

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR

BUREAU OF SAFETY

ACCIDENT ON THE

PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD

VANDERGRIFT, PA.

JULY 21, 1936

INVESTIGATION NO. 2085

SUMMARY

Railroad: Pennsylvania
Date: July 21, 1936
Location: Vandergrift, Pa.
Kind of accident: Derailment
Train involved: Freight
Train number: NL-1
Engine number: 6326
Consist: 87 cars, caboose
Speed: 25-35 m.p.h.
Track: Compound curve 5°
Weather: Clear
Time: 6:32 p.m.
Casualties: 1 killed; 2 injured
Cause: 12-year old boy placed piece
of iron on track

August 28, 1936

To the Commission:

On July 21, 1936, there was a derailment of a freight train on the Pennsylvania Railroad near Vandergrift, Pa., which resulted in the death of one employee and the injury of two employees.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Conemaugh Division extending between Conpitt Junction and Federal Street, Pittsburgh, Pa., a distance of 79.2 miles; in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a double-track line over which trains are operated by timetable, train orders and a manual block-signal system. The accident occurred on the westward main track at a point about 1 mile west of the passenger station at Vandergrift; approaching this point from the east the track is tangent for a distance of 1,800 feet, then there is a compound curve to the right 3,700 feet in length, with a maximum curvature of 6° ; the accident occurred on this curve at a point 1,623 feet from its eastern end, where the curvature is 5° ; the superelevation of outer rail at this point is 2 1/8 inches. The grade for westward trains is 0.75 percent ascending at the point of accident.

In this vicinity the main tracks are paralleled on the north by two auxiliary tracks, which, after merging together, connect with the westward main track through a trailing point switch, the frog of which is located 403 feet west of the initial point of derailment. A siding parallels the main tracks on the south. All of these tracks are laid on a side hill cut, parallel to the south bank of the Kiskiminetas River.

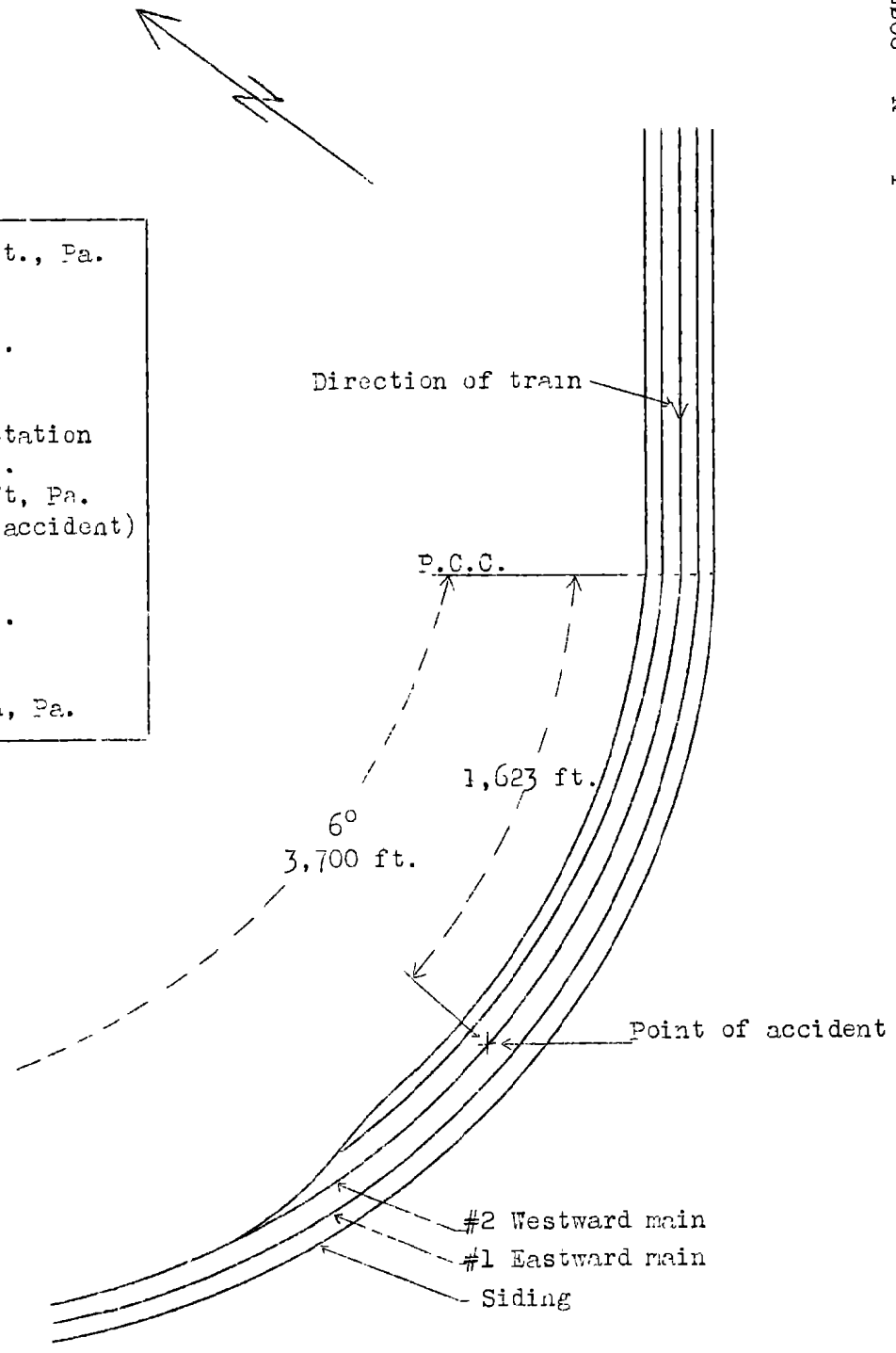
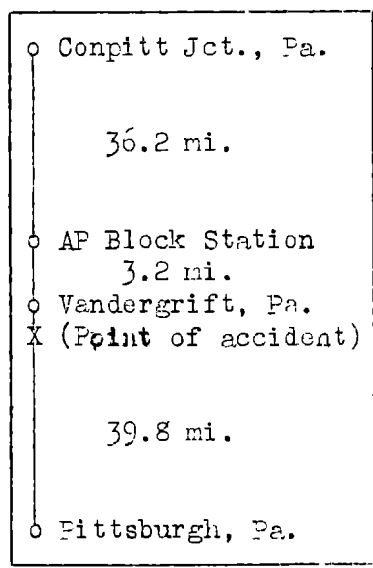
The main tracks are laid with sawed and turned 130-pound rails of 30 and 36 foot lengths, with an average of 17 and 21 treated oak ties to the rail length, fully tieplated, double spiked, and ballasted with cinders to a depth of 3 feet; the tracks are well maintained. The maximum authorized speed for freight trains on this curve is 35 miles per hour.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 6:32 p.m.

Description

Train NL-1, a west-bound freight train, consisted of 87 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 6826, of the 4-8-2 type, and was in charge of Conductor Cramer and Engineman Devinney. This train passed AP Block Station, the last open office and

Inv. No. 2085
Pennsylvania Railroad
Vandergrift, Pa.
July 21, 1936



3.2 miles east of Vandergrift, at 6:26 p.m., according to the train sheet, and was derailed about 1 mile west of Vandergrift while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 25 and 35 miles per hour.

The indications were that the leading pair of engine-truck wheels were the first to be derailed; when they struck the frog of the trailing-point switch of the auxiliary tracks, the engine, tender, and first 9 cars were derailed, obstructing both main tracks and the siding; 4 other cars farther back in the train were also derailed and damaged. The engine stopped on its left side on the eastward main track, with its front end 295 feet west of the switch frog. The employee killed was the fireman, while the employees injured were the engineman and head brakeman.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Devinney stated that he was maintaining a look-out ahead while rounding the curve west of Vandergrift, at a normal speed of between 30 and 35 miles per hour, but he did not notice any object on the rail. The first intimation he had of anything wrong was on seeing something like flying dust, and not realizing that any part of the engine was derailed, he looked to see whether there was anything dragging. Before he had time to take any action the engine encountered the trailing-point switch, left the track and started to turn over and he immediately applied the air brakes in emergency. Engineman Devinney said that there was nothing wrong with the engine and it rode all right; the air brakes were tested and worked properly and the train handled satisfactorily en route, while speed had no bearing on the accident. After the accident he did not notice any outsiders in the vicinity. Head Brakeman Harpster was in the cabin on the rear of the tender; he gave testimony similar to that of the engineman as to what transpired. Immediately after the accident two or three young boys, about 14 or 16 years of age, who were in that vicinity, offered to assist him across the river to a doctor but he went forward and protected the front end of the train. Statements of Conductor Cramer and Flagman Firestone were to the effect that there was nothing dragging, nor anything wrong with the equipment that would have contributed to the accident, nor was speed a factor. The flagman immediately went back to protect the rear end of the train.

Assistant Train Master Dixon was walking along the track about 30 car lengths west of Vandergrift station when Train NL-1 passed at a speed of about 35 miles per hour; as was customary he observed the train for indications of dragging equipment, hot boxes, etc., but saw nothing of such a nature.

After the accident he saw several young people in the vicinity. He looked for evidence as to the cause of the accident and found that the engine truck wheels had run off the high rail of the curve and he noticed a small piece of iron lying right at the point of derailment which bore a bright mark, indicating that it had been run over. He left the iron in its original position, where it was afterwards found by Superintendent Sixsmith and party. It was the opinion of Assistant Train Master Dixon that this piece of iron caused the accident.

Supervisor of Track Critchfield stated that he examined the track at the point of derailment, after the accident, and found it to be well maintained and in good condition, and there was nothing about track conditions that would have caused or contributed to the accident. Later he saw the piece of iron that was run over and found at the point of accident and in his opinion this was the cause of the accident.

Road Foreman of Engines Longstreth examined engine 6826 at the point of accident; the wheels and flanges of the engine truck were in good condition and there was nothing about the condition of the engine that would have caused the derailment.

Superintendent Sixsmith, in company with Master Mechanic Teufel and Division Engineer Tyler, went over the track eastward from the derailed equipment in an endeavor to determine the cause of the accident and at a point about 15 car lengths from the engine, found a flange mark on the outside of the high rail and at a point 9 feet 11 inches from this mark a piece of strap iron was found lying on the ends of the ties, parallel with and about 4 inches from the high rail of the curve. This piece of iron measured $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length, $1\frac{7}{8}$ inches in width, and $\frac{1}{2}$ inch in thickness; it was heavily coated with rust, but had bright spots on both sides of one end, which indicated that it had recently been run over. The piece of iron was afterwards placed on the rail at a location indicated by rust flakes and a slight indentation on top of the rail, and the receiving end of the iron partially fitted the contour of the rail, indicating this was the position of the iron when it was run over. Flakes of rust similar to those on the iron were also found on the tie immediately ahead of the spot where the iron was first discovered. Superintendent Sixsmith concluded that the accident was caused by this piece of iron lying lengthwise on the high rail of the curve, causing the left front wheel of the engine truck to mount the rail and become derailed, running in that position until the frog of the trailing-point switch was encountered, precipitating the final derailment. A police investigation was immediately started in an effort to locate the party responsible for having placed the iron on the rail. Eleven boys were

apprehended on July 24th and taken to the State police headquarters at Greensburg where they were questioned individually. A 12-year old boy admitted placing the iron on the rail and he re-enacted the incident in the presence of the police and several residents of Vandergrift; the boy was then held by State police pending further action. In view of the above, Superintendent Sixsmith was of the opinion that the accident was caused by the engine truck encountering a piece of iron which was mischievously placed on the rail.

William Coy, age 12, stated that earlier in the day he and several other boys got into a box car and played cards; they then got out and he put some glass on the track, but one of the other boys made him take it off, following which he put a piece of brass on the track and was again made to take it off. Later on he started home alone and he picked up a piece of iron and put it on the track and then went home and ate, following which he went out and played, and he did not learn of the accident until about $\frac{1}{2}$ hour after its occurrence. He then went to the scene of the accident and realized what had caused it. This boy identified the piece of iron as the one he put on the track.

Discussion

The investigation developed that a piece of strap iron, found on the ties on the outside of the high rail of the curve, measuring $8\frac{1}{2}$ " x $1-7/8$ " x $\frac{1}{2}$ ", had been placed on top of the rail by a 12-year old boy who was arrested and confessed to having placed the iron on the track.

Conclusion

This accident was caused by a piece of iron having been placed on the track by a 12-year old boy.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON,

Director.