

# APPENDIX VII: GRAPHIC DESCRIPTION OF A BATTLE WITH SNOWDRIFTS

*The Egan Express*, February 24, 1881

This article closely resembles the story about the superintendent from the East from *The Long Winter*.

## Graphic Description of a Battle With snow Drifts.

Below will be found an exciting account of a battle with snow on the Kansas Pacific railroad, taken from the *Denver Tribune*, which will be read with interest by our readers:

During Sunday night Sup't Odell made arrangements to clear the track of snow, and realizing how great a task it was, perfected plans on the most thorough and extensive scale. Four of the largest and strongest engines on the road had been sent on from the Smoky Hill division, together with construction cars and a commissary outfit, the latter containing provisions and general supplies sufficient to sustain five hundred men five days. A gang of 100 shovelers was got together and boarded the construction cars, and Sup't Odell and his two most efficient road bosses stepped into the Superintendent's car. In selecting the men for the great engines Mr. Odell exercised unusual care. Summoning an engineer or fireman, he asked, "Are you afraid to go where I tell you?" Each man selected for duty on the engines was asked this question. Only one engineer expressed hesitation, and he was quickly and kindly relieved. When the train was made up it consisted of

### AN IMMENSE SNOW FLOW,

four engines, three construction cars, the commissary car, and the superintendent's car, in the order named. When all was in readiness Mr. Odell said, "I've got the best crew for such work I ever had. You will see some fun." As so early Monday morning saw the expedition move out of Wallace.

From Wallace to Cheyenne Wells there are twenty deep cuts from 400 to 700 feet in length, and it had been reported, and such was found to be the case, that snow had drifted and packed in each one of these from 7 to 12 feet deep, the drifts for a few feet in some instances being still deeper. These drifts were plowed through successfully. In one or two instances a second trial was necessary, but in most cases the engineers, by crowding on a full head of steam and going at the cut with increased force, carried the train through the drifts and out beyond, leaving a clear path as they progressed. In one cut eleven head of cattle were killed, and in another, the last one before Cheyenne Wells was reached, an east bound freight train, headed by two engines, was found unable to move. The snow fighters added the strength of their four big engines, and the freight was backed up to Cheyenne Wells. When the head locomotive of the snow train would sound the signal that a drift was to be attacked, and the increased motion of the train would denote the approach to the cut, all hands would make ready for the shock. Those who have been in a railroad collision can appreciate the sensation produced upon the occupants of the cars when the immense iron snow plow was sent with tremendous force against the solid mass of snow twelve feet high, wedged in for a distance several hundred feet between two perpendicular walls of rock and earth.

Cheyenne Wells was at last reached, and here it was learned that the worst cuts were yet to be met with. The train, after a slight halt was ordered forward and several big banks were met and overcome and finally the largest and deepest cut on the division was reached. The Sup't knew that the most difficult place on the road had yet to be surmounted. This cut is a very deep one, its west end terminating at First View. It is 1,700 feet long, the walls rising high, and both openings being at points where the strong winds from the rolling prairie, which

sweeps out for hundreds of miles, sweep with full force and drive the snow into the semi-tunnel until the space is filled and packed in as if driven with immense sledge hammers. This point was reached about 7 o'clock in the evening, just as a large full moon was lighting up the night. It was clear, the air cold and chilly, but the wind had entirely subsided. The train was brought up to the east end of the cut and a survey of the task to be accomplished was taken. All hands were ordered out, and the locomotives pushed the cars back for about two miles, where they were left upon the main track. The shovelers were ordered to go upon the bank and as rapidly as possible, in gangs of four men each, cut trenches across the track, as deep as could be without too much loss of time, and about five feet apart. This work was for the purpose of disturbing the solidity of the mountain of snow, and of breaking up the mass as much as possible. The shovelers went at the work with a will, and in a short time this labor had been accomplished. Then everything was made ready for the charge on the snow with the ponderous plow. All hands secured as eligible a position as possible to witness the grand sortie. The engines went back for the distance of a mile and a halt to gain a greater degree of velocity. The engineers and firemen stood at their posts firm and fast. Full head of steam had been attained, and the powerful engines fairly trembled to exhaust their strength. The word was given and the engines were thrown wide open and came rush-

ing along the track at a rate of speed which sent the sparks flying from the flanges and shot clouds of flame from the smoke stacks. As the gigantic plow was driven with frightful and resistless force into the wall of snow, the effect upon the spectator was such as can be experienced under no other circumstances. Balls of snow weighing 1,000 pounds were sent from the chute of the great iron plow, as the monstrous machine pushed for a distance of 600 feet into the cut. Then the wonderful force was spent, and it was known that another and perhaps several trials would be necessary before the entire 1,700 feet could be got through. The plow and locomotives were completely buried in snow and several men walked over the smoke stacks and cabs on the snow piled upon them. The shovelers were ordered to cut out the engines and the hundred men went to work with a will to remove the snow from around them. It consumed about one hour to accomplish the task, and then another charge was made with the same terrible excitement and danger. It required four charges to cut thro' the snow, and then the plow was pushed through into the open plain beyond, and then the station of First View was reached at about 11 o'clock. From First View to Hugo the snow encountered was overcome with comparative ease, and Hugo was reached early Tuesday morning. At this point the snow brigade from Denver was met, and the road was declared "open for travel."