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MAILBAG

Some reflections on a Swiss holiday

These observations have been put on paper as a result of various articles in recent issues of "Swiss Express".

In the March 1996 issue, there was an account of a trip on the Rochers de Naye line.

My husband and I made this trip on a less than perfect day for weather but as it coincided with steam running, we went ahead with the ride. At Glion the "no signalman" signalling panel, which allows several trains to follow each other in the same direction, is on the station building on the platform side. From this we were able to see where various trains were and deduce that the steam locomotive and stock were on their way down from the carriage sidings. On the day of our ride there were just 2 other people besides ourselves travelling from Glion to Caux; more passengers travelled from Caux to Rochers.

We were greeted at Caux, where we had a break, by an alphorn serenade. This seemed to be a regular feature as 2 other non-steam arrivals were similarly greeted. We saw a plaque in English on the outside wall of the buffet which reads "To the people of Caux this tablet is erected as a token of gratitude and remembrance from officers and men of the British Empire escaped prisoners of war 1943-44." We wondered how they came to be in such a remote spot. Was it because of the proximity of the French border? We were unable to find any further information, either there or since returning home. Perhaps there are members of SRS who could help with this information.

Whilst staying at Glion, we took the opportunity to travel on the 'Rive Bleu Express' from Evians-les-Bains to Le Bouveret. Being used to the strict regime in this country with regard to safety and wandering on the track, we were somewhat amazed at the 'laid back' attitude on this run. The state of the trackbed was a bit hairy in places - literally! It was noticeable when we were back on Swiss territory. There was trouble with binding brakes on one of the coaches and we stopped twice to rectify the problem - in the traditional manner, with a hammer! There being numerous level crossings on the route, we were amused when the same crossing keeper appeared

several times. He usually managed to beat the train to the next crossing in his car so that we were not held up.

We used the steamers on Lac Lemman as a relaxing way of getting from place to place. We were surprised on the 'Italie' that we did not have to pay a supplement when it was a paddle steamer. This was explained by the fact that it isn't a 'bateur a vapeur' but a Diesel Electric Paddle Vessel. To our knowledge the last DEP in Britain was the 'Talisman', an LNER-built ship which sailed the Clyde estuary before being scrapped in 1966. It was not an altogether successful experiment and no other paddlers were altered on the Clyde. We have since discovered that there are more DEPs on Lac Lemman. What do the Swiss know that we didn't? Is there a booklet about the CGN vessels, both steam and diesel similar to the one produced for the SGV on the Vierwaldstättersee?

We have enjoyed the articles in 'Swiss Express' about the various lake steamers. We were interested when sailing on the DS Blümlisalp on the Thunersee to see a plaque beside the one listing the ship's details acknowledging the help of the Cantonal lottery funds in the restoration of the vessel. This was at a time when there was great debate in this country about the allocation of lottery money to heritage projects. Also have other people noticed that on all restored paddle-steamers the treads on the internal stairways have the ship's name in brass? On the 'Blümlisalp' the spelling was 'Bluemlisalp'. This ship was used in the recent TV programmes about Albert Einstein and the theory of relativity; the other ship was the 'Stadt Bern'.

Whilst in Interlaken we took the opportunity to visit the model railway. This is near Interlaken West station and is reached by turning right out of the station. The Rhaetian Railway layout is extensive, covering the whole exhibition building using flyovers and spirals to create gradients. It is a 1:45 gauge layout. The other layouts of assorted gauges were equally interesting and well worth making the effort to see.

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