

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR
BUREAU OF SAFETY

ACCIDENT ON THE
ILLINOIS CENTRAL SYSTEM

TALLAHATCHIE, MISS

NOVEMBER 4, 1937.

INVESTIGATION NO. 2217

SUMMARY

Inv-2217

Railroad:	Illinois Central
Date:	November 4, 1937.
Location:	Tallahatchie, Miss.
Kind of accident:	Derailment
Train involved:	Passenger
Train number:	5
Engine number:	1187
Consist:	12 cars
Speed:	55-58 m.p.h.
Track:	1° curve; 0.17 percent ascending grade.
Weather:	Clear
Time:	1:35 a.m.
Casualties:	2 killed and 4 injured
Cause:	Train struck and ran over cattle on the track.

December 9, 1937.

To the Commission:

On November 4, 1937, there was a derailment of a passenger train on the Illinois Central System near Tallahatchie, Miss., which resulted in the death of two employees, and the injury of two passengers, one person carried under contract and one dining car employee.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Grenada District of the Mississippi Division which extends between East Junction, Tenn., and Memphis Junction, Miss., a distance of 93.5 miles, and is a single-track line over which trains are operated by timetable, train orders and an automatic block-signal system. The accident occurred at a point 1.4 miles south of Tallahatchie and 2,926 feet south of the northern end of a 1° curve to the right which has a total length of 5,363 feet. The grade is undulating, being 0.17 percent ascending at the point of accident.

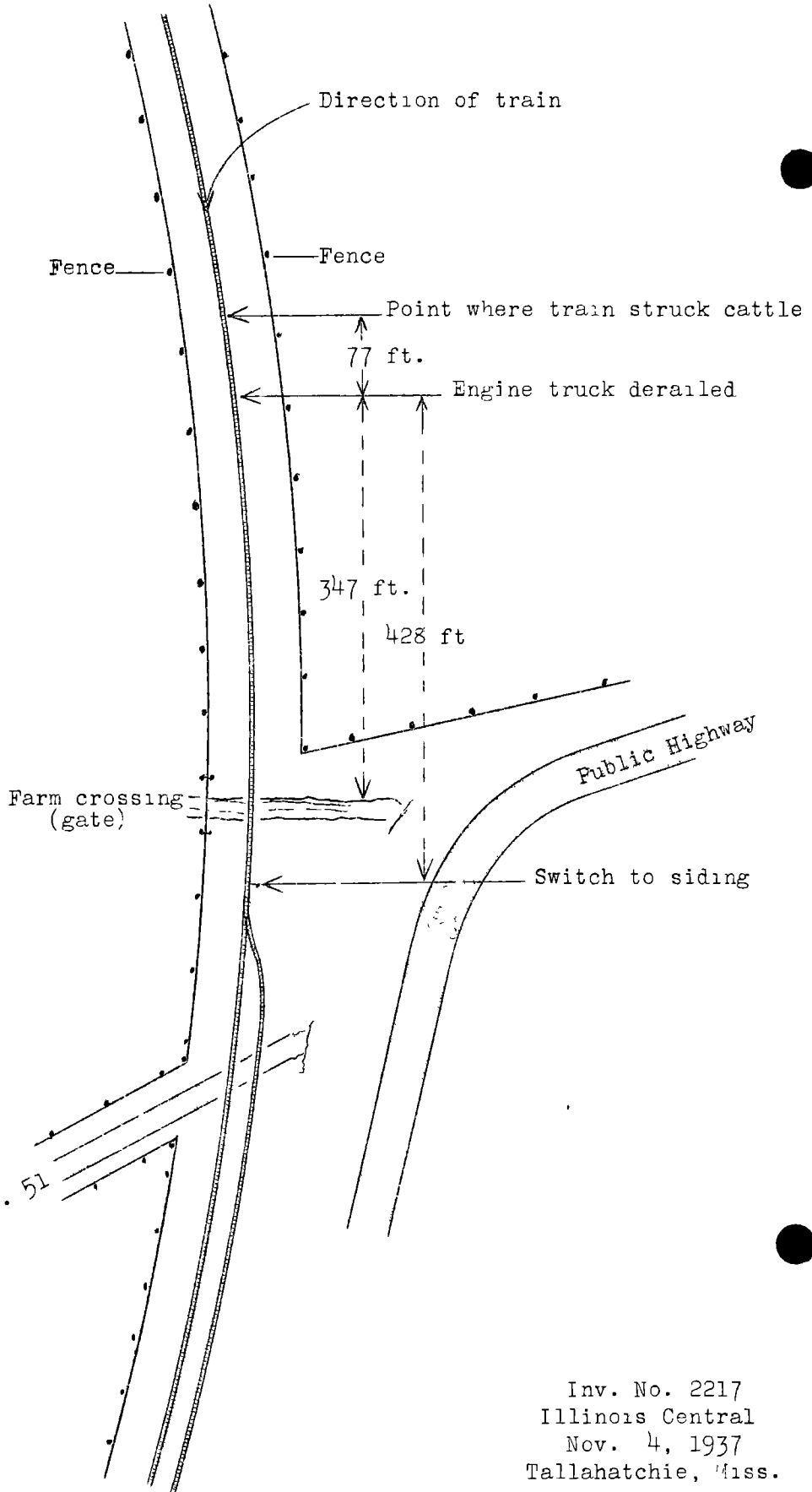
The track is laid with 90-pound rails, 39 feet in length, with an average of 24 treated ties and 6 rail anchors to the rail length; it is single-spiked, fully tie-plated, ballasted with slag to a depth of 10 inches below the bottom of the ties, and is well maintained. The maximum authorized speed for passenger trains is 60 miles per hour.

A facing-point switch for south-bound trains is located 428 feet south of the point of accident and provides access to a temporary siding which parallels the main track on the east.

A private dirt road about 10 feet in width, connecting farms which lie on either side of the right-of-way, crosses the track at right angles approximately 347 feet south of the point of initial derailment. The right-of-way in the vicinity of the point of derailment is fenced with 5 strands of barbed wire, secured by wire to the guard posts. This fence together with a gate at the private road crossing fully protects the right-of-way on the west side. The fence on the east side, however, terminates at a point just north of the farm crossing and there joins a fence which extends eastward. From that point southward to a point beyond the siding the east side of the right-of-way is unprotected by fences. There are no cattle guards at the farm crossing.



○	Memphis, Tenn.
	4.3 mi.
○	East Junction
	45.4 mi.
○	Sardis, Miss.
	4.7 mi.
○	Tallahatchie,
	1.4 mi.
X	Point of accident
	42.0 mi.
○	Memphis Jct., Miss.



Inv. No. 2217
 Illinois Central
 Nov. 4, 1937
 Tallahatchie, Miss.

The General Stock Law of the State of Mississippi requires that persons owning livestock, or having control of livestock, such as cattle, horses, etc., shall not permit such livestock to run at large upon the open or unfenced lands of another person; except as therein expressly provided, but shall keep such livestock confined in a safe enclosure or upon lands belonging to such person. A provision of this law grants the privilege of nullification of the requirements of this act to any county in which a majority of the electors so decide at an election held for that purpose. Panola County has not so elected.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 1:35 a.m.

Description

South-bound passenger train No. 5, consisting of one express refrigerator car, one baggage and express car, one mail storage car, one baggage and express car, one horse car, one combination baggage and buffet-club car, two Pullman sleeping cars, one dining car, two Pullman sleeping cars, and one Pullman sleeping-observation car, in the order named, hauled by engine 1187, was in charge of Conductor Benson and Engineman Barnett. The cars were of all-steel construction, with the exception of the first car which had a steel underframe and wooden superstructure. This train departed from Memphis, 54.4 miles from Tallahatchie, at 12:27 a.m., according to the train sheet, 7 minutes late, passed Sardis, the last open office, 4.7 miles from Tallahatchie, at 1:28 a.m., 2 minutes late, and after passing Tallahatchie was derailed while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 55 and 58 miles per hour.

The engine and tender stopped on their left sides at right angles to the track with the engine headed east, 784 feet beyond the point of derailment. The first and second cars were demolished and stopped at right angles to the track, the second car being cut in two. The third car mounted the boiler of the engine and stopped with its front end projecting upward about 25 feet, and its rear end resting on the ground; this car was badly damaged. The fourth car also was demolished and stopped at right angles to the track parallel with the wreckage of the other cars. The fifth, sixth and seventh cars, and the front truck of the eighth car were derailed, but remained in general line with the track. The employees killed were the engineman and fireman.

Summary of evidence

Conductor Benson stated that the air brakes had been tested before leaving Memphis and worked properly en route. The engine-man made a light application of the air brakes on passing Sardis and the whistle signal was sounded at Tallahatchie. The headlight was burning brightly. Conductor Benson had just looked over the train on both sides on descending the Tallahatchie hill and had entered the club car, the sixth car in the train, where he was sitting when the crash occurred. The train traveled a distance of about 4 coach lengths before stopping. He estimated the speed to have been about 55 miles per hour at the time of the accident. After the accident he found evidence that the engine had struck some cattle, and marks on the ties indicated that the lead engine truck wheels had been derailed for a short distance before the engine encountered the siding switch where the driving wheels became derailed. He did not notice an emergency application of the air brakes prior to the accident nor did he hear a warning whistle signal, and he was of the opinion that due to the curve the engineman did not see the cattle in time to act.

The statements of Baggage-man Avery, who was in the sixth car in the train, practically corroborated those of the conductor. He added that the air brakes were applied in emergency, but was unable to say whether before or after derailment.

Flagman Pickle stated that it seemed to him that the air brakes were applied in emergency about the time the car gave four or five hard lunges. He immediately went back to flag and saw parts of carcasses strewn along the track and a live cow about 100 feet north of the train.

Division Engineer Pittman stated that on examining the track he found hair of cattle on a spike and a rail joint, indicating the point at which the animal had been struck and then dragged over the ties for a distance of 77 feet where a wheel mark was found on the ties 5 inches from the gauge side of the right or west rail. The carcass, being on the left rail, caused the left wheel to be lifted above the rail and permitted the right wheel to drop down inside of the rail. At the same time the carcass held the left wheel up so that it was not until a point 8 feet south of the first mark of derailment was reached that a similar mark appeared on the tie 6 inches from the outside of the left or east rail. Parts of the carcass were scattered along the track for a distance of several hundred feet. The marks of the derailed engine truck wheels extended for a distance of 454 feet where the left wheel struck the turnout rail of the siding, causing the truck to slue to the left in such manner that the front wheels followed the siding, while the rear wheels followed the main track and precipitated the final derailment. The carcass of a yearling,

weighing possibly 300 or 400 pounds, was found lying on the east side of the track at a point 132 feet south of where the first animal appears to have been struck, and there was no evidence that more than one animal was rolled under the wheels of the engine. On the morning of the accident the gate at the farm crossing on the west side of the track was closed and fastened with wire, and his inspection showed that the fence along that side was in good condition. It is the practice on this railroad to have cattle guards at private crossings where the fields are fenced on both sides. At this particular place, however, there was no gate on the east side due to the fact that the fence south of the crossing had been removed about 6 months previous to the accident when a temporary team track was constructed a short distance south of that crossing. The fact that the private crossing connects with a public highway which closely parallels the track on the east at this point renders a fence unnecessary since a State law requires that stock be kept from roaming the highways. The north switch of the siding was locked for the main track and had not been damaged. One of the wings of the frog was broken. Track conditions were good and contributed in no way to the cause of the accident.

Superintendent Caulfield stated that the electors of Panola County, Mississippi, where this accident occurred, have never nullified the application of the general stock law to their county, in the manner provided in the act for so doing.

Section Foreman Horn arrived at the scene about two hours after the occurrence of the accident and from his observations he thought that it was a small animal weighing about 200 pounds that had been struck and dragged along the track. Inspection of the fence disclosed it to be in good condition and there were no gaps. The animals apparently entered upon the railroad right-of-way near the farm crossing and then proceeded northward. He had had considerable trouble with stock on his section, which consists of 11 miles of main track. Four or five head of cattle had been killed during the last four or five months, and about two years previously one animal had been killed in the immediate vicinity of the point of accident. By common consent the stock law is not observed and cattle are allowed to run out everywhere, especially after the crops are gathered. While a cattle guard might have prevented the animals from going northward, there was nothing to prevent them from getting on the track in the vicinity of the siding. It has been his observation that cattle would walk over the cattle guards. The weeds in the vicinity of the point of accident had not been cut since July or August, and the engine-man's view may have been restricted considerably by the weeds and the banks of the cut.

Traveling Engineer Harrington stated that examination of the engine truck of engine 1187 indicated that the front pair of wheels were the first to be derailed; scars were on the back of the left flange and on the rim of the right front wheel. There were no scars on the rear pair of wheels.

Observations of Commission's Inspectors

Examination of the track disclosed marks on the track as described by Division Engineer Pittman, as well as evidence that two animals had been struck, one having then been dragged along the track, while the other was thrown into a ditch east of the track. Inspection of the track for a distance of more than one-half mile north of the point of accident showed it to be in good condition and there was no evidence of anything dragging that might have contributed to the cause of the accident. The fences were in good condition. Examination of the engine showed marks on the lead wheels of the engine truck indicating that they had been scraped against the rails at the time of derailment. The corrugated cover plate used in place of slats was torn off the pilot and the frame was bent back under the pilot beam. The bolts and rivets in the frame, however, were tight and indicated that the pilot was tight and secure at the time of the accident.

In company with Division Engineer Pittman and Traveling Engineer Harrington, observations were made to determine the range of vision had by the engineman of a south-bound train at the point of accident. Engine 1623, used in making these observations, has driving wheels of smaller diameter than those on engine 1187, hence the engineman's seatbox was a little lower than that on engine 1187. However, this made little difference as the view across the curve was obscured by a small knoll on which weeds and brush had grown to above the level of the top of the engine cab. It was found that by looking through the front window an object at the point where the cattle were struck could be seen for a distance of 771 feet; looking through the side cab window the distance of visibility was diminished to 737 feet.

Discussion

The evidence indicates that the engine struck two head of cattle, one of which was thrown to the left of the track while the other animal was dragged along the track in front of the engine. The left front engine-truck wheel passed over the animal, causing the right wheel to drop inside of the rail; the lead pair of wheels then ran on the ties until the siding switch was encountered 428 feet beyond, where the major derailment occurred.

In this vicinity livestock is allowed to run at large contrary to the provisions of the General Stock Law of the State of Mississippi. Such fences as the railway company deems necessary in the vicinity of the point of accident are maintained in good condition; however, the fence on the east side of the railway terminates at the farm crossing, the fence south of the crossing having been removed some time ago to permit the construction of a team track, the north switch of which is located 81 feet south of the crossing. The cattle apparently entered upon the railroad right-of-way in the vicinity of the farm crossing and continued northward.

Considerable trouble has been experienced on this section with livestock getting on the tracks, about four head of cattle having been killed during the last four months.

Conclusion

This accident was caused by the train striking and running over cattle on the track.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON,

Director.