

Tracking the Divide

The Deliberations as to a Route Choice by the Santa Fe Railway Across Scurry County

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Good afternoon. Today we're discussing the bringing of the railroad to Scurry County. Two railroads served the county: The Pecos and Northern Texas Railway, which was an affiliate of the Santa Fe System, and the Roscoe, Snyder and Pacific Railway.

(Speaker produced models of a Santa Fe F7 and of an RS&P SW1 out of his coat pockets and placed them on lectern.)

At the turn of the century, the main line of the Santa Fe Railway System ran southwestward from Chicago into Kansas. It split at Newton, one leg going westward to Los Angeles and the other southwards to Galveston. These lines formed two sides of an Illinois - California - Texas triangle. Because the Santa Fe had to haul Texas - California traffic hundreds of miles out of the way via Kansas, traffic on the third side was monopolized by the Southern Pacific Railroad. However, by upgrading certain secondary lines and building a few hundred miles of new track, the Santa Fe could close the triangle and offer competitive service. In 1904, Santa Fe surveys began for the new line across West Texas. In anticipation of heavy traffic, the line was to be laid out on an 0.6% maximum grade if possible. An 0.6% grade rose between 7-8 inches in each 100 feet of track, or 31.7 feet per mile.

Surveyor J. V. Key was instructed in the late summer to examine two routes from the Llano Estacado to crossings of the Texas & Pacific Railroad. Key left his crew on the plains and made a quick horseback trip over the suggested lines. The first descended the Caprock, the edge of the Llano Estacado, in Dickens County and reached the T&P at Abilene. It was a good line, but construction would be difficult, and there would be ten miles of undesirable 1.25% in Dickens County. His second line lead from Sweetwater to Snyder and northwards to Emma in Crosby County.

Key evaluated the country as he passed. He had a high opinion of Scurry County, which he called "the most prosperous of any county through which I have passed. It is rather thickly settled; the farms in good condition and the cotton crop is good..."

"...there is a high divide from the northwest corner of Scurry county to and beyond Roscoe. To reach this we would have to overcome an ascent of about four hundred and fifty feet over a broken country through which, for ten miles, construction would be costly. After this ten miles we would have an extremely cheap line to a point about ten

miles north of Snyder. From this point to within ten miles of Emma the country is so difficult that while it is not absolutely impossible, I think the cost would be too high to warrant its consideration."

Key, without instruction, examined another line. This ran northwestward along the top of the divide for several miles, then turned westward, passing about seven miles southwest of Snyder. After crossing the drainage in southern Scurry County, the line followed Bull Creek across Borden County, passing north of Gail, and climbed the Caprock with an easy 0.6% line.

Key was not the first Santa Fe surveyor to examine this particular line. Late in 1888, Philip Smith followed the same basic route from Loraine, a few miles west of Roscoe. Smith used a 1.25% grade line, and while his line also passed south of Snyder, he thought he could serve the town. Key, limited to 0.6%, did not think he could.

Smith's examination was hurried and he was unable to return to Scurry County for a formal survey. Key, however, collected his crew and set them to work on the lines he had just examined. While the crew was in the final stages of work on the Dickens County to Abilene line, Key rode alone to Snyder to make a detailed examination of the area directly west of that town. As he feared, no 0.6% line was possible, so Snyder could not be served.

The Santa Fe's main office regretted missing Snyder, saying that "it would be desirable to hit it if possible." Key thought about building a short spur to serve the town. Another thought was to run the line atop the divide to a point five miles east of town, then to sharply turn west and rejoin the principal survey southwest of Snyder. Unfortunately, this would add about six miles to the line at over \$10,000 per mile to construct. The extra miles would also increase perennial maintenance and operating costs. Key said, "I hardly think the town is worth it."

While Key liked the line through Scurry County, he did not recommend its construction: "The cost of the Roscoe line, per mile, for grading and bridging is just 60% of the Abilene line. Notwithstanding this I think the Abilene <line> much the better as the country as a whole is a great deal more productive at present and more susceptible of future improvement."

The Santa Fe chose to develop the route via Abilene, but it did create a subsidiary to construct the Roscoe line. This was the Gulf, Colorado & Northwestern Railway, chartered September 13, 1905. Despite the creation of this company, nothing was done on the Roscoe line, but planning continued for the Abilene line.

By the summer of 1906, contracts were being negotiated with local railroad committees. The Abilene route seemed so secure that three members of Abilene's railroad committee decided to build their own railroad along the route northwestward from Roscoe. F. W. James, Ed Hughes, and W. G. Swenson obtained a charter on October 1, 1906, for the

Roscoe, Snyder & Pacific Railway. A survey was quickly run following the divide from Roscoe, then dropping down the west slope near the head of Hell Roaring Hollow, then paralleling Deep Creek into Snyder.

Hughes and Swenson had another railroad interest. In corporate partnership with the Colorado & Southern System, they built a railroad into Abilene from the north. Part of this line, completed early in 1907, paralleled the Santa Fe survey south of Anson.

In September of 1906, the Santa Fe postponed the Dickens-Abilene line. Although the true reasons were not publicly stated, the main reason was that the railroad considered local railroad committees to be too pushy and demanding, Abilene's in particular. Also, the Santa Fe wanted to explore new options that had appeared. One of these new possibilities was a route down the Caprock via Yellow House Canyon that was being advocated by C. W. Post, O. L. Slaton, and others. Surveyor F. M. Jones was sent to investigate.

Jones first looked at a new line northward from Merkle through Roby to the Caprock in Crosby County. Then he followed Key's 1904 survey through Scurry County. Key's line won his praise except in the matter of length, but he felt that improvements could be made. He was particularly interested in the divide. "There is a tendency for spurs to put out from the plains between the streams," he said. "These spurs are usually abrupt, and often end in detached mesas or mountains. The spur that puts out on the watershed between the Brazos and the Colorado is very extensive. It extends from the southwest corner of Garza county to the western part of Taylor county, and forms a secondary plain, which I will call the Roscoe Plains. These plains are cut off from the Staked Plains by a saddle about 200 feet deep in the southwest part of Garza county. This saddle seems to be a dividing line in the formation. South of it ... the slopes ... are easy. North of the saddle ... the slopes are very steep."

If possible, Jones proposed to reach the "very flourishing town" of Snyder and to continue southeastward down the middle of the divide.

Having investigated routes on either side, Jones now set about examining the requested route on the south side of Yellow House Canyon. Jones came down the Caprock at Dokegood Creek in Garza County. The line used thirty miles of almost continuous 0.6% to drop from the plains to the Double Mountain Fork of the Brazos River.

The line then faced the formidable northern face of the Roscoe Divide. Here, the plain rested atop steep cliffs edged by a contorted landscape punctuated with detached mesas. Despite the forbidding aspect, Jones found an easy line.

Grape Creek on the north and Deep Creek on the south had been nibbling on opposite sides of the divide, separating the Fluvanna Flat, from the main body of the divide. The saddle in between is not deep or abrupt, but the creeks had carved a notch in the bluffs

and laid down fairly gentle talus slopes. Jones used this saddle to cross into Colorado River drainage.

Jones speculated that several routes led from the "Scurry county saddle" to Coleman, but he was mainly concerned with two: The Roscoe Plain route, and another through Roby and Merkle. The most direct route, via Sweetwater, he considered "out of the question on account of the numerous drainages to be crossed at right angles, with precipitous ridges between."

A. P. Kittell had been following Jones with a surveying crew, making instrumental studies of his proposed lines. Kittell found that a line following the top of the divide would go too far out of the way. The divide was too crooked.

Shortly, Jones was back at the Scurry County saddle, planning to run a line from there to Roby. His plans changed quickly. "I found this route rather discouraging at the start. The drainage into the Double Mountain Fork, known as Ennis creek, is extensive and broken. It includes the northeast quarter of Scurry County, and reaches within four miles of Snyder. I concluded that it would be necessary to head this drainage; and, to do so would bring the line within four miles of Snyder.

"Now to pass within so short a distance of a town like Snyder in an open plains country, did not seem to me to be the proper thing. And to run from the Scurry county saddle to Snyder, and then turn nearly due east to Roby, was a possibility that did not appeal to me. I therefore changed my course, and instead of going to Roby I came through by way of Sweetwater. And, although I did not make a very thorough investigation, I believe we can get a line through that way. Possibly not immediately through the town of Sweetwater, but within a few miles. This line would probably have a 20 mile section of moderately heavy work, but there is not much rock, and there need be but little adverse grade. It would cross the T&P at Eskota or Sweetwater, or between the two, and pass to the south of Merkle to Buffalo Gap."

Switching attention between the various lines, Jones tried to find an 0.6% line up the Colorado River from Ballinger to Scurry County. Failing in that, Jones examined the terrain between Snyder and Roby. Eastward from Snyder, it would have meant climbing onto the divide and almost immediately down the other side. The Clear Fork of the Brazos River and several tributaries would be crossed, each with its own valley with ridges between them. The best route followed the narrow divide between the Clear Fork and the Double Mountain Fork. This ran northeastward from Snyder. At the county line, the route turned southeastward to the mouth of Spring Creek, thence to Roby. This was a good line, "but it takes such a detour to the north, as to make it worthless for our purpose."

The Sweetwater line was looking better almost daily, and Jones began giving serious thought to operating matters, such as water stations and shop locations. Jones favored making Coleman Junction, Pyron, Lubbock, and Clovis the division points. Pyron was

the point in southeastern Scurry County where the line climbed out of the Cottonwood Valley onto the divide. However, Pyron was not chosen for a division point.

The actual location through Snyder presented some problems. Back in December of 1906, Jones had recommended that the line "should pass along the creek one block west of the court house square," but months later, now aware of Deep Creek's nature after a spring storm, he had other thoughts. "I do not see any way that we can get close to the business section. The other railroad ... is so low, (below high water) that we would not want to cross it at grade, and could not if we would."

Jones ran several lines passing northeast of the business district. Some of these were for the purpose of confusing onlookers. He had a hunch that the Roscoe, Snyder & Pacific Railway, then under construction, might deliberately extend across the Santa Fe survey. This had already occurred near Hermleigh, where the Santa Fe approached the western edge of the divide to descend to Snyder. "I believe the location has been somewhat changed since I examined it, before grading was begun," commented Jones. "This is going to somewhat increase our work for seven miles east of Snyder."

Despite the year of surveys on the Sweetwater line, the Santa Fe remained committed to the Abilene route. However, conditions were rapidly changing for that project. Where before the Texas & Pacific was the only railroad line encountered, several other railroads had entered the area. Interests of the Colorado & Southern and the Swensons had built a railroad into Abilene from the north, and a company backed by C&S investors was building south from that city. The Texas Central was extending from Stamford to Rotan, and the Kansas City, Mexico & Orient built northward from Sweetwater.

Several other railroads were planned for the area, but the most worrisome to the Santa Fe was a joint project of the C&S and the Swensons. This Stamford & Northwestern Railway was projected from Stamford to Plainview. For many miles, it would duplicate the Santa Fe survey and even filed a condemnation suit upon the pass in Dickens County. It was the C&S' intent to sell a half interest in this line to the Santa Fe. Although no proof has surfaced, the C&S may also have hoped to interest the Santa Fe in the lines to Abilene and to the south. Even if the Santa Fe did not participate in these lines, the C&S lines would parallel the Santa Fe's projected route for almost its entire length.

In the spring of 1909, the Santa Fe abandoned plans to build via Abilene and also refused to participate in the Stamford & Northwestern. Instead, the Santa Fe announced that it would begin immediate construction through Lubbock, Post City, Snyder, Sweetwater, Buffalo Gap, and Coleman.

Meanwhile, the Roscoe, Snyder & Pacific had finished its line into Snyder a year earlier, on June 12, 1908, and was building to Fluvanna, which it would reach September 11, 1909.

Shortly after the Santa Fe announced its plans, a committee of Abilene citizens, including some of the founders of the RS&P, called upon governor Thomas Campbell. They charged, among other things, that the Santa Fe was deliberately paralleling the RS&P to run it out of business. Outraged, Campbell wrote to Santa Fe president E. P. Ripley. He listed the charges, including the claim that "...after crossing the Texas and Pacific Railway, you will go out of your way to parallel a small railway built by Texans with Texas capital."

Ripley replied to each charge, including the parallel charge. "It is unfortunate that the exigencies of the situation compel us to parallel for a short distance the Roscoe, Snyder and Pacific Railway, which I would be very glad to avoid, and which we have sought in every possible way to do, and I would be very glad even now to relieve the owners of that road of their load if we could make use of it. It is unfortunately, however, built in such a location and upon such grades as to make it entirely useless for our purpose. It is only fair to state, however, that the portion of the grades of this line north of Snyder was built after our surveys had been made, and with full knowledge on the part of <the owners> that they were not only building along our surveys, but several times crossing what they knew must be our right of way ... but the most casual survey of a map of Texas would show you that if our line were to be changed as desired by the gentlemen who called on you, <it> should parallel a large number of existing lines and to a very much greater extent. It will show you in fact that no location could have been selected so free from interference with existing lines as that which we did select."

Even after Ripley's letter, Campbell was still threatening to call the legislature into special session to pass a law forbidding a large railroad to parallel a small one. A committee of citizens from towns other than Abilene called upon the governor. The leader, Thomas Trammell of Sweetwater, spread a map on the floor of Campbell's office and lectured on the advantages of the Santa Fe's chosen route and spoke disparagingly about the RS&P. "On this parallel proposition the committee showed to the Governor that after the Santa Fe had made its survey, the promoters of the R. S. and P. Railway Company, for some unknown purpose, after it passed Snyder, crossed the old survey of the Santa Fe, which was already on the ground, three times in some four hundred yards and still another time within a distance of five miles, which contemplated extension of the R. S. and P. Company has not yet taken place."

What was not known at the time was that the committee had also threatened to expose certain investments that the governor had made in Abilene. The charge was false. No such investments existed. However, the governor decided to let the Santa Fe build unopposed. No new law would have affected the Santa Fe's project anyway. The project was already underway.

Just before the fuss began, the RS&P sold a strip of right of way to the Santa Fe for \$1.

The Santa Fe's usual method of obtaining right of way was to send a representative, Addison Eby in this case, to the leading citizens of the county in question. The citizens

were to organize a right of way committee and to acquire the specified land. When called for, the land would be donated to the railroad.

W. A. Fuller owned property in both Scurry and Garza counties. He agreed to donate a strip of right of way, but in a manner that made it doubtful that he would do so. Fuller was an officer of the Snyder National Bank. The bank's two major deposits were controlled by C. W. Post: A personal account, and the Double U Company account. There was at that time no bank at Post City, although local ranchers had asked Mr. Post for one on several occasions. When Fuller's cooperation with the railroad was in doubt, Post started a rumor that he would close the accounts in Fuller's bank if the man reneged. A few weeks after starting the rumor, Post founded a bank in Post City. Fuller donated the land. Fullerville was named for him.

Construction of the roadbed proceeded from several locations simultaneously. Construction equipment, including a pile driver, was shipped to Snyder over the RS&P.

Tracklaying began at Coleman on October 12, 1909, and at Lubbock on the twenty-fifth of the same month. G. W. Harris' crews reached the first station in Scurry County, Pyron, on January 6, 1911. Hermleigh was reached on the 11th and Chorn the 25th. Rails snaked through Snyder the 4th of the next month and to Brand the 14th. Dermott and Fullerville were attained in March, on the third and 14th respectively. Water stations were established at Pyron, Snyder, and Dermott, with coal also available at Dermott.

The railheads met at Augustus, near Post City, on April 30. The Santa Fe's Construction Department provided haphazard train service while the track was conditioned and facilities were constructed. The Operating Department took the line on December 1, 1911.

And that is how the Santa Fe came to Scurry County. I thank you for your attention. Now it's time for me to take the train and leave

(Speaker pocketed the locomotives and departed.)