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Spiez; 20 July 1990. BLS Re6/6 No 11639.

Photo Alan Pike

SRS 10th Anniversary Tour Part 1

STARTING WITH STEAM

by Steve Horobin

To celebrate its 10th Anniversary the SRS Committee decided to promote a visit to Switzerland under the leadership of our Chairman, Alan Pike. As a result, on Saturday 21 July 1990 a group of 11 members flew out from Heathrow to join the three already at the Hotel Bahnhof, Spiez. The numbers were to vary through the subsequent week.

Saturday 21 July

Having arrived at Spiez after spending a week exploring the Bern and St.Gallen regions, Richard Penny and I met the main group off the 21:28 Bern-Interlaken service and, after the hotel formalities were over we retired to the bar to get acquainted over a few jars and to talk animatedly about the coming week's programme.

Sunday 22 July

By chance - and some wheeling and dealing by our Chairman - tickets were obtained at a late stage for the *Dampfzug zum Dampfschiff* excursion from Bern Weissenbuhl to Interlaken Ost, thence to Brienz. Four members made an early start and just made a tight connection at Weissenbuhl, boarding the train with seconds to spare. Stephen Greenfield who, although confined to a wheelchair, gets around very well, was dropped out of the back of a carriage, wheelchair and all! Luckily he was unhurt and continued to take an active part in the week's events, though his "driver" at the time was not allowed to forget it!

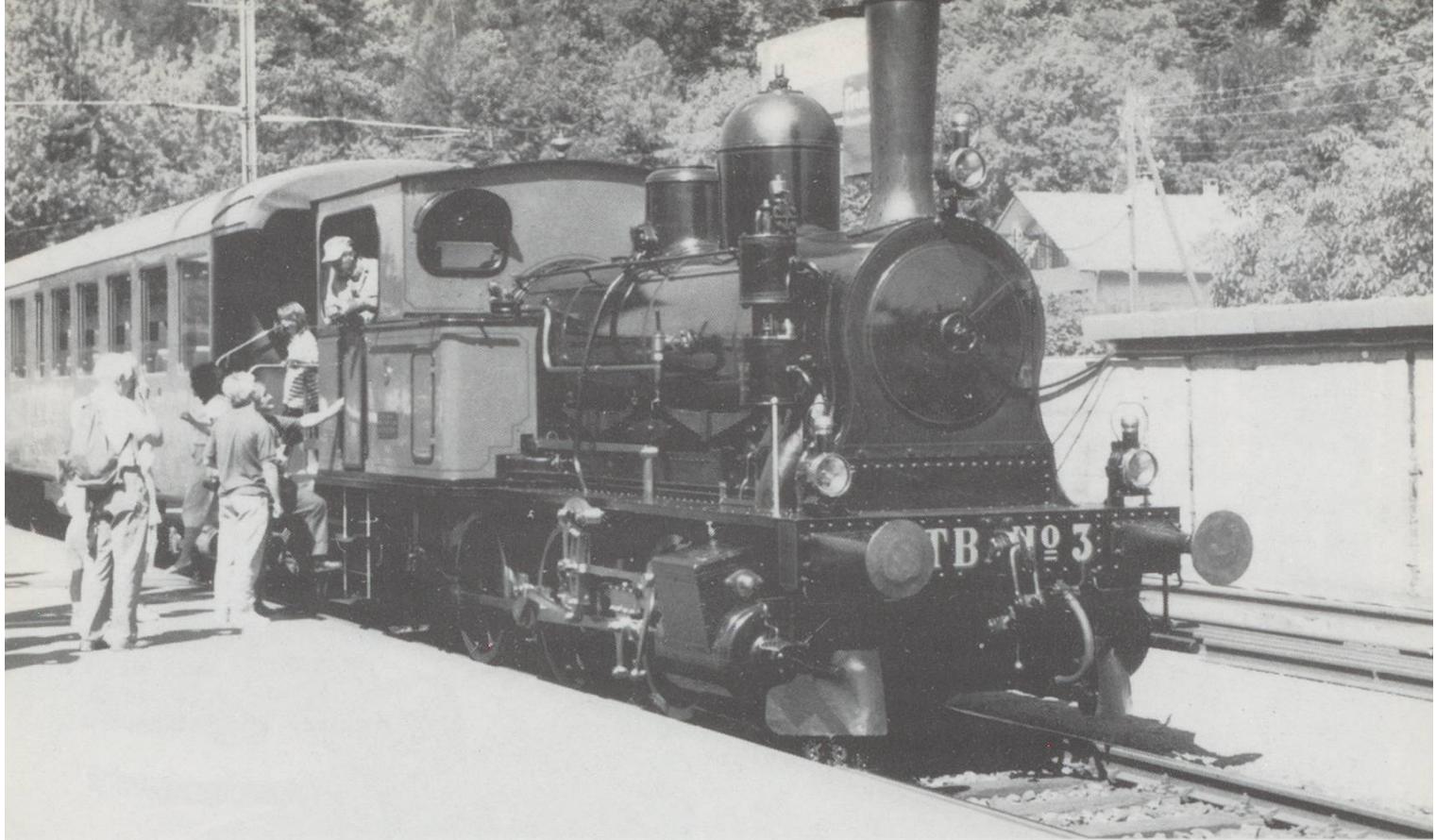
GTB Ed3/3 No 3 pulled into Thun station at 10:05 and we boarded for a pleasant journey along the shore of the Thunersee with No.3 making light work of the 15% gradient towards Spiez.

I joined the group of four to Brienz by the paddle steamer *Lotschberg*, and then on to Meiringen and the MIB while the main group went up the Schynige Platte Bahn where, on a very hot, clear day they enjoyed a superb view of the Jungfrau.

Later that day we all met up at Interlaken West and visited the Model Railway Exhibition. Though far from finished, it should be on the itinerary of all members visiting the Oberland. It is remarkable in that trains can be seen climbing up to ceiling height and meandering from room to room.

Monday 23rd July

At 09:00 we walked to the entrance of the BLS Spiez works and were met by Herr Walter Kleine and the Chief Engineer, Herr Ducommun for a conducted tour of the workshop, maintenance shop and depot. We began in the maintenance shop and were immediately struck by the brightness and cleanliness of the place. Re4/4 No.172 was in for its 24 weeks service and we were able to visit the cab. Each service takes just 24 hours.



GTB Ed3/3 No.3 in immaculate condition at Interlaken Ost on 22 July 1990.

Members of the party inspect at close quarters whilst Alan Bailey records the scene on film.

Photo. Alan Pike

tour of the workshop, maintenance shop and depot. We began in the maintenance shop and were immediately struck by the brightness and cleanliness of the place. Re4/4 No.172 was in for its 24 weeks service and we were able to visit the cab. Each service takes just 24 hours.

Along the ceiling of the shop are piped rows of coloured lights, similar to those found in discos. These are not for decoration, since they indicate, when lit, that the catenary is live. A very elaborate procedure is used to switch the power on and off.

Perhaps the most vivid demonstration of the efficiency of the works was the arrival of an EMU, which was spotted over the drop by a battery powered tractor. A power bogie was removed on the drop and replaced by a serviced unit from the store. The EMU was returning to service as we left some 45 minutes later.

After receiving an interesting insight into the way the works operated, we moved to the Depot where various Re4/4s were stationary, along with EZB Ce4/8 No.307 and GTB Ed3/3 No.3 which we had ridden behind the previous day.

Moving on to the workshop we toured the electronic, sheet metal, welding and forging areas where locomotives come in for their 12 month overhaul. With 150 locomotives and drivers, and 220 skilled and semi-skilled workers at its Spiez works, the BLS runs an extremely impressive and efficient operation.

Herr Kleine then escorted us to Interlaken Ost where a service bus (with 15 reserved seats) took us on a three minute journey to the entrance of the BLS carriage works at Bonigen, where we were met by Herr Werner Seiler, Deputy Chief Engineer, who was to be our guide.

The older works mainly consisted of two buildings separated by a traverser. An extension of the works is in hand. Our first sight was of one of the three recently acquired ex-SNCF baggage cars, now being modified for BLS service. A BLS publicity carriage was being constructed from a bogie coach with end-balcony entrance. A similar 4 wheeler was outside. Various



Members of the party partaking of liquid refreshment at Bönigen works on 23 July 1991. Herr Walter Kleine of the BLS is centre, facing the camera.

Photo Gary Olsen

coaches and wagons were in for repair and maintenance. It was interesting to see at close hand the new self-steering coach bogies.

In the wheel shop we watched wheels being reprofiled. We learned that the wheels on MkIV coach bogies need reprofiling after 250,000 km whereas those on the older stock last for 600,000 km. No-one knows why!

Also on site were a carpentry shop, upholstery shop, paint shop, cleaning department, bridge inspection department and uniform stores. 180 people are employed, the majority of them highly skilled, sometimes using old, but well maintained manual equipment.

When our tour was over we were treated to plentiful refreshment, particularly liquid and very welcome on a hot day.

For the remainder of the day, the majority of the group went by lake boat to Brienz and thence up the Rothorn - by diesel, alas. To add to this, there was nearly a mishap when their train met a steam locomotive coming down on the same section of track!

Tuesday 24th July

We left Spiez at 09:01 and changed at Bern for Winterthur, where we were to take a tour of the SLM works - for most the highlight of the trip. On our arrival at 11:31 we were met by the Society President Mr. A.E.Hauser-Gubser who escorted us to Sulzer Bros (the parent Company of the group) where, in the canteen, we were provided with a substantial buffet lunch by Sulzers.

After lunch, our President took us a short walk to the SLM works entrance where, on the notice board we read "SLM welcomes the Swiss Railways Society". We were met by Herr Frederick Steinmann, Director of Engineering and the Project Manager and taken to the splendid ornate Board Room where Herr Steinmann gave us a brief talk in excellent English in which, with the use of a model, the principles of the revolutionary, yet basically simple design of the new self-steering passenger bogie was explained. From this talk, and from the equipment we saw, it became obvious why no photography



The immaculate interior of the BLS Spiez works with Re 4/4 No.172 in for overhaul on 22 July 1990.

Photo Alan Pike

was allowed. All our many questions were answered fully and frankly but it would take many pages to do full justice to the range of items we were privileged to see here.

We then visited the machine shop and from there went to the Erecting Shop where we saw some of the first batch of class 460 locomotives in various stages of construction in great detail. Herr Steinmann explained the new technical methods that are being incorporated into these machines and showed us the self-steering motor bogies now in use on the BT and SZU Re4/4s and the S-Bahn Re4/4 450 class. 450.030.2 and 450.031.0 were near the stage of being sent on to Brown-Boveri to have the electrical equipment installed. 450.022.9 was in for repairs following a collision caused by vandals.

SLM currently has a full order book. As well as locomotives for the SBB, it has orders for the BVZ, FO, Wendelstein Bahn (Germany) as well as three steam rack locomotives for the Rochers de Naye, the Brienz-Rothorn Bahn and an Austrian line (probably the Schafbergbahn). Options for a further 11 steam rack locomotives, mainly for Austrian systems are hopefully awaiting confirmation.

It was obvious that although SLM is part of a larger group, it is fiercely proud and independent and has a very progressive, hard-working attitude. As a Society, we should be very thankful that time was found to accommodate our visit, which is normally only extended to professional engineering bodies or customers.

We were invited back to the Sulzer canteen for a "light meal", which turned out to be a large, assorted and delicious. We were given many journals and leaflets to remind us - if this was necessary - of our visit and of SLM's prowess. Our President and Chairman then gave short speeches of thanks which we heartily endorsed ■

To be continued