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THE ACCIDENT AT AIGLE CFF STATION

By Ian Edwards

This summer I revisited Switzerland in an effort to complete another section of my filming the smaller railway lines. While photographing and video taping the Chemin de fer Aigle-Leysin - AL - at Aigle at 1830 hours on the 27th July 1988 - a tremendous crash was heard from the area of the main line, so I rushed onto the platform just in time to witness the second part of an accident which involved three C.F.F. trains.

A local pickup freight train hauled by locomotive type Ae4/7 No. 11953 was stationary on the track at platform three, while a shunter type TeIV No. 8203 removed two of the parcel wagons and reversed down to the south end of the loop. In the meantime the main line route through the station was signalled for the passage of the 105 Kmph Milan to Geneva Eurocity express hauled by locomotive Re4/4 No. 11343. The initial impact at between 60 to 80 Kmph was between the express and the shunting locomotive, in which the TeIV and its two baggage wagons was pushed all the way back up the loop into the rear of the pickup freight. The second impact was between the express/shunter and the pickup freight.

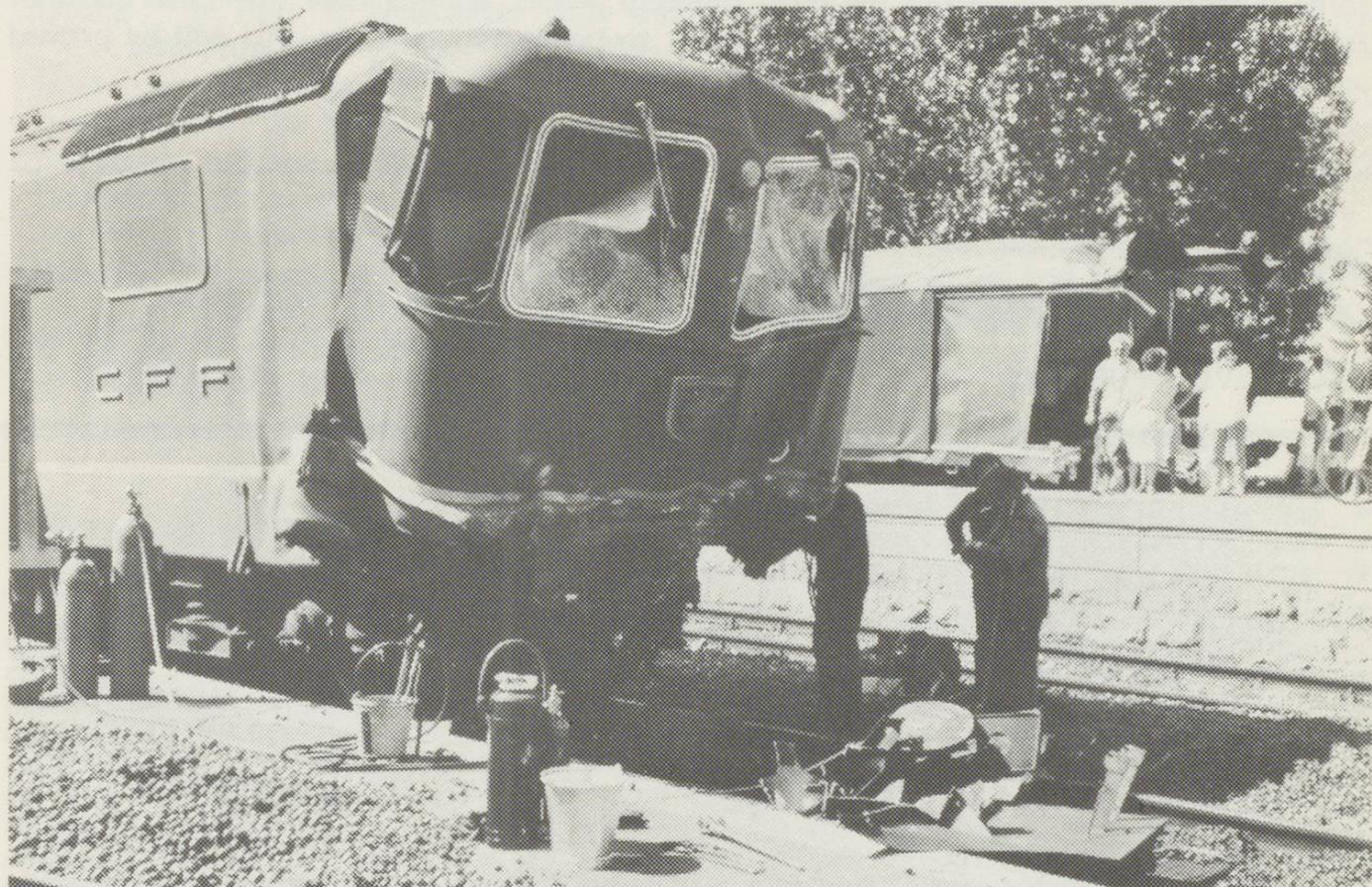


Collision of EC "Lemano" with freight train at Aigle.

Photo: I. Edwards

The impact with the pickup freight caused the destruction of a closed freight wagon, and forced one of the open wagons type Fs-u No. 987 up onto the overhead catenary gantry in doing so unloading vegetables onto both track and platform. The shunting engine was badly damaged both front and back and lost its pantograph in the accident. On the express train the damage consisted of; the locomotive was badly crushed in the front and the rear, the RIC Baggage coach Type D No. 51 85 92 70 107 located

just behind the Re4/4 was bent double as it was pushed upwards through the front of the platform canopy before coming to rest above the locomotive, the first of the C.F.F. type Bpm coaches was damaged where the baggage coach had crumpled the front area, and the restaurant coach lost its pantograph as the overhead wires were dragged down. The rest of the coaches of the express appeared to be undamaged and remained on the track. Catenary wires through a large part of the station area were brought down. Amazingly, when the rescue teams arrived just minutes later they found that nobody was seriously hurt but about fifty people required treatment for minor injuries and shock. Fortunately the driver of the express escaped injury, as he could be seen walking around inside the locomotive looking for an exit as both doors had been crushed, eventually leaving via one of the side windows.



Re4/411 locomotive No. 11343, showing damage to front area.

Photo: I. Edwards

Just one and a half hours after the accident, the wiring crews were hard at work clearing away the damaged catenary and wires and installing new parts. It was around 2100 hours that the first train - southbound towards Brig - passed through the area, headed by an Re4/4IV No. 10103 with its pantograph lowered and being propelled by locomotive type Em3/3 No. 18810 located at the rear of the train.

The next morning when I returned to the station at 1000 hours, I found that during the night the double slip points at the entrance to the loop had been replaced. The RIC baggage coach had been cut into two pieces and deposited along with the remains of the freight wagon - which had ended up on the catenary gantry - on the goods platform. The coaches of the "Lemano" had been towed away during the night to St. Triphon just 5 kilometres south of Aigle. The two locomotives remained locked together until about 1400 hours, as they were parted the full extent of the damage to the Re4/411 locomotive could be seen. The pantograph was missing, the rear cab was completely crushed by the baggage coach, the front cab was pushed back by the impact

with the shunting locomotive, and the front bogie had been pushed back about 400 mm. Before the Re4/4 locomotive could be moved the buffers had to be cut away along with all equipment below the cab floor including the front part of the bogie itself. When this had been done the locomotive was jacked up to enable the bogie to be replaced onto the track, it was then towed away. Just after 1400 hours the remains of the pickup freight had been checked and any repairs that were required prior to moving it had been done, it was then taken away closely followed by the TeIV shunting locomotive.

With all the damaged rolling stock out of the way, the permanent way teams set about replacing all the damaged and buckled track in the loop area. It was the end of the week before the loop was back in full use and normal service was resumed through the station. All that could be seen to indicate something out the ordinary had occurred, were some button carrots lodged in the most unlikely places. At this time the actual cause of the accident is not known but it would point to being human error, this will be proved or disproved when the results of the C.F.F. inquiry are announced.

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