

Unused railroad tracks skirting Otavalo, Ecuador

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Railroad tracks overgrown with weeds extend into the distance. A few houses border the tracks. Mountains loom in the background.

In the late nineteenth century, the railroad came to Latin America. Railroad technology revolutionized transportation, especially in areas not located on a seaport. Since the Andes mountains separate the verdant rainforest from the Pacific Ocean, the railroad played a significant role in advancing the agricultural production of Ecuador. Progress came at a cost, however. Railroads are very expensive to build and the government took out millions of dollars in loans and provided valuable concessions to foreign governments and corporations. The result was that Ecuador moved from a self-sustaining agricultural nation to an indebted nation that is dependent on international market forces.



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