

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE MOUNT HOOD RAILROAD NEAR HOOD RIVER, ORE., ON NOVEMBER 23, 1923.

January 18, 1924.

To the Commission:

On November 23, 1923, there was a derailment of a freight train on the Mount Hood Railroad near Hood River, Ore., which resulted in the death of one employee.

Location and method of operation.

The Mount Hood Railroad is a single-track, standard-gauge line, extending between Hood River and Parkdale, Ore., a distance of 23.2 miles, and connects with the Oregon-Washington Railroad & Navigation Company at Hood River, its northern terminus, the accident occurring at a point 1.01 miles south of the station at Hood River. No block-signal system or book of rules is in use, and no bulletins issued affecting operation, trains being operated by a time-table and upon the authority of the agent at Hood River, who also acts as a day dispatcher. No dispatcher is on duty at night, as all trains, which consists of one motor car and a mixed steam train, are moved during the day, with the exception of a few weeks each fall during the fruit shipping season, when extra freight trains are operated by one crew at night. Approaching the point of derailment from the north, after leaving the yards at Hood River, there are numerous curves and short tangents. Just preceding the point of derailment there is a 12-degree curve to the right 650 feet in length, and then 658 feet of tangent, the derailment occurring at a point 95.5 feet from the southern end of this tangent track. The grade in this vicinity is about 1 per cent ascending for southbound trains.

The track runs generally north and south, and for about 3 miles out of the station is laid along the banks of Hood River, passing through numerous cuts and along the sides of high bluffs. The track is laid with 45-pound rails, 30 feet in length, with about 17 fir ties to the rail length, triple-spiked and ballasted with gravel. The surface and alignment were good and the track generally well maintained.

About 3 miles south of Hood River station there is a switch back, and it is the practice to push the cars ahead of the engine from Hood River to the switchback, and then proceed, in order that the engine may be at the head end of the train for the balance of the trip.

It was raining at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 8.00 p m.

Description.

Southbound freight train extra 1 consisted of 10 empty refrigerator cars, hauled by engine 1, and was in charge of Conductor Campbell and Engineman Smurtleff. Engine 1, headed south, left Hood River light at about 7 30 p.m.; at Powerdale, approximately 1 mile south of Hood River, the engine coupled to the 10 cars, leaving this point at about 7.45 p.m., proceeded a distance of about 0.61 mile, and while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 3 miles an hour, the first car was derailed as a result of striking a small pile of rocks on the track.

The first car continued on the ties a distance of 39 feet after striking the obstruction and was then derailed to the right and came to rest in an upright position with the front end about 5 feet west of the west rail and the rear trucks derailed but on the roadbed. The employee killed was the brakeman, who was riding on the derailed car at the time of the accident.

Summary of evidence.

Superintendent Smurtleff, who was operating the engine at the time of the derailment, said the first intimation he had of anything wrong was when he received stop signals, followed by several jars and jerks from the head end of the train. He applied the air brakes in emergency, bringing the train to a stop within a distance of about two car lengths. After the accident he inspected the air brakes and found that they were operative on nine of the cars, the tenth car being derailed. He stated that during the rush fruit season, a period of about three weeks in the fall, extra trains were operated at night but at all other times trains were operated only in the daytime. On account of the grades and light power, and to facilitate switching, no cabooses were used on the night extras and they were thus able to haul one more car of fruit. The caboose used during the day is equipped with a tail nose, while at night without the caboose, trains are operated without a tail nose. Superintendent Smurtleff said it was very dark and was raining hard at the time of the accident and expressed the opinion that had there been a tail nose on the leading car, owing to the lack of illumination of the track ahead, the conductor or brakeman

would not have been able to see the obstruction in time to avoid striking it. The slide consisted of about two cubic yards of earth and rock.

Conductor Campbell stated that after picking up the 10 cars at Powerdale he went along the train inspecting the angle cocks and made a test of the train line by opening the angle cock at the head end of the train and was answered by two blasts on the engine whistle. He rode on the leading car from that point until reaching the point of derailment, using his electric lantern to observe the track ahead, with which he said he was able to see a distance of about a car and a half or two car lengths, although it was raining and blowing and was very dark. The train was moving at a speed of about 6 or 8 miles an hour when he observed a black-appearing object about the size of a man's body on the left rail of the track ahead, he hurriedly caught the grab iron to brace himself for the impending shock, and began giving stop signals to the engineer, the train coming to a stop in about two car lengths after striking the obstruction. He did not know Brakeman Goss was riding on the leading car at the time of the derailment, and expressed the opinion that Brakeman Goss either jumped or was thrown against the wall along the track and rolled under the cars.

It is customary in severe weather in winter to provide watchmen and to patrol the track at points considered dangerous, but due to the fact that there had been very little rainfall prior to November 20, 1935, there had been no occasion to provide for special patrol. On November 23, 1935, the day of the accident, there had been an unusually heavy rainfall throughout the day, being heavier in the latter part of the day. At about 2.00 p.m. the section foreman in charge of this section of track passed the point of derailment, he said he found two small rocks on the track which evidently had rolled down from the bank, he inspected the bank but found nothing to indicate other loose rock in the wall or that a fall or slide might occur.

No speed restrictions are in effect on this road, but according to Superintendent Shurtleff, there is a general understanding that during stormy weather trains are required to proceed cautiously and to take no chances. Observing this custom he said a man is often sent ahead of a train during stormy weather to observe track conditions.

Conclusions

This accident was due to the train striking

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earth and rock which, loosened by heavy rain, had fallen upon the track.

Had a capoose equipped with a headlight and a hose connection to the brake pipe been operated at the head end of this train, the employees could no doubt have discovered the obstruction in time to avert the accident.

None of the employees involved was on duty in violation of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BOPLAND.

Director