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A Dream Fulfilled by David Baker

Above: Rhätische Bahn, Ge6/6 407
Plinthed at Bergün

Photo: David baker

I first visited Switzerland in 1985 when my wife and I stayed for ten days in Interlaken. We travelled by plane and train with Swiss Travel Service. During the holiday we used the Half Price Pass and visited Wengen, Grindelwald, Jungfrau, Thun etc, making good use of trains and boats. I became hooked on the Swiss Travel system, railways in particular, and have amassed a collection of videos over the years. Although we have driven to Switzerland every other year since 1985, I have dreamed of a Swiss Railway Holiday.

Many hours of planning with an old Cooks Timetable formed the basis of a "possible sometime" 15 day trip, but a health scare prompted me to follow the maxim "Go when you have the chance" and a full timetable was obtained from Swiss Tourist Office. This was a wonderful investment!

More hours spent planning, but this time with definite time parameters in mind! A compromise of 10 nights was agreed with "she who considers that trains are a means to an end and are not to be enjoyed", and I co-opted my brother, Michael, as travelling partner. The aim now was to visit as many railways as possible within the time

restraints and my concentration was thus focussed on the southern and central areas with 3 centres chosen for accommodation i.e. Chur, Brig and Montreux.

Arrangements were made by telephone direct to hotels chosen from the Swiss Tourist Office lists. Although Switzerland is a landlocked "island", they are not as insular as we are when it comes to languages and I had no problems in discussing terms with English speaking staff in the hotels.

The next stage was to arrange the air transport from Manchester to Zurich, travel insurance etc. and for the purchase of a 1st class 15 day Swiss Pass. The flight from Manchester to Zurich was ideal because it arrived at about 10.50 local time giving a chance for almost a full day's rail travel. The return flight, likewise, allowed a good day's travel, as it left at 19.30 hrs local.

The full itinerary and timetable as finally agreed would take up too much space in this magazine, but I hope that the following breakdowns will show the scope of travel with a 15 day Swiss Pass, albeit for only 11 days usage. A map of Swiss Railways will help, but surely all readers will have this valuable item.

Itinerary

May 31 Manchester-Zurich-Romanshorn-Vaduz-Chur.

June 1 Chur-Altstätten-Appenzell-St.Gallen-Wattwil-Buchs-Chur-Arosa-Chur

June 2 Chur-Samedan-Scuol-Preda-Bergün-Davos-Chur

June 3 Chur-Pfaffikon-Rigi-Vitznau-Brunnen-Andermatt-Chur

June 4 Chur-Bellinzona (Bus)-Lugano-Andermatt-Brig

After a very early start from home we caught the 04.10 train from Leeds to Manchester Airport. This was a bit of a drag! The plane was a little late in leaving but a fast flight enabled us to catch our planned train at Zurich for Romanshorn. After acclimatising for an hour we carried on to Rorschach and Buchs, before catching the postbus to Vaduz in Liechtenstein and a cup of coffee. On to Sargans after half an hour to catch the next train to Chur and a local bus to the Hotel Ibis. The town centre hotels which I contacted had been commandeered for a symposium, but the Ibis filled the bill, although it is over a mile from the station.

After the first night in Chur we started with a 07.45 walk to the station for the 08.21 to Altstätten. On alighting at the SBB station on the eastern side of the village, our walk to the Appenzeller Bahn station gave us a chance to pick up the odd bottle of beer and also two small screw top bottles of a French red wine, which turned out to be very drinkable. Supermarket shopping is the cheapest way of buying drinks in Switzerland, by far. The main street in Altstätten leads directly to the AB terminus, from where our train to Gais and Appenzell departed. Appenzell is a lovely village alongside the River Sitter. Very aptly named as before long two "odd Englishmen" were sitting with beer bottles and dangling feet in the water. On through Herisau to St. Gallen and a visit to the superb Abbey Library with an impressive wooden floor and thousands of old books. My size elevens were fitted with special slippers to protect the floor, but, I'm glad to say, so were everyone else's.

From St. Gallen we took the BT via Wattwil, as far as Nessau-Neu St.Johann where we embarked on a postbus to Buchs, to make a return to Chur by rail in time for the 17.50 to Arosa. The weather unfortunately had dulled over

and the views going up to Arosa were not very good, and those coming down were non-existent because of the early darkness. To cap it all Arosa was closed? Perhaps another time!

A bright sunny Sunday morning and we left for Samedan at 08.52. We crossed the confluence of the Hinterrhein and Vorderrhein and into the splendid Domleschg Gorge. After Alveneu Station all heads were out of the right hand windows to see the magnificent Landwasser Viaduct just before Filisur. The screeching wheel flanges after Bergün signal the start of the spirals, 5 in tunnels, 1 in the open, and the 4 viaducts before reaching Preda. At Samedan Michael carried on to St. Moritz whilst I headed for Scuol Tarasp and a pleasant run through the Upper Engadine. In the midst of this peaceful scenery a large construction site, near Susch, revealed the southern portal of the new Vereina Tunnel, due to open in the year 2000, between Klosters and Susch. After meeting up at Samedan again we joined the train down into the Albula Valley once more, this time alighting at Preda. Late on a hot, sunny afternoon we walked from Preda to Bergün on the Lehrpfad with its wonderful views of the viaducts and spirals in the Albula alley. This also suited my interest in botany and nature in general. I would recommend this walk to anyone reasonably fit, but suggest it is done downhill, from Preda to Bergün. There is a height difference of 400 metres over the 8 kilometre trek. Because of the time taken to look at the flowers and scenery on the walk our schedule was put back one hour. This gave us time to have a good look at the beautiful "Crocodile" locomotive outside Bergün station. Our run through Davos and Klosters, therefore, was later than planned and the light was fading beyond Klosters back to Chur.

Monday's inspection of the interior of a large cloud on Rigi was a disappointing experience, but at least I had seen the wonderful views of Lake Lucerne on a previous visit. We did manage to get a fleeting look at VRB No. 7 at Rigi-Staffel, surrounded by the mists. Down then to our first steamer trip of the holiday, from Vitznau to Brunnen, before joining the SBB to Göschenen. The next two legs were trusted to the Furka Oberalp as we climbed out of the Schöllenen Gorge and into Andermatt, sited directly above the Gotthard Tunnel. We had time for a walk around the village before starting the rack assisted climb



Above: Appenzeller Bahn (AB), ABDeh4/4 6
Altstätten, approaching Altstätten station.

out of Andermatt. This climb zigzags its way up to Nätchens passing beneath a pair of red benches on which my wife and I had our lunch in 1994, whilst looking on a "model" Andermatt. Don't some small details make vivid impressions on holidays ? On now, in a fading light, to Disentis, eastern terminus of the FO, to change onto the Rhätische Bahn for Chur and bed.

An early start on Tuesday with the 08.10 Postbus to Bellinzona, after trusting our suitcases with the Rhätische Bahn and Furka Oberalp on their lone journey to Brig. The two and a quarter hour journey through the Via Mala and San Bernadino Pass is the quickest route from Chur to Bellinzona and offers very pleasant scenery prior to the train journey to Lugano. The high temperature prompted us to catch the steamer to Morcote on the south west shore of Lake Lugano, but unfortunately this pleasant village requires more time than our timetable allowed.

A short run back to Bellinzona for a one hour break before going on to Andermatt, again via the steep rack-railway from Göschenen. No time to spare as our connection to Brig, the western terminus of the FO, was waiting.

June 5 Brig-Zermatt-Brig-Domodossola-Locarno-Brig

June 6 Brig-Interlaken-Grindelwald-Kleine Scheidegg-Wengen-Interlaken-Brig

June 7 Brig-Martigny-Chatelard-Montreux-Aigle-Champéry-Montreux

The Hotel Europe overlooked the station at Brig and from our room we could see locomotives of the FO, BVZ and, a bit further away, SBB and BS. Our first trip from Brig, Wednesday, took us to Zermatt where we walked down a long cool passage to the funicular up to Sunnegga. Here we had wonderful views of the Matterhorn and Gornergrat, whilst slaking our thirsts with a cold beer. Time didn't allow a trip on the Gornergratbahn but we watched, from Sunnegga, as it wound its way like a model train in the distance and we welcomed its return down in Zermatt. Our return journey was extended through Brig to Domodossola, on the Italian border. Here we made our connection through the Centovalli to Locarno on the line with the unfortunate acronym FART. Views of the "Hundred Valleys" were stunning. The rivers showed various shades of glacial green. Two hours in the pressure cooker of Locarno and we returned back to Brig on the final connecting train of the day.

A reasonably late start on Thursday 6th allowed time for a look around Brig Station. This was fortuitous as a nose bleed turned my blue and white shirt into a patriotic symbol, thank goodness the Hotel was opposite the platform! Over the Lötschberg Pass to Spiez and Interlaken West where we walked through the main street to the station at Interlaken Ost, the terminus for the Bernese Oberland Bahn trains to Lauterbrunnen and Grindelwald.

We chose the portion for Grindelwald and settled down to watching the countryside, passing the Schynige Platte station at Wilderswil and the splitting-point at Zweilütschinen where the Lauterbrunnen portion carried on its separate way. Just before Grindelwald we spotted a house with its top storey on fire, but the fire appliances seemed to be in control. We had a closer view when we caught the Wengernalpbahn train to Kleine Scheidegg and it appeared that not too much damage had been done. A welcome beer at Kleine Scheidegg whilst watching the Jungfrau start its climb up into the Eiger and beyond, before we returned back to Interlaken on the alternative route via Wengen.

Another walk in Interlaken, but this time along the River Aare, which gave us another chance to cool our hot feet. Glacial waters are extremely cold and our feet quickly changed from pink through red to blue.

A restful steamship trip to Spiez further aided our cause, the benefits of which were soon tested on a walk from the Quayside to Spiez Station, where our train back to Brig was caught by the skin of our proverbial teeth.

Friday dawned bright again and our suitcases once more made their way in front, this time to Montreux. We, meanwhile, alighted at Martigny to catch the train up to Le Chatelard. The train clings to the valley side, as do the local villages, in particular Finhaut, and we changed for the downward train at Le Chatelard, allowing only a few minutes to look at the funicular to Lac d'Emosson and a large electricity substation, a busman's holiday for us! Whilst going up through the valley we noticed the Trient Gorge at St. Vernayez and got off to have a good look. A moderate walk into the gorge on a wooden walkway fastened to the stone walls led between steep cliffs into a sunny viewing area which was a splendid place to open two of our small bottles

of wine. On now to Montreux, pick up our cases and sign in, before leaving again for Aigle. The choice I had made from the 3 railways in Aigle was the trip to Champéry with its views of the Dent du Midi and adjacent mountain ranges. The terminus at Champéry, rebuilt in 1990, also houses the lower cable car station to Palachaux. On our return to Aigle we had time to inspect the other two railways which leave the town centre, the Aigle-Sepey-Diablerets and Aigle-Leysin. We arrived back into Montreux in time to have a walk along the lakeside and take a well earned nightcap before bed.

June 8 Montreux-Neuchatel-Le Locle-Bern-Palézieux-Gruyères-Montbovon-Montreux.

June 9 Montreux-Lausanne-Nyon-La Cure-Morges-Bière-Vevey-Montreux

June 10 Montreux-Zweisimmen-Interlaken-Meiringen-Lucerne-Zurich-Manchester

Although it was obvious last night that alterations were taking place at Montreux station, the full implication did not hit us until we arrived for the Lausanne train. It was like a scene from "It's a Knockout" in front of the Hotel where the MOB and MGN terminate. The safety precautions, barriers etc. to protect passengers and staff were so minimal, I do not know how the contractors got away with it! I'm sure I could hear Stewart Hall laughing!

Our train turned up, on time of course, and off we went to Neuchatel in order to embark on the 11.08 to Le Locle. At Chambrelieu the train carries out a reversal to effect the climb into the Jura and immediately in front of our carriage window were two brightly painted locomotives, Re460-022-7 in Swiss Touring Club livery and Re446-447-5 in Marklin livery. We had been fortunate enough to see the Marklin on its debut day! (See Page 52 Vol 4/11). Following a short turn round at Le Locle, where an SNCF loco was waiting to depart for Besancon, we headed for our next stop at Bern, via La Chaux de Fonds and Bienne/Biel. On arrival we found the station full of police with highly visible guns, but did not find the reason for their attention. A hot, sultry, afternoon walking the streets of Central Bern did not do justice to this fine city. On the way to Palézieux we had the mother and father of all thunderstorms, hailstones like cherries pounded the carriage roof for about twenty minutes. The temperature dropped however, which was a blessing, but poor visibility in the steady rain



*Above: Gruyère-Fribourg-Morat (GFM), Be4/4 152
Chapel St. Denis at Palézieux.*

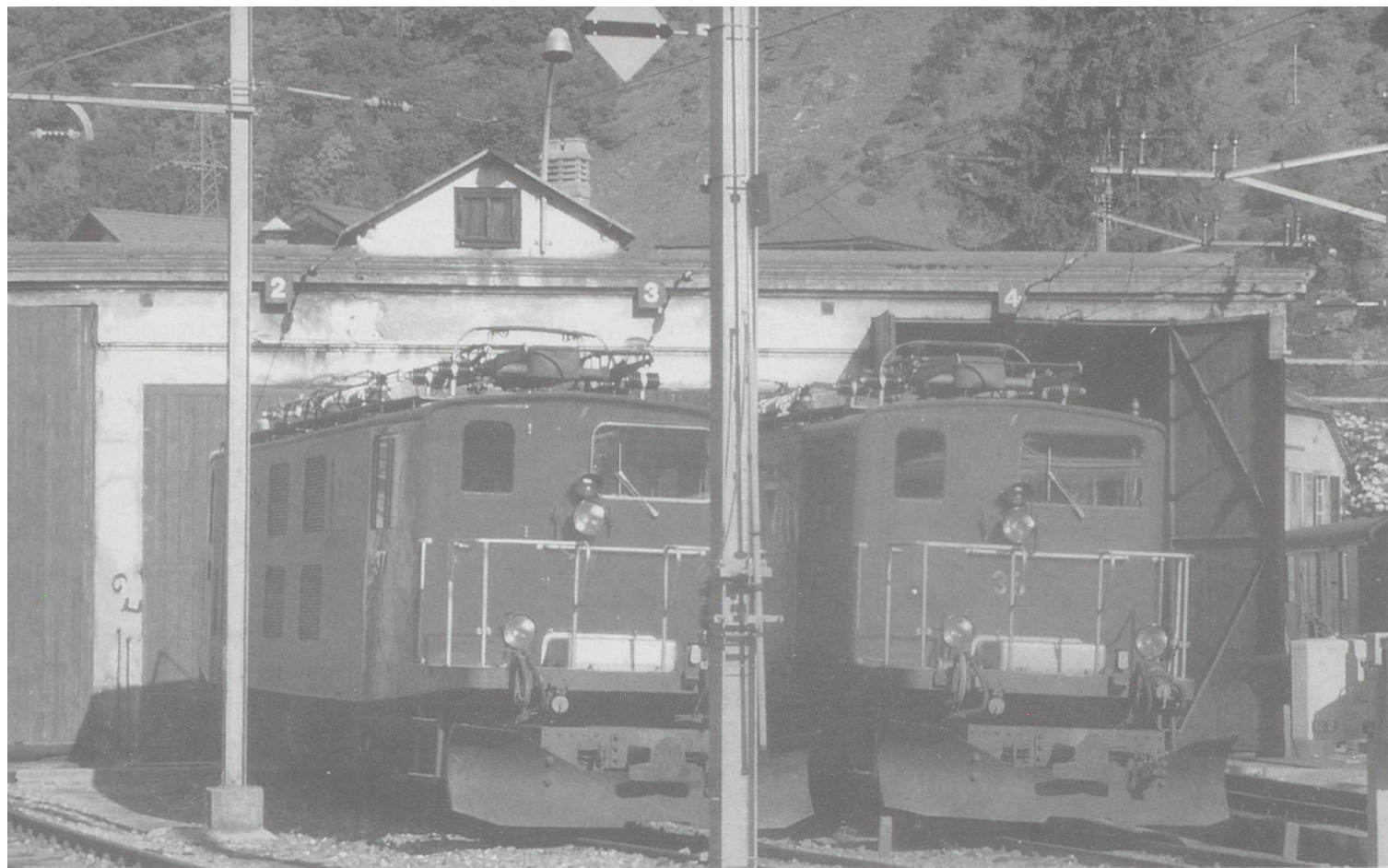
which followed meant that we did not see the Gruyère countryside to its best advantage. We had to wait for an exceptionally late MOB train at Montbovon for Montreux, in fact almost twenty minutes. Shelter was required from the still heavy rain and we even had to postpone our planned walk between Vevey and Montreux that evening.

On our last full day we had arranged for Michael to visit Lausanne and Geneva whilst I went to Nyon and Morges to ride the Nyon-St.Cergue-Morez railway to La Cure and the Bière-Apples-Morges railway to Bière. They were pleasant enough, but I enjoyed Nyon, where I spent just over an hour, more than either of the smaller villages. A local festival was taking place, with decorated floats and, I may say, some pretty ladies.

We met up again at Lausanne station and walked down to the quayside to embark on the final steamer trip of our holiday. We had intended to go on to Villeneuve and walk to Montreux but instead we replaced our cancelled walk from Vevey to Montreux.

Finally, our homecoming day arrived and we turned up with our luggage at Montreux. When asked "shall we send it on to Manchester?" we decided that we did not trust the British end and

only sent it to Zurich! A full trip on the MOB this time, from which we obtained our last views of Montreux as we climbed up the zigzags, in fine weather, and on through the Jor tunnel via Montbovon to Chateaux d'Oex and Gstaad, playground of the rich. After leaving the station at Gstaad the wheel flanges told us of the severity of the bend as we passed around the rear of the town. The MOB terminates at Zweisimmen and we changed to the standard gauge of the BLS down the Simme Valley to Spiez and on to Interlaken Ost. A change of gauge again, now to the only Federal owned narrow gauge line, that lies between Interlaken and Lucerne. We ran alongside Lake Brienz, without sampling a steamer, and took a break in Meiringen, where meringues are reputed to have originated. We, however, bought a large portion of apfelstrudel and a beer, sitting in the cooling shade near to the town church before catching the next train to Lucerne. As, on my previous visit, Lucerne was almost unbearably hot and whilst Michael went sightseeing I hung around the station watching the train movements. I think also, to be honest, now it was so near, I was looking forward to being home. The run into Zurich Flughafen was



Above: Furka-Oberalp Bahn (FO), HGe4/4 36 & 37, at the FO depot at Brig.

an anticlimax and apart from watching the countryside in general had no particular significance. The long slog through the underground shopping malls and passages, with our suitcases this time, took us from the rail station to the Airport, and we regretted our earlier decision to distrust our wonderful Manchester Airport staff. Slightly late, we arrived in Manchester for a drive home chauffeured by number one son.

Conclusions

The statistics of the holiday show what can be attained with careful planning and the value which can be made by purchasing a Swiss Pass. Railways visited or ridden on - 41.

Lakes travelled on - 4.

Distance covered (rail, bus & steamer) - 3,440 Km or 2,137 miles.

Cost of Swiss Pass + additional fares.

(Supplements were required on Arth Goldau-Rigi-Vitznau and Grindelwald-Kleine Scheidegg-Wengen)

Having had over two months to reflect on the holiday, I can make the following comments:-

Although the value of the Pass in financial terms speaks for itself, there was a temptation to do a bit too much travelling.

On average we were out at about 08.30 hrs each morning and returned to the Hotel at about 21.30 hrs. This was tiring, even though breaks were planned en-route. The forwarding of suitcases helped tremendously, we only carried hand luggage, with camera, food, drink etc. which was easier to keep an eye on, as well as to carry. It would also have been more tilting if I had not had the foresight to purchase First Class Swiss Passes, the difference is well worthwhile. In fact, another sound investment!

The opportunities for photographing railways, except at stations, were more limited when travelling all the time. I remember talking to a member at the York Model Railway Show in spring who decried going by car but, to be fair, I had more opportunity to watch and photograph trains from the trackside than by actually riding all the time. A good compromise, perhaps, would be a 15 day car trip with an 8 day pass included?

However, it was a dream fulfilled and, the holiday of a lifetime for me. Although I do hope to be back, by car, in northern Switzerland next year for a few days, I cannot envisage doing a similar trip again.