Park County ranches were shipped to Leadville, Denver, and eastern markets for processing. Passenger trains provided links between Denver and the mountain towns of the central Rockies.⁵⁷

Tourism also emerged as an important DSP&P undertaking. Railroad historian M.C. Poor wrote that "to the tourist, no more beautiful pictures of glorious mountain scenery were ever framed by a passenger coach window" than those of the South Park line.

Croft in his 1881 Grip-Sack Guide noted the hunting and fishing opportunities of South Park: "Game such as deer, elk, bear, mountain lion, grouse, and occasionally mountain sheep, are plentiful in the park and vicinity, while the streams are stocked with an abundance of the finest mountain trout."⁵⁸ The railroad's passenger department issued pamphlets describing the line's "unsurpassed scenery" to encourage tourist travel.

The most important DSP&P facilities in Park County were located at Como (milepost 88.3 from Denver, elevation 9,796 feet). The construction of the Breckenridge extension insured that Como would become an important division point for the DSP&P. Foundations for a roundhouse and locomotive shop were begun there on 28 April 1881. Railroad facilities in the town included a depot (20' X 60' with two additions), a twelve-stall stone and wood roundhouse with a fifty foot turntable, machine and car shops, a wooden water tank, coal bins, and the two-story, brick Pacific Hotel. Como was a company town with the sale of town lots limited to railroad employees. By the late 1880s, ten to twenty-six trains passed through Como each day. Margaret Coel described railroad activity in the town:

There was no shortage of work for railroaders in Como. Freight trains hauled the drills, rigs, shovels, picks, black powder, hoists, pumps, wire ropes, and stationary engines to the mining districts and carried the ore from the mines to smelters in Leadville and Denver. Long coal trains rumbled out of Como every day, hauling the coal needed to keep the steam engines running at the mines and to supply the DSP&P locomotives. . . . Merchandise trains carried the flour, fruits, vegetables, calico, pots and pans, and furniture needed by the miners and their families.

As the DSP&P mainline was built across Park County, a number of support facilities were erected at points along the way from northeast to southwest. Estabrook (milepost 51.6 from Denver, elevation 7,565 feet), Bailey (milepost 56.2), and Shawnee (milepost 58.9, also known as Slaght's) each had combination frame depots/living quarters and siding tracks. Maddox, just east of Shawnee, featured a 48-car siding for loading ice from the Maddox Ice Company's lake. Grant (milepost 66.1, elevation 8,576 feet) once housed the most important DSP&P facilities in this section of the county, including a frame depot, living quarters, section house, and telegraph office, a large wood water tank, stock pens, siding track, and a frame roundhouse. The roundhouse was destroyed in a December 1880 fire. Webster (milepost 69.4, elevation 9,011 feet) possessed a frame depot/living quarters, wood water tank, and siding track.

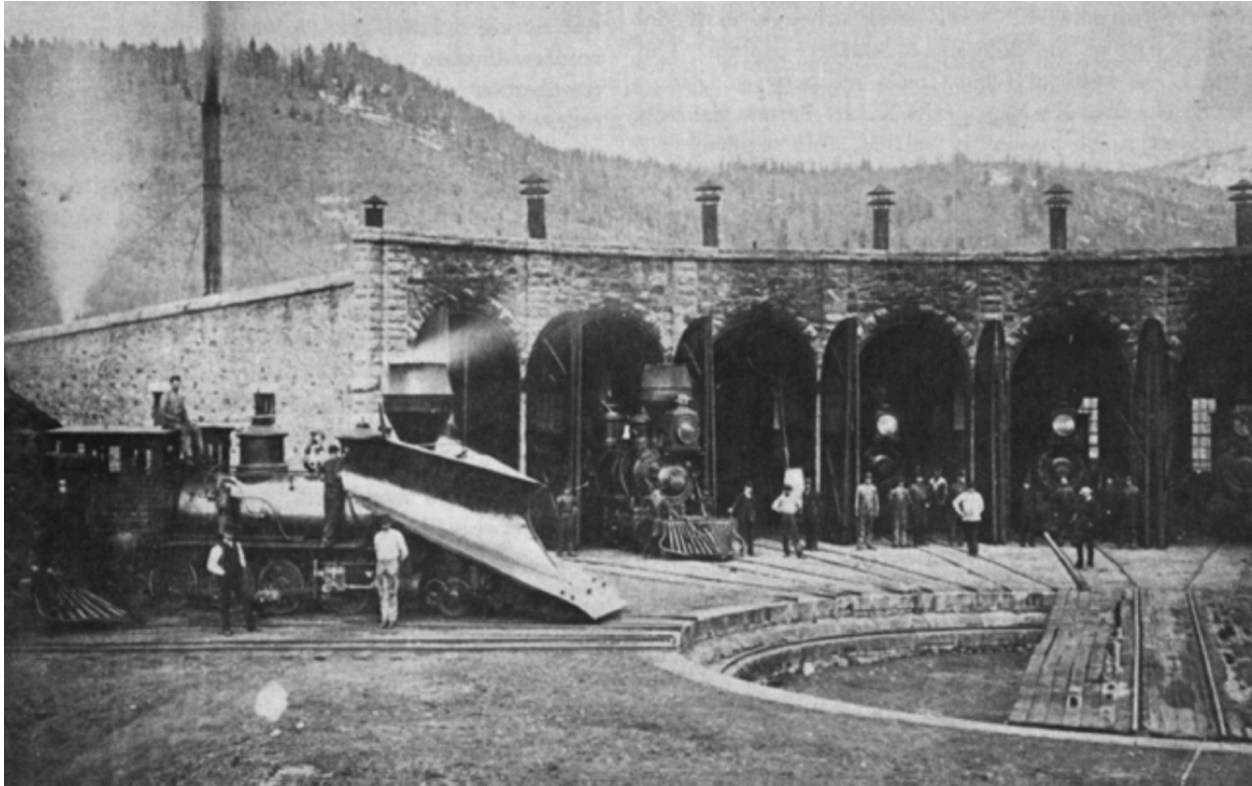


Figure III-7. The most extensive DSP&P facilities in Park County were located in Como and included a stone and wood roundhouse with a turntable. Note the locomotive on the left equipped with a wedge snow plow. SOURCE: Poor, Denver, South Park and Pacific.

Kenosha (milepost 76.2 from Denver), at 9,991 feet at the summit of Kenosha Pass, had a frame depot (16' X 24' with an addition), a small frame car repair shop (12' X 28'), and siding tracks. A combination frame depot and living quarters was built at Jefferson (milepost 81.1, elevation 9,508 feet), as well as a coal bin, a wooden water tank, a two-story frame section house, stock pens, siding tracks, and a wye.⁶¹ A small, frame depot was located at Red Hill (milepost 93.6, elevation 9,542), while Hay Ranch (milepost 97.7, elevation 9,326) had a frame section house.

Garo (milepost 104.6, elevation 9,184) was the junction point for the Fairplay branch line of the DSP&P. The settlement possessed a frame depot and living quarters, a two-story frame section house, coal bins, a wooden water tank, stock pens, a wye, and siding tracks. Platte River (milepost 113.5, elevation 8,944 feet) was located about nine miles south of Garo, not far from the site of the Salt Works, and featured a combination depot/living quarters, a wooden water tank, a frame section and bunk house, a coal bin, stock pens, and siding tracks. Hill Top (milepost 119.8, elevation 9,482), at the summit of Trout Creek Pass, was the last DSP&P station in South Park. Known also as Bath, Summit, and Trout Creek Pass, the station had a frame depot/living quarters/section house, three bunk houses, a wye, and siding tracks. The overpass for the Colorado Midland track was located just east of this station at milepost 119.