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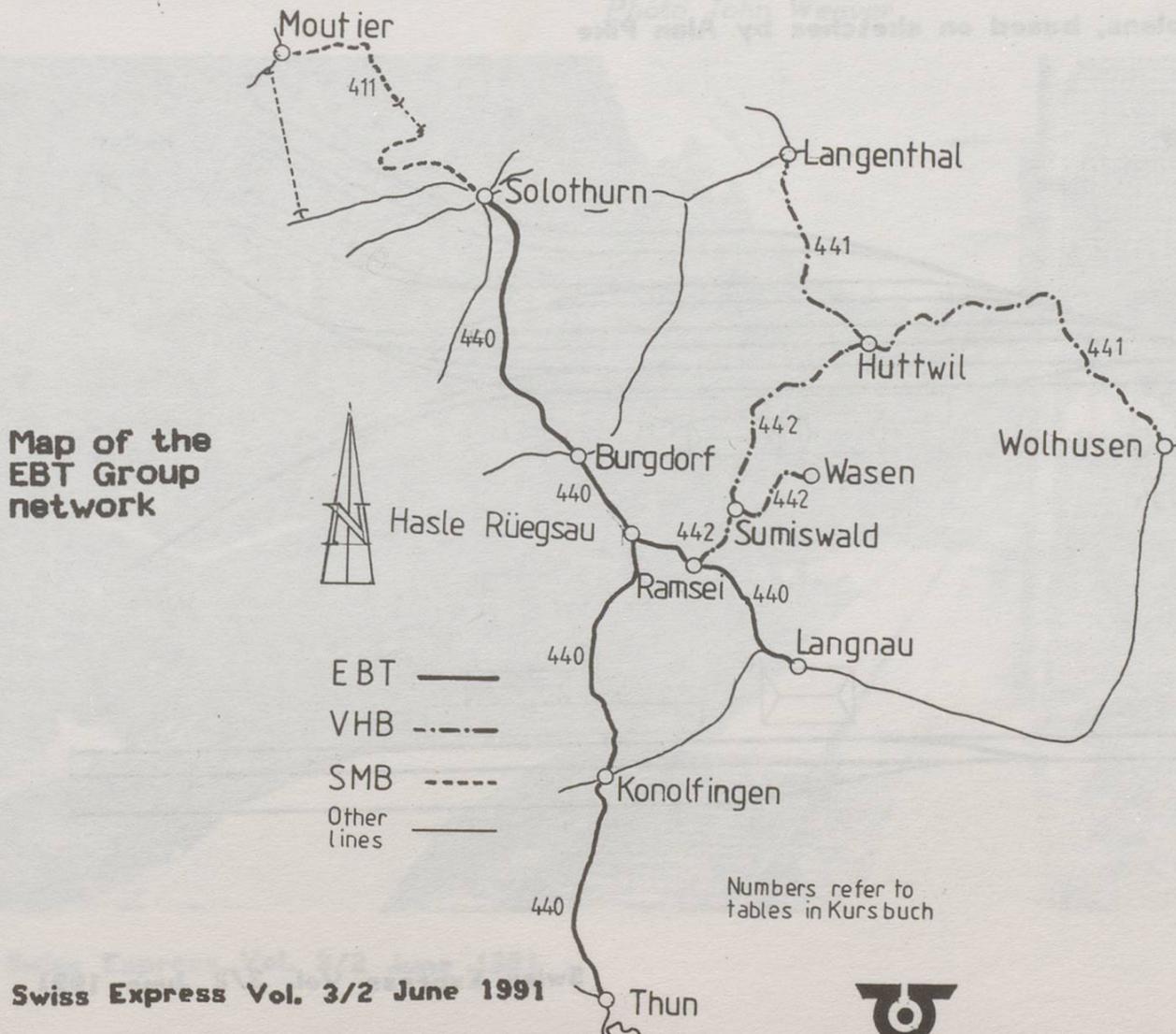
Introducing the Group

by C.J.Freezer



Last autumn, at Nick's suggestion, we rounded off an idyllic week in Switzerland with a trip over part of the EBT network, a group of private railways comprising the Emmenthal-Burgdorf-Thun (EBT), the Solothurn-Munster-Bahn (SMB) and the Vereiningte-Hutwill-Bahn (VHB), operated in such close harmony that, without Alan Snowdon's excellent map, it's difficult for the traveller to discover where one starts and the other leaves off. The confusion is confounded by the use of modern two-car sets, the most recent of which are derived from the standard BLS design, branded with all three sets of initials and run indiscriminately over the system.

Until then I had looked on the EBT as a convenient short-cut on the route from Spiez and Thun to Lucerne, but in a couple of hours, I revised my opinion. Here we had a close-knit network, with relatively simple stations providing an integrated local service over a fairly large area of Switzerland, sadly overlooked because it lacks spectacular scenery and doesn't serve any of the recognised tourist centres. Yet not only does a trip over the system bring one into contact with workaday Switzerland in many of its varied aspects, the railways have considerable modellingpotential. Not only are most of the stations capable of selective compression as the foundation of a model, as the two track plans by Alan Pike will show but the passenger trains are short, for even the occasional loco-hauled sets rarely exceed four coaches. There is ample lineside industry and although the main work is now carried out by railcars, locomotives, motorised luggage vans and tractors are very much in evidence.



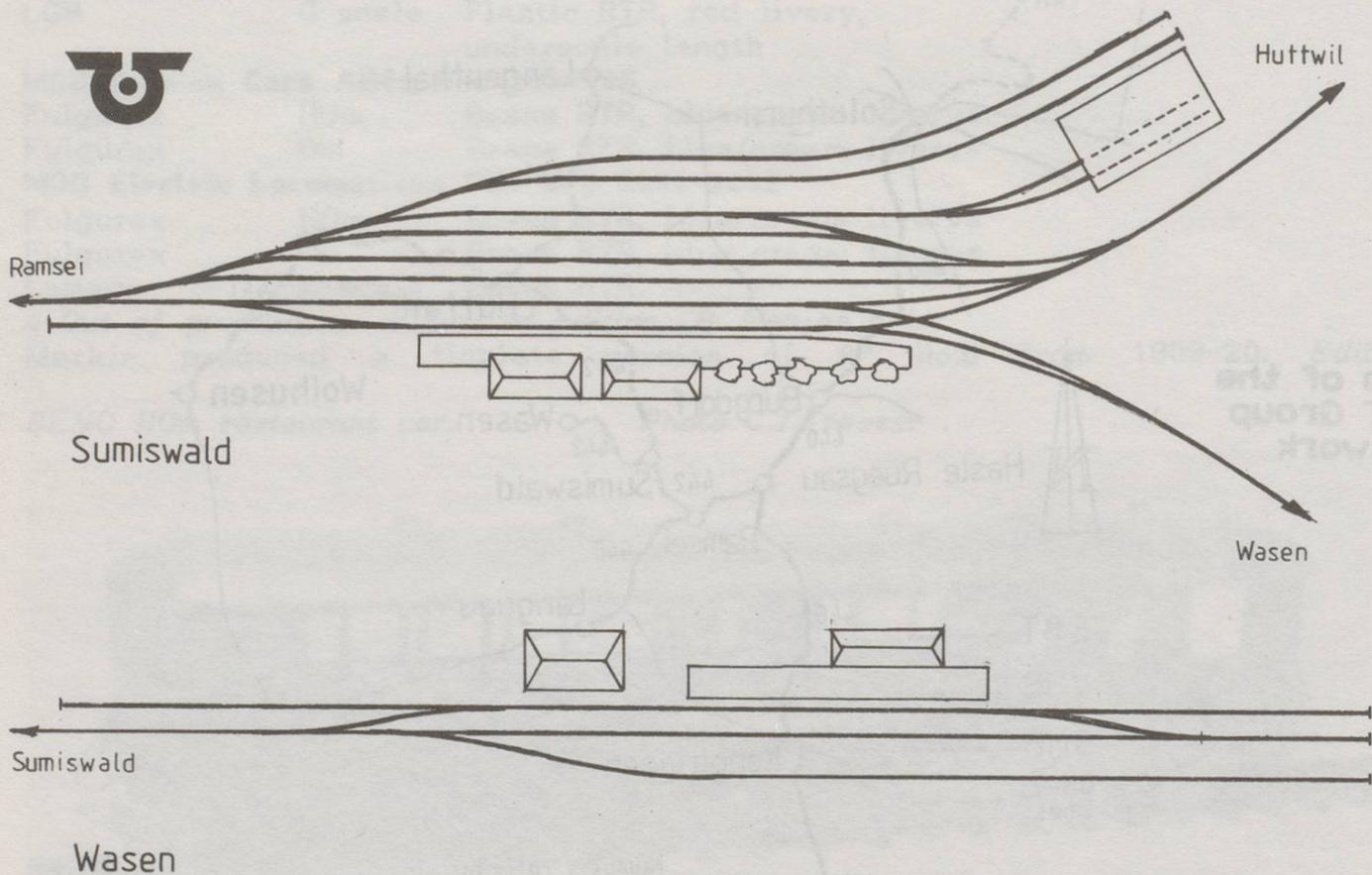
There is a snag, to the best of my knowledge no EBT group models are available, certainly none appear to be listed by the mass producers though Liliput did produce a fine model of the Be4/4 locomotives, one of which I was shown at IMREX. The fact that the modern two car railcars aren't readily available graphically underlines the difference between the British and Continental European approach to modelling. This is the "branch line" prototype we have all been looking for, one can settle for a single station, or create part or even the whole of the network for timetable operation on a grand scale. At the very least, there should be a well illustrated book on the system.

I decided there and then that the group should be featured in Swiss Express. Before I could get down to the nitty gritty, not one, but two well illustrated articles landed on the editorial desk. It was the MacHeath syndrome again - "How happy would I be with either, were t'other fair charmer away." Then the penny dropped, why not do the job properly? With just a little editorial tweaking there was enough material on hand to provide a profile of the system.

Naturally, we're only scratching the surface, but I hope that this feature will tempt members to spend a day on the group, for there is plenty of railway interest to see. At least two of the towns served, Solothurn and Thun, are excellent bases for a holiday, with attractive old buildings as well as good rail connections. We were less impressed with Burgdorf, but a twenty minute lay-over is not long enough make a fair assessment of any place, particularly when the station is not adjacent to

If this profile also spurs a publisher to commission a proper study of the group, so much the better. Whilst lacking the more obvious charms of the metre gauge lines, or the spectacular nature of the Gotthard and Lotschberg routes, it has a very special flavour that is quintessentially Swiss ☐

Station plans, based on sketches by Alan Pike





Above: the old VHB scene at Sumiswald looking eastward in September 1983. The Huttwil line bears left behind BDe 4/4^t No. 244 on a gutterzug; the Wasen branch goes off to the right behind the Te['] acting as station pilot.

Photo Alan Pike

Below: Wasen station, with De4/4 No 267.

Photo John Weaver

