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Winter trip to Interlaken

by Les Heath

The last time I went to Switzerland in the winter was 10 years ago, so we decided it was time to make the effort and go again. We opted to go by car, which would give us a means of getting around as there were a lot of places to fit in to the holiday. We used Interlaken as our base as we were familiar with the area in summer.

We had booked into the Hotel National in Interlaken, this is situated on the side of the Hohematte (the large green in the centre of Interlaken) and only a couple of minutes walk from Interlaken West station. Our first meal (on the Saturday evening) was a Farmer's Buffet, which consisted of about twenty assorted Swiss dishes from which you helped yourself, giving a real taste of Switzerland in more ways than one. This was a perfect way to start the week, the Hotel staff and the food could not have been better.

As we had left the holiday until late in the winter season and we wanted to see some snow, we realised we would have to travel up the valleys from Interlaken to reach the snow. On Sunday we went to Grindelwald, stopping at Wilderswil to look at the Schynige Platte trains in their sheds, waiting for the summer to start running again. From there we went on to Zweilütschinen for a quick look at the nicely restored coaches of the BOB and a look around the works; just ask politely and the staff could not be nicer! Continuing to Grindelwald we walked along the main street window shopping. As we wanted to see Wengen, it was a case of heading for Lauterbrunnen, where we parked in the new multi-storey car park and purchased our tickets for a trip on the WAB. At Wengen the snow was a couple of feet deep and we had a wander around this charming motor traffic free village, watching the three to six year olds skiing on the small slope in the centre of the village, making us feel ancient. After a refreshing drink we waited for the down train to Lauterbrunnen: the views on the way are fantastic. We omitted a

visit to Kleine Scheidegg, promising ourselves this later in the week.

As this was a family holiday, and not pure train spotting, there had to be the wife and son's choices of places to visit, so I innocently suggested Gstaad (MOB) Luzern (Brünig line), and Spiez (BLS) as these just happened to hold a little railway interest for me. We went to Gstaad on Monday, stopping at Zweilütschinen just to see how standard gauge wagons are run onto the metre gauge rollböcke. We then carried on to Gstaad, arriving at the station just as the *Panoramic Express* pulled in. We bought some cakes in the patisserie and looked in the shops. We then drove back to the Schonberg Chairlift and, feeling somewhat out of place as we were the only three without skis, rode to the top. The view was great, the air was fresh; we walked to the restaurant at the top and sat on the verandah looking out over the skiers, drinking cold drinks. The sunshine was really warm, there can't be a better way to pass an hour. We were the only people to go down on the chair lift, we then drove back to the hotel and another large Swiss dinner.

The next day saw us on our way to Luzern via the Brünig pass. At Hasliberg, the summit of the Brünig line, it seemed strange to see that only the main lines were cleared of snow, with the sidings buried about ten feet deep with the pointwork disappearing into walls of snow. When we got down to the Lungernsee the water level had gone down by about 30 feet; could any member suggest why?

We passed Alpnachstad and the Pilatusbahn, as we had been up the mountain at least six times already. If any member has not yet been on the circular trip, don't miss it; it's one of the best of journeys in Switzerland.

When we got to Stans we turned right and went up to Engelberg (LSE) where we had some fun with a sledge we purchased for Andy. After lunch we went to Luzern and had a wander around the Kappelbrücke, looked at the ducks



Panoramic Express at Gstaad

in their pens near the road bridge and walked around the lake shore, finishing up with a look round the new station. The city was much quieter than in summer, when we've been before, but there were still plenty of Japanese tourists.

The next day was spent shopping in Interlaken, with a visit to both stations thrown in. At the end of the day Andy (9) decided he would like a train set so after a bit of persuasion we convinced mum that he should have a small N gauge set, fortunately the model shop had one.

When we woke on Thursday it was raining. Great, I thought, this means it is snowing further up; just what Marilyn wanted to see so, after breakfast we drove to Interlaken Ost and caught the BOB train to Lauterbrunnen, changed to the WAB and went up to Kleine Scheidegg. The snow was falling thickly, this made the holiday perfect, just like a picture postcard! We enjoyed piping hot bratwurst whilst listening to

the alpenhorn being played outside the station, and watched the Jungfraujoch trains winding their way upwards. We then boarded the WAB train down to Grindelwald, changing back to the BOB for the return to Interlaken. This completed a circular trip which is as good in winter as it is in summer. On our final day we went to Spiez where I was able to photograph one of the *Red Arrow* railcars repainted bright red and lettered OeBB.

This brief account does scant justice to the scenery and the amount of pleasure one can get from this area, winter or summer. We cannot praise the Hotel National too highly, or the proprietors, Herr and Frau Kubler. The meals were Swiss style and excellent, the service was first class and is highly recommended by us - please mention my name should you decide to stay there. It was with considerable regret that we packed our cases for our return, but we've re booked for February 1993 and arranged for lessons on the dry ski slopes..