



RIO GRANDE

revisited

In and out of the mountains in 1965, it's uphill for D&RGW

BY DAVID P. MORGAN

Before the decline and fall of naïveté, and in a season when strong men were unembarrassed to admit of being possessed by vocations, a cavalry veteran wrote to his sweetheart about a utopian vision: “I had a dream last evening while sitting in the gloaming at the car window. I mean a wide-awake dream. Shall I tell it to you? I thought how fine it would be to have a little railroad a few hundred miles in length, all under one’s control with one’s friends. . . .” He deemed his railroad “usefulness on a large scale,” run by profit-sharing employees to whom the idea of a strike would never occur, and he promised to roam it with his bride in a private car built for two.

Insofar as any dream can be realized, this one was, and it exists today as the 2,132-mile Denver & Rio Grande Western. If *Zephyr*-fast freight, continuous dividends, dome seats for passengers, and an ability to convert more than 20 cents out of each revenue dollar into pre-tax net can be equated with ideal railroad-ing, then D&RGW has arrived. Three generations of managers were required to create this utopia, however, and some fancy foot-work will be needed in our time to preserve it.

The fact that Rio Grande has survived at all as a solvent and separate entity may be attributed to successive and often painful metamorphoses. Gen. William Jackson Palmer, our idealistic letter writer, made the first two basic mistakes himself in 1870 before a mile of track had been laid. He selected the wrong gauge, 36 inches, and mapped his line south from Denver toward the wrong destination: Mexico. The narrow gauge, chosen after an inspection of the 23½-inch Festiniog Railway in Wales, was cheap to build but ultimately expensive to operate and isolated the road from carload interchange. So far as direction went, Palmer set out to connect rather than compete with the transcontinentals, but that aim became academic when the Santa Fe beat him to Raton Pass, thereby barring the gateway to the Southwest.

So off to the mining camps steamed the 4-4-0s and 2-8-0s, probing the most tortuous canyons and highest passes in search of silver and gold, charging all that the traffic would bear, and — in the absence of competition more effective than stagecoach and oxen team — grossing revenues sufficient to expand the system to 1,644 route-miles and into Salt Lake City and Ogden, Utah, by 1883.

Even when the early errors of construction were corrected by standard-gauging the main line and relocating it over Tennessee Pass instead of Marshall, the Rio Grande had long since lost its grasp on utopia. Its circuitous, harshly profiled path through the Rockies confined it to being a local road rather than a true transcontinental link (as late as the 1920s overhead business received from and delivered to connections would amount to less than 5 percent of D&RGW tonnage), and overexpansion made it easy prey for outside raiders.

ENTER GOULD AND MOFFAT

As the 20th century dawned, another man dreamed of an ideal railroad, but instead of a few hundred miles his would stretch almost 14,000 — from the Atlantic at Baltimore to the Pacific at San Francisco. George Gould dreamed of a true transcontinental in which the Rio Grande would serve not only as a link across the mountains of Colorado and Utah but also as a bankroll to pay for rails beyond to the Sierra and down the Feather River Canyon into northern California.

“No railway combination in the United States is so loaded with possibilities. . . . Here is material for dreams,” exclaimed Frank Spearman in 1904 about Gould’s maneuvers. Who then — Spearman the writer or Gould the expansionist — could have foreseen the panic of 1907 or Western Pacific’s twice-budgeted construction costs or the opening of the Panama Canal or World War I?

In retrospect it is clear that the ambitions of absentee ownership were dispatching Rio Grande straight down the drain. The money spent on WP would unglue D&RGW’s treasury, postpone internal betterments, and render the road a jointly owned stepchild of Missouri Pacific and the very line D&RGW’s credit had been ruined to build, Western Pacific. Surely the only way to reconcile history in hindsight is to observe that minus Gould’s dream, D&RGW in 1965 would be without a valuable interchange in Salt Lake City and thus left with only Southern Pacific in Ogden as a gateway to and from the Bay Area.

Now bring to bear a third and final forma-

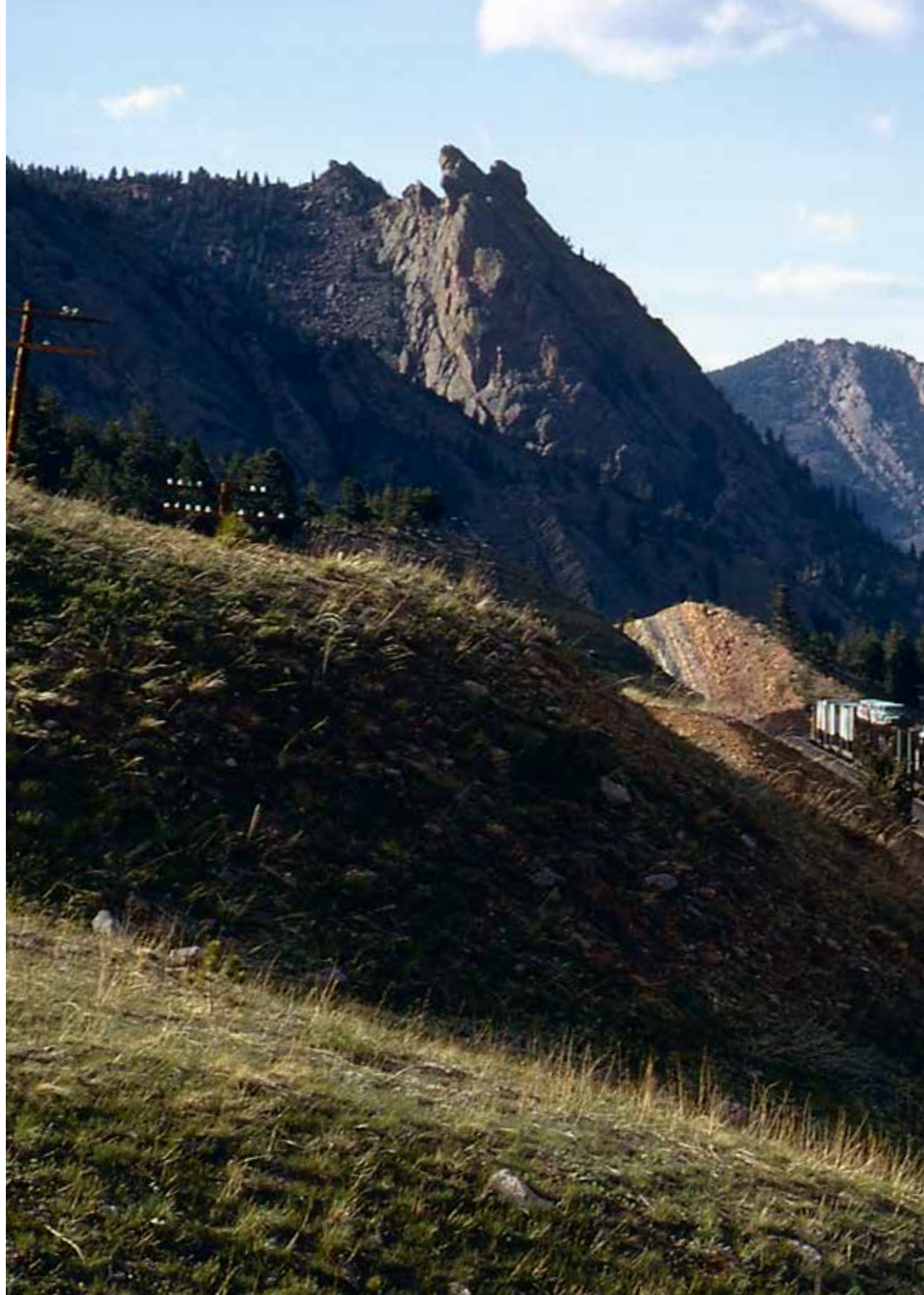
New GP30’s roll freight through a typical Rio Grande setting in artwork by George A. Gloff, who was TRAINS’ art director in 1965.





On the narrow gauge, a K-37 Mikado approaches Carbon Junction, just south of Durango, Colo., with a freight for Chama, N.Mex., in summer 1967. Craig Willett

tive influence upon Rio Grande: the dreamer who wired a friend in 1902, “I have decided to build a steam railroad from Denver to Salt Lake City,” and soon thereafter muttered, “By God, the road will be built, if I have to go out and drive spikes myself.” Rio Grande resisted its savior with all its might. When David H. Moffat was D&RG’s president after Palmer, he urged a frontal assault on the Rocky



Mountains west of Denver. Ignored, yet unable to contain his ambition, Moffat built his own line — not to Salt Lake as he planned, but at least deep into the consciousness of Gould and Union Pacific’s E. H. Harriman and, most important, of Denver. Moffat died in 1911, out of health and money if not spirit. But in death he won out. For Denver and Colorado got caught up in the dream, too, and public funds were secured for Moffat Tunnel, the completion of which in 1928 at once relieved Moffat’s Denver & Salt Lake from its economically prohibitive Rollins Pass cross-

ing of the Continental Divide and made of the moribund D&SL a genuine threat to D&RGW.

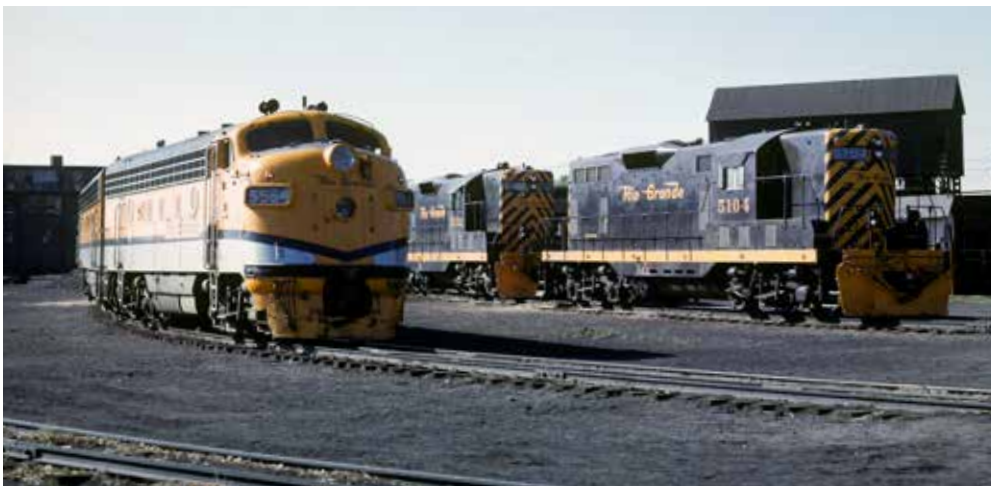
Never mind that what followed cost Rio Grande its solvency. Simply concede that construction of the Dotsero Cutoff and purchase of D&SL, thereby placing Denver on a transcon main, was inexorable. “By God, the road will be built,” Moffat had said, and when the Cutoff opened on June 16, 1934, it was.

RECIPE FOR A COMEBACK

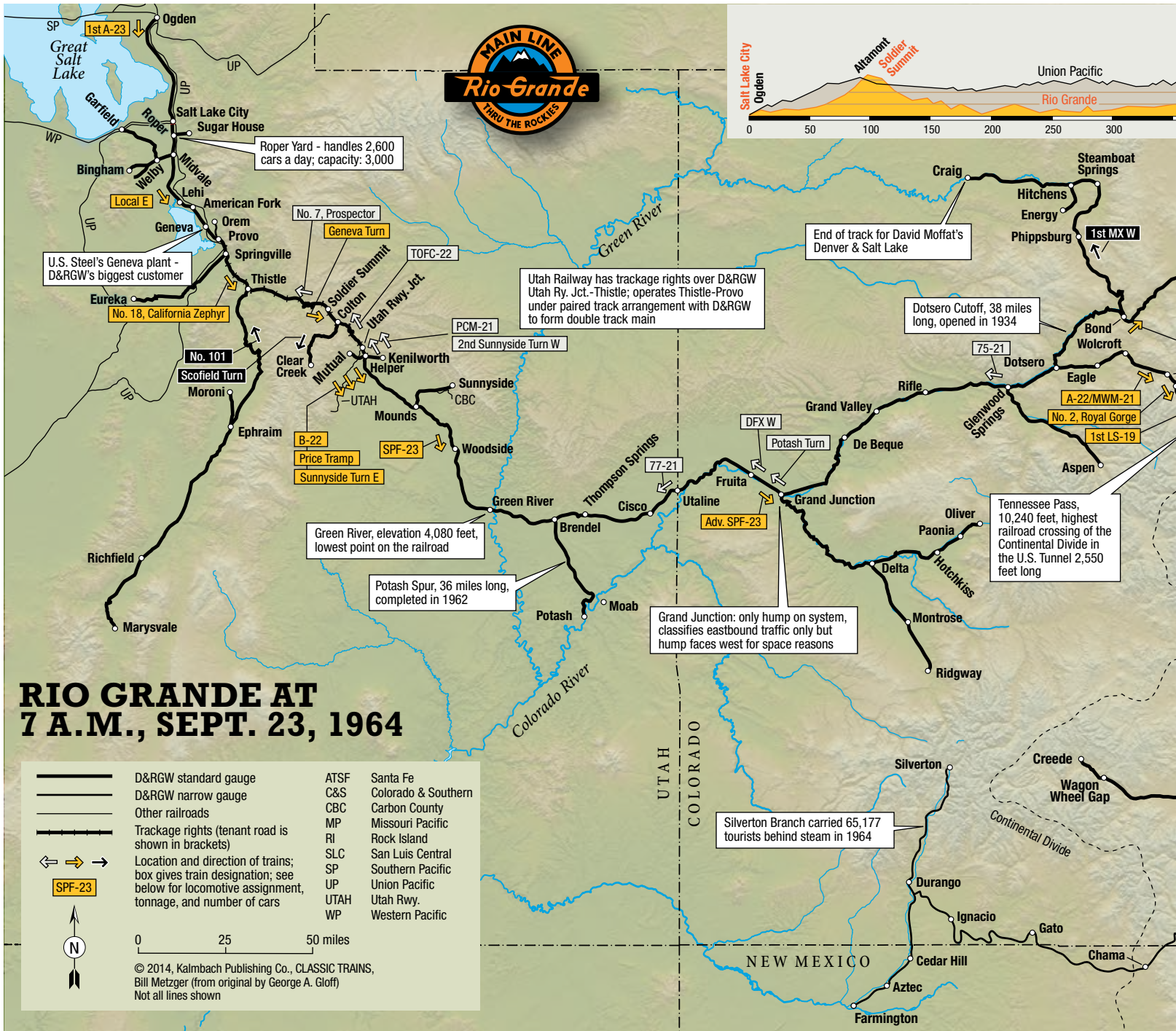
Witness now the birth of Rio Grande as we know it. What was the substance of its



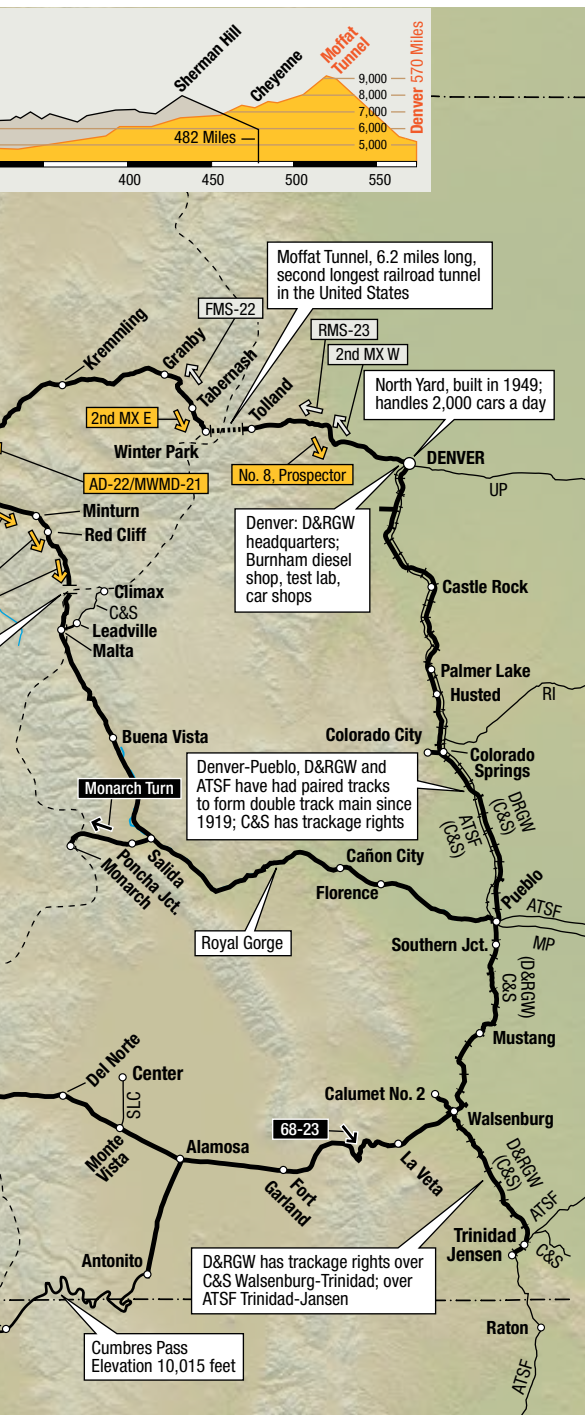
Two GP35's usher one of Rio Grande's characteristically short freights, mostly piggyback and auto-rack cars, down the Front Range of the Rockies in May 1967. The train is passing the siding at Plainview, 20 miles west of Denver. K. C. Crist



At Alamosa, the eastern limit of D&RGW's narrow-gauge system after 1951, F7's and GP7's stand on dual-gauge track in May '63. Three-rail track extended down to Antonito, site of the famous END OF STANDARD GAUGE sign. Alvin Schultze, Dave Oroszi coll.



Main Lines: Eastward	1st A-23 (called to depart 7:30 a.m.) 5912, 5901, 5308 81 loads, 49 empties – 7,782 tons	No. 18, California Zephyr 5544, 5543, 5532, 5531 13 cars	B-22 5644, 5643, 5682, 5692, 5562 60 loads, 4 empties – 3,830 tons	Sunnyside Turn E (called to dep. 8 a.m.) 5714, 5633, 5632, 5732 4 loads, 39 empties – 1,681 tons	Adv. SPF-23 5554, 5553, 5572, 5612 46 loads, 6 empties – 3,541 tons
	Local E 5724, 5604, 5664 21 loads, 61 empties – 3,352 tons	Geneva Turn 5564, 5582, 5561 83 empties – 2,158 tons	Price Tramp (called to depart 7:30 a.m.) 5301, 5304 13 empties – 324 tons	SPF-23 3001, 3002, 3019, 3003 26 loads, 11 empties – 2,275 tons	AD-22/MWMD-21 3013, 3011, 3012, 3009 24 loads, 13 empties – 1,917 tons
Main Lines: Westward	No. 7, Prospector 5481, 5482, 5583, 5571 7 cars	PCM-21 5741, 5742, 5722, 5743, 5744 58 loads, 15 empties – 3,874 tons	77-21 3007, 3032, 3033, 3034 72 loads, 14 empties – 4,841 tons	Potash Turn (called to depart 7 a.m.) 5641 16 loads, 1 empty – 1,727 tons	FMS-22 3015, 3010, 3008, 3016 42 loads, 3 empties – 1,776 tons
	TOFC-22 3026, 3025, 3030, 3031 34 loads, 7 empties – 2,479 tons	2nd Sunnyside Turn W 5621, 5732, 5652, 5714 56 loads, 1 empty – 6,517 tons	DFX W 5551, 5713, 5711, 5691 61 loads, 3 empties – 5,627 tons	75-21 3014, 3027, 3028, 3036 61 loads, 7 empties – 3,645 tons	RMS-23 3037, 3035, 3038 19 loads, 11 empties – 1,844 tons
Branches	No. 101 5313 21 loads, 9 empties – 1,798 tons	Scofield Turn 5312 15 empties – 449 tons	Monarch Turn 5934 13 empties – 349 tons	1st MX W 5684, 5683, 5682, 5681 1 load, 61 empties – 1,772 tons	68-23 5591, 5592, 5584, 5613, 5634 42 loads, 15 empties – 3,070 tons



A-22/MWM-21 3020, 5703, 3018, 3017 34 loads, 7 empties – 2,446 tons	1st LS-19 5761, 5762, 5723, 5763, 5764 78 loads, 15 empties – 5,639 tons
2nd MX E 5721, 5663, 5602, 5672, 5671 64 loads, 2 empties – 6,220 tons	No. 2, Royal Gorge 5581, 6012 3 cars
2nd MX W 5774, 5773, 5772, 5771 3 loads, 41 empties – 1,220 tons	No. 8, Prospector 5534, 5533, 5552, 5614 8 cars

reformation? Looking back today, Al Perlman (who resigned D&RGW's executive vice-presidency in 1954 for the top job at New York Central) cites four basics of comeback: abandonment of the narrow gauge; divorce from MP-WP control so as to insure free interchange with all other connections, notably SP at Ogden; physical modernization, mainly through dieselization to reduce helpers; and equalization with competition of UP.

Federal Judge J. Foster Symes, into whose court Rio Grande came seeking relief from its outlandish debt of \$177 million in 1935, first cleared the air. D&RGW had appeared in his chambers before, in the control of — the man on the bench noted — “a group of financial institutions in New York City, the officers of which have never willingly ventured west of the Hudson. . . .” Yes, he'd grant relief under Section 77 of the Bankruptcy Act — but control would go to a couple of local boys. Utah judge Wilson McCarthy and Denver banker Henry Swan were railroad neophytes compared with the names suggested from the ranks of co-owners MP and WP, not to mention D&RGW itself. But they were homegrown and amenable to the court's advice that they overhaul the road, keep it free of outside influence, and operate it in the interests of the mountain habitat it served.

The package with which they left court possessed 771 miles of narrow gauge, a string of unbroken deficits since 1930, a 77 percent operating ratio, all the deferred maintenance anyone could comprehend, and a failure to respond to the serum of the Dotsero Cutoff.

What McCarthy and Swan managed between 1935 and 1947, when Rio Grande was released from the court's custody as a free and healthy independent, is an oft-told tale of modern American railroading. One might say that they force-fed the patient with technology. Centralized Traffic Control . . . train radio . . . lab analysis of fuels and lubricants . . . off-track M/W equipment . . . piggyback — anything that could do the job better and/or cheaper. The new team was as scornful of sentiment as the road's fresh, lightning-lettered herald. Perhaps its immediate, wholehearted acceptance of EMD's original FT diesel symbolized its attitude as much as the adoption of any other single new tool.

World War II both hurried and hindered the Rio Grande's comeback. Swollen revenues lowered the operating ratio and paid for improvements. War also proved that technology could triumph over terrain; too much tonnage and too many troop trains were shoved into Moffat Tunnel and over Tennessee Pass and Soldier Summit to dispute the point. But war gave the narrow gauge a new lease on life and obscured a true assessment of the road's ability to hold its own against UP.

Judge Symes was still riding the bench on April 11, 1947, when Rio Grande emerged from bankruptcy, and Wilson McCarthy

switched hats from trustee to president. Year after year Symes had held off the regiments of lawyers whose clients would have throttled rehabilitation, settled more generously with creditors, and/or restored former absentee control. When he finally released the railroad, it was indeed light of debt, combined with Denver & Salt Lake, muscled with \$58 million worth of capital improvements, and free of outside control.

And since 1947? Rio Grande has been, in the words of Chairman John Evans, “free to pursue its own destiny.” That pursuit makes for one of the more intriguing stories in Western railroading today, for while Rio Grande's postwar conduct has been exemplary in the view of both customers and stockholders, the road now finds itself rolling into an era in which it may be difficult indeed to hold to General Palmer's dream of “a little railroad a few hundred miles in length.”

AYDELOTT'S CHALLENGE

Today the pressure for preserving Palmer's dream falls upon Gale Benton Aydelott. At 49 he's young as railroad presidents go, also tall, friendly, articulate, sure of himself and his property. The son of a Burlington official, “Gus” Aydelott joined D&RGW as a section-hand following graduation from the University of Illinois in 1936. He knows what it means to freeze in Tabernash (unofficial low: -66 degrees) and bake in Green River (official high: 112 degrees), and he is a fair hand at holding tonnage with a 26L automatic brake. By instinct and experience an operating man, he now faces non-mechanical complexities of the character that once tried the souls of Palmer and Moffat — namely, mergers.

The plant Gus Aydelott has presided over since the death of Judge McCarthy in 1956 is small, modern, mountainous, and bracketed by competition. When the new boss took over, Rio Grande was completing the rehabilitation program begun in 1935 by the trustees, and its economic shift from local carrier to transcon link was complete.

As of January 1, 1963, Rio Grande was operating 649 route-miles by signal indication without train orders (*i.e.*, CTC), enough to protect all heavy-density single track. CTC will be installed next between Salt Lake City and Ogden (which might be termed a heavy-duty branch since crews all operate to the SP interchange on a turnaround basis out of Roper Yard); and within two years between Salida and Pueblo (where improvements are tied in with a 20-mile line relocation occasioned by a new dam). Traffic is too light on D&RGW's ancestral main from Denver to Pueblo, between which Colorado & Southern and Santa Fe join in a paired-track contract, to justify CTC, at least in Rio Grande's eyes.

“The Grande” began dieselizing its yards in 1941, received its first FT road units the following year, and ushered out standard-gauge steam at the end of 1956. Attentive to



From F-unit cab or Vista-Dome, the *California Zephyr* (here climbing the Front Range) offered superb views of the Rockies. Jim McClellan



The diminutive Denver-Craig *Yampa Valley* — an Alco PA, a heavyweight baggage-RPO, and a dome-observation built for C&O's stillborn *Chessie* streamliner — is pictured in October 1965. Ron Burkhard

the informed enthusiasm of his test lab, Aydelott in 1961 imported three diesel-hydraulics from Germany, but the newcomers had trouble inhaling at 9,000 feet-plus and were sold to SP in '64 with no regrets. Electro-Motive now is threatening to monopolize a diesel roster it has dominated since NW2 No. 100 went to work in 1941. Locomotive replacement (using FT's as trade-ins) began in 1962-64 with delivery of 28 2,250 h.p. GP30's and 10 2,500 h.p. GP35's. This year 12 more GP35's will join the fleet and 10 SW1200's will begin supplanting a yard-unit fleet previously divided up among Alco, Baldwin, Fairbanks-Morse, and GE. Rio Grande doesn't believe in re-engining older power, finding it cheaper to junk the unit and buy new.

Exposition Flyer, San Juan, Scenic Limited, Shavano — Rio Grande has several famous if not classic passenger trains in its scrapbook of the past and not a few in its present, notably the domeliner *California Zephyr*, whose Chicago-Oakland passage D&RGW shares with Burlington Route and WP; and the summer-only, steam-powered *Silverton* on the narrow-gauge branch out of Durango, Colo., which the road gave up trying to abandon and began exploiting. The CZ pays its out-of-pocket expenses, is sold out in summer, and makes friends, some of whom are shippers. The *Silverton*, often running in two sections, carried 65,177 tourists in the 1964 summer season. This leaves: Nos. 7 and 8,

the Denver-Salt Lake City *Prospector* — plush, but with too many empty seats and berths, revenues spiked by mail and piggyback; Nos. 1 and 2, the Denver-Salida (since a cutback this year from Grand Junction) *Royal Gorge* — two Alco PA's, three cars (including an ex-*Chessie* dome), lots of scenery, no profit; Nos. 9 and 10, the Denver-Craig *Yampa Valley* — one PA, two cars, lots of scenery, no profit, but impossible to kill; and Nos. 3 and 4 — what's left of MP's *Colorado Eagle* from St. Louis (handled by D&RGW north of Pueblo), nicknamed the "Sparrow" since MP dropped the sleepers, lounge, and diner last year. Add excursions (for Air Force Academy football games, skiing at Winter Park, boat races down the Colorado River, rodeo at Kremmling, state fair at Pueblo) in ex-Northern Pacific coaches and you have a passenger business that, with mail and other allied revenues, grosses something over \$4 million a year, loses a bit over \$5 million under the ICC formula, and causes management no panic if no particular fiscal pleasure.

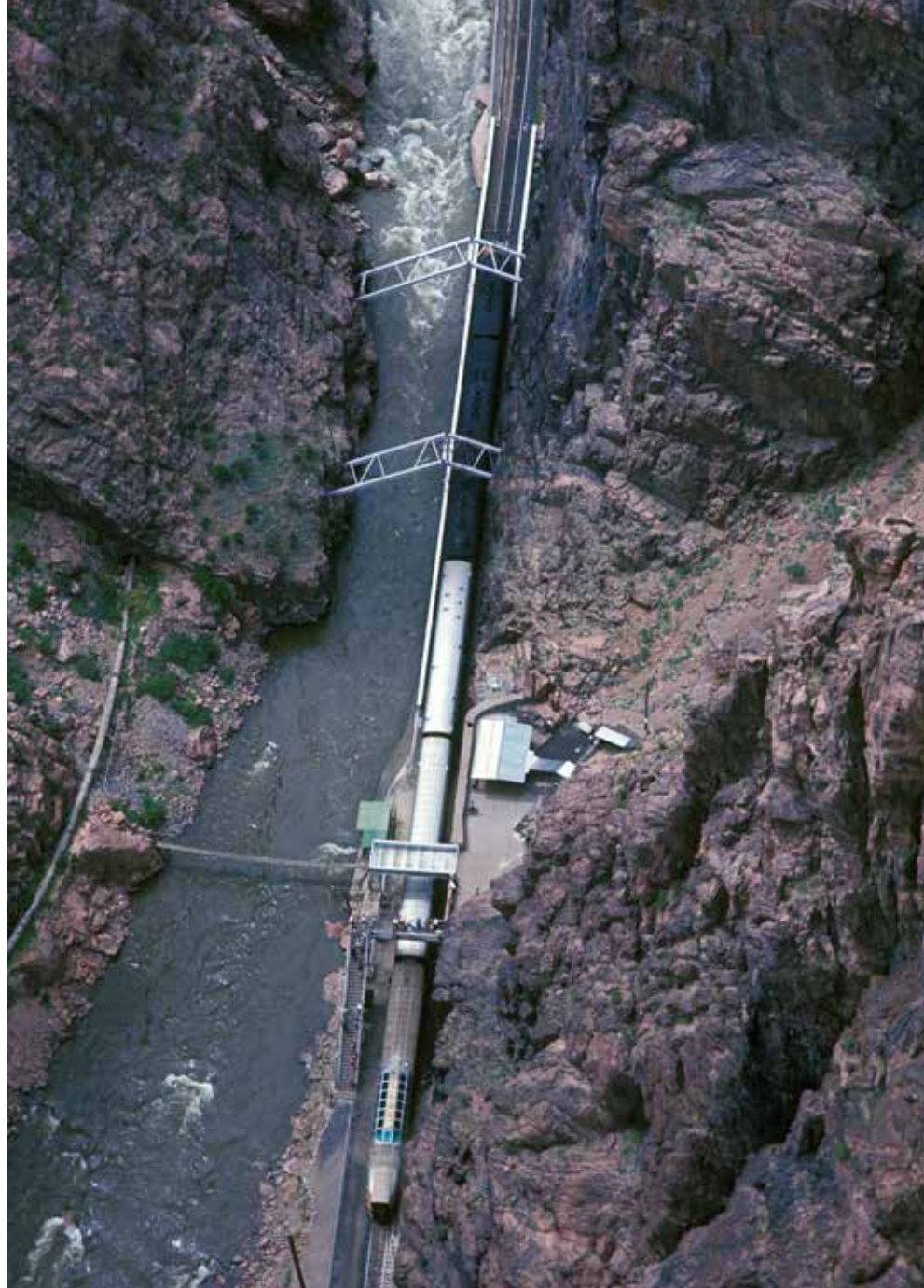
There are two fundamentals about the complexion of D&RGW's freight receipts and ton-miles: Bridge or overhead traffic accounts for more than a third of system tonnage and, because of its high-rated nature, approximately half of freight revenues; and bituminous coal is far and away the most important single commodity on the railroad, accounting for a third of all tonnage and 13

percent of freight revenues. D&RGW won and keeps the bridge business by solicitation (it maintains 30 off-line sales offices) and over-the-road performance. Being a small middle link in a transcon chain, Rio Grande has a relatively soft voice in ratemaking, a situation not much to its liking but beyond its control. As for coal, it has been part and parcel of Rio Grande since before the road existed. Coal is the reason more than half of D&RGW's standard-gauge freight cars are hoppers or gondolas. And coal is what feeds the furnaces at U.S. Steel's Geneva plant at Provo, Utah, a World War II installation that now easily ranks as the road's No. 1 customer, as well as at the older (Palmer founded it) Colorado Fuel & Iron complex in Pueblo. Add to that an expanding electric utility market. Someday Colorado-Utah coal mined on D&RGW rails may move overseas.

Any railroad is never finished in an engineering sense. True, Rio Grande can hardly alter the altitudes it attains (7,440 feet at Soldier Summit, 9,239 at the center of the Mof-fat Tunnel, and 10,240 atop Tennessee Pass) and its minimum mainline height clearance of 20 feet 5 inches is ample, so the road concentrates on reducing curvature and laying more 136-pound rail. Equipment naturally receives most of the "additions and betterments" budget, but as funds permit, the eternal rebuilding process goes on. In 1963, for example, the big job was done between Cottonwood and Agate, Utah, 3.6 miles; bulldozers eliminated 197 degrees of curvature and reduced overall length by 1,960 feet.

And strange as it may seem in our time, Rio Grande isn't through expanding its route-mileage. Vast mineral reserves are accessible to its property, and each one spells potential tonnage that is uneconomic for trucks. Consider Potash Spur. The name is deceiving, for this 36-mile heavy-duty line, completed in 1962, is almost as long as the Dotsero Cutoff and in places is much more scenic. It departs from the main line at Brendel, Utah, and runs south to the Colorado River, gouging through an 8,000-foot, 123-foot-deep cut and into a 7,059-foot, 23-foot-tall tunnel (on a 1.2 percent grade) on the last lap. The goal is Texas Gulf Sulphur's 2,788-foot mineshaft into the largest known potash field in the U.S. This fertilizer ingredient's market is as sure and expanding as the world population and its need for food. Initial mine production was estimated at 550,000 tons a year. Unfortunately, a construction accident in building the mine itself set back the target date for revenue rail potash movements from late 1962 to early 1965. The "spur," incidentally, cost \$7½ to 8 million, of which D&RGW paid outright only \$500,000 (for rail and ties). Texas Gulf Sulphur will get a \$10 refund per car shipped until the balance of the line's cost is retired.

To more people than Rio Grande cares to contemplate, its name spells not fast freight



The *Royal Gorge* pauses for passengers to take in the majesty of its namesake Colorado River canyon in June 1964. The Denver-Grand Junction train, whose three F's stand on the unusual Hanging Bridge, was soon cut back to Salida. Alvin Schultze, Dave Oroszi coll.

or even CZ but 264 miles of 3-foot gauge. This last legacy of General Palmer's era is steam-powered, indescribably scenic, rugged (24-degree curves, 4 percent grades, an elevation of 10,015 feet at Cumbres Pass), and — except for those *Silverton* tourists — hopelessly unprofitable. Two weeks might elapse between trains on the Alamosa-Durango line, yet major M/W expenditures are needed. Romance is expensive, too expensive, and the outlook for the narrow gauge exclusive of the *Silverton* Branch is bleak.

FREIGHTS ON ZEPHYR TIMES

Figures, facts, faces cannot reveal a railroad, much less a Rio Grande. One can ab-

sorb only so much from history, ICC reports, and Wall Street opinion. The men inside the converted department store that serves as D&RGW headquarters at 1531 Stout Street in Denver can bring the property into near focus, but the true image is west of the city, out in the Rockies and the Wasatch.

"Rio Grande?" exclaimed a Canadian railroader once. "That's the railroad where you reach for the throttle and the brake at the same time."

So climb aboard in the darkness before dawn on September 29, 1964, at North Yard, Denver, and ride west on an RMS (Rock Island Merchandise Special). Between the four GP30's on the point and the silver-and-gold



SD9 5313 and an F7B heel to a curve south of Littleton, Colo., under threatening skies in April 1966. This is the D&RGW-Santa Fe Joint Line, also used by the C&S. K. C. Crist

caboose of the symbol hotshot are 42 cars. They came into Denver from the east on the Burlington at 2:30 a.m. and on the Rock Island (which is a tenant at North Yard) at 2:35. North Yard received the CB&Q interchange at 3:55. By 4:30 the train has been tied together, inspected, given an air test, and is rolling. RMS is just 2,710 tons on the conductor's wheel report, less than half the units' rating, so we're OS'd without helpers and on almost passenger-train time.

RMS is bound for the Continental Divide on a grade of 2 percent, but the illusion is of the rails paralleling rather than approaching the frontal range of the Rockies until the train is almost 20 miles out of town. At Rocky Flats the line comes to grips with its opponent, describes a sort of elongated S-curve known as the "Big Ten" because of its 10-degree curvature, and bores upward. Speed on the Big Ten is the index of what a train will make on the balance of the climb to the summit; RMS rounds it at a steady 23 mph.

Speed . . . that's the controlling word on Rio Grande today. A year ago the road would have moved westbound freight via the Moffat in two 5,000-ton trains, each with helpers; today RMS will be one of five smaller, faster, helperless trains splitting up the same tonnage. (D&RGW's transportation ratio has not been materially affected by this switch to streetcar headway since the practice has reduced the deadheading required to equalize crews and power in the tonnage days. Anyway, the road has little choice. Not only piggyback and auto-racks require speed but even lumber now demands expedited handling.) Into the Moffat Tunnel at 6:25 a.m.; Rio Grande has almost doubled the elevation in 50 miles of almost continuous 2 percent and

in less than 2 hours, penetrating 30 tunnels in the process before the big bore itself. Dave Moffat has been vindicated once again.

Over the apex at 9,239 feet and then down the west slope rolls RMS, descending on 1 percent with the speedometer needle glued to whatever the timecard allows: 40, 55, or 60 mph. Now a sharp dispatcher and CTC resolve the old bugaboo of single iron by stitching together meets, mostly running meets, 1-2-3, just-like-that. RMS, holding the main, meets the *Prospector* at Winter Park — a running meet. . . . In the hole at Tabernash is LSD-25 (Lumber Special via Denver, out of Oregon on September 25) with four F7's on the point and a three-unit helper (Tabernash to Winter Park). . . . In the hole at Flat another brace of four F7's with an RBX (Red Ball Extra). . . . RMS is into Bond at 8:38, changes crew, departs at 8:42, meeting MWMD (Midwest Merchandiser) and overtaking an RBX. . . . At Lacy RMS takes siding for SPF-29 (SP Forwarder via Pueblo) and holds the main at Grand Valley to meet SPD-29 (SP Forwarder via Denver). Both hotshots are operating with GP30 and/or GP35 teams. . . . Yet another SPF is in Grand Junction, and the eastbound *California Zephyr* is just arriving as RMS stops at 12:17 p.m. for fuel and a crew change. Dead time: 8 minutes.

The morning of outrageously beautiful vistas — the frontal wall of the Rockies, James Peak, then Beyers, Gore, Red, and Glenwood canyons along the Colorado River — is as old as time. The morning of exploiting a 175-mile short cut to Utah — credit that to Dave Moffat. The morning of 6- to 8-inch slag ballast, 115-pound rail, and CTC is owed to Symes and McCarthy and Swan and Evans and Perlman. But the morning of



Five F7 cab and booster units hoist tonnage around Little Ten Curve, 19 miles west of Denver, in October 1964. Just ahead is the more dramatic Big Ten Curve. R. R. Malinoski, Frank & Todd Novak collection

highballing, GP30's, and light tonnage belongs to Gus Aydelott as does the resulting hike in gross ton-miles per freight train-hour.

West of Grand Junction the relentless race continues as 9,000 h.p. shoves the miles behind. It's down, down, down to Green River, Utah, which at 4,080 feet is the lowest point on the system (Pennsy tops the Alleghenies at a shade more than 2,200 feet above sea level), then the climb resumes. The ruling grade to Helper is 1 percent; thereafter to Soldier Summit atop the Wasatch the pitch tightens to a maximum of 2.4 percent. On the back of the assault out of Castle Gate on 8.3- and 9-degree curves the speed declines to 21, then 20½, finally 20 mph.

Then, descending on 2 percent double track and after describing two enormous horseshoe curves above Gilluly, comes the sight of sights: an "A" train (for Advance) is climbing the mountain, its 114 cars urged upward by four GP30/35's up front and two F's and an SD9 cut in on the rear.

On to Roper Yard, Salt Lake City. Arrival



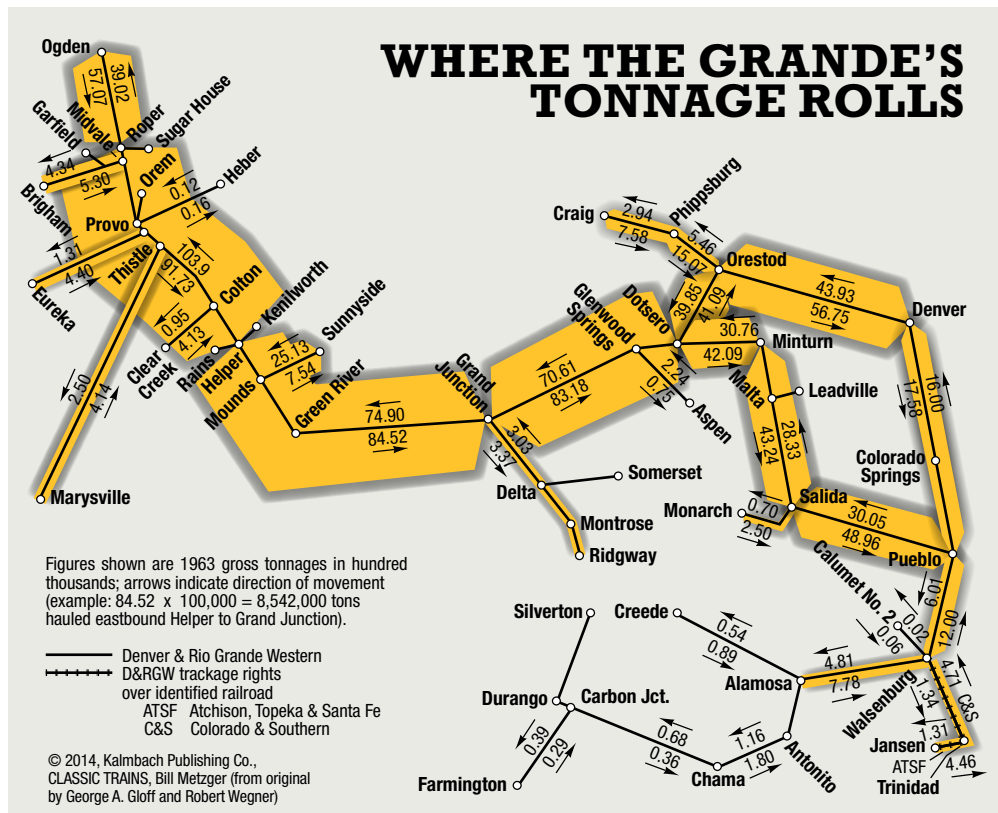
time: 7:35 p.m. In spite of a succession of slow orders in Utah because of flawed rails turned up by a Sperry rail inspection car, RMS has approximated the fastest freight schedule published by Rio Grande between Denver and Salt Lake City as recently as 1961; yet its performance constitutes a base rather than an optimum. The hottest of the hotshots today makes the same run in 13 hours 10 minutes, and you don't get there any faster in a CZ dome seat.

INDEPENDENT STREAK

So we ask you: Isn't it sufficient for Rio Grande to push tonnage through the mountains as fast as streamliners, hold its operating ratio in the 60s, maintain the property, mail regular dividend checks, and otherwise corporately and publicly behave itself today?

The dismaying answer is No.

To make money in our time D&RGW had to convert itself from a local road into a bridge line, which automatically made it dependent upon its connections. So far, so good in a status quo situation. But in 1965 every one of Rio Grande's connections is involved in a control or merger negotiation. First there were Santa Fe and SP jockeying for control of Western Pacific. Caught uncomfortably in





A quartet of GP30's and GP35's, paid for in part with FT trade-ins, lead a Denver-bound freight out of Plain siding in 1966. Steve Patterson

the middle, D&RGW wished aloud for WP's independence but sided with SP, its biggest single interchange. However, an ICC examiner has recommended that Santa Fe get WP. Next enter Rock Island, which Union Pacific wants. If successful, UP would thus lop off a valuable connection between Denver and the Missouri River. Finally, Rio Grande itself has been subject to outside scrutiny since Santa Fe approached its back door via WP, and both Burlington and UP have acquired D&RGW stock (9.2 percent in UP's case) for

“defensive” and “merely protective” reasons. Obviously the merger pendulum is swinging, gaining speed, and will not be stopped. Just as obviously Rio Grande must expand too or lose its hard-won, cherished independence. Gus Aydelott intends to trade iron horses along these lines: If UP asks for merger with Rock Island, then Rio Grande will ask as a condition to ICC approval that it be allowed to purchase the RI lines between Denver and the Missouri River (at Kansas City and Council Bluffs) that duplicate exist-

ing UP routes. And Aydelott will argue that he wants an access to the Missouri River for the same economic reasons that UP requires admittance via RI to such gateways as Chicago, the Twin Cities, and St. Louis. Nobody, least of all Aydelott, assumes that such a boost in D&RGW size to 3,000 miles could be accomplished without some financial stress. Purchase price would be a rub. And once bought, the RI lines would need new diesels and cars as well as an M/W overhaul to bring the lines up to D&RGW standards.



An F7 waits at Rocky siding, just below Little Ten Curve, for two of D&RGW's three Krauss-Maffei diesel-hydraulics to pass with a westbound in February 1962. Note the dynamometer car, a former World War II troop sleeper, behind the K-M's. K. C. Crist



SD9 5304 is near the end of the Marysville Branch, which left the main line at Thistle. By the time of this March 1971 photo, service here was down to once a week. Keith Ardinger

But then, Rio Grande possesses as much experience in these areas as the next guy.

Certain Wall Street observers feel that Rio Grande has maximized its efficiency and now finds it increasingly difficult to keep in check its operating ratio (which stood at 69.5 percent for the first 10 months of 1964 vs. 67.9 for the same period of 1963) because of recent wage boosts and the demand for shorter, lighter freight trains. If so, acquisition of a line to the Missouri River could bring relief by spreading the overhead over more route-miles and virtually doubling the

average haul on bridge traffic. Question: Should Rio Grande have acted as soon as UP made a bid for Rock Island — as did North Western — instead of waiting until a few days before 78 percent of RI stockholders voted for UP control? UP now has momentum minus any agreement to share its prize other than to sell south-of-Kansas City trackage to SP. In a similar case — Seaboard Coast Line — the ICC turned down Southern's demand for certain duplicate Georgia

and Florida mains when approving merger.

Thus today the immediate future in a railroad world dizzy with merger fever is obscured for Gen. William Jackson Palmer's line of "a few hundred miles in length," and the visibility may be reduced to that inside Moffat Tunnel. Perhaps, though, there's an analogy to be found in the story of the small boy who in the dome of the *California Zephyr* declared with delight at East Portal, "Look, mommy, it's tomorrow already!" ■