

ARKANSAS RAILROADER
The Arkansas Railroad Club Newsletter
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OUR NEXT MEETING IS OCTOBER 11, Sunday afternoon, 2:30 p.m., Room 305, Missouri Pacific Union Station, Markham and Victory, Little Rock, Ark.

ON A SATURDAY AFTERNOON by W. L. "Mike" Adams

"Well Boss, you will never know if it will work until you try, let me back him up." This was Conductor J. W. "Tobe" Bullard talking and we were in a beautiful sylvan setting in the foothills of the Ouachita Mountains of southwest Arkansas. The time was a bright Saturday afternoon in early spring--the dogwoods were in bloom and the bream and crappie were spawning in the Antoine River just down the dumb from us and all was right with the world. All, that is, except for the "daily except Sunday" local service advertised for the Missouri Pacific's "Womble" branch. On the outbound trip that fine day Train 921 with engine 4108, an EMD PL-2 in charge of Engineer Chick McDonald, had rounded a curve about three miles north of RK Junction and much to the consternation of Chick and his fireman, Jim Marshall, had struck a large rock that had rolled from the adjacent mountainside and lodged against the inside rail. Chick had "big-holed" the 4108 and as the maximum authorized speed was only 30 mph, the damage was light. The brake cylinders had been stripped from the trucks of the 4108, and the first car, an empty Frisco gondola billed to Caddo Gap for barite loading, had ridden up on the rock and was teetering in the air with the wheels about two feet from the rail. To the left was a fill above the Antoine River fifty feet below, and to the right, of course, a high rock bluff.

I was Assistant Trainmaster for the Missouri Pacific with headquarters at Gurdon, Arkansas, located about 22 miles southwest of Little Rock on the Arkansas Division. At that time, the year being 1955, Gurdon was quite a rail center with switch engines around the clock and locals radiating out in four directions. This particular money maker ran between Gurdon and Norman with a side trip to Delight and was commonly known as the "Womble" from the former name of Norman. Conductor Arthur Buckley of the distressed local had hiked back to the village of Antoine and called me from a general store, explaining his predicament. I immediately called Hugh Shideler, our genial Roadmaster, and while he was lining up section forces I ordered out the "wheel" car. This interesting piece of equipment was loaded with cables, jacks, blocks, trucks and enough allied material to cope with minor derailments, and if enough sweat, tears and profanity was brought to bear, could handle some pretty big ones. Tobe Bullard caught the relief outfit as Conductor. Our first chore upon arriving at the scene of battle was to drag the rear end of the local back to RK Junction and stash it away in the siding. While this was being done, a staff meeting was held between myself, Roadmaster Shideler, Mechanical Foreman Driskill and assorted lackeys and lookers-on such as trackmen, brakemen, stray farmers, woodcutters and anyone else with two cents advice to offer. Arriving back at the scene with the wheel car, Tobe tamped his old brier with Granger rough-cut and with that big grin on face looked over the situation. It had been decided that if the section men could dig a large hole alongside the ballast line and then

line over the track about a foot, it might just be possible to pull the car back easy and roll the rock into the hole and clear the locomotive. We could then take dynamite and demolish the rock at our leisure. With this plan of attack established and approved, everyone fell to with gusto and soon had a large hole dug and the track jacked and lined over as far as possible.

The moment of decision had arrived. As Assistant Trainmaster I was in charge and if it went well, would take the credit--the credit with the rank and file as being smart enough to take the advice of men long experienced in handling the varied calamities that befall a railroad; with the management as being able to take care of my end of the line without always crying to the Trainmaster or Superintendent for help.

This Frisco gondola was practically a new car. Mentally I could see the look on the face of the President of the Frisco if this car became contrary and instead of falling back on the rails, decided to take a swim in the Antoine. Another pressing consideration was the Missouri Pacific's fine diesel locomotive. At this point installation of new brake cylinders would put it back in running condition but what if it too decided that it could stand a quick dip in the swift flowing Antoine?

Problems--decisions--problems! Now this is when you earned your stipend as a big-shot operating official of the mighty Missouri Pacific. I was in charge of all I surveyed and must make up my mind. To delay would mark me a fence straddler--not to mention increase the already mounting overtime bill for varied and sundry employees. I pulled out my Dunhill and rilled it from my can of Prince Albert. When I had it drawing to my satisfaction I turned to Tobe and said, "Okay, Tobe, take her away--easy now."

Well, the Frisco will never know how close they came to having a freshly washed gondola and our little BL-2 was saved the ignominy of an unscheduled dunking. That rock rolled back into the hole just exactly the way it was planned, and the following Monday the section gang busted it up with a stick of dynamite. I gained stature, I hope, in the eyes of my fellow workers and all in all it turned out to be a pretty fine Saturday afternoon.

I see by the paper that Tobe has passed away. It was his obituary notice that brought these memories rushing back to me. Tobe graduated from the rawhiding drudgery of fourteen-hour locals and when he retired was wearing the gold braid of Conductor on the Texas Eagle. I miss him. I miss all of the "brush hogs" as the railroad men of Gurdon were called. Their ranks are getting thin.

ROCK ISLAND DETOUR LASTS TEN DAYS, INSTEAD OF TWO. . . because a beam temporarily supporting the old and new spans nearly collapsed into the river during the changeover. Rock Island trains were cut to a minimum during the detour over MoPac's Baring Cross Bridge. John Martin, Jr. reports that the Rock's red-ball freights, #25 and #26, had cabooses on both ends so they were delayed a minimum of time being reversed. During the detour, all Rock Island traffic entered and departed their Little Rock yards at the west end.