

Denver & Rio Grande Western Railway

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Railroads first reached Denver, Colorado in 1870 as standard gauge transcontinental lines heading west. General William Jackson Palmer saw the need for lines running north-south in Colorado through the Rocky Mountains (with their vast rich mineral deposits) to move freight and passengers to the transcontinental lines in Denver. He set up the Denver & Rio Grande Railway in 1871 to build narrow gauge (3 feet) lines south from Denver into the Rocky Mountains to tap into this mineral wealth. Eventually some 3,600 miles of 3 foot narrow gauge lines were built. The line to Silverton (495 miles from Denver (5240 feet)) started in 1876. The line reached Alamosa (250 miles) in 1878, Chama (342 miles (7863 feet)) in early 1881 (reaching 10,015 feet on the way), Durango in August 1881 (6505 feet) and Silverton in July 1882 (9318 feet). The Durango to Farmington (New Mexico) branch came later.

The railroad later became the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad with extensions west of Denver up the East Face of the Rockies being converted to standard gauge with the opening in 1927 of the Moffat Tunnel (6.25 miles long peaking at 9250 feet). In recent years the D&RGWR became part of the Union Pacific Line linking Chicago, Denver, Salt Lake City and San Francisco (currently served by the daily California Zephyr passenger service run by Amtrak). 63 miles of the line around Chama survive as the Cumbres & Toltec with one steam passenger train daily in each direction which reaches 10,015 feet in the Cumbres Pass. The 45 miles from Durango to Silverton now form the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad with two steam passenger trains daily up to Silverton and two back down after lunch to Durango.

The 7mm Scale layout portrays the service from Denver to Durango and onto Silverton, plus the Durango to Farmington Branch as a Colorado Southern operation for variety. The time period is 1900 to 1905 at the peak of goods transportation. The model scene is primarily set at Durango and its precious metals (chiefly silver) smelter. The model layout has about a scale mile of track with 29 switches and operates under dual cab control. The Durango train schedule is set out overleaf.

Trains featured are the Durango/Denver Mails (including a Denver Federal Mint bullion car to carry silver to Denver), the Durango/Silverton Accommodations and the Durango/Farmington Flyers. In between are way freights to and from Alamosa and Chama, ores from Silverton, coal for the smelter and locomotives from the Durango City Coal Mine at Carbon Junction, lumber from the Posta forests for the Durango Sawmills with timber exports in all directions, livestock movements (sheep from Silverton, beef from Farmington, plus pigs from Iowa transferred at Denver to the narrow gauge – all destined for Durango's slaughterhouse), imports of beer from Denver, a host of domestic and industrial goods, and railroad maintenance work.

Construction of layout buildings has started (a switcher shop, Denver Union signal tower and part of the smelter are already done). Track ballasting will start shortly.

Please feel free to give advice and ask questions – your interest will be appreciated.

Thank you.

(John Feltham (Gosport American Model Railroad Group))