



# CUMBERLAND VALLEY RAIL TRAIL



## Dangers of Early Railroad Travel

**Troop Train Disaster:** On September 26, 1862, in a heavy fog, a Cumberland Valley Railroad (CVRR) troop train of about 20 cars ran into the CVRR engine *Utility* (pictured at right) as it sat stationary on the track just west of the Susquehanna River. The cars contained eight companies of soldiers from the 20th Regiment of the Pennsylvania Emergency Militia who were returning to their homes in Philadelphia and Reading after the Battle of Antietam.

The 20th Regiment saw little action in the Antietam campaign and had spent the previous few days quietly encamped near Greencastle, PA. In fact, until their fateful train ride home, only a few of its members had suffered any injuries at all. But on September 26, as many as eleven men of the 20th would lose their lives, thereby becoming the first fatalities suffered by the regiment in the war.

According to the *Carlisle Herald* account of the incident, nearly 80,000 soldiers had been transported to the Upper Potomac without incident via the CVRR, but by this time in the war, the CVRR “was not managed by its own officers, but by persons appointed by the government.” Even so, the CVRR eventually agreed to pay \$25,000 to the survivors of the worst accident in CVRR history.

“Dreadful Collision on the Cumberland Valley Railroad,” *Carlisle Herald* (October 3, 1862).



CVRR's passenger locomotive *Utility*. Image credit: Project Gutenberg

The train traveled only about a mile-and-a-half out of town before it met the westbound train from Harrisburg head-on at this curve in the trail. The baggage cars telescoped, killing one of the baggage handlers.



**Disaster strikes again:** The fact that both eastbound and westbound trains of the CVRR ran on the same track made travel particularly perilous.

On October 18, 1888, at this location (known then as *Britton's Woods*) a CVRR engineer decided to head eastbound from Shippensburg without dispatcher's orders.



Both conductors were seriously injured as were other CVRR crew members and passengers.

Three views (above right) and a map (right) of the fatal head-on *Britton Woods* train wreck of the Cumberland Valley Railroad in this bend in the rail corridor on October 18, 1888.

Image credits: Cumberland County Historical Society  
Image credit (map): Bridgens 1858 wall map of Cumberland Co

