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THE END OF THE LINE AT LOCARNO (SSIF/FART)

By T. Elston

It was always one of the highlights of our holiday at Stresa, on Lake Maggiore, in Northern Italy, for my Wife and I to take the Viguzzo - Centovalli train from Domodossola in Italy to Locarno in Switzerland.

Whilst I was aware of the proposal to construct tunnel access to the terminus at Locarno, as reported in the Swiss Express No. 9 March 1987 (page 23), it was a shock to see how much progress had been made in the year since July 1987, when everything seemed normal. This year the rail journey from Domodossola terminated at Ponte Brolla, and the remainder of the journey to the terminus at the SBB Station in Locarno was made in a large articulated single decker Mercedes-Benz "Girobus". There are at least two of these vehicles on the route. The Girobus now deposits passengers on the Shopping Plaza by the PTT Postal Bus Park, outside the SBB Station. Now at least one doesn't have the hazard of crossing the very busy main road from the old Centovalli Terminus to the SBB Station.

At Ponte Brolla a new platform face has been constructed on the approach curve to the old station, just before the level crossing. The Girobus has a large turning space to enable it to park parallel to the new platform. The old single main line track from Ponte Brolla towards San Antonio is now used as an empty stock siding. Except for the level crossings and where the track is embedded in the street cobbles, much track has already been lifted either side of San Antonio. Elsewhere one can see an automatic ticket machine standing forlornly by the side of an abandoned platform and trackbed. The old Centovalli Terminus is blocked by large stone blocks and flower pots at the top end and railings at the bottom end. Major construction work is already underway. At San Antonio piles are being driven and large holes have been excavated in the path of the main track and passing loop. At Locarno the empty Centovalli stock used to be stabled in sidings at the back of the SBB Yard behind a large freight shed. About half of the freight shed at the outer end has been demolished and construction (the inevitable pile driving) is proceeding on the cleared site.

The departure of trains from the old Terminus heading for the single track in the centre of the main road and the run on down to the major cross roads at the bottom, undoubtedly caused major disruption to other road users. It was perhaps inevitable that with the prospect of abolishing 28 level crossings, the railway would eventually have to give way to the car and lorry in the name of progress.

But my Wife and I sadly miss the colourful scene of the little pale blue and cream trains threading their way through the beautiful flower decked streets of Locarno. A sad loss indeed. Thank goodness for memories and photographs!

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FART ABDe4/6 No. 16 about to depart from Locarno.

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