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Book & Video Reviews

Swiss Railways in the Sixties; volume one by Alan Snowdon, 38 Oakwood Close, Redhill RH1 4BD. Cost £10 plus p & p.

This 46 minute video recording is the first in a series by SRS member Alan Snowdon. It is a VHS PAL compilation of 8mm silent film taken in the 1950s and 1960s. Subjects covered include; the Gotthard line, the Schwyzer Strassenbahn, the Brunnen-Axenstein rack line, trams in Lucerne, Zurich's "Gold Coast" line and train watching at Zurich Hauptbahnhof.

The tape has a commentary in English by a Swiss lady which provides useful information. There is no music. The sleeve of the tape has a line diagram showing the routes covered in its footage.

When viewing the tape after present day recordings made by, for example, MITV or Rinco-vision the quality of the colour pictures may leave a little to be desired but to say that without qualification would be to miss the point of this recording. Here we have vintage film of thirty or forty years ago giving those with an interest in Swiss railways a valuable historical insight into Swiss social and transport past. We should be grateful that someone has taken the time and effort to put the recording together. Whilst some of the editing results in "choppy" viewing for modern Swiss rail enthusiasts this video offers an interesting insight into the background of current traffic operations. At £10 per copy this tape offers value for money.

I particularly liked the glimpses of the TEEs and the shunting sequences at Goschenen - watch out for the FO train winding its way up to Andermatt. We see inside the signal cabin at Zürich and learn about various Swiss signalling practices. Watch out for the building of the Gotthard route motorway. Traction is both steam and electric. At the end of the tape several sequences are shown in slow motion. The film maker invites viewers to let him know if more of this material would be favoured by future purchasers.

PM

Ruckblick 150 Jahre Schweizer Eisenbahn;
Part 1. Desti Film, D-74179 Obersulm Postfach 111, Germany. Available from; MITV, Southamp-ton, England. £???.? (plus £? p&p) .

This 58 minute broadcast quality video production features Limmatt and the Spanish Brotli Bahn, the Jubilee Class 460 lok and the a wide variety of steam and electric motive power used in 1997. For 460 enthusiasts there are many views of Ajax, Pepsi, Agfa, Zugkraft Aarag, SF, Kambly, Danzas etc. High speed trains including the ICE, TGV, Cisalpino are included together with Zurich's S -Bahn and the latest Doppeldecker SBB carriages. These contrast with the extensive steam footage.

The historical aspect of the various SBB and other lines, including the Rigi Bahn, is covered by archive colour footage which appears to date from the 1950/60's and is of very good quality. It includes RhB and some Crocodiles! Watch for the gramophone and fancy dress party aboard one SBB special service. What is apparent from the archive pictures is just how much building work has taken place in the intervening period. Three decades ago the hillsides appear devoid of chalets - in 1998 they are everywhere! Some time is spent on views of the popular lake steamers.

The pictures include in the cab or on the foot-plate footage, trackside shots, recordings made within the carriages, at stations and "trains in the landscape" images. The 1997 film footage was taken in mostly dull conditions interspersed with some glorious sunshine. There are no snow scenes.

It is worth watching out for the archive pictures of cars loading for the Gotthard shuttle, the Red Arrow, a superb line up of Class 460s and 465 at Lausanne. Picture quality on this tape is very good as is the Hi-Fi sound with some music, live sound and commentary in German. The recording was been made in collaboration with the SBB as a partner in the 150th anniversary celebrations.

Those who were unable to visit Swiss railways during 1997 will find this a useful overview of some of the events and for those who were fortunate to be present there this tape will be a nice souvenir to a year of spectacular railway activities. In conclusion a worthwhile summary of current modern Swiss standard gauge motive power supplemented by some valuable historical coverage of the Swiss transport scene of several decades ago.

PM