

Denver & Rio Grande Western Railway

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This On30 narrow gauge layout (American 'O' Scale (1:48) running on 16.5 mm narrow gauge track) portrays the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railway's Three Foot Gauge service in Colorado from Denver to Durango (450 miles) then on to Silverton (another 45 miles leading to connection with the Silverton Northern). The layout's operations also incorporate those on the branch line from Durango to Farmington in New Mexico (but run here as a Colorado & Southern line for variety) and on the Rio Grande Southern line between Durango and Ridgway. The layout thus represents four of the railroads and a considerable proportion of the Three Foot Gauge track mileage that once existed at high altitudes (up to 10,000 feet plus) in the Rocky Mountains lying within the American states of Colorado and New Mexico.

The layout is centred on Durango and the American Smelting & Reduction Company ore smelter around the year 1905 at the peak of freight and ore transportation for the precious metals (mainly silver) mining industry in central Colorado.

The layout has 1.85 scale miles of track and is electrically divided into 59 sections. There are 39 turnouts ('points') and a scale 48 foot diameter turntable. One turnout is for future access to similar narrow gauge layouts. A circuit of the layout is 22 feet long, and 5 circuits make a scale mile (110 feet). Electric Dual Cab Control enables any two engines to be run simultaneously (but not on the same electrical section).

The layout shown today features metallic ores brought down from the Silverton area for smelting at Durango, coal for the smelter brought from the Durango City Coal Mine, lumber hauled from the Posta forests for the Durango Sawmills, livestock movements (sheep from Silverton, beef cattle and horses from Farmington) and the general traffic arising from Denver, Farmington and the Rio Grande Southern line.

The layout buildings around Durango (Smelter, Station, Freight Depot, Engine House and Coaling Tower) have been modelled on the Denver & Rio Grande originals (some of which have been demolished, altered or rebuilt over the years since 1905).

The rolling stock is mostly of the period but with livery variations. Some D&RGW passenger cars (and Engine 138) have the later 'Bumblebee' (Grande Gold) livery – this livery continues in use today on the Durango & Silverton (a successor line to the D&RGW). Most of the other engines are in Vanderbilt (black) livery and some have silver-grey smokeboxes and chimneys. All the engines are equipped with working headlights. Passenger cars, baggage cars and most cabooses have internal lights.

The layout's all-steam (and mainly coal-fired) Engine Register now totals 18; it comprises two Porter 0-4-0 Switchers, a Porter 0-4-2 wood-fired Switcher, a 2-4-0 Forney with 2 tenders, eleven 2-6-0 Rogers Moguls with tenders, a wood-fired 4-4-0 Baldwin American with tender, plus the Colorado Mining Company's 28 Ton Climax and 14 Ton wood-fired Shay – the latter two are geared articulated tank engines specifically designed for haulage along temporary lightweight tracks such as those typically laid in mining and forestry locations.

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Since the last Group Show in August 2012, the Colorado & Southern has built a long range Water Tender (25EW) for use with the railroad's 2-4-0 Forney (25). This additional tender is in use on the layout today attached to the rear of the Forney's normal tender enabling that engine to travel greater distances between water refilling stops. The Silverton Northern has built 2 ore cars (94 and 95), each of 14 tons capacity, for conveying additional ore from the Silverton mines to the Durango smelter to supplement the smelter's own existing ore hopper cars and thus allow an increase in the production of silver ingots for despatch to the Denver Federal Mint.

Also running on the layout today are the Rio Grande Southern 'Galloping Geese' (motor cars with articulated trailers converted to run on railroad tracks) together with the Colorado & Southern engine and stock collection (plus Climax and Shay logging engines and equipment) belonging to Gosport Group Member Bryan Spencer. Do watch out for these welcome visitors taking their turn at running on the layout.

Bryan is currently building his own narrow gauge layout inspired by the Colorado & Southern and including logging and coal mining activities. On completion his layout will appear at Gosport Group Shows together with a trestle bridge to link his layout to this one. Bryan and I look forward to the day soon when trains will pass over the trestle on their journeys between our two layouts.

This conveniently brings us round to opportunities today to help run the layout by joining in and doing some of the engine driving yourself. If you are interested in driving today – just ask! Please note that children (at the discretion of the Engineer Staff) may drive an engine provided that they are accompanied by an adult or adults who can supervise them throughout their driving session.

If you are new to model railways the Gosport American Model Railroad Group hopes that driving an engine here today will encourage you to take up railway modelling as a hobby - one from which you can derive much enjoyment as well as acquiring new friends and the skills for construction and operation of a layout of your own. If model railroading appeals to you then you are most welcome to come along and join us!

Bryan and I would like to thank you for not only coming to the Gosport American Model Railroad Group Show today but also for the interest you have shown in our joint American Narrow Gauge display. We are in the Group's 'O' Scale Narrow Gauge (On30) Section and our motto is 'Narrow of Gauge but not of Mind' so do please feel free to give advice and ask questions – your views will be appreciated.

John Feltham (Member of Gosport American Model Railroad Group and the British Region's Solent Sub-Division of the National Model Railroad Association (USA))