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The Kappelbrücke

When Luzern's historic Kappelbrücke was destroyed by fire in August 1993, few of us imagined that we would be able to cross the Reuss by this route for many years. Yet by April 1994 the bridge had been completely rebuilt, using as much as possible of the original structure. The major deviation from the original is the replacement of fire-damaged wooden piers between the Wasserturm and the west bank with concrete struts while the north west corner has been modified to include a small bay. Apart from this, the original design has been faithfully reproduced. The souvenir shop is back in business, a corner of its display in June carried a selection of fire damaged items from its old stock in trade.

A few minor additions have been made, there are plaques at each end providing a record of the disaster and the approach steps now carry non-smoking warnings and also bar dogs. In addition, the iron clips supporting the plaques are of a slightly different design and secured in place with modern cross-head screws.

When we first walked across on 25 June, the rafters were bare, since nearly two thirds of the old paintings had been destroyed. During Wednesday 29 June nearly half had been replaced by facsimilies, so far as we could determine, photographic reproductions mounted in traditional style frames. It is expected that, in due course, replicas will be installed, thought no doubt the remaining originals will be safely housed in a gallery.

Of course the renewed bridge is predominately light brown, it will take at least a century for the timbers to weather to the old darker shade. After the initial shock, we got to like the effect, indeed we were seeing the bridge as it looked when it first formed a vital link between the East and West banks of the Reuss.

The lesser known Spreurbrücke has had its medieval paintings cleaned, revealing a wealth of detail. Somehow, the macabre subject matter seems more innocuous now the gloom is missing. No smoking signs are not currently fitted to this bridge, no doubtless this omission will soon be rectified.

Derailment at Lausanne

Services through Lausanne were severely disrupted by a derailment just before 3 am on 29 June 1994, which caused a severe spillage of Epichlorhydrin from ruptured tank wagons. According to a detailed report in the Luzerner Zeitung, the train was travelling in the westerly direction when, immediately to the east of the platforms, a single wagon became derailed at one of the turnouts. It proceeded through the station until, at the next set of points, a further twelve wagons left the track. These continued to remain upright until, alongside the locomotive depot, the vehicles jackknifed. Seven wagons were spewed over the track and two tank wagons were ruptured. As a precaution, the whole of the Fontenay Quartier was evacuated whilst emergency services dealt with the spillage.

We were first alerted to this event by the Teletext demonstration in the Luzern Transport Museum, which gave a brief outline and indicated that rail transport in the West of Switzerland was completely disrupted. By the following afternoon, notices at Zürich Hauptbahnhof were still advising passengers for Lausanne to enquire at the information desk and those for Genève to travel via Biel/Bienne. During the period, train services were suspended between Renens and Vevey/Palexieux, with through trains diverted via Neuchâtel.

Your editor was not only able to purchase a copy of Luzerner Zeitung before leaving that city, but found a discarded copy of Blick on the train for Zürich Flughafen. As one might expect, the information in this journal was less informative, if more sensational with part of the limited text devoted to a recap of recent rail accidents.

