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"DUE TO ADVERSE WEATHER CONDITIONS....."

The Gotthard in September 1987.

John Jesson

My holiday was fixed for September 15th at Altdorf. Two weeks beforehand Switzerland suffered torrential rain on top of an already damp summer, resulting in landslips and washouts which blocked the Simplon and Gotthard main lines, and parts of the RhB, FO, and BVZ. Canton Uri was particularly badly affected. After a week, the Gotthard was still blocked, with two washouts between Gurtellen and Wassen. The forecast, though, was for freight traffic to resume on Friday 11th and passenger traffic a day later, so I set sail confident that I would have plenty to see.

I had intended to spend most of the holiday walking, hence using Altdorf as a base, but I altered my plans to stay instead at Erstfeld, a decision I had no reason to regret. The situation when I arrived was that a full freight service was in operation, together with all long distance passenger trains. Four or five of the semi-fast internal trains to/from Chiasso were not running, and local trains were being covered by buses between Erstfeld and Göschenen.

I reckoned it would be worthwhile spending a day finding out what damage had been done by the weather, so I used the bus service to get to Wassen. Somewhat to my surprise, for part of the journey we used the motorway but the northbound carriageway was shut, with two-way working on the southbound lanes (often a separate road). I could see no actual damage to the motorway, but some large boulders blocked the other lane at one point, and many repair vehicles were in evidence. I understand that a bridge pillar has subsided about 2 metres, taking the road with it. Fortunately the reinforcing rods are not broken and it is hoped to be able to raise the whole pillar hydraulically and build a new foundation underneath. Initially it was estimated that the work would take two years, but this may be pessimistic. In the meantime there is an 18 ton weight limit on the motorway.

The worst damage to the railway is about 100m south of Gurtellen station, where both tracks had been washed away by the River Reuss, and at Wattingen where, again, both lines were left in mid-air. This last damage now seems to have been repaired and almost ready for use once more. A wiring train was stabled nearby while I was there, although some catenary masts had still to be put in position.

Walking back from Wassen was not without its problems as footpaths also have been destroyed. The first footpath I tried was closed, and the second involved a badly damaged bridge over the Reuss, but officially negotiable nevertheless. A short distance downstream there had been a

landslip, but it was possible to get across the still very wet ground. On the other side of the river were the remains of the old Gotthard road, which had been undermined and had collapsed into the river, leaving chunks of concrete and reinforcing rods dangling. The bridge over the Meienreuss was still standing - just - but it would need a rock climber to get over it.

From here I followed a track which led me to the reservoir at Pfaffensprung (emptied of water because of the huge amounts of rock, silt and other debris washed into it by the storms) and thence back to the West side of the river. A footpath leads from the power station alongside the railway all the way to Gurnellen. Fortunately, at the point where the railway has been damaged the path is a little higher up and has not been affected. Even more fortunate, there is a perfect view of the work going on to make good the ravages of the weather. So far, the northbound line has been reinstated over a five-span girder bridge (with a 50 kph speed restriction). The overhead catenary masts are not fixed to the bridge, but are set into the adjacent ground, which seems to have just escaped being washed away. A temporary access bridge has been built over the Reuss, and all sorts of machinery was in use. A veritable hive of activity.

Immediately south of the single track bridge the line splits into two again as far as the crossovers at Pfaffensprung, from where single line working is in force to Wassen. The footpath dives under the railway a few metres further on, and another scene of devastation ! The railway has barely escaped here, but one building was not so lucky. Where the building was is another hastily - constructed track to allow access for bulldozers and the like. (One of them was kind enough to stop work for a moment so I could pass it.)

I reckoned I had earned a beer after all this, so I patronised a hostelry in the station forecourt, intending to continue on another path alongside the river. Not a chance ! Washed away again, so I had to use the road towards Amsteg. After a while I abandoned road, river and railway and followed a path through the woods high on the east side of the valley which culminated in a glorious view down the Bristentobel to the rail bridge over this side valley. From there it was but a steep descent to the main road and a short walk to Amsteg-Silenen station and the bus back to Erstfeld.

On railway matters I should comment that the 'Cantons' have made a comeback on the Gotthard, including some double-headed workings. Single class Re 4/4<sup>III</sup> locos work most of the semi-fast passenger services (all of which had been reinstated by Monday 21st September), but the bulk of the work is handled still by the Re 6/6's. Indeed, one train I saw had no

less than four Re 6/6's, all on the front end, and undoubtedly a loco - balancing exercise, as the train certainly didn't need such power.

The Ae 8/14 11852 is at Erstfeld, but is not in working order nor, apparently, is it likely to be. The 'plinthed' crocodile 14270 has suffered from vandalism, with various 'bits' going missing. I am sure all members will join with me in deploring this so-called 'enthusiasm'. On a happier note, on Friday 18th both of Erstfelds Museumloks were to be seen on the track. 14253 ran light engine to Altdorf, returning light a short time later. (Was it to keep the wheels shiny or because the depot knew I was intending to photograph it?). 11801 double-headed a freight to Arth-Goldau as booked and returned somewhat late with a massive train of about 60 - 70 wagons, which was too long for the loops at Erstfeld and effectively blocked in a northbound freight for a short time.

Another member has told me that during the complete closure of the Gotthard line, many trains were diverted over the Lötschberg/Simplon route, and the HLS took a trick from the SBB's book by cutting in an assisting loco partway along the train, often an Ae 6/8. (Swiss rule surely must be to never scrap anything that might be useful.) Other observations made during my travels can be summarised as follows:

- + Highest number 'Kolibri' seen was 2115, at Rorschach depot.
- + Some 'Kolibri' trains seen minus the power car, with Re 4/4<sup>II</sup> instead.
- + 2110 (formed with one red-doored coach) was working services in the Zug/Luzern/Arth-Goldau area Tuesday 22/9. Also at Erstfeld 23/9 morning.
- + Zürich Airport - Luzern push-pull service with ex-Swiss Express stock mostly powered by red or green Re 4/4<sup>II</sup> locos. Only 'complete' train seen on Thursday 24/9 (with 11109). Extra coaches frequently hung on the back, necessitating shunting at ZH Hbf.
- + The earlier Re 4/4<sup>II</sup> now seem to be fitted with the later style of buffers, and some locos have had the diamond pantograph replaced by a single-arm type.

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1947....EISENBAHN & MODELLBAUFREUNDE LUZERN.....1987

The 40th Anniversary of the Lucerne Model Railway Club. (EMBL)

On Saturday 19th September, EMBL held its 40th anniversary celebrations in fine style. Naturally enough, the proceedings, which were a closely guarded secret, got under way in the Verkershäus at Lucerne with wine and light refreshments followed by a trip in the museums 'Spanish Bun' train and a short walk to the old Hotel Seeburg halt on the line between Lucerne and Meggen. There we joined a