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Celebrations at Le Bouveret

The 18th Festival International Suisse de la Vapeur

Photos by Cyril Freezer

Train about to depart from Voie 2, Chablais City, Swiss Vapeur Parc, 19 June 1994

Swiss Vapeur Parc held an open weekend on 17-19 June this year, when this extensive dual gauge miniature railway system was host to a large number of visiting enthusiasts who brought with them their engines. It was too good an opportunity to miss, particularly as we could take the 08:45 boat from Ouchy. It turned out to be a perfect day for the venture, brilliant sunshine, cloudless sky and pleasantly warm for our trip along Lac Lemman on the *Chablais*.

The Parc is a short walk from the landing stage at Le Bouveret, reaching the entrance we discovered that the bulk of the car park was occupied by a large marquee, which was dispensing refreshments. Not feeling in need of these so early in the day, we proceeded through to encounter another ticket booth, this time for the trains. Early as it was, the place was well filled and a plethora of locomotives, large and small, powered by steam, internal combustion and electricity (via batteries) were

either on shed at the main roundhouse pattern depot or circulating around the line.

Passenger pick-up and set-down occurs at a large station, Chablais City which has three through roads, two of which were used for the passenger carrying trains and one as a by-pass for the many smaller units consisting, in the main, of a locomotive plus riding truck for its happy owner who, for once, was able to give his model a really good run. The passenger trains consisted of the usual straddle pattern coaches hauled by larger and more powerful engines. A clock giving the time of the next train is provided, but on this occasion it was not used, trains ran as soon as they were filled, and a procession of units perambulated the extensive and involved system continuously.

Although the railway is primarily a steam powered system, four large i/c units, one based on a FO Tunnelok one on a MOB 6000 the other two BDeh4/4+Bt sets in AL and BVB



RhB G4/5 No.108 on 7 $\frac{1}{4}$ in gauge busy hauling passenger carrying stock on the Swiss Vapeur Parc tracks, 19 June 1994

rivers, are provided, presumably for use at off peak periods and in inclement weather. An interesting steam unit is an 1:8 scale LMS Black 5, together with a train of "ride on" LMS coaches.

Among the visitors on 19 June were two models based on RhB prototypes, the G4/5 2-8-0 and the G2/3+2/2 Mallet. Both ran on 7 $\frac{1}{4}$ in gauge, but whereas the 2-8-0 was a massive brute, the Mallet was a very small unit. The Greenly approach to scale still rules! Indeed Henry Greenly's influence was evident by the fact that the gauges were given officially in imperial units, 5 in and 7 $\frac{1}{4}$ in gauges.

All structures around the railway are based on prototypes, and are scaled down to fit in with the overall ambience of the setting. The majority are functional, either serving as refreshment or souvenir booths, or, in the case of the main signal box, controlling the entry and exit from Chablais City. In addition there is a

1:8 model of Aigle Castle and a growing 1:5 scale collection of buildings which form Chablais Village. These included a church, a bank and a souvenir shop, whilst a town hall is now under construction, a clear case of Swiss priorities. These buildings add to the overall effect of the railway and, in conjunction with the well laid out paths, allow the visitor to stroll around enjoying the sight of the many trains from different angles.

On entry we each received a souvenir booklet which was mainly advertising, but included some details of the railway together with illustrations of the basic locomotive stud. This however did not include a detailed plan of the site, only a redundant map showing the location - redundant, since the recipient had clearly found his or her way there without its aid! We aren't quibbling, any group who can organise so enjoyable an event can be allowed one minor omission. Still it is a pity we couldn't trace the present convolutions, let alone get a preview of the further extension which should be in use by 1996.

CJF