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A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A HOLIDAY PASS

by Michael Donovan

My first experience of Switzerland was a holiday in Davos in 1970 when I fell in love with the Rätische Bahn and got SFr10 for a pound! We honeymooned in Davos the following year, where we met a character called Samedan Willi, a guard, who invited us to his home in Preda. I took my wife back to Switzerland in 1973 when we holidayed in Brig.

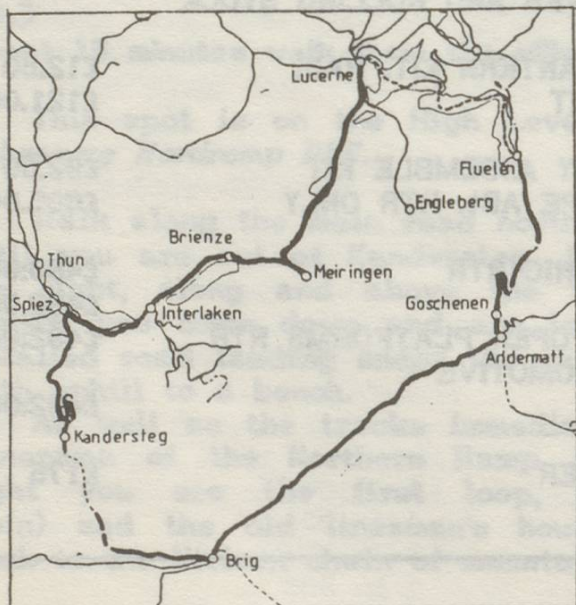
1973 was the first year of the Swiss Holiday Pass and, despite our status as very junior railway staff, we felt that 8-day passes for £13 seemed like good value. We were right, we each got about £56 worth of travel from them, or about £39 worth at staff rates.

Strangely, there was one morning when I couldn't think what to do. I was thumbing through my Kursbuch, seeking inspiration, when the penny dropped. I shouted "Grab the food and run!" We tore out of the hotel, and down the main road to the station.

Fortunately, the Furka-Oberalp trains start from the forecourt of the main station. Fortunately indeed, because the Glacier Express started to move away - half a minute early, I'll have you know - just as we scrambled on board! So began an excellent day.

We travelled up the line, past the Rhone glacier and over the first hump to Andermatt, where we alighted. The next move was the crawling, winding descent through the snow-sheds to Goschenen where we joined a northbound standard gauge train.

I have to admit that, 17 years later, I cannot be certain where we left the train, but it was probably Fluelen, as we then joined a lake boat and cruised the length of the Vierwaldstattersee to Lucerne. Can you imagine a better site for a picnic? Swiss bread, cheese and ham (English orange squash however, I think!) and the beautiful Swiss scenery unrolling on either hand. We had some time to spare in Lucerne and wandered around the gardens and the town before returning to the station. The next move was to the SBB narrow gauge, through Brunig and Meiringen, past the Brienersee to Interlaken, followed by the run past the Thunersee to Spiez. By now we were running into the evening and wanted to get back for a meal, so we didn't wait for more than a soft drink before scrambling onto the BLS train back to Brig.



Without the old timetable it's hard to recall the actual times, but my impression is that we left Brig at 09:30 and got back about 20:00. The weather was fabulous, the scenery superb and the railways, of course, fascinating. I'd recommend the trip to anyone.

As it was the first year of the Holiday Pass, the Swiss tourist authorities asked us to fill in a questionnaire detailing how we'd used the passes. This we duly did and were delighted to receive two linen maps of Switzerland, complete with the crests of the Cantons. Naturally, we still have them. I do wonder, though, how much our peregrinations caused the rise in price of the Pass the following year.