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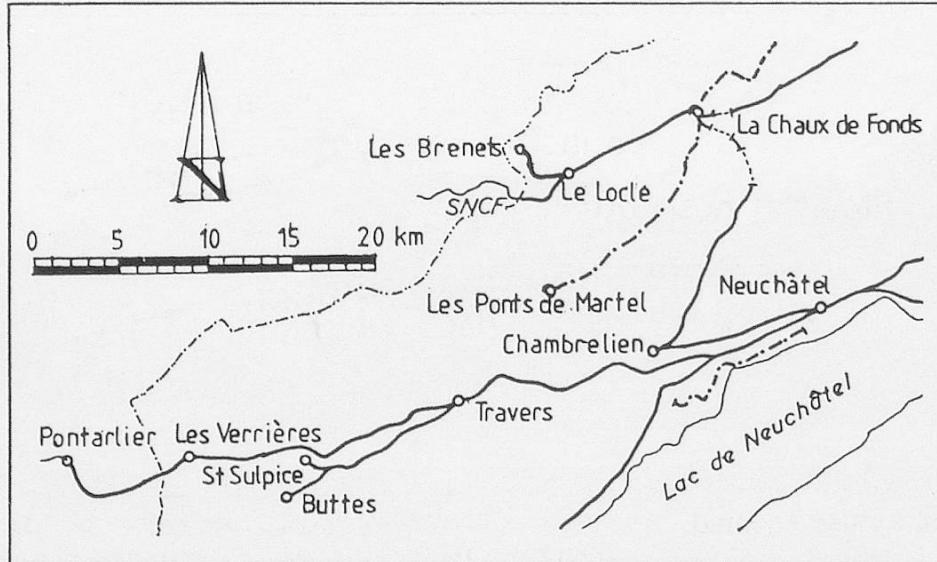
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Retro 42

by Naomi Falkson

Our good fortune started with an accidental meeting with Swiss member George Hoekstra of *Loki* magazine on the BLS *Salon Bleu* bound for Bern. By using the magic of fax to our local garage, we were able to receive later that day details of *RETRO 42*; a celebration of fifty years of electric traction between Neuchâtel and Les Verrières (Pontarlier).

We met at Thun on his birthday, Sunday 18 October. His smiling face, under the familiar hat, appeared from the train window and we joined company. On a slow train from Bern to Neuchâtel we looked expectantly for our favourite signal box at Kerzers and saw it this time resplendent, flanked by the horse-chestnut trees below in their autumn colours.

Via Travers to Les Verrières, where we alighted to find the station crammed with enthusiasts, all trying to board the two-car special *transport of dreams*, comprising the 1935 vintage *Fleche Rouge* (type RAe2/4) with its distinctive snout at each end and a Fiat-built diesel double deck autorail whose construction date was undisclosed, but which appeared to be less than ten years old. These were both grossly overloaded with seemingly every square centimetre of standing space; just like the Central Line in the rush hour! However, with our 'True Brit do-or-die spirit' we managed to squeeze into the rear driving cab of the *Fleche Rouge* a moment before the venerable pneumatically operated twin-leaf door slid shut

with a wheeze. The leaky mechanism continued to hiss throughout our short journey. As George remarked, these units were never designed to carry such excessive numbers and possibly the motors could never have coped unassisted.

We were able to observe the autumnal countryside receding as we were hauled by the diesel up the incline towards Pontarlier. Snow from the day before had settled on the tree-line whereas, on the lower

slopes the leafy trees in varying shades of green, gold, red and brown were illuminated by the bright sunshine. Those edged with frost glittered and glistened; truly an uplifting experience.

We returned to Les Verrières in the autorail, seated in that privileged space next to the driving cab from where we were able to watch our driver operate the gear change and other controls as we pushed the RAe2/4 gently back to base. The Fiat autorail is ex-CFC, according to the publicity handout, and in private ownership, unlike the *Fleche Rouge* which is still owned by the CFF.

These movements were supervised by an official in an authentic vintage uniform of the 1920s, complete with long tunic adorned with gilt buttons and an impressive pill box hat. He was about the same height and build as the late General de Gaulle and appeared to have the same air of authority and haughty bearing.

On arrival at Les Verrières we inspected the souvenir stalls and food outlets that had been set up on the platform before boarding the Special Train, a rake of elderly 1st and 2nd composite cars with rather faded upholstery that had forever entrapped that distinctive aroma of steam, oil, coal and soot with a degree of mustiness that arises from permanently closed windows.

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Oberfriedhof

Oberfriedhof is an imaginary village in Canton Uri, situated near the top of the Klausen pass, linking Linthal with the Schächental. The railway between the towns of Linthal and Altdorf on the main line over the Gotthard pass was never built in reality. Nor, for that matter, was the metre gauge branch from the end-on junction of the Rhätische Bahn and Furka Oberalp at Disentis. So a group of members in Cumbria set out to rectify this omission.

The resulting HO and H0m layout received critical acclaim when it was shown in incomplete form at the 1992 AGM in Carlisle. Not only was it surrounded by members throughout the morning and afternoon, a gallant few were joining in operation well into the small hours after the dinner. The layout had its first public outing at this year's Barrow exhibition over Easter and is now available for other exhibitions. See the box for details.

The story is that the main line over the Gotthard pass has been blocked by a landslide near Sisikon, north of Altdorf. As a result the line over the Klausen pass is being used as a diversionary route until the bottleneck can be cleared. This simple ploy allows a wide variety of trains to run over the line at close intervals. Virtually any train seen in Switzerland can be

justifiably run over the model. OK a triple current TGV would be a bit out of course, but who is quibbling. The main point is that the layout is designed as a showcase where typical Swiss trains, standard and metre gauge, can be shown in action for the edification and education of those unfortunate individuals who have yet to encounter the prototype in reality.

Oberfriedhof will be publicising Swiss Railways and the Swiss Railways Society for many years to come.

Layout Statistics

Layout size: 30ft x 9ft, not including barriers.

Scale 1:87 (3.5mm to 1ft).

Gauge 16.5mm (HO) and 12mm (H0m).

Period 1980 to present day.

Viewing from front only.

Operators required: 4 to 6

Electrical requirements:

1 x 13A socket.

Set up time approximately 3 hours.

Transport:

1 hired Transit plus 1 car.

Distance no object.

Insurance value (1993) £17,500

Contact address:

Mr. I.D. Edwards, 28 Mountbarrow Rd., Ulverston, Cumbria LA12 9NQ

Phone 0229 583595 evenings
0229 583333 Ext.255 work

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This train was especially for the steam buffs as we were headed by loco C5/6 No.2978 of 1917, now of the Vapeur Val-de-Travers (VVT) fleet and for which we were invited to pay a supplement of 5 francs each for the trip back to Travers. We left late for this twenty-five minute journey and as we progressed in stately style, with scores of photographers along the track-side to record the scene for posterity, we wondered anxiously whether our connection would be held, enabling us to complete the excursion in reasonable time.

We need not have worried. At Travers we quickly transferred to the regular service headed for Neuchâtel and were soon on our way. En-route our Federal Railways official changed

out of his splendid uniform into the rather more mundane Ticket Inspector's garb which he evidently wears in that capacity with the CFF. After that, he cashed up his takings from the sale of commemorative tickets, preparatory to handing them in upon arrival at Neuchâtel, waiting in line with members of the public at the booking clerk's window for this purpose.

There was just time for a quick coffee before joining our train to Bern where we bade George goodbye as he went to attend a birthday party arranged for him by his son.

Thank you, George, for a splendid day out and our thanks too to the CFF, SNCF, RVT and VVT for co-ordinating their efforts to make it all happen.