

Once Upon A Steam Age

By John Davis

Once upon a steam age, on the 3rd and 4th of November 1927, it rained and rained, a steady torrential downpour that nearly washed the Central Vermont Railway and the State itself, into oblivion as well as inundating the upper regions of New Hampshire.

During the several days it took to assess the damages inflicted on the CV, which revealed the railway in shambles through the heartland almost down to Brattleboro, Canadian National began assembling equipment and material for delivery to St. Albans in rebuilding southward from that point; and at the same time tasking the Portland Division to not only take on movement of all the Montreal-New London tonnage normally routed over the CV, but also to provide equipment and assist in moving material and supplies to mid-Vermont via connecting railways.

Although flood damage on the Portland Division was minor compared to that on the CV, there were two breaks in the line west of Island Pond and another to the east between Cascade and Gorham, interrupting through service until November 10th.

Shortly after 5293 arrived in Island Pond at 12:30 a.m. on the 4th, a washout cut the line three miles above the west yard switch, and at 1:15 a.m. an eastbound manifest derailed at Summit when water-soaked roadbed slipped out from under it. Rising streams in the Waterville Valley temporarily halted the Richmond auxiliary from reaching Norton, and it even became necessary before daybreak at that site to erect a cofferdam across the track to hold water back from other low-lying areas.

By mid-day on the 5th, the worktrain Mogul 861 had taken up on the previous afternoon for restoring the first washout west of Island Pond, returned with manifest engine 3704 in tow from Summit. 3705 then took auxiliary 50029 up to the derailment site, where it joined the Richmond crane in getting the line cleared at 5 p.m. on the 6th, and the track sufficiently ballasted to allow 5289 passage with Train 14 from Montreal at 8:20 a.m. on the 7th.

Throughout the 6th and 7th, 2574 made numerous trips eastward with a gravel train from the company pit at Bloomfield, filling in and shoring up roadbed damage where the tracks between North Stratford and Mapleton had been submerged by the overflow of the Connecticut River; and on the 8th, 2612 was dispatched east with Island Pond piledriver 50618 to assist Deering piledriver 50620 in closing the gap at Gorham. This bridging was completed on the 10th, and 5559 came into Island Pond at 2:55 p.m. with Train 17 from Portland for a resumption of full service between Montreal and Portland.

Dispatched from Montreal's Bonaventure Station early that same evening was Train CV20, "*The Washingtonian*" behind CN engine 5579. At 12:20 a.m. the 11th, 5579 was cut off in front of the Island Pond station, and the GT's 5583 with Cydney Barnes and Peter Goulet in the cab, took over for speeding the deluxe limited onward to Rigby Yard in South Portland, where it was then turned over to the Boston & Maine.

George McKelvey and J. L. Ouellette, crewing the 5559, brought out the first Train CV21, "*The Montrealer*" from Rigby Yard for Island Pond on the 12th. The movements of CV20 and CV21 were subsequently added to the Portland Division's timecard as Second 12 and Second 15.

Also the morning of the 12th, a half dozen freight extras were put on daily schedule to move the solid blocks of rerouted CV tonnage between Rigby Yard and Montreal. Moguls 732 and 862 disappeared from the trainsheet that afternoon for a number of days; said to have been sent with work equipment on loan to the Montpelier & Wells River Railway via the B&M from Groveton down to Wells River, where they would restore the M&WR in order to reach the CV mainline at Montpelier Junction and enable worktrains to rebuild the trackage in both directions.

Over the next ten days another half dozen daily extras went to work on the Sherbrooke Sub., dodging the Rigby-Montreal specials and regularly scheduled trains, to fill Island Pond yard and available sidings down the line, with hundreds of cars of engineering equipment, construction materials and boarding cars. These would be forwarded to the CV when the M&WR and the B&M's line on the west bank of the Connecticut were reopened.

Among the fleet of locomotives CN assigned from other regions to augment Portland Division motive power, from the 11th onward, were four of the Central Vermont's Class N-5 2-8-0's, numbers 462, 467, 470 and 474. The latter spent most of its time on the Berlin Sub-Division working a variety of jobs. Engine 862 reappeared at Groveton with piledriver 50620 on the 17th, and the 732 was brought back the 22nd and promptly dispatched to Deering with 50618 in tow.

On November 23rd, a direct Island Pond-White River Junction run via Groveton, Woodsville and Wells River was added to the schedule for expediting equipment, materials, supplies and some merchandise relief; the four CV Class N-5 engines were then reassigned to Montreal and a group of Class N-4 engines from the Eastern Township lines were assigned to Island Pond to augment the Berlin Sub-Division N-4 engines in covering the White River Junction trains.

Bob Walker and J. A. Milligan, with engine 2538, took down the first White River Junction train on the 23rd, followed by 2624, then 2609. At 9:30 a.m. the 24th, Walker and Milligan departed White River with the 2538, reaching Island Pond at 8:50 p.m. Eleven hours and twenty minutes to complete a run of nearly one hundred twenty miles!

Many trips took even longer, and occasionally the crews coming northbound even ran out of time and had to be relieved at North Stratford, sometimes at Groveton. Considering these trains had to switch ends going onto or coming off the B&M at Groveton, observe one slow order after another, yield in meets with southbound GT relief trains, go in the hole for all B&M movements, make numerous stops for water, and likely cut off for coaling at Woodsville on the way north from White River, it is surprising that relief crews were not called more often.

Locomotives used on this run were the Portland Division's 713, 2538, 2565, 2571, 2574, 2575, 2595, 2606, 2609, 2610, 2611, 2612, 2624, 2648 and 2654. CV 2-8-0's 404, 406 and 413 were reassigned to Island Pond several weeks after this route was established. The 406 also went out on Gorham wayfreights, and on worktrains up and down the Sherbrooke Sub-Division.

Just how many of the 700,000 cubic yards of earth used in rebuilding the CV were brought in over this route from the CN pits at Dixville, Danville and elsewhere, is as unknown as is the number of obsolete freight cars delivered to Slip Hill where they were rolled into the big hole to serve as fill; but it is probably safe to estimate that more than half of those cubic yards moved through Island Pond, as the activity at the company pits appears to have been around the clock.

On December 1st, there were three gravel trains in service on the Sherbrooke Sub-Division bringing loads into Island Pond and taking empties back, despite coinciding with the seasonal influx of grain extras which always strained the pool of motive power. On the 5th, the number of gravel trains was increased to five, and on the 10th, two more daily roundtrips were added. During the previous week, the effects of the Great Vermont Flood had been felt in Michigan, for on the morning of the 12th, Grand Trunk Western engines 3408 and 3409 doubleheaded in from Richmond towing a gravel extra, followed in the afternoon by GTW 3407 and GTW 3410 on separate gravel trains. The next morning GTW 3412 and GTW 3413 doubleheaded in with another trainload of gravel.

On January 4th, 1928, with the Rutland Railway now restored to handle the "*Washingtonian*" and "*Montrealer*" on a more direct route, W. E. Emery and A. F. Bean with engine 5604 took down the final Second 12 "*Washingtonian*" from Island Pond to Rigby, while E. Kimball and Arthur Bonneau were bringing up the last "*Montrealer*" carded as Second 15 with the 5559. On the 5th, CN redirected use of CV engines 600, 601 and 602 to Island Pond for Portland to Montreal passenger service. The 601 arrived with Train 14 on the 6th, 602 brought it in the following day, and 600 came in on the 17th with Train 12, but only the 600 and 602 reached Portland - one trip each - and with good reason.

These three engines were relatively new, delivered scarcely six months earlier, and with the time schedule of Trains 11, 12, 14 and 15 for the Island Pond-Montreal segments, ideally suited to keep four separate trains rolling daily. And they did so over an extended period, stopping only long enough to be turned and serviced before heading out again. The fact that Trains 11 and 12 were only six day a week jobs was actually a bonus, for the idle engine then could work a freight to Montreal and back. Occasionally 602 served as East-West Helper between North Stratford and Summit.

By February 1st, reconstruction of the Central Vermont was rapidly nearing completion, and the three, four and sometimes five Island Pond-White River Junction extras running daily in both directions began to dwindle, initially to two runs a day, and by mid-month, only one. On the 1st of March, J. W. Campbell and D. E. Moran departed the White River Junction yard at 6 a.m. with 2575 and pulled into Island Pond at 4 p.m. with the final, and four hundred sixty-sixth train operated via a most unique route.

The GTW engines remained at work in the Eastern Townships hauling gravel trains down for GT worktrains to distribute along the Berlin Sub-Division and on occasion, the Montreal manifests. None of this group came east of Island Pond except 3407 for some minor repairs 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 the Portland Division returned to normal - until the next time.

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.