

August 20, 1912.

In Re Investigation of Derailment on the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad, July 30, 1912.

On July 30, 1912, there was a derailment of Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific passenger train on the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad at Pueblo, Colorado, resulting in the death of the engineer and two passengers and the injury of three passengers and three employees. After investigation into the nature and causes of this accident, the Chief Inspector of Safety Appliances reports as follows:

Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific train No. 206 was an east-bound passenger train running on the tracks of the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad between Pueblo and Colorado Springs, Colorado. It was hauled by engine No. 1325, and consisted of one combination baggage and smoker, one chair car and two standard Pullman sleepers, in charge of Conductor Hazelbaker and engineer Swearinger. This train was due to leave Pueblo at 8:20 p. m., but on account of heavy rains it did not leave until 10:20 p. m., and was derailed about 3 miles east of Pueblo station at 10:30 p. m. The estimated speed at the time of derailment was from 12 to 20 miles per hour.

The forward trucks of the engine remained on the tracks at the north end of the fill. The engine being dragged backwards by the cars in the train it turned over and landed in the bottom of the river. The tank of the engine became detached from the trucks and was washed down the river nearly a quarter of a mile. The combination baggage and smoking car was carried down the river about 200 feet. The chair car turned over almost on its side and rested in the river. The front end of the forward sleeper went down into the river, the rear end remaining partially up on the embankment. The rear sleeper remained on the track.

This division of the Denver & Rio Grande railroad is double tracked from Pueblo to Dundee, a distance of about 8 miles, and is used jointly by the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific and the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad, eastbound trains using the right hand track. At the place of the accident the road runs along the west bank of the Fountain River. The track is straight, with nothing to obstruct the view for a distance of 20 telegraph poles approaching the place of the accident, which occurred upon a one-half degree curve. The track construction is substantial, being ballasted with smelter slag and cinders. Thirty foot 85-lb. steel rails are used, 18 soft pine ties to the rail. The rails are single spiked, no tie plates being used. Four miles of double track and 2.23 miles of siding are maintained by a foreman and 3 section men.

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The embankment where the derailment occurred consists of about 12 feet of a fill built in 1894, and is protected by a rip rap wall of heavy derrick rock, the footing being carefully made of brush with the heavy derrick rock laid on top, filled in with smaller rock laid by hand, making a smooth surface. A line of cottonwood trees has grown along the base of this wall for a distance of half a mile, many of the trees being 10 inches in diameter. The Fountain River as a rule carries only a small amount of water, but the current runs directly against the wall and the river bed is composed largely of quicksand. There was no rain falling at the time of the accident, but earlier in the evening there had been a very heavy rainfall extending throughout the valley tributary to the Fountain River.

Section foreman King and track walker Meyers stated that on account of the heavy rainfall they were patrolling the track and looked over this place of track between 9:00 and 9:15 p. m., at which time it appeared to be in proper condition. Conductor Hazelbaker stated he was in the chair car at the time of the accident and his first indication that there was anything wrong was a swaying sensation as if the train was going sideways. He thought the train was running at a speed of from 10 to 12 miles per hour. He had several slow orders, none of which covered the place of the accident. Fireman Elrod stated they were running about 30 miles per hour, and though the engine was equipped with an electric headlight which was burning brightly at the time of the accident he saw nothing wrong with the track.

This accident was caused by a portion of the fill or embankment on the west side of the Fountain River sliding into the river under the weight of the train, it evidently having become undermined by the flood waters of the river caused by heavy rains.

Respectfully submitted,

Chief Inspector of
Safety Appliances.