

Silverton Train / Red Mountain Train / Rainbow Route

When did the FIRST railroad arrive in Silverton?

Where did it come from? 1881, Denver & Rio Grande from Durango.

How many narrow-gauge railroads ran OUT of Silverton?

When? Where did they go? What distance?

1. D&RG. to Durango. 1881. 45.2 mi.
2. SRR. Silverton Railroad over Red Mtn to Ouray's Albany Mill. 1887. 21.5 mi.
3. SN. Silverton Northern. Animas Forks. 1889. 13.8 mi.
4. SG&N. Silverton, Gladstone & Northerly. 1899. 7.5 mi.

What were the other 2 'feeder' connecting railroads?

1. 1D&RGW. Denver & Rio Grande Western. Montrose-Ridgway-Ouray. From Ridgway, it connected to the D&RGS that looped around to end up in Durango. 35.9 mi. 1887.
2. D&RGS. Denver & Rio Grande Southern, from Ridgway, southwest past Telluride via Lizard Head Pass, and Rico; then southeast through Mancos to Durango, where it connected to the D&RG. 161.8 mi. Completed (working from both ends) in 1889.

Which Line was called the Rainbow Route? The Silverton Railroad.

Where did the name come from?

1. Supposedly coined by Daniel Day, Mears' friend and owner of one of Ouray's two newspapers.
2. Originated from a discussion about fishing for rainbow trout, which were plentiful in some mountain streams.
3. A more romantic version says the railroad arched across the steep Red Mountain Divide like a rainbow in the sky as it reached forward to a pot of gold.

What counties (territories) were served by the narrow-gauge lines (and later, the Skyway)

1. La Plata
2. San Juan
3. Ouray
4. San Miguel
5. Montezuma
6. Dolores

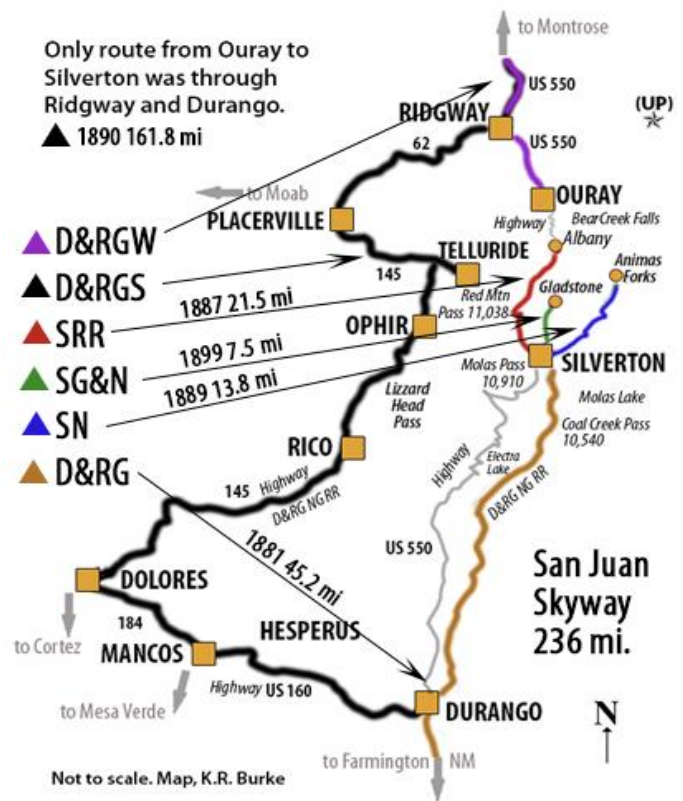
Which of the four narrow gauge lines was also called the Red Mountain Railroad? And why?

SRR. Because it ran over Red Mountain Pass and through the Red Mountain mining district. The name was never official.

What was the Red Mountain Mining District, and why was it important?

While it boomed (appx.1880-1893), it was one of the richest and most productive in the world, second only to Leadville in Colorado. It produced over 30 million in silver, lead, zinc, copper and gold (about a quarter billion in today's dollars), shipping 20,000-25,000 tons of ore out and 15,000 tons of coal and materials into the mines.

Did it run year 'round? No. Due to harsh winters, did not operate from February to mid-May.



Where was the Red Mountain Mining District and how big was it?

Between Silverton and Ouray, encompassing Red Mountain Pass. Approximately 8 square miles. Over 40 mines and up to 10,000 people living and working there at its peak. The district included 7 mining towns: Albany, Guston, Ironton, and Red Mountain Town (Rogersville) in Ouray County; Sweetville, Chattanooga and Red Mountain City (Congress) in San Juan County. Towns followed the ore strikes and were often temporary. Sprang up, then moved, everything hauled by wagons. See map.

What and where is Red Mountain? How does it get its name?

There are 3 Red Mountains, all south of Ouray. #1, at 12,900 ft., is the location of Red Mountain Town. Numbers 2 and 3 are over 12,000 ft. All get their name from reddish iron ore on the surface.

What is Narrow Gauge?

The term refers to width of the railroad tracks. Standard gauge is 4.8 ½ feet wide. Narrow gauge is only 3' wide to accommodate tight curves, narrow passages, and steep inclines, normally no more than 4%, but the SRR had to negotiate some at over 5%,

Who built the 4 Narrow Gauge railroads connected to Silverton?

Otto Mears, "Pathfinder of the San Juans," built the SRR and SN. He eventually leased, then bought, the SG&N (built by the Gold King Mine). Mears had a financial and operational interest in all 6 of the railroads which connected directly, or indirectly, with Silverton.

What were the 3 primary challenges of building the SRR and who solved them?

Charles W. Gibbs, experienced railroad engineer, designed three ingenious solutions to navigate steep, mountainous terrain and turn trains where there were no flat areas to accommodate them.

The Chattooga Loop – steep inclines and curves over 30 deg. near town of Chattanooga. 10,262 ft

Red Mountain Wye – depot, locomotive & 2 cars in a wye at Red Mountain Town at 10,910 ft.

Corkscrew Gulch – 50' covered turntable on main track at Corkscrew Gulch. 5% grade, 12,244 ft.

Is the Rainbow Route the same thing as the Million Dollar Highway?

The Million Dollar Highway is a paved highway between Ouray and Durango. It includes the SRR route plus the section between Ouray and Ironton that never had rails, only a wagon road.

Who built the Million Dollar Highway? What is it? When was it built?

CDOT. The Colorado Department of Transportation built the paved highway in the 1920s. It encompasses the roadbed of the Silverton Railroad and Otto Mears' original wagon toll road connecting Ouray and Silverton. Continuing south to Durango, the highway parallels the old D&RG south, which is now the D&SNG Durango & Silverton NG RR tourist train.

Why was it called the Million Dollar Highway?

One legend states that the road was built using a million dollars' worth of gold and silver tailings. Another story is that the nickname originates from an exhausted traveler who proclaimed: "I would not travel that road again for a million dollars!" The true reason is probably because it cost a Million Dollars to build.

Is the Million Dollar Highway (with Rainbow Route) the same thing as the San Juan Skyway?

No. But it is a section of it. The San Juan Skyway Scenic and Historic Byway is a 236-mile All-American Road, National Forest Scenic Byway, and Colorado Scenic and Historic Byway located in Dolores, La Plata, Montezuma, San Juan, and San Miguel counties, Colorado. (See map.)

Is the Million Dollar Highway (with Rainbow Route) the same thing as the Alpine Loop?

No. The Alpine Loop is 63 mi of unpaved 4x drives connecting Ouray, Silverton, and Lake City.