

Photo of the Month

The Brightwater Train Wreck, 1907



Brightwater Train Wreck, November 29, 1907
(Neg. # N002880. Lent by Nuel Lynch)

During the over one hundred years of its existence, the trains of the Frisco line would fall prey to its treacherous tracks winding through the Ozark Mountains. Rock slides, shifting tracks, collisions with other trains and those unfortunate enough to try and cross in front of a speeding train; all of these things took a toll on life, limb, and property.

These wrecks could be deadly, especially for the train crews. The Frisco wreck at Bethel Heights on October 17 of 1897, near where the tracks cross present day Highway 264, was especially deadly. On that day, due to the failure to use proper signals, "Two giant locomotives [met] in a deadly embrace." In this massive pileup two men were killed, one of them an unidentified tramp, and five were badly injured. The locomotives themselves were reduced to an "unrecognizable mass of wood and iron."

While there were dozens of wrecks during this period, the most famous of the Frisco train wrecks was called the Brightwater Wreck. This accident occurred on November 29, 1907, when a runaway freight train coming down the slope from Avoca toward the trestle over Little Sugar Creek slammed into a slower moving train still on the bridge. Due to the quick thinking of the engineer of the runaway train, who blew warning signals on the whistle, all crew from both trains jumped to safety before the collision. The runaway train's engine plunged forty feet into Little Sugar Creek. The only casualties were four show horses on the leading train. Some of the whiskey cargo on the leading train was unaccounted for after the cleanup.