

CNR November 1927
washout and WRECK
AT KINGSEY,
QUEBEC
BY JOHN R DAVIS

NOTE: THIS IS A REVISION AND EXPANSION OF THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE WRITTEN FOR THE ISLAND POND, VT, HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S ANNUAL MEETING SOUVENIER AUGUST 1983 TITLED "GREAT VERMONT FLOOD OF 1927." John R. Davis

Once Upon A Steam Age – Portland Division, November 1927

By John R. Davis

Once upon a steam age, on the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th of November 1927, torrential rains inundated much of Canadian National's Portland Division in the Eastern Townships, upper regions of New Hampshire, Vermont, and parts of Maine, and nearly washed subsidiary Central Vermont Railway and that state itself, into oblivion.

Inspection of CV damage revealed the destruction through the heartland and south beyond Brattleboro would require months of effort akin to building a new railway before it could be reopened to traffic; while the estimate for effecting repairs and closing a number of breaks to restore service on the route to Portland would be six or seven days.

Immediately CN began moving equipment and material from across the system for rebuilding south from St. Albans, and not only repairing the Portland Division but tasking it to move all Montreal- New London CV traffic through to the Boston & Maine's Rigby Yard in South Portland, and to provide motive power, crews, and equipment to assist moving material and supplies into mid-Vermont via connecting lines.

Although regional media eighty-five years ago carried early accounts of the flooding as front page news, most reports on the extent of damage appeared only in local papers and subsequent media attention was usually about progress of reconstruction within Vermont, and without mention of the Portland Division's role enabling the progress of that restoration.

Fortunately some documentation, such as enginehouse and station registers, a few photographs, and the recollections from several of those participants no longer with us, exist to permit a portrait of Portland Division operations and involvement in Vermont's recovery during that period.

By 7 pm the 3rd rain had fallen steadily for over twenty-four hours without let-up, rivers and streams across the region at flood stage, and track patrols were reporting water rising even higher in some areas as the downpour continued to intensify, but all that evening's trains went out as scheduled, albeit with caution. Shortly after midnight however, all h--- began breaking loose, and within a few hours the Division would be in shambles – a tragic derailment, trains stranded at remote locations, others were canceled altogether, and water over the tracks everywhere with washouts galore.

Upon #15's arrival at Norton at 12:15 am the 4th, 5292's engineer reported debris blocking a box culvert near MP 152, and at 1 am engine 861 was dispatched from Island Pond with a crew to clear it, while during the time 861 was enroute to the site and returning at 3:30 am, conditions west of Richmond and northeasterly towards Victoriaville worsened.

At 1:30 am the bridge two miles east of Kingsey on the Danville Sub was swept away as the night train of the 3rd from Quebec City crossed it, dropping the engine into the stream and leaving two smashed coaches dangling from the abutment, and claiming lives of five railway crewmen. Minutes before the relief train sent from Richmond was reaching the disaster scene, a track patrol found a washout about 2:10 am at South Durham on the St. Hyacinthe Sub, forcing the 2:35 am annulment of #15 on arrival at Richmond and its counterpart #34/14 with engine 5289 to tie up on reaching Danby at 2:50 am.

Despite the St. Francis River threatening Richmond yard and eastward, Sherbrooke Sub was still passable for work extras to position ballast cars at Sherbrooke and Coaticook and Extra 3704 East to make Summit siding at 6 am for meeting #11 engine 5293 due out of Island Pond at 6:10 am. But at 6:20 am as #11 approached the culvert at MP 154 east of the meeting point, a sudden torrent of water took it out from under the two headend cars just as 5293 made it across and swept them downstream.

The baggage car came to rest about 50 feet downstream with one side and an end partially torn away, while the mail car stood upright on its trucks buried in the stream bed some 50 feet further beyond the baggage car. Miraculously no one was injured although the express messenger and baggageman received minor bruises in being shaken about.

At 7 am engine 861 was again ordered west to return the rear cars of #11 to Island Pond, and within half an hour both #11's engine and the freight train would be stranded at Summit as sectionmen erected a cofferdam across the tracks at Norton to prevent flooding the village. As this was occurring, long stretches of track from North Stratford to Mapleton on the Berlin Sub were either being covered or washed away entirely by the rising Connecticut River, ~~with~~^{and} a 200 foot washout at MP 137 cutting the line between Wenlock and Bloomfield.

Further east by 8 am there would be a gap of 175 feet at MP 92.4 between Berlin and Gorham, the Peabody River bridge askew on a washed out west pier at MP 90.8, and the Androscoggin River that lapped the rails on Shelburne Pool causeway when 2575 went across at 5:40 am with the wayfreight for Portland, now nearly two feet over it; causing 3714 with #493 to tie up on high ground at Gilead as water ahead and behind the train continued to rise and cover the tracks in a dozen places from Shelburne to a mile or more east of Bethel station.

At 9 am, 2574 went east with a crew and material to begin work at MP 137, at 9:12 am 5289 ran back to Montreal from Danby as an extra, and three worktrains had been dispatched from Richmond, one at the Kingsey tragedy side, one on its way towards South Durham, and the third heading for Sherbrooke. At 1 pm 3703 left East Deering for Locke's Mills with hoist 50056 and ballast cars and at 6 pm went back to Bryant's Pond to tie up for the night. As the Androscoggin began to recede that evening, 3714 left its train at Gilead and ran east to Bryant's Pond where it tied up at 7:30 pm.

On the 5th, 3705 went out at 5 am with Auxiliary 50029 for MP 154 to recover the derailed cars, but it took until 12:15 pm to lift the baggage car out and set it aside to burn, and difficulty reaching the mail car required relieving the crew at 2 pm and again at 2 am for retrieval work. At 7 am 3703 and 3714 were ordered to Locke's Mills for loading ballast and work between there and Gilead, returning to Bryant's Pond for the night and taking coal and water. At 8:35 am 1602 left Lewiston with a passenger extra taking a large crew of men to Locke's Mills to work the ballast trains, arriving there at 10:22 am and departing at 10:45 am back to Lewiston.

At 8:45 am as 2574 returned east to finish cribbing the washout at MP 137, 732 departed Portland with a passenger train for South Paris, arriving at 11:27 am and leaving back to Portland at 12:55 pm. The South Durham break was closed in time to allow the annulled #15 which had tied up at Richmond early the 4th to depart for Montreal at 11:14 am as #11, and for #16 to come through from Montreal and terminate at Sherbrooke at 11:35 am.

2575 left Portland at 2:35 pm with a wayfreight for South Paris and tied up for the night at 8:30 pm. At 3:30 pm #16 went back from Sherbrooke as #17 where it was annulled and then ordered out as #43 for Montreal, while #12 left Montreal on its scheduled time, but operated only as far as Coaticook. After

removal of the cofferdam at Norton, 2518, which had left Richmond at 6:30 pm with a piledriver outfit and material, reached Summit at 9 pm and after leaving the worktrain for engine 5293 to handle and unloading the material for trestlework, departed at midnight for Sherbrooke.

On Sunday the 6th, #33 left Richmond at 3:50 am for Montreal, at 4 am 3705 and 50029 completed rerailing the mail car and was headed back to Island Pond with it, 2574 returned from MP 137 at 6:40 am, and at 7 am 3703 and 3714 went to work between Locke's Mills and Shelburne hauling ballast. At 7:20 am 5605 left Portland with a Berlin Sub #117 for Bethel and returned as #116. At 8 am 2612 went out as work extra hauling ballast to MP 137.

#116 from Montreal ran only to Coaticook and then went back as #117. At 3 pm work extra 5293 completed the new trestle at MP 154 and moved the piledriver outfit down from Summit along with 3704 as dead tow and part of its train, closely followed by 5289 with #14 coming through to arrive at Island Pond at 3:30 pm. 2518 came in at 4 pm with a hoist from Richmond and the rest of 3704's train from Summit. At 4:10 pm 3705 went west for Richmond, and at 11:40 pm 5293 departed with #15 for Montreal.

On the 7th, 861 left at 6:45 am with the wayfreight for Richmond, and at 8 am 3705 came in from Richmond with more equipment and ballast from Sherbrooke. Except for a delay equipping #11, which finally departed at 8:30 am behind 3706 doubleheaded by 2518 as 2nd #11 due to a 1st #11 having been made up at Richmond that left there at 2 am, the regular passenger movements into and out of Island Pond over the Sherbrooke Sub returned to operating normally. At 9 am 2574 went west to MP 154 with the borrowed hoist for ballast work, returning at 6:05 pm. 2518 came in at 3:50 pm with more cars of ballast from Richmond, and 3706 arrived at 9:15 pm from Montreal with freight and some cars of rock from Actonvale.

The Berlin Sub runs that day were similar to those of the 6th, 5605 and 5583 on passengers from Portland to Bethel and back, 2575 took a wayfreight east from South Paris, and at 7 am as 3703 and 3714 moved the ballast operation from Locke's Mills up to the Pleasant River and Mason pits at Allens, 2576 departed East Deering with a wayfreight for Bethel and then tied up for the night at Bryant's Pond with 3703 and 3714. At 9 am 3712 went to Bloomfield pit east of MP 137 for ballast and a crew for repairing roadbed and trackage with new rails as necessary across the meadows to Beatties, returning at 7:35 pm.

On the 8th only manifests #492 and #493 remained absent from Island Pond's normal "westend" timecard. To the east, while passenger and freight services were still held to running between Portland and Bethel, 3703 and 3714 went to work at 7 am between Allens and MP 90.6. At 8:30 am 2612 ran east with piledriver 50620 and material for Gorham to commence work at the west end of the gap at MP 92.4. At 9 am 3712 was sent to work between Bloomfield pit and Mapleton, while at 10 am 3705 was dispatched to North Stratford and Mapleton dumping rock.

The 9th would find increasing activity on the westend, 3708 brought in a freight extra from Montreal at 10 am, 3417 arrived from Richmond with freight at 11:30 am, 3702 came in with #492 at 3 pm, 2518 brought in a ballast train at 5 pm from Richmond, and at 8:30 pm 3420 arrived with a mixture of freight and ballast from Richmond.

At Gorham earlier that morning, 3714 finished work at the Peabody River bridge, letting 3703 across with Portland piledriver 50618 that 2575 brought to Bethel the previous day. By 9 am it was at the east side of the MP 92.4 gap joining 2612's outfit working from the west, and 2574 was heading east from

Island Pond for Berlin picking up carloads of pulp enroute, and 3705 and 3712 were on ballast extras between Bloomfield and Groveton. Both passenger trains operated from Portland to Gorham and back, while 2576 arrived at Gorham at 5 pm with wayfreight and merchandise cars.

At 1:50 am the 10th, the MP 92.4 gap was bridged and Montreal-Portland service fully restored. At 5:15 pm 3711 departed Island Pond for Portland with #14, 5559 took #16 out at 2:05 pm, while 5583 brought in #17 from Portland at 2:55 pm and 5605 came in with #15 at 11:25 pm. Other moves not on the regular timecard at Island Pond that day were 2611 leaving at 9 am and 3712 at 9:30 am to dump rock between North Stratford and Mapleton, 3702 returning at 10 am from a Groveton turn, 3703 coming in at 7 pm with a train of empty pulpracks from Berlin, and as 2612 was arriving from Gorham with the piledriver outfit at 8 pm, a passenger extra being routed via Portland was departing Montreal's Bonaventure Station and its counterpart skirting Boston.

At 12:20 am the 11th, as Train #CV20 "*The Washingtonian*" halted on Track 2 in front of Island Pond's station where 5579 was swiftly exchanged for 5583 with Cydney Barnes and Peter Goulet in the cab, and quickly underway again for delivery to the Boston & Maine at Rigby Yard in South Portland; George McKelvey and J. L. Ouellette, having moved 5559 light through Portland's Commercial Street to the B&M yard, were on their way with the first Train #CV21 "*The Montrealer*" via Yarmouth Jct to Island Pond, arriving at 4 am, from whence 5579 would speed it onward to its namesake city.

In addition to the passenger and freight runs regularly carded at Island Pond, between 6 am and noon that day, three Richmond turns entered the yard, CV engine 462 with a train of ballast which 2612 moved east on a Groveton turn, 3416 and 3428 came in on rock trains with 3712 then forwarding one to Groveton on another turn. At 4 pm 732 arrived from Gorham for servicing after leaving piledriver 50618's outfit at Groveton, and from 4:30 to 9 pm, three more Richmond turns pulled by 3419, 2601, and 3429 would arrive with ballast trains.

The 12th began at Island Pond with arrival of 5579 on #CV20 at 12:20 am and its quick departure for Rigby via Yarmouth Jct behind 5584, at 4 am 5583 brought in #CV21 from the B&M Rigby handoff and fifteen minutes later left for Montreal with 5579 in charge. At 5 am 5293 came in with #14 which 3705 then drew on for Portland, at 5:30 am CV engine 470 arrived on a Richmond turn. At 6:10 am 5289 headed for Montreal with #11, at 7 am 2574 left with the Gorham wayfreight, and at 7:20 am 3418 brought in another turnaround from Richmond.

At 8 am 732 and 862 left coupled together for Groveton with 50620's piledriver outfit and disappeared for a number of days, loaned for restoring the Montpelier & Wells River road via the B&M at Wells River, to enable getting worktrains onto the CV at Montpelier Jct. At 12:10 pm 3417 came in from Richmond with ballast and at 12:30 pm 3700 arrived from Portland with #493, which was taken west by 3417.

5574 replaced 5604 upon #17's arrival from Portland at 1:05 pm, 5605 took over for the 5071 when #16 came in from Montreal at 1:55 pm. At 2:45 pm 3706 came in from Montreal with #492 which 3702 left with for Portland at 3:15 pm. 3420 arrived from Richmond at 3:30 pm with ballast and went back with the annulled #493 that 3714 started out with November 4th and now brought in at 4 pm from Gilead, eight days after leaving it there.

At 4:30 pm 3708 arrived with a Richmond turn, at 6:20 pm 713 came in with the wayfreight from Gorham and 861 at 7 pm with the Richmond wayfreight. At 8:15 pm 2624 and 2654 doubleheaded in with an extra from Montreal, 5292 arrived at 10:30 pm with #12, followed at 11 pm by 3419 on a

Richmond turn. 5072 brought in a ballast train from Richmond at 11:20 pm and would take #14 to Portland the next morning.

Over the next ten days another half dozen daily extra^s would work the Sherbrooke Sub, dodging Rigby-Montreal specials and regularly scheduled trains to fill Island Pond yard and available siding space down the line with hundreds of cars of work equipment and material to be forwarded to the CV when the M&WR and the B&M's line to White River Jct reopened.

Among locomotives CN sent to assist Portland Division power from the 11th onward, were four of Central Vermont's Class N-5a 2-8-0's, 462, 467, 470 and 474, with the latter primarily working on the Berlin Sub. On the 17th 862 appeared at Groveton with piledriver 50620, and on the 22nd 732 ran from Groveton to East Deering returning the 50618.

On November 23rd, an Island Pond-White River Jct run via Groveton, Woodsville and Wells River was added to the schedule for expediting equipment, material, supplies and some merchandise relief. The CV Class N-5 engines were then reassigned Montreal and a group of Class N-4a engines from Turcot and Brockville assets were assigned Island Pond to augment Berlin Sub and Richmond-based Eastern Townships N-4 power moving the unique White River Jct trains.

Bob Walker and J. A. Milligan, with 2538, took down the first White River Jct train that day, followed by 2624, and then 2609. At 9:30 am the 24th, Walker and Milligan left White River Jct with 2538 and came into Island Pond at 8:50 pm. Eleven hours and twenty minutes to complete a run of nearly one hundred twenty miles! Many trips took longer, occasionally crews coming north had to be relieved at North Stratford, and sometimes Groveton.

Considering the engines had to switch ends and be turned on the B&M table at Groveton, observe slow orders and go in the hole for all B&M movements and southbound GT relief trains, make numerous stops for water and likely add coal at Woodsville coming north, it is surprising crews did not require being relieved more often.

Engines used on this run were Brockville's 2538, 2595, 2606 and 2648; Turcot's 2571, 2624 and 2654; and Portland Division's 713, 2565, 2574, 2575, 2609, 2610, 2611, and 2612. CV 2-8-0's 404, 406, and 413 were assigned Island Pond several weeks after this route was established. The 406 also went out on Gorham wayfreights and Sherbrooke Sub worktrains, while several of the Brockville engines saw use on Island Pond-Gorham wayfreights.

Just how many of the ^{1,296,000}~~700,000~~ cubic yards of earth and rock used in rebuilding the CV came from CN pits at Dixville, Danville, Actonvale, and elsewhere, is as unknown as the exact number of obsolete freight cars delivered to Slip Hill and rolled into the big hole to serve as fill; but it is probably a safe estimate that more than half of that figure moved through Island Pond, as the activity at company pits appeared to have been around the clock.

On December 1st, there were three ballast trains on the Sherbrooke Sub bringing loads into Island Pond and taking empties back, coinciding with seasonal grain extras to further strain on the motive power pool. On the 5th, the number of ballast trains increased to five, and on the 10th two more daily trips were added. During the previous week, the affects of the great deluge were even felt in Michigan, for on the morning of the 12th, Grand Trunk Western S-lf engines 3408 and 3409 doubleheaded in towing a ballast extra from Richmond, in the afternoon, 3407 and 3410 arrived with separate trains, and the next day 3412 and 3413 doubleheaded in with another.

The Rutland Railway reopening of January 4, 1928 enabled moving "*The Washingtonian*" and "*The Montrealer*" on a more direct route. The last #CV20 from Island Pond to Rigby was taken down by Walter Emery and Aubrey Bean with 5604, while Ernie Kimball and Arthur Bonneau were bringing up the final #CV21 with engine 5559. On the 5th, CN reassigned CV engines 600, 601, and 602 to Island Pond for Portland-Montreal passenger service. The 601 arrived with #14 on the 6th, 602 brought it in the following day, and 600 came in on #12 the 17th, but only the 600 and 602 went through to Portland, one trip each, with good reason.

These Class U~~4~~a 4-8-2's were relatively new, delivered scarcely six months earlier, and the three engine rotation for Trains 11, 12, 14, and 15 on the Island Pond-Montreal card where they would be stopping only long enough to service and turn, offered maximum usage as opposed to overnight layovers when operated ~~■~~ through to Portland. The fact #11 and #12 were only six day a week jobs was a bonus, for the idle engine could then work a freight to Montreal and back. Occasionally 602 served as East-West helper between North Stratford and Summit.

By February 1st, the CV reconstruction rapidly neared completion, and the three, four, and sometimes five Island Pond-White River Jct extras running daily in each direction began to dwindle, first to two runs a day, and by mid-month, one. On March 1st J. W. Campbell and D. E. Moran departed with 2575 from White River Jct at 6 am and arrived in Island Pond at 4 pm with the four hundred and sixty-sixth train operated over a most unique route.

The GTW engines remained on the Sherbrooke Sub hauling ballast down for work extras to distribute along the Berlin Sub, and occasionally drew mainline manifests to and from Montreal. None of the group came east of Island Pond except 3407 for some minor shopwork at East Deering shop, and by mid-April all were enroute home to Battle Creek. On May 26th, the CV 600's also went home, and Portland Division returned to normal – until the next time.

Sources:

- CN Form 534 Engineers and Firemens Register and Rest Book (inbound movements)
 - East Deering Nov 1927-May 1928
 - Island Pond Nov 1927-May 1928
 - Gorham Jan 1928-May 1928
- CN Form 535 Appearance Book for Engineers and Firemen (outbound movements)
 - East Deering Nov 1927-May 1928
 - Island Pond Nov 1927-May 1928
- CN Book 740 Record of Train Movements
 - Bryant's Pond station Nov 1927
- Recollections of numerous CN-GT personnel employed in operational/administrative capacities on the Portland Division during this period, particularly:
 - the late King Bartlett, Agent, Locke's Mills station
 - the late Arthur Bonneau, Engineman, Berlin Sub on White River trains
 - the late Robert C. Crockett, Agent, Bryant's Pond station
 - the late Guy Durrell, Engineman, Berlin Sub on White River trains
 - the late John S. Hicks, Operator, North Stratford station
- Report of A. B. McNaughton, Supt of Portland Division as furnished to Canadian Railway and Marine World and published in journal of January 1928 (though contrary to his statement, the MP 92.4 gap at Gorham was closed Nov 10th, not the 11th)

Reviewed and corrected May 16, 2012 John R. Davis

ENGINES APPEARING AT ISLAND POND NOVEMBER 4, 1927 TO MAY 26, 1928

- on Berlin & Sherbrooke Subs b - Berlin Sub only s - Sherbrooke Sub only

713 b	2604 s	3417 s	3710 -	5577 s
732 -	2606 -	3418 -	3711 -	5579 s
733 -	2607 s	3419 s	3712 -	5582 b
734 b	2609 -	3420 s	3713 -	5583 b
803 s	2610 -	3421 s	3714 -	5584 b
858 s	2611 b	3422 s	5052 s	5585 s
861 -	2612 -	3423 s	5059 s	5592 s
862 -	2617 s	3424 s	5060 s	5604 b
2515 s	2621 s	3425 s	5069 s	5605 b
2518 s	2622 s	3426 s	5071 s	7155 b
2520 s	2624 -	3427 s	5072 s	7527 b
2538 -	2634 s	3428 s	5074 s	7528 b
2545 s	2648 -	3429 -	5075 s	7530 b
2565 -	2654 -	3462 s	5286 s	CV
2568 s	2663 s	3700 b	5289 s	404 b
2569 s	3407 -	3701 -	5292 s	406 -
2571 -	3408 s	3702 -	5293 s	413 b
2574 -	3409 s	3703 -	5295 s	462 s
2575 b	3410 s	3704 -	5549 s	467 s
2576 b	3412 s	3705 -	5559 b	470 -
2579 -	3413 s	3706 -	5561 s	474 -
2595 -	3415 -	3707 -	5562 s	600 -
2596 s	3416 s	3708 -	5574 s	601 s
2601 s		3709 -		602 -

EPILOG - That next time was the Hurricane of 1938, with service on the Central Vermont again interrupted, particularly its Southern Division, by the heavy rains and flooding which devastated both the southern New England region and its rail network. Once more, from September 22nd until October 1st, the "*Washingtonian*" and "*Montrealer*" expresses and rerouted manifest tonnage would roll via the Portland Division.

Enginemen Ritchie and Dubois left Montreal at 9:54 p.m. the 22nd with Train CV20 running as Passenger Extra 6018 East for Island Pond. Cyd Barnes and J. C. Leblanc manned the 6018 at 2:30 a.m. the 23rd and took the "*Washingtonian*" on to Rigby Yard at South Portland, where they laid over awaiting the B&M's delivery of the "*Montrealer*" and departed there at 11:15 p.m. with arrival in Island Pond at 5:20 a.m. the 24th. Thereafter during the rerouting the two trains were dispatched and reported as "CV20" and "CV21". The last trip of Train CV20 over the GT left Island Pond at 2:40 a.m. October 1st for Rigby with enginemen Larrabee and Grady on 5557 which they doubleheaded back on a manifest freight the 2nd. Enginemen Simard and George with the 5584 picked up the last Train CV21 from Rigby at 12:01 a.m. the 1st.