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A Biel-Taufellen-Ins (BTI) train at its terminus in the road outside Ins (BN) station. 2 September 1992

The North West Bit Part 1

A Different Viewpoint

by John Jesson

Photographs by the author

How many of you, when planning a holiday in Switzerland, have considered the area bounded by Basel, Brugg and Biel? And how many have actually spent a holiday in that area? I don't see many hands. It is, though, an area worth exploring, despite the lack of high mountains and the Rhätischebahn.

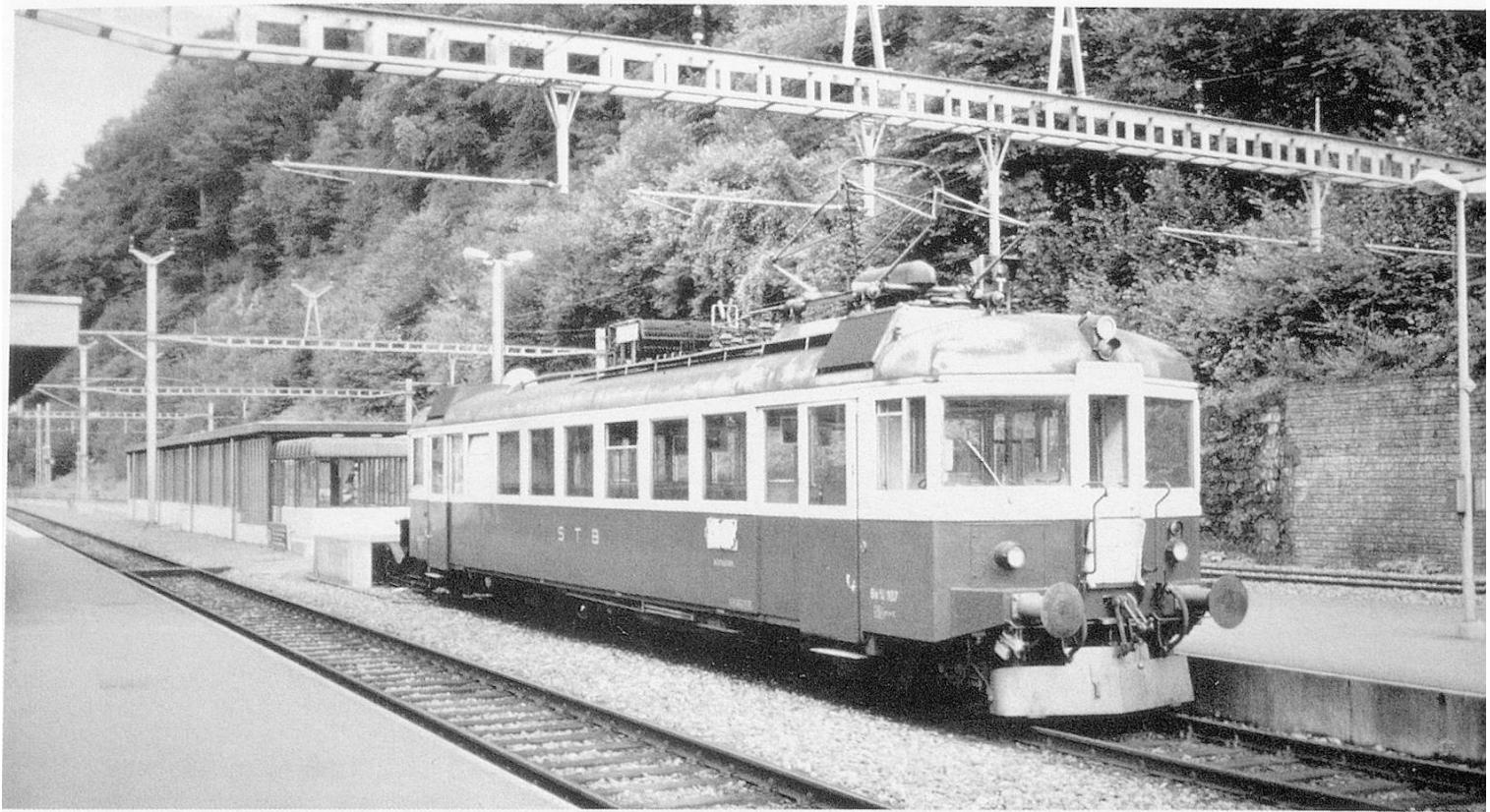
In 1992, thanks to the SNTO and all you members who liked the signalling articles, I had an 8-day 1st class Swiss Pass and decided to base myself for the week within this area. It turned out to be an interesting holiday, although coming dangerously close to being a grice at times.

After some thought, I decided to try Sissach as a base for the week. It is midway between Basel and Olten, and has a semi-fast service both ways as well as the hourly stopper. The choice of venue was good; the choice of hotel was not, so you don't get to know the name. Just don't stay very close to the station. I've got used to flying these days, but my peculiar requirements sent my tame travel agent running for his Valium, so I

pretended I was younger than I am and went via the night boat Dover-Ostend and train via Aachen, Köln and the Rhein. As I work (yes, I do, Mick) for BR, this is a cheap option, and a much more interesting journey than by air.

I set off on the Tuesday evening and was settled in Sissach by soon after four on the Wednesday afternoon. Within twenty minutes I was out in the fields with cameras ready, enjoying the sunshine. Just outside Sissach, on the old Hauenstein line, is a level crossing. Nice spot to photograph the BDe4/4 + Bt shuttle. Why is there always some clown riding a bike who weaves through the waiting traffic and leans on the barriers? After a meal in Basel, Wednesday was an early night (just you try sleeping in the company of a boatload of backpackers).

Thursday was a 'photograph a Be4/7' day. It was also wet, but the true enthusiast is not put off by such trifles. There are two obvious ways of getting to Biel from Sissach; via Olten and Solothurn or via Basel, Delémont and the Grenchen tunnel. The latter is prettier and



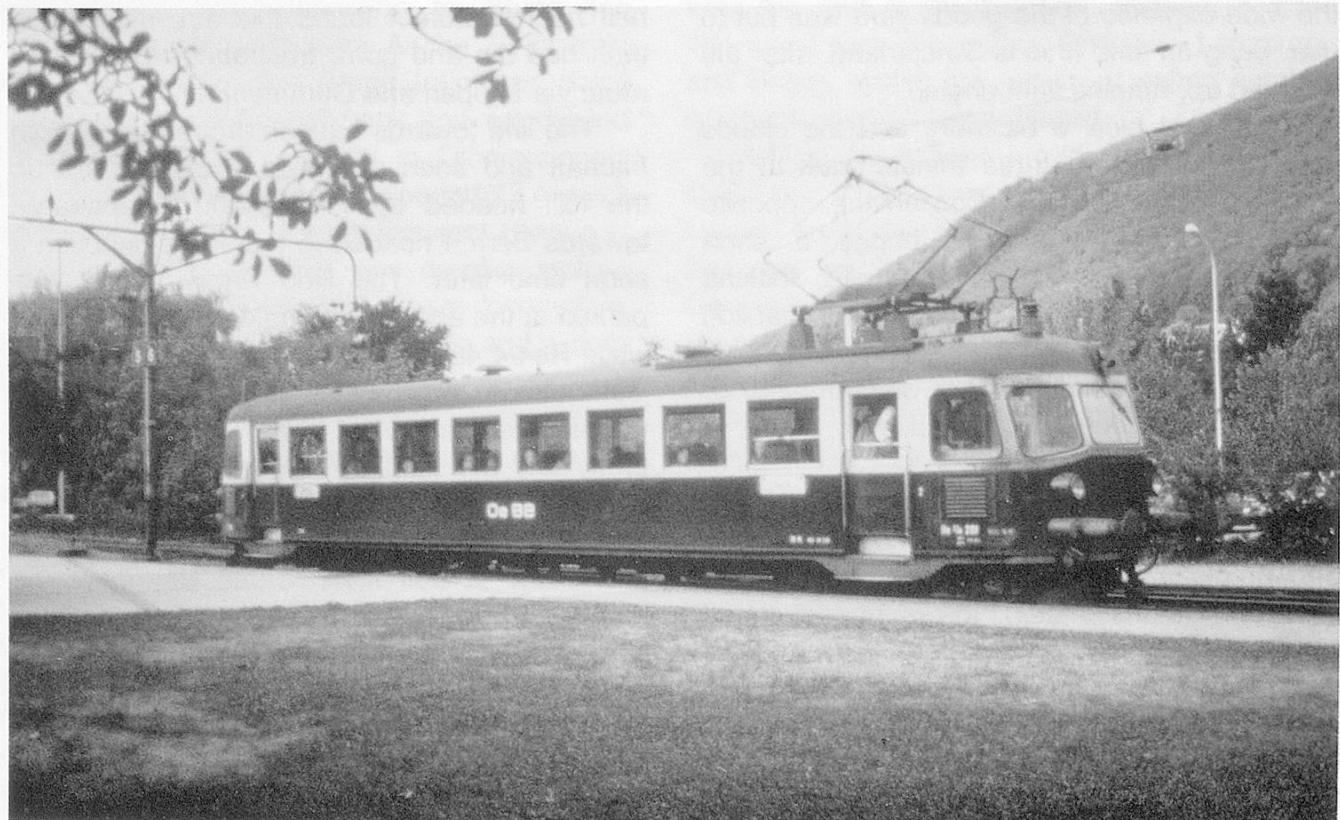
STB (Sursee-Triengen-Bahn) No.107 in the bay at Flamat, the opportunity to photograph it gained when I missed my train to Laupen. 3 September 1992

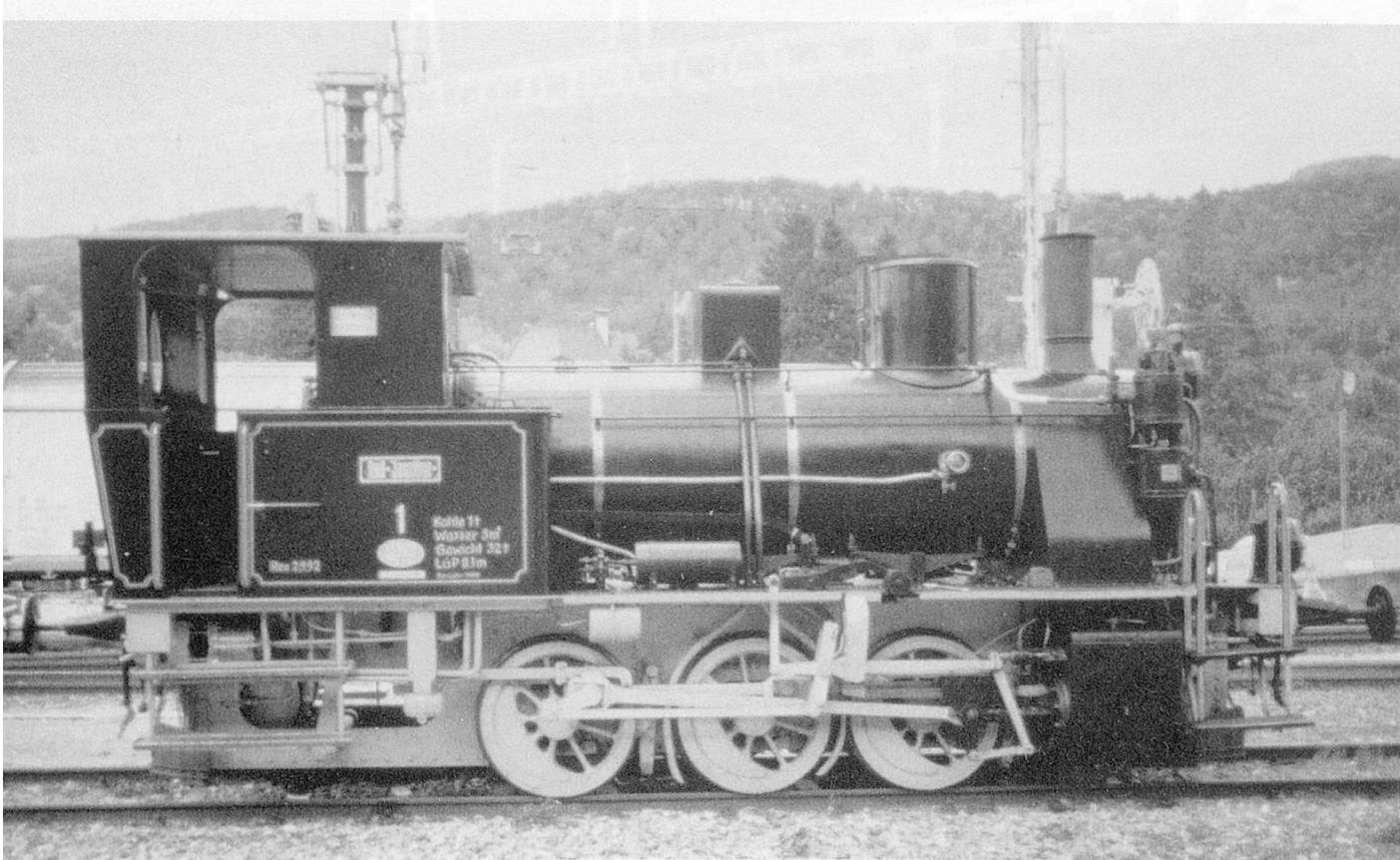
slower and, as I found, has a factory on the outskirts of Delémont which, on this day at any rate, was using a steam shunter.

The Be4/7 runs between Biel and Studen.

But where is Studen? The running time indicates it is only a short distance from Biel, and a scrutiny of the SBB rail map showed it to be a stationless place between Brügg and Busswil

The rather pretty setting for the Oensingen end of the OeBB. Be2/4 No.201 (ex-BLS No.721) is just leaving on its short journey to Balsthal. 5 September 1992





In steam at Balsthal for the OeBB *Event Weekend* was this smartly turned out 0-6-0T No.1. 5 Sept. 1992

on the line towards Lyss and Bern. At Brügg, the line crosses the river Aare, which I hoped might prove a suitable setting for a photograph. Arrival there was in steady rain but after a while the accompanying wind blew it somewhere else. By this time the Be4/7 was nearly due, so the wide expanse of the goods yard was put to use. Bang on time (this is Switzerland, after all) it turned up, running light engine.

The wind blew a bit more and the clouds followed the rain, a three minute walk to the river showed a likely location on the opposite bank, reached by a road bridge a short distance away. 12504 duly returned, looking very nice in its brown and black livery, hauling a long train of empty car transporters. One of the few passenger trains still diagrammed for an Ae3/6¹ took me back to Biel, with 10712 in charge.

Lunch at Biel was followed by a trip on the BTI, which starts underground and runs through pleasant countryside to terminate in the road outside Ins station. Ins is one of those stations where nothing happens for an hour, then trains arrive in all three directions, inter-connect and all depart again, leaving the station to go back to sleep. Before it woke up, I had recorded the BLS 4-ton crane wagon on

film, then took part in the hourly excitement and boarded a 2-car silver/orange EMU of the GFM which took me to Fribourg. A quick connection on to Flamatt where, sure enough, stood an elderly green/cream railcar, marked STB 107, destined for Laupen. It was, but not for another half hour. Before I found this out, my correct train had bin and gorn, frustrating my planned route via Laupen and Gümmenen.

The line towards Laupen drops rapidly from Flamatt and soon afterward a eight toiled up the hill, headed by 11648, and disappeared towards Bern. I headed in the same direction a short time later. The Red Arrow railcar was parked at the end of a siding outside Bern shed while Re4/4 460.004 was in the holding sidings just outside the station. Dinner that evening was at Olten, in the old town. The waitress was pretty and the food was good and reasonably priced - what more can a man ask?

Friday was shopping day in Zürich - eventually. A dull start to the day saw me traverse the old Hauenstein line, very much a rural railway nowadays, then on to Aarau for a trip on the WSB to Schöftland. No doubt both places are delightful in fine weather but with rain sheeting down and a bitter wind their delights are somewhat muted. Aarau, of



EC with a difference! OeBB Ce2/2 No.103 leaves Balsthal with two SBB IC/EC coaches. The similar No.102 is at the other end of the train. 5 September 1992

course, is a giant building site as it is in the throes of being 4-tracked and modernised, but did provide a welcome sight for a modeller's eye in the shape of a 2-car NPZ.

The train to Lenzburg was several minutes late, making my connection to Brugg (no umlaut this time) rather tight. As the Zürich train accelerated away, the Brugg train was doing likewise on the adjacent track and we chased the Zürich train all the way to Othmarsingen. Ain't bi-directional signalling wonderful? A quick dash at Brugg, then a more leisurely change at Turgi, a rather rambling and derelict looking place, with an ex-industrial steam locomotive, called *Molly* parked on the platform and a dolly bird in charge of the station.

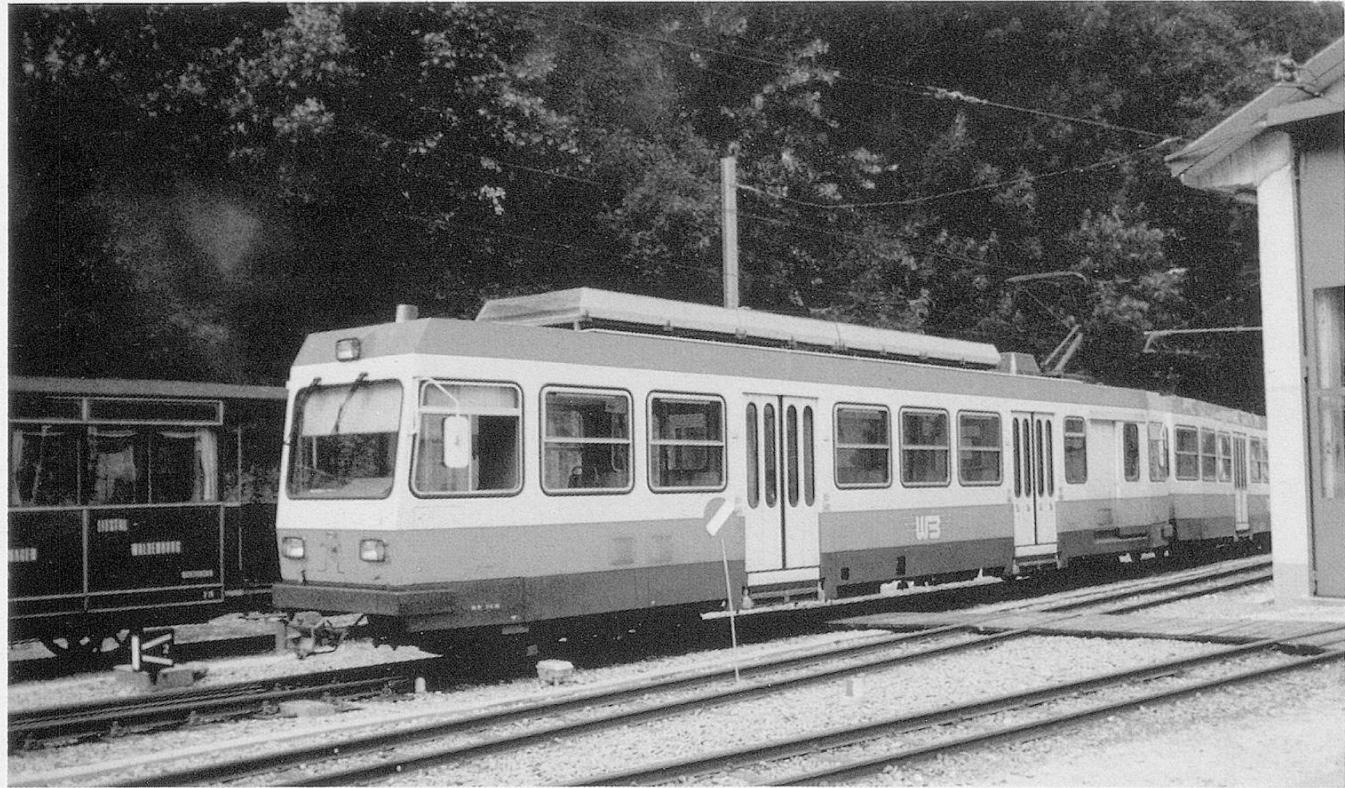
Koblenz was next, which provided a chance to photograph that strange international service across the Rhein to Waldshut; a DB 798 railbus. It also exhibited some rather odd shunting manoeuvres with three Ae6/6s. Then it was on to Eglisau and a long-distance view on the Rhein bridge, then Bülach, a DPZ to Stadelhofen and a walk up the Forchstrasse to WABU. This is a useful shop for all sorts of bits and pieces, such as HRF and Roco parts. He also markets dry-print letters/numbers in three sizes, 1mm, 1.5mm and 2mm, and four col-

ours, black, white, silver, yellow, which I have used quite a lot.

The tram journey to the Hauptbahnhof was in the dry, but a violent storm, with torrential rain, put the mockers on watching the working from the end of the platform. Instead, a little ride round took me to Zug, Rotkreuz, Lenzburg and Brugg, where the choice of eating establishments seemed rather limited.

Before my holiday I had noticed that the OeBB were holding an event over the weekend I would be in Switzerland, so this peculiar little line was my first objective for Saturday. At Oensingen there was no indication of any special event taking place and the service along the branch was provided by an ex-BN railcar No.101. Part-way to Balsthal is a monumental factory, best-part derelict and the whole run only takes eight minutes.

At Balsthal there was quite a lot to see. Two steam locos were busy shunting, they later worked specials to and from Oensingen with a couple of old open balcony coaches. The Seetalbahn *Krokodil*, No 15301, was forlornly displaying a notice asking for contributions towards its overhaul and return to work. Two old wooden bodied restaurant cars were performing their designed function whilst a



A Waldenburgerbahn train arrives at Waldenburg on 5 September 1992. Note the immaculate 4-wheeler in the background, being made ready for a steam special.

Felschlösschen beer van was serving - guess what! The SBB Railshop was present, selling all sorts of SBB memorabilia, even uniforms and telephones, as well as posters and postcards.

One of the promised attractions arrived about half an hour after me; 460.004 + two SBB IC/EC coaches. The Re4/4⁴⁶⁰ shunted itself into a siding, where visitors were able to examine it. To ease access into the cab, a fork lift truck spent about 15 minutes stacking pallets beside the locomotive to make rudimentary steps. Beneath the driver's side window on each side of the locomotive is the name *Uetliberg*. The lettering is black and rather small and doesn't show up well at all. The two coaches were sandwiched between two diminutive OeBB Ce2/2 electric shunters, Nos.102 & 103, and ran additional trips to Oensingen and back. I have seldom seen such a comical formation.

By and by, I left Balsthal on a postbus to Waldenburg, a pleasant run which starts off with a good view of a ruined castle. It was also a high speed run, as not many people seemed to want to patronise the service, just three, and of those I was the only one to travel throughout. At Waldenburg I found that the Waldenbur-

ger Bahn steam locomotive, *G.Thommen*, being prepared for duty. Much smoke was in evidence and two blokes were polishing like mad.

At one point on the journey to Liestal a BMW pulled out of a side road in front of the train as it was leaving the station. The train driver wasn't prepared to give way and neither, at first, was the BMW's driver. However, the sight of the train continuing to bear down on him broke his nerve and he rapidly backed clear. A few seconds later the BMW roared past us, its driver making rude gestures at the train. It would have been nice to have seen the BMW in a ditch further on, but such satisfactions come but rarely.

The rest of the day was taken by the delights of the BLT, who run interurban trams on several routes through and around Basel. The SBB took me to Dornach, from where BLT Route 10 starts its hour-long journey into Basel and out again to Rodersdorf. The bright yellow, Rather angular BLT articulated trams are a contrast to the dark green, more rounded BVB town trams. A curiosity of route 10 occurs towards the end of its journey. After leaving Flüh, where alternate trams terminate, a long run through fields leads to Leymen, which is in



A BLT articulated tram on route 10 waits on the turning circle at Rodersdorf. 5 September 1992

France. A longer run takes you back into Switzerland and to Rodersdorf, an attractive terminus with a restaurant and a view across a wide valley towards France. And not a whiff of a customs official anywhere.

On the Swiss side of Basel (SBB) the trams cross the railway over the Münchenstrassebrücke, right alongside the SBB loco depot. I

stopped off here to take a few photographs and was rewarded with the sight of preserved Birseckbahn bogie tram No.13 and three-axle trailer No.27, in attractive tan livery, carrying a wedding party. A few shots of the depot and a few more of the Ae4/7 on carriage shunting

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Plastic Pig par excellence. 'Overall advertising' takes on a whole new meaning 5 September 1992



It Doesn't Have to be a Train

by C.J. Freezer

Sometimes, when manning a Swiss Railways Society stand, one gets the feeling that one is more a travel agent than anything else since so many questions relate to journeys in Switzerland, where to stay, what to do and how to get there in the first place. Not infrequently the all important question of cost arises.

Most members are, I think fully aware that Switzerland is nowhere near as expensive as its reputation suggests, but there is no gainsaying the fact that if you decide to spend a fortnight using a first class Swiss Pass and elect to stay in comfortable hotels in the larger rail centres you won't have any change out of a grand. That you get full value for your money, with comfortable travel, good service, complete freedom of choice and superb scenery and fascinating towns thrown in, is equally undeniable. But if you don't have that sort of money, what then?

Since I reached official retirement age and changed my job description, Doris and I have taken to having two main holidays, a no reasonable expense barred fortnight in Switzerland in June and an economy tour in the Autumn, usually through Germany and invariably by means of a package coach tour. Last year we made a change.

It all stemmed from the fact that Doris wanted to spend more time in Lugano and although I agreed, I felt that it is a poor centre when using the Swiss Pass. Whilst we were pondering this, we were also ruffling through those enticing brochures to select our Autumn holiday. Doris passed over the Cosmos book, observing that there was an interesting trip to Interlaken. I took the book, turned the page and found an even more interesting one, an eight day trip with five nights in Lugano and one overnight stop in the Lake Luzern area. That settled the autumn break on the spot.

To be honest, it wasn't a rail based trip, though as we stopped overnight in Flüelen I did manage to fit in a little late night train spotting on the Gotthard. We also had one short train trip from Ponte Tresa as part of a round trip to Isola Bella on Lake Maggiore. In the main the object was to have a proper look at Lugano

and take in most of the package's excursions. The basic cost was £250 a head, and even with extras and spending money there was change out of £1000 for the two of us, which is comparable with any other similar trip. Had we extended the trip to a fortnight, we could have made good use of the local pass, which gives a 7 day coverage of the lake boats, local buses and some rail journeys, plus half price journeys through most of Canton Tichino.

These aren't the cheapest trips around. There are frequent offers in local papers for bargain price tours which, speaking from personal experience, are usually excellent value. In fact, were it not for the AGM, about now Doris and I would be on the shores of the Vierwaldstättersee on a trip advertised in our local free newsheet for a basic £99, departing direct from Hemel Hempstead. Who says Switzerland is expensive?

A Different Viewpoint

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duties at the other side of the bridge and I was ready to find a BLT route 11 tram to Aesch. A likely looking tram approached, but it was another special; a standard BLT artic but a most un-standard trailer - a pig. This trailer advertises a well-known bank and the rear end is a superb rendition of a pig's head, with tail lights in the nostrils. On the top is a giant coin being popped into the piggybank - where else - and the whole vehicle is of course painted pink.

I caught up with this refugee from Bournemouth at Aesch where it was berthed in the outer loop and was able to get a better photograph of it before walking through the town to the SBB station to return to Basel and dinner in the station restaurant.

To be concluded

For Sale: Marshall: Rlys of S & E Switzerland (mint), Willen: *Locomotiven der Schweiz 2: Schmalspurb Triebfahrzeuge* (1972 ad, h/b), Allen: Mountain Railway Guide to Central Switzerland. Offers please to Andrew Hyleman, 15f Greenfield Court, Dundee, DD4 0EF, by 15th April.