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Ae3/6^{II} and timber-clad restaurant cars at Thun, December 1993. Photo Philip Elwin.

Mailbag

Ae3/6^{II} 10424 at Thun

Further to your notes on the movement of class Ae3/6^{II} 10424 to Thun I enclose a photo taken at Christmas. As you can see it was attached to three Restaurant cars, all temporarily clad in sawn timber. At the time the station buffet had just closed for refitting and the Restaurant Cars were intended as a substitute, although they themselves were still incomplete.

The loco, which seems to be used as a mobile transformer, is without coupling rods and pantograph. I had been under the impression that it has previously been on train heating duties at Linthal.

Philip Elwin
Nottingham

The Fürigen Bahn

Like Ron Smith, I too stumbled upon the Fürigen Bahn almost by accident and was also struck by its air of "Victorian Gentility".

The Bottom Station, Harissenbucht is a 5-minute walk from the Schiffquai at Stansstad. On boarding you gain the operator's attention by pressing a bell push inside the funicular car. One can imagine he may be engaged on divers

The fare is SFr.3 one way and SFr.5.50 return and the Swiss Pass is not valid.

By taking the footpath to Burgenstock, which is quite steep, excellent views are to be had of the Vierwaldstättersee and the surrounding area. The walk takes about an hour and a half and is very rewarding. From Burgenstock you can rest your legs on the way down in the 100 year old funicular that connects with the lake boats at Kehrsiten.

Steve Horobin
Haverhill

The BLS Erlebnis Pfad

Having recently returned from an eight day visit based on Kandersteg (25 February - 5 March 1994), I was most interested to read Richard Pinner's account of the BLS Erlebnis Pfad on the Northern Ramp (*Swiss Express* Vol 4/1). The article does not mention that the path is officially only open from 1 April each year. During my visit it may well have been possible to use much of the path but enquiries at Kandersteg station would not recommend its use before 1 April, or on the South Ramp for that matter.

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As my prime interest is photography may I also suggest that the North Ramp path is certainly unsuitable for decent photography until well into the late morning, as being on the east face of the valley for most of its length it is in deep shadow.

I was surprised closer to Frutigen to find a new large unsightly building being erected at the north end of the Kander viaduct close to the western side (older stone) viaduct. This spoils the classic view of the viaduct from the castle ruin. The optimum lens for 35mm work from this spot is a 35mm wide angle and the trees are beginning to encroach into the field of vision from the higher level unless some official trimming is carried out.

Traffic during my visit was sporadic. Apart from the regular hourly passenger service, daytime freight traffic was fairly infrequent. Many of the heavier freights were headed by 2xSBB Ae6/6 and these often followed closely behind the passenger trains.

The weekend of 26-27 February saw huge queues build up for the car carrier trains through the Lötschberg tunnel. Perhaps a wait of 1½ to 2 hours was normal all day. The efficiency of the car train operation was most impressive with trains leaving every seven to eight minutes. From my observations I would suggest that eight trains were in continuous operation. All were Re4/4 powered with Bt driving trailers at the south end, except for one which had Re4/4s at both ends.

An Ae6/8 seemed to have a regular weekday duty assisting freight trains from mid-afternoon onwards between Frutigen and Kandersteg, sometimes as pilot, once within the train and once as banker. Between duties it was stabled at Frutigen station.

Despite being discouraged from walking on the South Ramp except between Eggerberg and Lalden, I took the risk on 3 March to take the train to Hohtenn after changing at Goppenstein on to the Goppenstein - Brig shuttle provided by BN Be4/4 762. I was rewarded by a perfect late winter's day of clear skies and brilliant sunshine - the perfect combination for superb photography.

For any members who have not yet sampled this walk, it is to be thoroughly recommended. Walking is fairly strenuous in parts and I

reiterate Richard Pinner's remark - you need to be decently equipped with strong walking boots. I walked from Hohtenn to Ausserberg. Forget the sign at Hohtenn station showing 2¾ hours to Ausserberg, I took 5¾ hours with frequent stops for photography. Incidentally there are no Little Chefs or MacDonalds en-route so take some food and drink unless you intend to do the walk at breakneck speed. The views down the Rhône valley are stupendous and the BLS is full of superb engineering features.

Undoubtedly the highlight was the Bieschtal Viaduct. There are two routes. One is reasonably level and perfectly safe, cut into the precipitous rock walls of the Bieschtal, which crosses the ravine on the railway viaduct. The other, which I followed, brings you high above the viaduct. Beware on this route, it isn't for the faint hearted. If you suffer from vertigo, don't attempt it. At noon the lighting was perfect, shining directly up the Bieschtal directly onto the viaduct. In about an hour I saw four passenger trains, three freights and the Goppenstein - Brig shuttle twice.

It was in this region that the circumspection of the BLS staff at Kandersteg was justified. There were two ground slips across the path which had to be negotiated with extreme care. No doubt these will be cleared up by April.

As the whole of the South Ramp is in roughly an east-west direction, it is much more suitable for photography all day than the North Ramp.

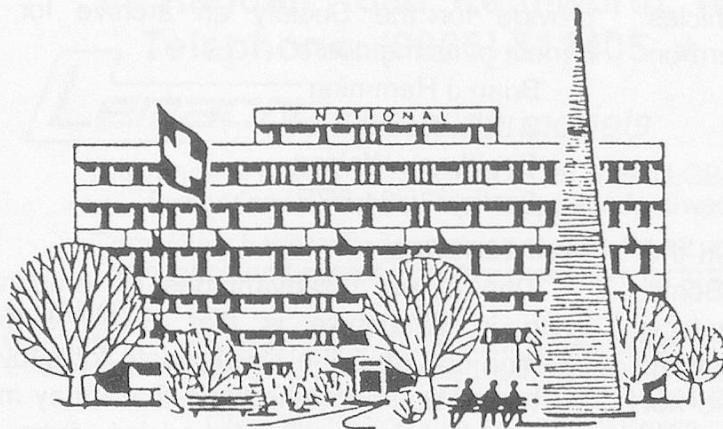
I might also mention that by February Brig had returned to virtually normal as far as the FO and BVZ are concerned, but the tide mark on the buildings surrounding the station give a vivid indication of the severity of last autumn's catastrophe. almost all the ground floor premises in the town were still in a devastated state with much boarding up and rebuilding going on.

Despite a considerable mileage travelled during the eight days from Zürich to Brig/ Andermatt/Genève/Bern etc, timekeeping was exemplary, with all connections maintained - a tribute to the Swiss railway network.

Having been a regular visitor to Switzerland for the last 38 years I am still impressed by the railway system, but sadly I see a country

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declining towards the standards of our own in many respects.

The graffiti, even in the Alps, is becoming a real problem - please do something about it Switzerland! It is sad to see the unsympathetic nature of much of the road building. What a mess behind Montreux. As elsewhere, it doesn't stop congestion. Queues of vehicles were miles long between Burgdorf and Bern on Saturday 5 March.

G.Dingle
Stone

Bernina Line Railcars

Referring to my letter and your reply in the September 1993 issue of *Swiss Express*, Bemo have now announced their intention to produce models of two of the Bernina line Triebwagen, ABe4/4 Nos 45 and 46. Although they are not scheduled for release until early 1995, I am sure that many modellers will be delighted to know that this gap in the range will now be filled.

David Arthur
Biggar

Another, probably more frustrating gap is also to be plugged with the provision of a Bt to run with the excellent ABe4/4 railcars that have been available for a good many years. By this time next year it will most definitely be easier to model the RhB "out of a box" than any other railway in the world. Though there is still the little matter of the scenery... CJF

Information Wanted

As the only British Society exclusively covering Swiss railways, we undoubtedly have a membership who between them must have records or access to information on most aspects of the railways of Switzerland.

My particular interest is in all forms of motive power and I have recently set up a computer database which carries all the detail I have been able to accumulate, both by observation and from published sources. The aim is to extend the database into a motive power register of Swiss railways and tramways so that the information can be made available to members or interested parties and perhaps selectively published from time to time.

In order to help fill many of the gaps that still remain I would be pleased to receive from

fellow members any detailed information on Swiss motive power (including tractors, railcars and trams) of all operators with initially particular reference to build details, works numbers, liveries, painting dates and modifications.

This is not a commercial venture, but an attempt to gather together information and provide for the Society an archive for the benefit of its members.

Brian J Hemming
3 Little Heath Road
Chobham, Woking
Surrey GU24 8RP

Maintenance

One of the disadvantages of temporarily living in Zimbabwe is that *Swiss Express* reaches one after the closing date for copy for the next one. I hope therefore that I may make some belated comments arising from the December issue.

Nominations were requested for a bad station buffet in Switzerland. Mine is certainly Brig where, regrettably my family have found the selection of food poor, the service slow and surly. This was in the summer of 1991, matters may have improved since.

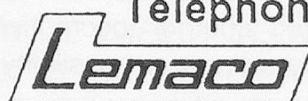
You indicated that you were "surprised that a chartered engineer should regard the fact that [traction] maintenance is done at night worthy of comment" in connection with the RhB. Having spent much of my engineering career in traction maintenance, I cannot agree with you. It is generally considered that humans perform their work best when their daily living cycle is not disturbed, as it must be when night working is involved. In maintenance, for anything other than basic work, it is important to ensure that everything is done to the highest possible standards as defective maintenance work will lead to failures in traffic, with disastrous effects on the heavily occupied, single track system of the RhB.

An additional difficulty the RhB has to face is the relatively small size of its locomotive fleets. If both Ge4/4 classes and the Ge6/6^{II} are sufficiently interchangeable as to be regarded as a single fleet of 40 units, then it is only just large enough to avoid the fleet size alone having an effect on the number of units actually available for traffic daily.

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way to providing the answer, but my own estimates from the type and age of the RhB fleet show that 34 of the 40 units should be in service for the whole of any given day and that the six out of service, only three at the most should not be returned to traffic for the following day. This assumes maintenance is being carried out seven days a week; the overall effect of tyre-turning and brake block replacement are, however, rather difficult to estimate. Does any member know how frequently either of these operations are necessary on the RhB, bearing in mind the nature of the line?

Paul Russenberger
London

Rothorn Steam

I am currently producing a book about the Brienz-Rothorn-Bahn and have been in correspondence with their director, Herr E. Streule. Consequently I can update readers of *Swiss Express* with news of recent events further to reports in the September and December 1993 issues.

Loco No 12 proved most economical in service during 1993 when it recorded almost the highest mileage of the entire locomotive fleet. Power output has proved better than expected and one-man operation is successful. The level of noxious gases emitted to the atmosphere is less than from a diesel locomotive of similar power output. As a result the BRB has now ordered another locomotive for delivery ca 1996. There is every possibility that a third one may follow.

As previously reported, traffic figures for 1992 were well up on previous years, mainly due to the centenary publicity. Figures for 1993 fell back to just over 160,000 - almost exactly the same as for 1988.

As well as installing a second track at Brienz for 1993, the loco depot building was also enlarged - presumably to ensure covered accommodation for the increasing locomotive fleet.

P.R. Arnold
Milton Keynes

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