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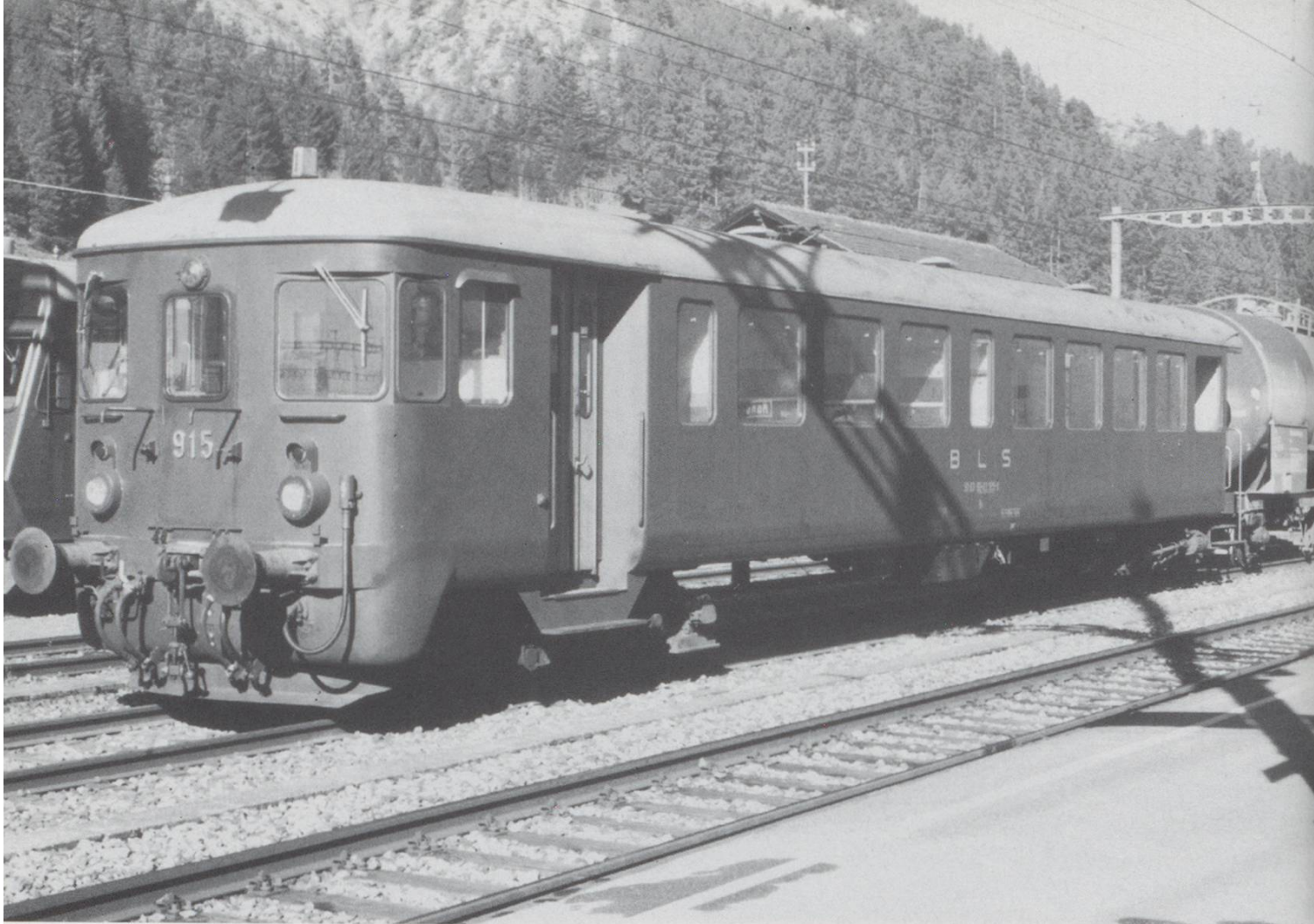
My first trip to Switzerland (part 2) by John Atkinson

(Continued from p. 12 of the June issue)

Having decided to return to Kandersteg, I spent most of the return trip trying to spot where we had walked the previous day. This met with limited success. I had great difficulty adjusting my cerebral compass to the fact that trains heading for a destination in one direction sometimes travel in the opposite; in Switzerland anyway. I baled out of the IC from Frutigen at Kandersteg and made my way to the south end of Bahnsteig 1 as the train departed. As soon as I had made ready with my video camera, an immaculate north-bound BLS train entered the station, the sun reflecting from the blue and white EWIV coaches and making the entire train look as if it had been polished. It was hauled by a 465 and consisted of three seconds, two firsts and an ex-SNCF baggage van at the end (a fourgon conclusion). I saw this train consist a couple of times during my trip and have since seen it so many times on videos, sometimes as a complete train and sometimes forming part of a train, that I begin to wonder exactly how many EWV coaches the BLS

possesses. Is it, in fact, the same rake all the time? Although I had a good video sequence I was prevented from taking a photo of this train by a south-bound double-headed Re4/4 freight coming to a halt on Gleis 1. At this point it became apparent that the island platform was the better of the two and would get even better as the sun moved round. From here I watched 193 Steg and 194 Thun, coupled together, make at least two attempts to shift a two-car BN emu on one of the loops. Having dragged it a few inches each time they eventually managed to get the brakes off and away they went.

There's no point in detailing everything I saw, photographed and filmed at Kandersteg, readers will be familiar with it, particularly the lucky member who lives there, so I'll confine myself to just a few comments or the personal impressions of a first-timer like me. I was fascinated by the mixture of stock used in different trains. It was rare to see a matching rake like the BLS one mentioned above, apart, of course, from the push-



pull ICs though even with these the Steuerwagen has its windows set higher in the body side than the EWIVs. Many trains were formed from EWI, EWII (some with Komfortstreifen), EWIV, RIC (some in green) and Eurofima stock together. Add to these the occasional BLS, German, Belgian or Italian coach(es) and it was all more than enough to keep me interested. (In passing, can anyone definitely confirm that only the B11 RIC coaches have received the (sort of) EWIV livery?)

Looking north down one of the loops I watched a Traktor towing a single van slowly approaching and then stop while still some distance away. Through the open doorway of the van a thin stream of steaming water was being ejected at an intriguing angle. I remained where I was and eventually the van, door now closed and hauled by BLS Tem 225 045-4, slowly passed by me. It was a short-wheelbase BLS van with a platform at one end lettered, if my memory serves me, 'Weichenreinigungswagen'. It seems they clean the points as well!

I watched the car-carrying operations shuttling back and forth to Goppenstein and momentarily wondered if I could hire a car for an hour or two

Previous page: Re4/4 172 with a single van at Kandersteg 30/10 97

Above: Bt 915 used on the car carrying trains on the Kandersteg - Goppenstein service.

simply to drive it on the train and ride through the tunnel in it. Abandoning the idea I later made my way under the tracks to the car-loading bay to take up a different location. I then thought about thumbing a lift from there but didn't do this either. There were two car trains at Kandersteg but one, complete with Re4/4, appeared to be out of use. I have read somewhere, I wish I could remember where, that the Kandersteg-Goppenstein car-carrying service provides something like 30 per cent of BLS income. This seems a frighteningly large proportion to me; can you imagine the all-powerful car industry putting up with that in this country? First, we would have to build a publicly financed road tunnel. Then, when the railway had closed, the road tunnel could be privatised and tolls introduced. (Not that I'm cynical or anything.) I watched a Pendolino trundle through and, never having been on a tilting train, thought this might be a good way to visit Milan on the morrow.



Above: Tem 045 with the point washing train referred to in the article, 30/10/97.

Having spent some hours at Kandersteg the temperature began to get noticeably lower and the wind was making itself felt so I decided to return to Brig. I remembered that my family had gone off on the FO that morning to look at a glacier or something and ride on a danglebahn. At Brig I could investigate the FO timetable, see if I could guess which train my family would return to Brig on and meet it somewhere along the line. (I had no idea which station they would be using.)

I took the first available train out of Brig where the street running on the other side of the river reminded me of the last time I had ridden through the streets on a train; Bad Doberan 22 years earlier, but there the similarity ended. I realised that what I had thought was part of Brig turned out to be called Naters, and the Re4/4 thus named seems to indicate that this is a separate town. I travelled as far up the line as Niederwald, which gave the shortest wait before catching a train back to Brig. At least, I think it was Niederwald; single line, single platform, a wooden shelter, two lights and a clock. There was a tunnel mouth, which does not appear on

the Kümmerly+Frey map, at the north end; perhaps it's just a very short tunnel. It was here that my luck ran out and reality and timetable parted company.

The sun had gone down, it was cold, the wind was becoming even more noticeable and five minutes had passed since I should have caught the returning train. I saw not a single soul about and checked the timetable. After 15 minutes it was getting dark as well; double check. After 25 minutes I wondered what part of the wooden shelter would be the most comfortable to spend the night in. I couldn't see the timetable well enough to check it again. Then the train turned up; I collapsed thankfully into it and to heck with the timetable. We lost more time on the way down to Brig at the passing loops and I decided not to look out at the stations for my family but sit tight and put off for as long as possible the opprobrium that would assuredly be heaped upon me for the lateness of the train should they be aboard. It terminated at Mörel where we



Above: Brig bound push-pull Inter City, Re460 043-3 in charge at Kandersteg, 30/10/97.

All photos: Author

changed into what seemed to be private coaches, specially hired for the purpose, that had brought FO passengers up from Brig. It's surprising how many buses can be filled by a not particularly crowded narrow-gauge train. I was looking forward to a hot shower and my evening meal and so not particularly pleased with all this but I have to admit it's an ingenious way of getting a train back on time and in its allotted path. Fortunately, my family had been on the train in front of mine so I was castigated only for being later than they were in arriving back at the hotel.

The following day was Friday and we had decided on a day trip to Milan using the Pendolino. These units seem less spacious than one would expect though perhaps we had become used to the EWIVs which, for me, are among the best stock I have ridden in. I cannot say I noticed the tilting (of course, one is not supposed to) apart from the horizon rising and falling sometimes. Then there are the electric window blinds; people would insist on making a nuisance of themselves with them. Every time I saw something I wanted to take a longer look at through a window on the other side of the coach, down would come the

blind. In addition to the supplements, the compulsory seat reservations were not cheap either. On our return these were obviously pointless, there were empty seats scattered throughout the train. In retrospect I don't think I'll go out of my way to ride a Pendolino again unless speed is really necessary and money no object. I doubt not that they adequately fill a market niche; it just doesn't happen to be mine.

Saturday was 1 November and the day of our return home though, fortunately, our flight was not until the early evening. Not wishing to venture too far from Brig we agreed on Visp, my family because they fancied some walking and I because I could film on the SBB line and watch the BLS line at the same time. If things became quiet attention could be diverted to the BVZ. We used the metre gauge to Visp and here I immediately crossed the line to photograph two VZ Krokodile, nos. 12 and 13, parked outside the shed. They were in good condition and appeared to be available for traffic

but neither moved all the time I was there. I had a look at the container-transfer arrangements, described by our editor on pp. 18–19 of last December's Swiss Express, but there was plenty going on in the main-line station so I took up position on Bahnsteig 1 with the sun behind me and got to work with my cameras. There seemed to be as many 465s on this line as there were 460s on the BLS. I did not see one on a freight but they appeared on everything from an Italian EC to a seven-coach rake on a stopping train. I photographed the 'Geneva Airport Express' that we had arrived on the previous Saturday, still composed of a mixture of BLS and SBB stock and hauled by a red Re4/4^{II}. Brown-livered Ee3/3 16459 was parked just beyond Gleis 3 and later in the day obligingly performed a brief shunting manoeuvre specially for my video. I also took a telephoto shot of a BLS three-car emu climbing up the valley side in the distance, the first and only time I saw one of these units south of Speiz.

All too soon we had to return to Brig, collect our luggage and catch the train to Geneva Airport. We had a choice of two trains and chose the first to leave, EWIV stock headed by a 460, as this gave us plenty of time to 'clock in' at the airport and allowed for any unexpected delay. We lugged everything on board and I wandered off with a camera for a 'last squeeze of the orange'. I eventually noticed three or four railwaymen engaged in exchanging a large heavy jumper cable between our loco and train; then came a station announcement informing us of a delayed departure. No problem, we had plenty of time and, apart from four German pensioners, we had the entire coach to ourselves. Then came a further announcement; the train would be very delayed. I returned to reassure my family having realised that the last announcement at least had been in four languages. The final announcement informed us that our train had been cancelled altogether due to a technical defect and that we should change to the train on the opposite platform face, leaving in a few minutes. Passengers for Geneva airport must change at Lausanne. This created a certain amount of excitement among my charges and the pensioners; questions were flying about, my family's directed at me and the pensioners' at each other. I loaded up with cases and staggered off the train. My fully loaded weight must have been at least 20 stones but the combined weight

of the pensioners must have been even greater as they nearly had me over in the course of their stampede across the platform. Away we went in an EWI bound for Lausanne. During the journey a conductor came and asked us if we were in danger of missing our flight (he must have known our destination from the gripper who passed through earlier). After confirming our arrival and departure times at Lausanne and the arrival time at the airport I replied that we should be OK. We would be presenting ourselves about 20 minutes before take-off but that was Swissair's problem. I also asked what could be done if, in fact, we were in danger of missing our flight. His reply involved getting us off the train and putting us in a taxi somewhere!

There was a seven-minute connection at Lausanne and it was not a cross-platform change. Ordinarily no problem despite having to herd three females in the right direction but by the time I had got us and the cases to the correct, very crowded, platform I was reflecting that it was fortunate I am an enthusiast. Our train arrived on time but very packed and hardly anyone got off. We literally fought our way on board, adopting pensioner tactics when necessary. I knew my family had made it but did not see them again until the train almost emptied at Geneva Hbf when, eventually, I managed to get further than the luggage vestibule where I stood for this part of the journey. My view through the barred window on one side had been obscured by piled luggage and on the other side was the toilet door. From the Hbf it was plain sailing and I was able to enjoy travelling in an EWIII for the first time. The train arrived at Geneva airport on time and, adopting a 'hanged for a sheep as a lamb' attitude, we made our way to the appropriate desk. Swissair did not even seem to notice our lateness.

It's astonishing how a year has passed and I have not returned to Switzerland. However, a few Swiss trains now run on my layout in addition to the many German ones and I have promised myself that I shall sneak back on my own next year!

John Atkinson

