

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

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REPORT NO. 3757  
THE WESTERN PACIFIC RAILROAD COMPANY  
IN RE ACCIDENT  
NEAR BERRY CREEK, CALIF., ON  
MAY 18, 1957

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SUMMARY

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Date: May 18, 1957

Railroad: Western Pacific

Location: Berry Creek, Calif.

Kind of accident: Derailment

Train involved: Passenger

Train number: 18

Locomotive number: Diesel-electric units 804D, 804B,  
and 803C

Consist: 12 cars

Speed: 40 m. p. h.

Operation: Signal indications

Track: Single; tangent; 0.86 percent  
ascending grade eastward

Weather: Cloudy

Time: 3:11 p. m.

Casualties: 33 injured

Cause: Landslide

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

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REPORT NO. 3757

IN THE MATTER OF MAKING ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION REPORTS  
UNDER THE ACCIDENT REPORTS ACT OF MAY 6, 1910.

THE WESTERN PACIFIC RAILROAD COMPANY

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August 19, 1957

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Accident near Berry Creek, Calif., on May 18, 1957, caused  
by a landslide.

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REPORT OF THE COMMISSION<sup>1</sup>

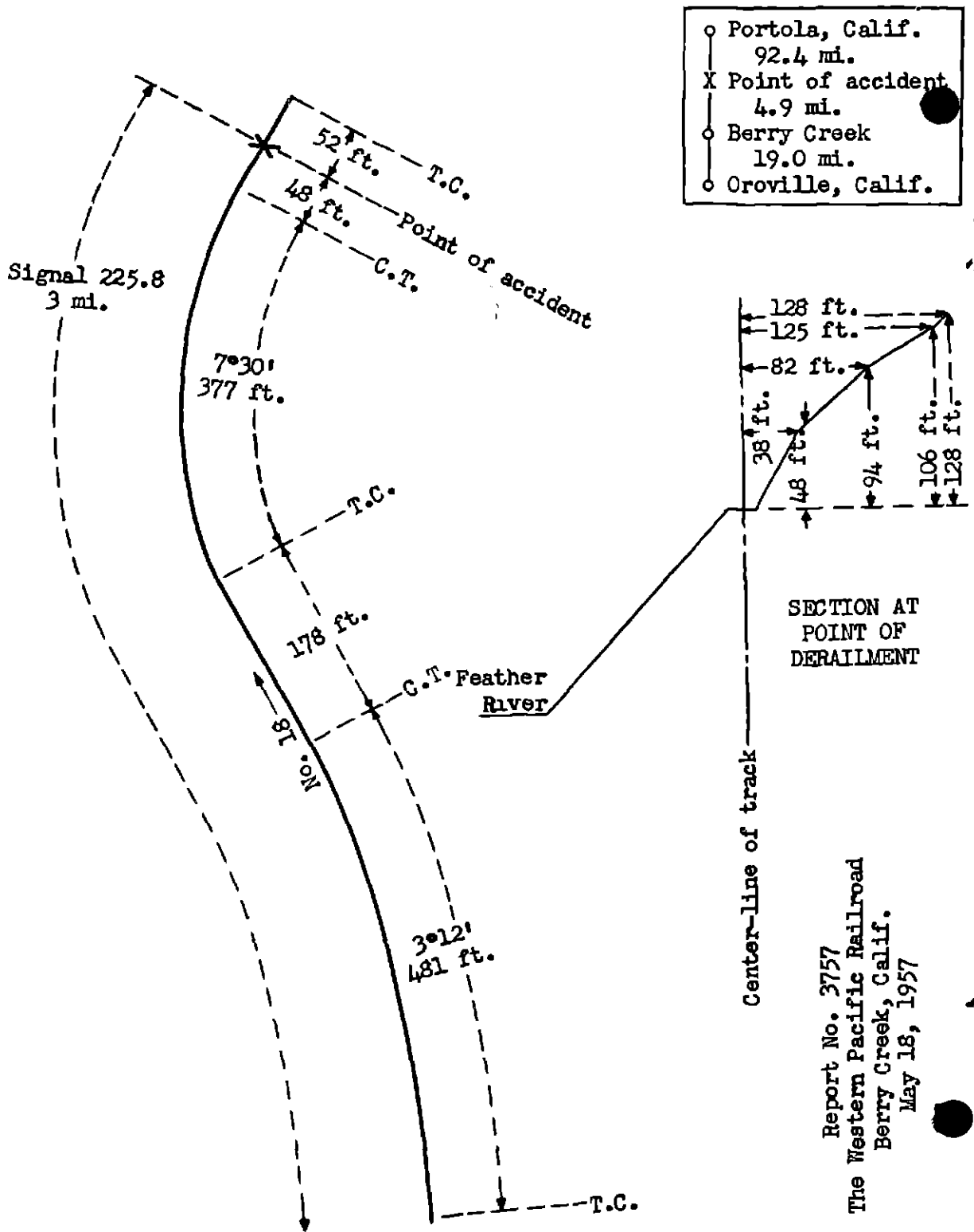
TUGGLE, Commissioner:

On May 18, 1957, there was a derailment of a passenger train on the Western Pacific Railroad near Berry Creek, Calif., which resulted in the injury of 24 passengers, 4 Pullman Company employees, 1 dining-car employee, 1 train porter, 2 train-service employees, and 1 train-service employee not on duty.

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1

Under authority of section 17 (2) of the Interstate Commerce Act the above-entitled proceeding was referred by the Commission to Commissioner Tuggle for consideration and disposition.



Report No. 3757  
The Western Pacific Railroad  
Berry Creek, Calif.  
May 18, 1957

- 5 -

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Western Division, extending between Oroville and Portola, Calif., 116.3 miles, a single-track line, over which trains are operated by signal indications. The accident occurred on the main track at a point 23.9 miles east of Oroville and 4.9 miles east of Berry Creek. From the west there are, in succession, a  $3^{\circ}12'$  curve to the left 481 feet in length, a tangent 178 feet, a  $7^{\circ}30'$  curve to the right 377 feet, and a tangent 48 feet to the point of accident and 52 feet eastward. The grade for east-bound trains is 0.86 percent ascending.

The track structure in the vicinity of the point of accident consists of 112-pound and 115-pound rail, 39 feet in length, laid on an average of 24 treated ties to the rail length. It is fully tieplated, single-spiked on tangents, and is provided with 4-hole, 28-inch joint bars and an average of 14 rail anchors per rail. It is ballasted with crushed rock to a depth of 18 inches below the bottoms of the ties.

In the vicinity of the point of accident the track is laid on a sidehill cut on the side of a mountain on the south side of the North Fork of the Feather River. South of the track the ground slopes upward at a ratio of 1/2 to 1 to a point 48 feet above the level of the track and 38 feet horizontally distant from it, then at a ratio of 1 to 1 to a point 94 feet above the level of the track and 82 feet horizontally distant. There is a small bench at a point 106 feet above the level of the track and 125 feet horizontally distant from it. Above the bench the mountain rises to a height of several thousand feet. North of the track the ground slopes downward at a ratio of 1 to 1 to the shore-line of the river, 126 feet below the level of the track. In the vicinity of the point of accident the side of the mountain is composed of earth and shale. There is a considerable amount of vegetation.

Automatic signal 225.8, governing east-bound movements, is located 3 miles west of the point of accident.

In the vicinity of the point of accident the maximum authorized speed for passenger trains is 40 miles per hour.

### Description of Accident

No. 18, an east-bound first class passenger train, consisted of Diesel-electric units 804D, 804B and 803C, coupled in multiple-unit control, one baggage car, three coaches, one buffet-dormitory car, one dining car, five sleeping cars, and one observation car, in the order named. All cars were of lightweight construction and were equipped with tightlock couplers. At Oroville the crew received copies of train order No. 423 reading as follows:

DUE TO STORM CONDITIONS RUN CAREFULLY WHERE SLIDES  
AND FALLING ROCKS MAY BE ENCOUNTERED.

This train departed from Oroville at 2:35 p. m., 10 minutes late, passed Berry Creek at 3:05 p. m., passed signal 225.8, which indicated Proceed, and while moving at a speed of 40 miles per hour, according to the tape of the speed-recording device, it struck a landslide at a point 4.9 miles east of Berry Creek.

The locomotive and the first two cars were derailed. Separations occurred between the first and second diesel-electric units and between the second and third units. The first unit was derailed to the north and stopped on its left side at a point approximately 150 feet east of the point of derailment and 120 feet horizontally distant from the track. The second unit stopped upright at the rear end of the first unit. The third unit stopped with the front end 17 feet north of the track and the rear end on the track structure. The derailed cars stopped in line with the track. The diesel-electric units and the first car were considerably damaged, and the second car was slightly damaged.

The engineer, the fireman, and a fireman not on duty were injured.

The weather was cloudy at the time of the accident, which occurred about 3:11 p. m.

### Discussion

As No. 18 was approaching the point where the accident occurred the enginemen and a fireman not on duty were maintaining a lookout ahead from the control compartment at the front of the locomotive. The members of the train crew were in various locations in the cars of the train. The engineer said that because of curvature of the track and the wall of the cut the slide first became visible to him at a distance

- 7 -

which he thought was about 200 feet. When he saw the slide he immediately made an emergency application of the brakes. The train struck the slide before the speed had been appreciably reduced. The engineer said that he had no knowledge of any slide having occurred in this vicinity prior to the day of the accident. The fireman was injured in the accident, and he was not questioned during this investigation.

After the accident occurred it was found that approximately 6,400 cubic yards of earth, rock, and shale had become dislodged from the slope south of the track and had fallen to the track. This material had become dislodged from an area approximately 100 feet in width and extending between points 48 feet and 128 feet, respectively, above the level of the track. Members of the crew of No. 18 said that material of the slide was falling at the time the train struck it, and that it continued to fall after the train stopped.

The assistant superintendent said that he had been acquainted with the physical characteristics of the railroad in the vicinity of the point of accident during a period of approximately 40 years, and he had no knowledge of any slide having occurred in the immediate vicinity of the point of accident prior to the day of the accident. The roadmaster passed the point of accident on May 15, and he detected no unusual condition. Intermittent rain had fallen during the week preceding the day of the accident and on the day of the accident, but not to the extent that it was considered necessary to patrol the track in this vicinity. The section force in this territory does not ordinarily work on Saturdays. A prospector walking along the track passed the point of accident about 40 minutes before the accident occurred. He saw no indications that a slide might occur.

Slide detector fences have been installed at various locations on this division where slides have occurred in the past or where it is considered that slides may occur, but it has not been considered necessary to install a fence at the point at which the accident occurred.

#### Cause

This accident was caused by a landslide.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this nineteenth day of August, 1957.

By the Commission, Commissioner Tuggle.

(SEAL)

HAROLD D. McCOY,

Secretary.

**Interstate Commerce Commission**

**Washington 25, D C**

**OFFICIAL BUSINESS**

**RETURN AFTER FIVE DAYS**

**POSTAGE AND FEES PAID  
INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION**