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Washout! - *The WI&M Rebounds From a Rough Day at Yale*

It probably seemed like an ordinary day

to the WI&M crew as their eastbound freight crested the hill at Yale, Idaho on the morning of February 14th, 1961. With an overcast sky and several inches of fresh snow on the ground, winter still held a grip on the mountains of North Idaho. But, daytime temperatures had already begun venturing above freezing lately, and there were other subtle signs that spring was on the way. As diesel #30 eased out of a gentle curve just past the east siding switch at Yale, the engineer continued applying his brakes to counter the full weight of the train shoving him down the steepening grade. Just then, the whole cab lurched to the side and the locomotive slammed to a sudden stop! Several heavy jolts and crashing noises from behind made it clear that there would be no more "ordinary" in this, or any of the next several days.

As the initial shock of the accident began to fade, the engineer and fireman climbed out of the cab and found their engine listing ten degrees to port with its wheels sunk deep in the snow and mud. Even worse, the first two cars behind them were bunched together and hanging over a deep crater into which had dropped both their trucks and twenty feet of track. While waiting for the rear end crew to walk forward, the engine crew began examining their surroundings to figure out exactly what had happened.



WI&M locomotive #30 has sunk to its axles in muddy snow after a fill washed out under the weight of its train in February, 1965. Photo: University of Idaho Special Collections Library

At this location, the railroad ran on a raised fill across the north end of a small meadow. On the opposite side of the tracks a narrow trench dropped down and away from the meadow. Recognizing that moisture collecting in the meadow would naturally drain along this trench, the WI&M's builders had wisely placed a 4-foot square wooden culvert under the fill to ensure that water would continue its normal flow unimpeded. Over time, however, the culvert had become clogged, turning the fill into a dam. As the snow covering the meadow began to melt, the pressure against the south side of the fill increased. And, with the water fully saturating the fill material, conditions became ripe for a washout.

On the morning of the 14th, the initial weight of #30

The non-profit WI&M Ry. History Preservation Group, Inc has been organized for railroad historians, enthusiasts, and modelers interested in gathering and sharing information on the Washington, Idaho & Montana Railway, from its origins in 1905 through it's operations of today.