

April 13, 1912.

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF ACCIDENT ON THE
GREAT NORTHERN RAILWAY, NEAR WRENCOE, IDA.,
March 25, 1912.

On March 25, 1912, at 3:45 A. M., there was a derailment on the Great Northern Railway near Wrencoe, Ida., resulting in the death of the engineer, fireman and head brakeman. After investigation, the Chief Inspector of Safety Appliances reports as follows:

West-bound freight train No. 401 consisted of 40 cars and a caboose drawn by engine No. 1203. This train was in charge of Conductor Mead and Engineer Wechslein and was en route from Troy, Mont., to Hillyard, Wash. It passed Sand Patch, Ida., at 3:15 A. M., and was within about two miles of Wrencoe when it was derailed by a rock slide.

The slide causing this derailment apparently came down at about the time the engine reached the point of the accident. A part of the slide struck the tender and first three cars, while the engine ran into another part of it and was derailed. The engine ran about fifty feet before leaving the right of way and plunging down an embankment about thirty feet high into the Bend d'Oreille River. The tender was lying across the track, and the first and third cars were derailed. The speed at the time of the derailment was about 15 miles per hour.

At the point in question, as well as in the immediate vicinity, blasting had been in progress on account of various improvements being made, and it is supposed that this, together with the jar of passing trains, loosened the rocks to such an

extent that they fell when train No. 401 reached that point. The contracting company had been drilling at this particular point for about two weeks and had commenced blasting about three days previous to the accident.

The track walker on duty at the time of the accident stated that he had passed the point in question about 15 minutes previously, and when the train was derailed he was standing beside the track about a quarter of a mile distant, waiting for it to pass him. He stated that the electric headlight of the approaching train clearly illuminated the track and that there were no rocks on the track. The slide seemed to come down at about the time the engine reached that point. When being passed by this train he had occasionally stood beside the track in the vicinity of where the slide occurred. He had noticed that the train jarred the ground very much and had often thought it would not take much to start some of the rocks. For this reason he kept out of the cut when trains were passing.

Both the engineer and assistant engineer in charge of the construction work, as well as various employees of the Great Northern Railway, considered this to be a dangerous place, and the rocks were to be removed. The section foreman stated that for several years it had been his practice to station a flagman at this point during the spring months on account of the dangerous condition of the rocks.

Whatever blame there is for this accident rests with the Great Northern Railway, since it is clearly apparent that the mass of rock responsible for this accident was considered dangerous notwithstanding the fact that it had been there for years.