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Two new locomotives on the Brienz Rothorn Bahn

by Chris Elliott, photographs by Author

13 August was a landmark in the history of the BRB for it was then that two new oil fired steam locomotives, Nos. 14 and 15, were officially taken into service. I was alerted to this by Peter Arnold's article in Vol 4/9 of Swiss Express and as my wife, Jane, and I were on holiday in Switzerland at the time we decided to go and see how new locomotives were officially taken into service. The weather did not look too promising as we travelled from our rented flat in Kandersteg by way of Spiez and Interlaken to Brienz. This was disappointing as it had been good for many days previously and was to be good again for the following days. While the sky was quite clear in the centre of Lake Brienz the clouds seemed to hang along the mountain sides at about 1500 m with little sign of moving.

At the Hotel behind the BRB station in Brienz a reception for all the invited guests was held. These were the shareholders who had provided funds for the locomotive purchase, employees of

the railway, local dignitaries etc. On the station Nos 14 and 15 were prepared to take the guests up to the Rothorn while No. 12 was prepared to take the service train. As we waited for departure No. 10, one of the diesels came down with the first train of the day. Once this had happened and a man with a small barrel organ had been successfully loaded in the front bay of the front coach we set off for Planalp where the ceremony was to take place. As we headed up the mountainside the weather was not improving but as the clouds were high we got some fair views of the valley and lake below. Somewhere below Planalp we came into the low cloud and from thereon visibility was 50m at best. On arrival at Planalp we found people getting ready for the ceremony. A small stage was erected next to the track decorated with flowers. At the station building, long tables were being set up with bread, cheese and wine. Emerging from the mist we soon saw two trains appear, the first propelled



by No. 14 and the second by No. 15. From these alighted the invited guests who had earlier been drinking coffee at the Hotel in Brienz. The ceremony could now start. There were addresses from various people including the Railway's Director, the leader of the Council and a representative from the locomotives' builders, SLM. From these we learnt of the productivity improvements that the Railway could expect with the investment e.g. Nos. 12, 14 and 15 could convey 120 people with a crew of two (as no fireman is required for an oil fired locomotive) while the older locomotives can convey only 60 people with a crew of three and how in 1968 very serious consideration had been given to the railways closure and replacement with a cable car and how committed the management now were to the continuation of steam power on the line. Much work had also been put in by the locomotive builders. The first one of the new design, No. 12, had taken four years from contract signature to delivery while for the delivery of Nos. 14 and 15 only two years were required. These were after all the first steam locomotives built for some time. There then followed a "visit" from two bearded gentlemen, one in top hat and tail coat

who turned out to be the Railway's original builder and his friend. From this it emerged that the whole railway, including track and trains, had been built for Fr.2M, the same cost as one of the new locomotives. Following this amusing little play, a local choir sang and then the plaque of the village of Brienz was unveiled on No. 14. No. 15 was to be named at a separate smaller ceremony in Brienz after a Japanese place in early August but it was still officially received into service on this day. Once the ceremony was over everyone had a drink with bread and wine to soak it up to the accompaniment of the music from the organ. After this had been mostly consumed the invited guests boarded their respective trains and headed for the Rothorn where they were to have a banquet in the Hotel. As the weather was so poor Jane and I decided to head back to Brienz for our more meagre picnic and so we boarded No. 12's train. As we left, Planalp looked quiet and gloomy just as it had done ninety minutes previously when we arrived. We, though, were pleased to have witnessed this little piece of history.