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Autor: Cramp, Barry / Cramp, Sue
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train is coming, so that when the train breaks the first light detection beam the barriers will drop and when the second beam is broken they will go up again. Clever stuff, but don't ask me how it works. In addition there is a sub-panel for shunting Wegerhaus. Signal aspects are obeyed - usually!

Of course operations do not always go smoothly by the book. Some trains get moved out of sequence, these are deemed to be running early or late as the case may be. If they are forgotten, they are supposed to have been cancelled. Then, just as you go to start a train from the sidings you discover that you, or more likely, the previous operator, has forgotten to attach the locomotive, so you are scratching around looking for one to a chorus of voices muttering "when is the next one coming?"

One individual who shall remain nameless, but I will call JJ, delights in detaching wagons off any train passing Rongellen and blocking up the cement or sawmill sidings just as you are

due to shunt one of them. This he usually does whilst the next shift is away having a cup of coffee!

Apart from all this there is always the Wegerhaus shunt. Or the overhead wire that breaks during the day. They never break before or after an exhibition, only during one. The same applies to derailments; they only ever happen when people are watching. It certainly makes life interesting!

All the operators will, I think, agree that after an hour's running they are ready for a break and a cuppa. Most new operators are surprised at how much concentration is required to run the layout. Operators are a bit like swans, all calm above the backscene but paddling like the blazes underneath.

My thanks go out to all "The Swans" who keep Via Mala running despite the occasional operating problem. I am fortunate in that they all do it for enjoyment. After all, it is our hobby and a lot of leg pulling goes on at the back.

Incident at Saanenmoser

by Barry & Sue Cramp

Travelling from Thun across to Gruyères this summer, we arrived at Zweisimmen to change onto the MOB. The new *Crystal Panoramic Express* was waiting but we forsook its luxury - and supplement - to follow a few minutes later by the Schnellzug and a first class compartment behind the driver to ourselves.

All went well until the loop above Zweisimmen. The Regionalzug duly passed and there we stayed. The guard's trackside phone call told of a derailment ahead. We would probably have to reverse to the station and go on by bus. More waiting ensued and then we were called on, to arrive at Saanenmoser by the side of the *Crystal Express*.

A loaded ballast wagon behind a diesel engine had broken its coupling and jumped the rails. Its wheels were firmly bedded in the wooden road crossing sleepers just by the station. We gathered round to watch the fun as the railway staff used hand-pumped hydraulic jacks with screw traverse to inch the wagon

back. It was going to be a long job to rerail that heavy wagon.

Then the plan was revealed. The *Panoramic Express* that had been due to cross our train at Gstaad would inch up to the derailment, passengers would swap trains and carry on back up the line. This duly happened, passengers from our two trains finding it a tight squeeze on the *Panoramic*. This then kept to the Schnellzug stops and timings, but running exactly one hour late. Connections were made at Montbovon and we arrived at Gruyères giving full marks to the MOB.

A vacancy has occurred for a Sales Officer for the Swiss Railways Society. Applications should be made to the Secretary, Peter Dransfield, 10 Beechwood Road, Mirfield, WF14 9JX. This responsible post is a vital one since the growing range of Society products and *Swiss Express* back issues are greatly appreciated by members. In the meantime, only orders for the new Society mugs can be accepted by Les Heath. Please do not send any further orders to Steve Crebbin.