



Railfanning Colorado's



Joint Line

By Doug Tagsold • Photos by the author

A trip across the HO scale Denver, Front Range & Western

What better way to spend a sunny summer day than to railfan one of your favorite railroad hot spots. The memories of one such day back in 1987 on the Joint Line from Denver to Pueblo, Colo., are ones I will cherish forever.

The history of the Joint Line begins with a narrow gauge line built by the Denver & Rio Grande from Denver south to Pueblo; it became standard gauge in 1881. The Santa Fe built its own line from Pueblo north to Denver in 1887. In 1899, the Colorado & Southern (now Burlington Northern) was granted trackage rights on the Santa Fe line.

In 1974 the Santa Fe's line through Colorado Springs was removed, leaving only the Rio Grande track from Palmer Lake, south through Colorado Springs to Crews, where the Santa Fe line resumes.

The majority of tonnage over the 120-mile Joint Line on that summer day in 1987 was an endless parade of BN coal trains to and from Wyoming, as well as several general merchandise or trailer-on-flatcar trains from all three railroads. Here are some photos from that memorable summer day. **GMR**

1 Previous pages: A pair of Santa Fe GP38-2s backs through the yard in Denver to its train as BN switchers put together another southbound freight.

2 Below: Santa Fe freight no. 424, with unit no. 3577 in the lead, pulls out of the yard and onto the Joint Line track.



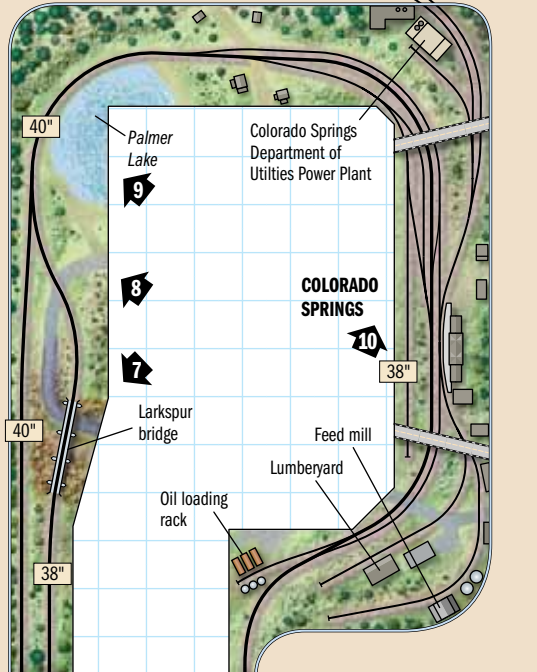


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3 **Above:** The southbound Santa Fe train pulls past Denver's Union Station, where excited passengers are waiting to board a special summer excursion to Winter Park on the Rio Grande's ski train.

4 **Left:** As the Santa Fe freight disappears into the Denver skyline, an empty BN coal train led by an EMD SD60 continues its journey back to Wyoming for another load of Powder River coal.

Two-track staging yard for CSDU Power Plant



Duckunder

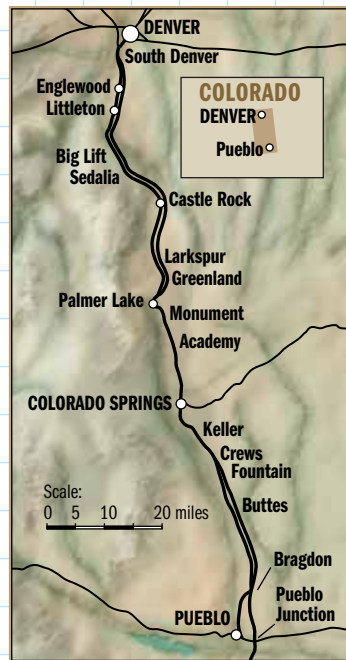
THE JOINT LINE

Lower level

Scale: 1/4" = 1'-0"

12" grid

38" indicates elevation in inches

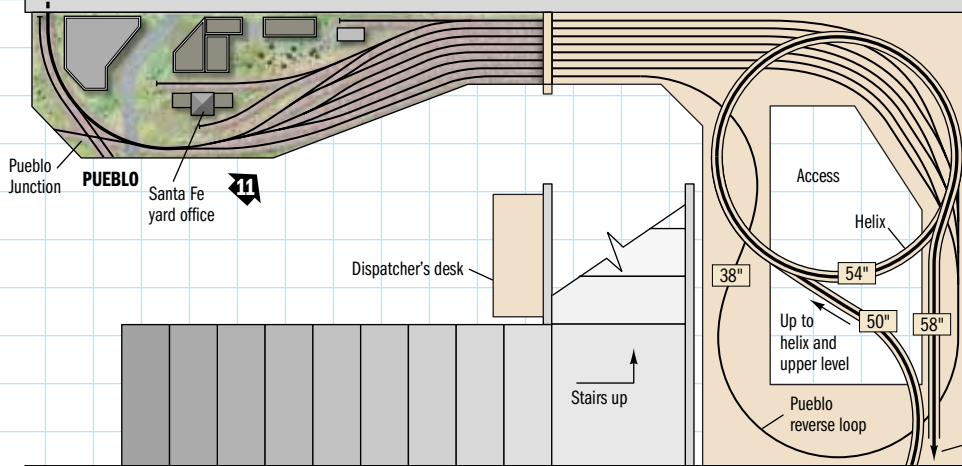


Rio Grande northbound main line
Santa Fe southbound main line

Castle Rock

38"

5
6

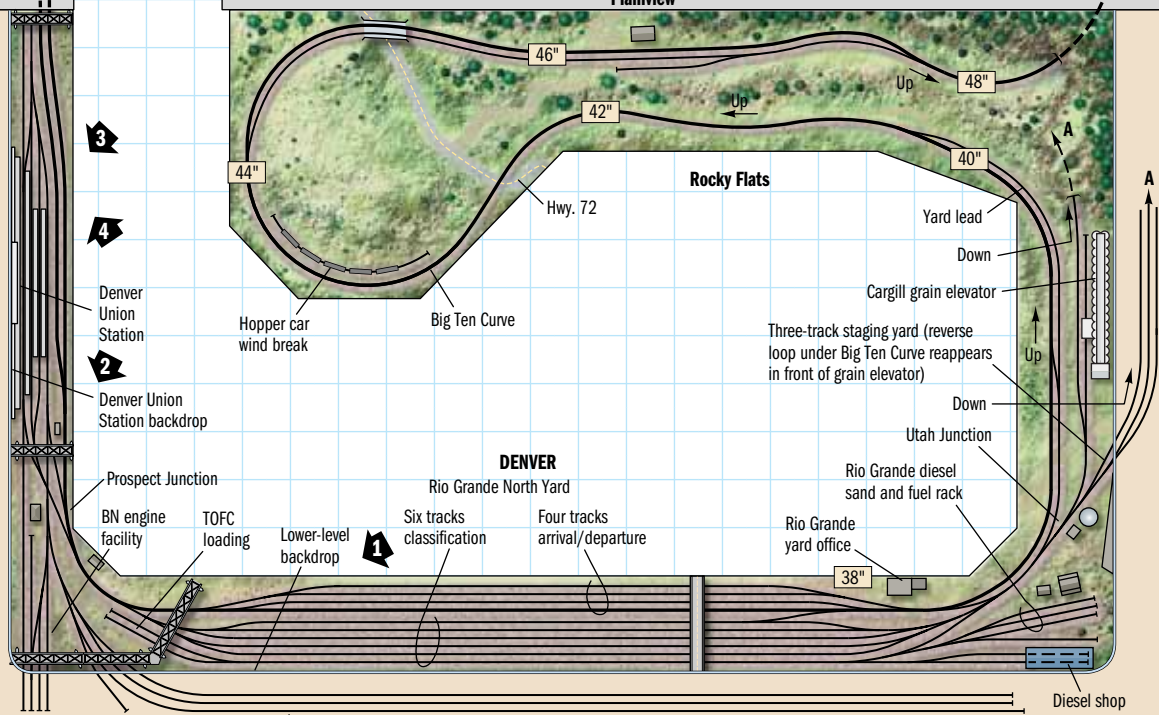


Plainview

3
4

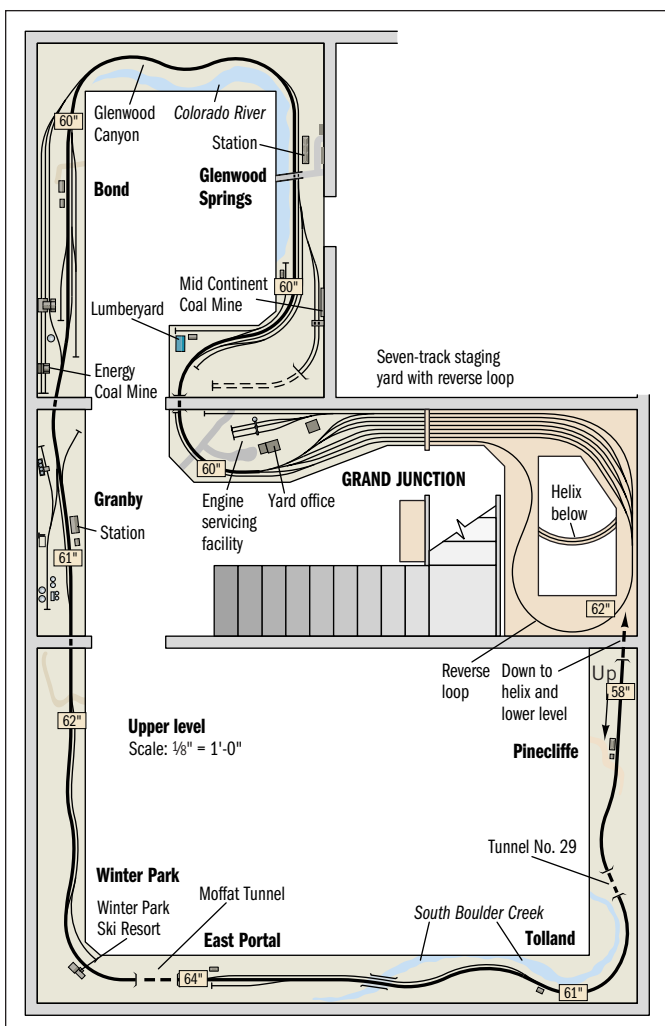
2

1



DENVER

BN 38th Street Yard (three-track staging yard)



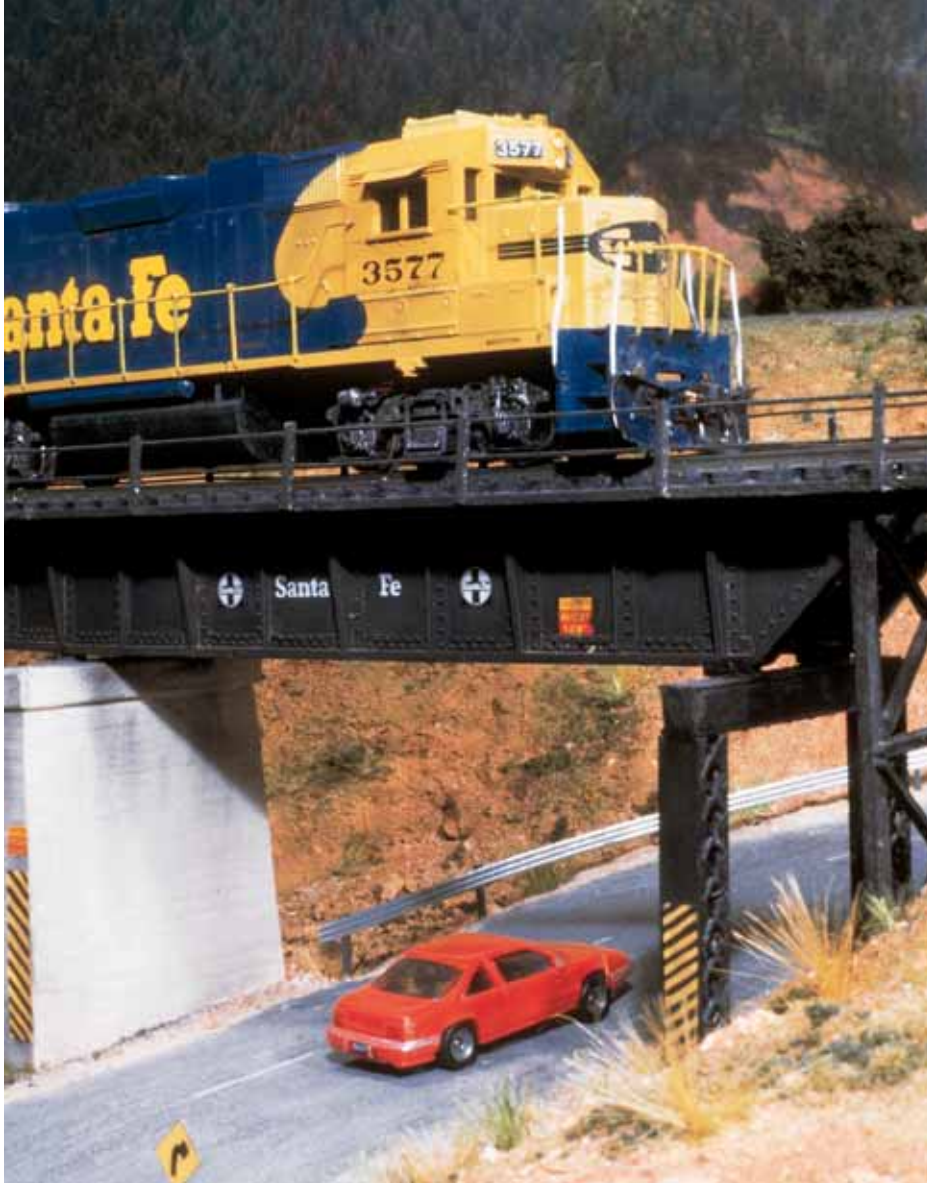
ILLUSTRATIONS BY RICK JOHNSON AND KELLIE JAEGER



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5 Top: We catch the Santa Fe southbound freight near Castle Rock, Colo. The climb from Denver to Palmer Lake is on a tough 1 to 2 percent grade, so catching up with southbound trains by automobile while railfanning isn't hard.

6 Above: As the Santa Fe train rolls out of sight, Rio Grande Pueblo to Denver freight no. 166, led by an aging GP30 and GP40, glides by on the northbound main.



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7 Above: Continuing south, we catch Santa Fe train no. 424 as it crosses the girder bridge just south of Larkspur.

8 Right: The southbound Santa Fe freight is held at Palmer Lake, where the Joint Line becomes single track. After only a short wait, the reason for the red signal becomes apparent. Northbound BN freight no. 91, led by GP50 no. 3148, rounds the curve around the small lake and begins its descent into Denver.

9 Far right: After the BN train clears, the Santa Fe dispatcher gives train no. 424 permission to continue south on the single track. Palmer Lake, which was man-made, was used as a water supply for Rio Grande steam locomotives. Today it's a popular picnic and fishing area.









Meet Doug Tagsold

A family vacation to Colorado in 1989 convinced Doug, then a New York Central modeler, to switch to mountain railroading. His HO scale Denver, Front Range & Western was featured in *Model Railroader* in the July and August 1999 issues.

Doug is the fourth generation to operate his family's funeral home business and is also a volunteer fireman. He lives in Blissfield, Mich., with his wife, Diane, and their two children, Steven and Jennifer.

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10 **Far left:** Our southbound freight zips through Colorado Springs, past the former Rio Grande depot, as a local Rio Grande switch crew moves cars to the various local industries. In the background is the CSDU Drake power plant, a major coal customer of the Rio Grande.

11 **Above:** Our train, Santa Fe no. 424, pulls into the SF yard at Pueblo, ending its run on the Joint Line. As soon as the train's caboose has cleared the switch, another empty BN coal train will begin its trip on the Joint Line. For us, it's time for a break before we head back to Denver.