

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: 5 (1997-1999)
Heft: 6

Artikel: A birthday holiday
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-854530>

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A BIRTHDAY HOLIDAY

by John B. Farmer

My wife and I were due to visit friends in Bremen Northern Germany, and I wanted to do the journey all the way by train via the Channel Tunnel. My wife posed the question that as it was the year of my 70th birthday, would I like to go on to Switzerland after Bremen? Would I? Not half!! It had been four years since our last visit, and not a chance to be missed

As to how to put the holiday together, two things helped. I remembered Roger Kemp's article in Swiss Express, Dec. 96, where he mentioned the start of the new DB ICE service - Berlin to Interlaken. What were the possibilities of joining this train? The other thing that helped was an advert in the Daily Telegraph for the Deutsche Bahn Office at Surbiton. A telephone call produced the booklet "Germany & Europe By Rail", which gave plenty of information regarding various tickets. Most importantly, having supplied DB with our proposed itinerary, the timetables which followed showed that it was possible to connect with the Berlin/Interlaken Express. Also included in the booklet were details of the Eurostar Cologne Special Ticket from Waterloo International to Cologne via Brussels at £79 return, and furthermore, that DB could issue the required Swiss Passes (rate favourable due to the firmness of the £). All this, together with a Euro Domino 3-day Pass (to cover the Cologne-Bremen, Bremen-Swiss Border and return Swiss Border to Cologne) saw the package complete.

Tickets having arrived and packing completed, on Mon. 2nd June, we caught the 09.27 Eurostar and arrived in Bremen Hbh at 21.13. After a few days with our friends (incidentally Bremen has some excellent new trams), we left Bremen on Sat. 7th June at 08.14 for Göttingen to connect with the Berlin/Interlaken Express and arrived at Interlaken (Ost) at 17.15 (again still reasonably fresh after our 7½ hours travelling on this super train.) We were speedily conveyed by our host to our splendid B & B en suite accommodation, with bedroom view of the Jungfrau mountain. We were situated about ten minutes walk to either Interlaken East or West Stations, and we lost no time in setting off to collect our Extra Day Free Travel on our Swiss Pass being issued to

celebrate the Swiss Rail 150 Anniversary. I also purchased a timetable, which should have been accompanied by a magnifying glass - the print was much smaller than my previous one, although this gave the advantage of being lighter to carry around!

After a meal, we returned to base to plan our forthcoming trips. I find this great fun, spreading out the Bahnkarte, looking for the route numbers, finding them in the timetable and plotting the various journeys.

Next morning saw us off by B.O.B. to Grindelwald and on by W.A.B. to Kleine Scheidegg, where we enjoyed an excellent bowl of vegetable soup on the balcony of a restaurant about 200 yards from the station whilst waiting for the cloud to clear and give us a view of Eiger. We would not make the ascent by the Jungfraubahn on this occasion, but continued the round trip via Lauterbrunnen (to marvel once again at the mighty waterfall) and back to Interlaken. With Swiss Passes at the ready, why not round off the day by taking the train to Brienz, to catch a glimpse of one of the fine new steam locomotives of the Rothornbahn - what a splendid sight and sound as this rounded the curve out of Brienz Station in the early evening sunshine, and thence our peaceful return home by boat.

Full use was to be made of our Passes the following day with a trip to Montreux via Spiez (a lot of rebuilding here), Zweisimmen, then the M.O.B., giving us a couple of hours or so for strolling by Lake Geneva, and rekindling memories of previous trips aboard the Panoramic Express and the wonderful Glion/Caux/Rochers-deNaye mountain line. The return home was via the standard gauge to Brig and Spiez.

Something of a change for Tuesday. A bus ride from Brienz Station to the Ballenberg Swiss Open Air Museum of Country Life & Craft. This is well worth a visit, with an excellent brochure in English(!). On such a hot day, it was good to wander in the shady places provided by this huge park. Old buildings from various parts of the country have been re-erected here - working water-driven saw and crushing mills, and a

never-to-be-forgotten loaf was purchased for supper from the old wood-fired bread oven.

We left Brienz in the afternoon by boat and disembarked at Giessbach to explore the funicular there, which we were informed was the oldest in Europe and used to be worked by water. The water-fall at Giessbach is a magnificent sight when viewed from the bridge under which it flows. The hotel at the top affords a fine view, just the place for coffee and cake.

Our fourth day was planned for the 'BIG ONE'. Many years ago, I remember being in a troop train which stopped at a place called 'Domodossola'. Realising that we could reach it on the Swiss Pass, we set off to Spiez and Brig, where we caught the Italian I.C. for Venice, stopping at Domodossola. As we approached the station, a voice wished all Swiss Pass Holders a pleasant journey. On arrival, we descended to the Centovalli Line and proceeded to Locarno. The ticket inspector stared long and hard at our Swiss Passes. Maybe he had not seen many D.B. headed ticket formats before – any rate, we were not thrown off. Next to Bellinzona to make the connection for Göschenen. What a climb on this spectacular little line to Andermatt. Then back to Brig, Spiez and home. We had been through the four Great Tunnels - Lotschberg, Simplon, Gotthard and Furka in about 12 hours.

Following a day for some laundry and taking the opportunity to explore locally, we virtually stuck a pin in the Bahnkarte and thought we would explore ENGELBERG for our next trip. First to Sarnen, where a 15 minute walk brought us to the Sarnersee and a totally peaceful coffee break. Then the junction at Hergiswil gave the connection with the train to Engelberg. The climb from Grünenwald to Engelberg is on the rack and pinion, as it is a very steep climb. This is obviously a ski resort. When we arrived, it was very quiet, hardly a soul in sight, just the birds singing, wonderful air - and a strawberry tart and cream!

We returned to Interlaken to prepare for MEGA LAUSANNE. We had obtained admission



tickets and directions, etc., prior to setting off on Sat. 14th June. All trains for MEGA LAUSANNE would stop at the designated Halt for the huge marshalling yards at DENGES-PREVERENGES. In return for our admission tickets, we were handed a commemorative key fob. Also one could purchase a book describing the event in English. After looking around the huge display, we watched the Parade. At intervals of two minutes for a duration of 2½ hours, all Swiss locomotives that were still in a track-worthy condition were paraded before a huge audience.

From the first steam locomotive "Spanisch-Brötli-Bahn" (making its first appearance in the Jubilee Year), to the latest in highspeed trains. To quote from the official booklet: "Replicas of the 'Spanisch-Brötli-Bahn' locomotive, built by SLM and HW Zürich for the centenary of the Swiss Railways in 1947, a permanent exhibit at the Swiss Transport Museum, Lucerne." A total of 60 vehicles were gathered together for that weekend. We returned home extremely tired, but had experienced a wonderful day.

Sunday, 15th June, we said our farewells and made our way home via Basel, Cologne and the Channel Tunnel.