

Way We Were
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Tell Us a Story
David Nicholas, researcher

Historical photographs can be puzzles: who took the picture, when, where, and what is the story? These are questions we might not have answers to when first looking at an image. But can these puzzles be solved through research of visible clues?

The picture featured here is from the Park City Museum archives. When first donated to the museum, the date and photographer were unknown. An inscription stated: "Denver and Rio Grande (D&RG) engine on high line." Let's investigate to learn more.

There are three cars comprising this train - the plow (nearest the viewer), the engine and the tender. A close look at the tender reveals the letters "cific." An important clue: this is not a Denver & Rio Grande train after all; it is a Union Pacific plow train.

The Denver & Rio Grande stopped serving Park City in 1946. Union Pacific assumed trackage rights to continue serving the mining facilities in lower Deer Valley and Park City environs. Therefore this photo was taken after 1946.

Visible just to right of the steam emanating from the train, you can see a smokestack. That stack was associated with the Ontario Mill and was constructed in 1880 of brick and mortar. It stood seventy feet tall and was an important town landmark. The mill itself had been dismantled long before this picture was taken.

The smokestack was dynamited in August 1949 - by whom and for what reasons were never determined. But that fact offers us yet another clue: we can now say that this picture was taken sometime between 1946 and 1949.

Before there was a Rossie Hill Drive there was a railroad spur which looped around the hill. The switch point was in the proximity of today's Deer Valley Plaza. The spur was called the "High Line." It served the Ontario and Judge loading stations which were adjacent to one another. The structures are visible in the background. To the right of the buildings are the towers of the Judge aerial tramway.

The weather is also revealed in the photograph. We know it was a calm day as the locomotive exhaust is billowing straight up in the air. And it was cold as evidenced by the snow affixed to the plow and engine. Consider that these were both very warm machines. Further, it was a sunny day as indicated by the shadows reflected off the train. The angle of the shadows hints that it's approximately 1pm-2pm.

Most of today's Rossie Hill Drive was built upon the High Line roadbed. For a trip down history lane I recommend walking Rossie Hill Drive (accessed via Deer Valley Drive) and continuing straight where it becomes Ontario Court at the intersection of Ontario Avenue and Rossie Hill Drive. Your destination will be

the remnants of the Judge and Ontario loading stations and the Ontario #1 drain tunnel.

Thanks to Gary Kimball, Jim Hewitson and Keith Droste for their encouragement to research this photograph. We now have more of a story to tell!



Image ID: digi.2.11008

Credit: Park City Historical Society and Museum, Himes-Buck Digital Collection

Caption: When donated, we knew hardly anything about this image. Now we can say definitively that it features a Union Pacific plow train on the "High Line" in Deer Valley and was taken between 1946 and 1949.