

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: 5 (1997-1999)
Heft: 4

Artikel: Celebrating the 125 years of the Bodelibahn : (or how to meet the editor 624 miles from home without really trying)
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-854499>

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Celebrating the 125 years of the Bodelibahn

(or how to meet the Editor 624 miles from home without really trying)

by Peter Marriott, photos: Les Heath

I had read too much about the BLS events in mid August 1997 to stay away. Whilst I usually try to get away to Switzerland once a year with such a plethora of railway events in the country in 1997 one short trip was just not enough! After all, it is not every year that the 150th Swiss railway's anniversary is supplemented by the 100th years Spiez-Erlenbach-Bahn plus the 125th years Bodelibahn celebrations.

Thursday 14th August

Heathrow air traffic control did not really help a carefully timetabled itinerary to get off to a good start. The 09.45am Swissair flight was delayed by 30 minutes and although I was first to leave the Swiss customs I had just missed the 12.43 train from Zurich Flughafen to Interlaken.

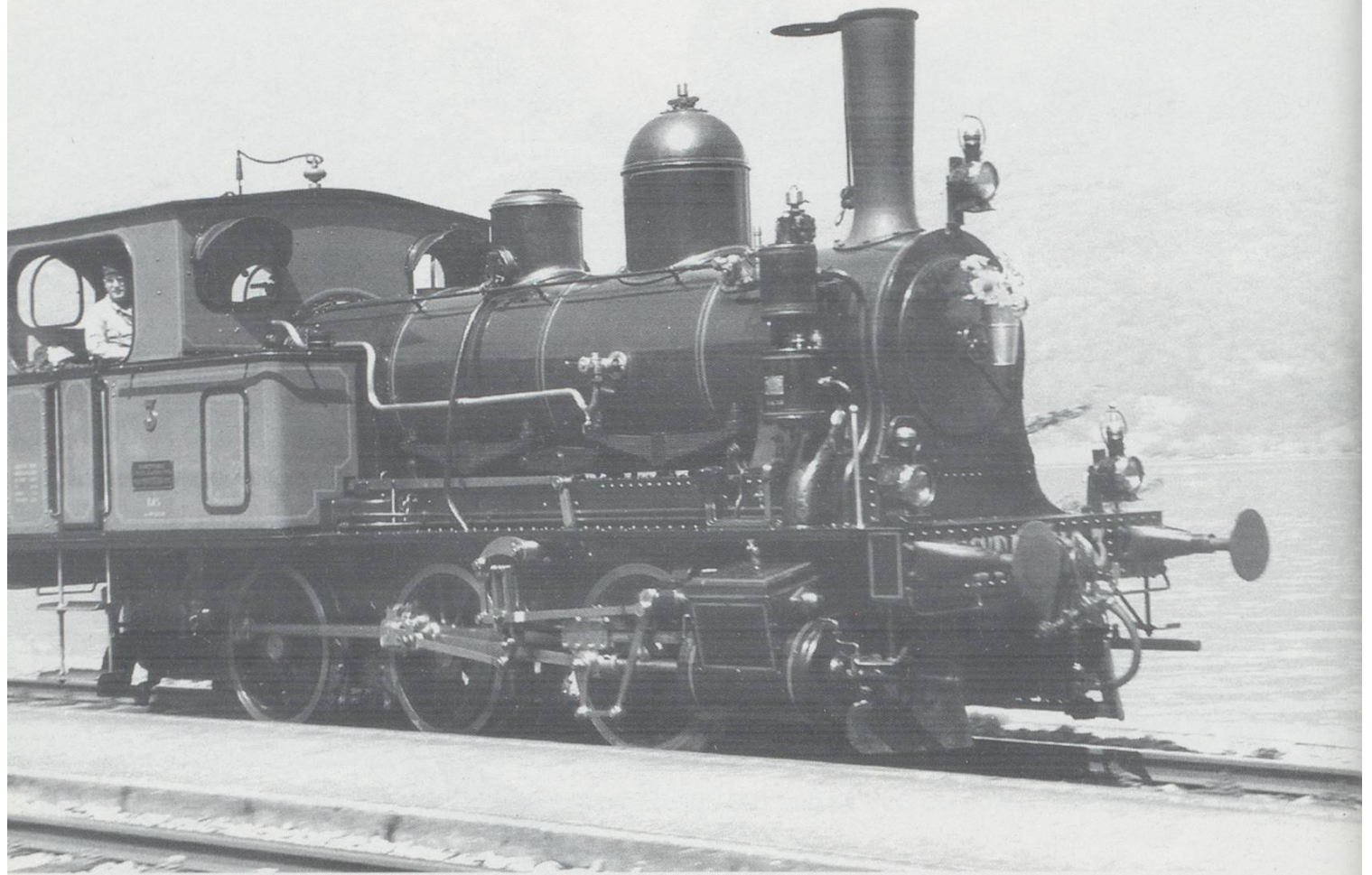
Because of the flight delay it was necessary to use the 13.07 Schnellzug service ex-Zurich Flughafen. The temperature was hot and its carriages without air conditioning were not the

most comfortable! I made a mental note to use only EC and IC air-conditioned stock, where possible, for the remainder of the trip (if the weather remained as hot as it was the first day. P.S. It did).

I had already booked three nights at the Des Alpes Hotel in Spiez for two reasons; firstly because it was within five minutes walk of the Bahnhof and Hotel National in Interlaken (which I had happily used on my last visit) was full. Des Alpes was clean and reasonably priced. Breakfast on the terrace overlooking Thunersee was superb.

The modern Migros opposite platform 1 at Spiez is useful even whilst waiting connections. The supermarket is downstairs with a large restaurant on the ground floor. A cup of coffee and a slice of cake cost 2.70 Sfr - cheaper than in the UK!

After depositing my luggage at the hotel I soon picked up a copy of the 125 Jahre Bodelibahn



leaflet at Spiez station which listed all the events of the forthcoming three days. The events were to celebrate;

- 100 years of the Spiez-Erlenbach-Bahn
- 125 years of the Bodelibahn
- the opening of a new maintenance hall at Bonigen BLS works.

The next train was taken to Interlaken and following a few minutes stroll through the town I watched some of the showjumping on the green alongside the Hoheweg. Whilst continuing my progress back to West Station I noticed the familiar figure of your editor standing on the steps of the Hotel National with the ever hospitable manager Hans Kubler. Les had telephoned me a couple of days before to say he would be "in town" for the BLS celebrations but I had not quite anticipated meeting up with him 7 minutes after arriving in Interlaken! I expected him to be obtaining yet more material for the next issue of Swiss Express but apparently he was recovering from a late night - he told me it was because of his delayed flight. I am not quite sure because he is known to enjoy Hotel National four course

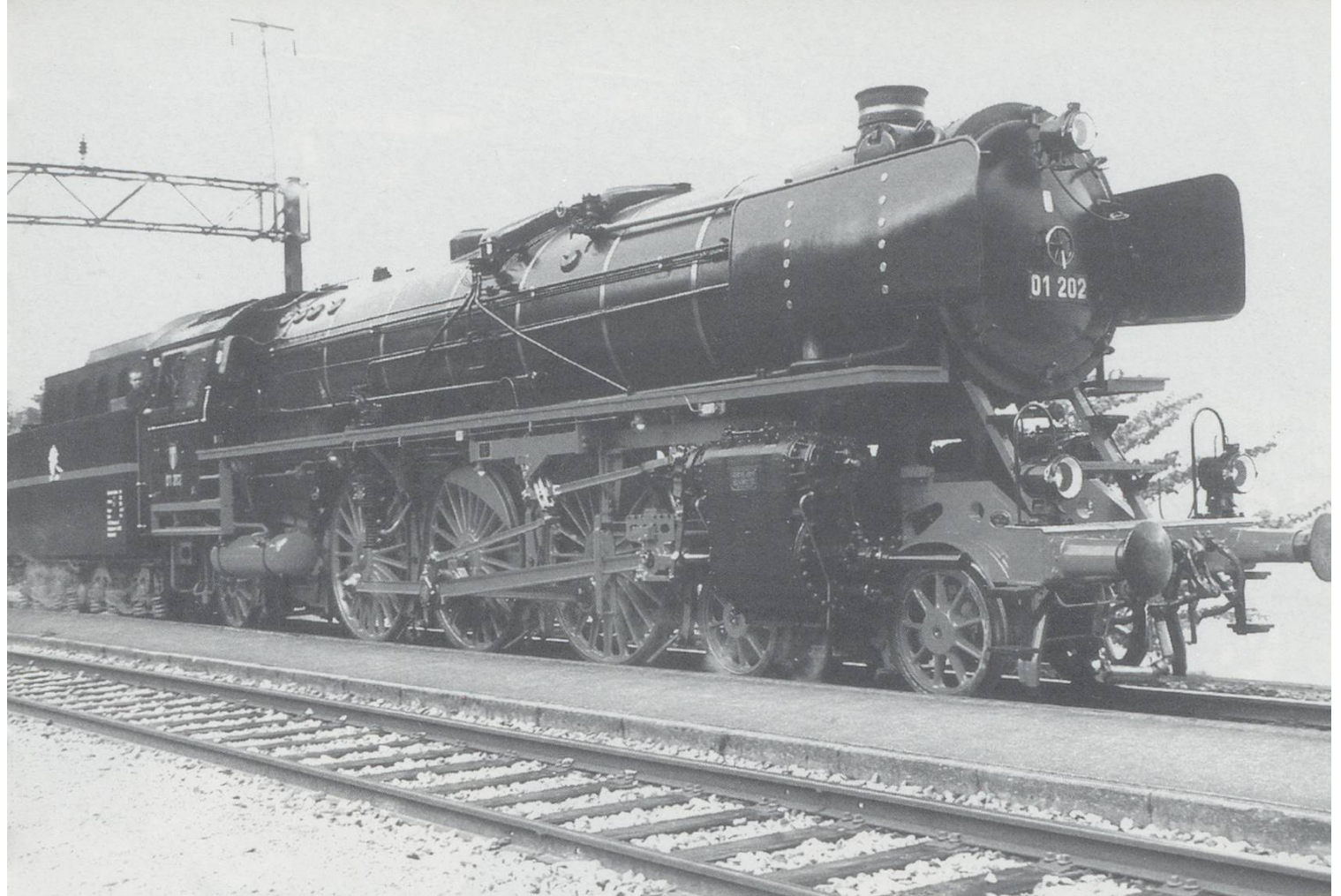
Previous page: The star of the show BLS loco 'Zephyr' with a rake of brightly coloured 4-wheel coaches (wagons with planks for seats) at Därligen.
Above: Another visitor at the parade EBT 3/3 3.

dinners and the odd drop of Rugenbrau.....

Les asked me what I intended to do the next day. "Catch the 08.04 Cisalpino from Spiez to Brig" was the response. The questioner was not too pleased that he would have to be up at dawn but nevertheless thought it was a good idea and we met the next day on platform 2 at Spiez.

Friday 15th August

The ride on Cisalpino to Brig was a little rougher than I recalled when I used the service in April. The quality of the materials used on the interior of the trains does not really match the standards set by Swiss and German manufacturers. Les advised me that the SBB and BLS were still unhappy with the quality of the trains and were discussing this with the manufacturers Fiat Ferroviaria. Nevertheless the 55 minute tilt train journey across the Alps was comfortable and we took the 09.58 back to Spiez and thoroughly



enjoyed the SSG Speisewagen across the Lotschberg route again. During August "happy hours" were available on this service (train 821) in addition to 6 more IC trains between the hours of 09.00 - 11.00 and 13.45 - 15.45. A reduction of 20% on all menu items was most welcome but probably encouraged us to eat more!!!

Retracing our steps to Interlaken to spend the remainder of the day on BLS activities for which we both would like to express our personal thanks to Peter Senn and Hansueli Kunz who had arranged for us to join the special train which departed from Interlaken Ost at 12.20 arriving at Erlenbach at 13.14. Following the brass band welcome two naming ceremonies were performed; multiple unit RBDe 4/4 732 (named *Erlenbach*) and BLS Class 465 013 (named *Stockhorn*). A large crowd had gathered in addition to the 150 special train passengers. Several of the participants in the naming ceremony arrived in a horse drawn post bus. Others were complete in national/cantonal dress. The return train left Erlenbach for Darligen at 14.30.

At Darligen there were more speeches, another brass band and a rather interesting welcome drink with a multitude of fruit floating in it. At 15.54 *Zephir* and a rake of five multi-coloured timber

Above: The most impressive visitor to the weekend was this DB class 01 202 which had hauled the Marklin special from Germany for the Festival.

open wagons left bound for Bonigen works. The loco driver had already warned Les, Robert Brookes of Swiss Radio International and myself that we may get a little wet if we rode in the front carriage but we nevertheless remained on our wooden seats - but for different reasons. Robert to record sounds of live steam for his future radio broadcast, Les to expand his enormous photographic collection and yours truly just because I was, at that time, enjoying the view.

We pulled out of Darligen and the soot began to come in our direction. Robert gritted his teeth and carried on sound recording, Les put in an instant order to the local Migros for Stain Devils as his beloved white SRS shirt became covered in black and I ran to the rear of the carriage to protect the only casual trousers I had brought to Switzerland. Some may say it was silly to travel behind a 125 year old steam loco in cream trousers. You are, of course, quite right.

As we travelled around Thunersee people waved and one car from Austria stayed alongside us all the way to Interlaken - he pulled into lay-bys to let



Above: Ce3/4 1367 seen here at Interlaken West on the Sunday morning getting a polish from a caring driver.

other cars pass but he was determined to drive at the same speed as the steam hauled train. Personally, my main railway interest lies in modern motive power and steam power doesn't usually stir my soul too much. The ride behind *Zephir* was something very special though. Probably like many Swiss Railways Society members I have used the Darligen to Interlaken route many times by road and rail but to pass through Interlaken West non-stop, whistle blowing, seeing some waiting passengers standing agog and others waving at the sight of the green and black 0-4-0 steam loco pulling a rake blue, red, green, yellow and purple wagons coupled to a tractor at the rear (for back up if need be) was definitely fun. As we came to the swimming pool the driver tooted the bathers; children ran across to run alongside the train, mothers waved and fathers stared in amazement. They evidently expected another Re 4/4 or Class 460 but *Zephir* and its train of colourful wagons was a very different sight.

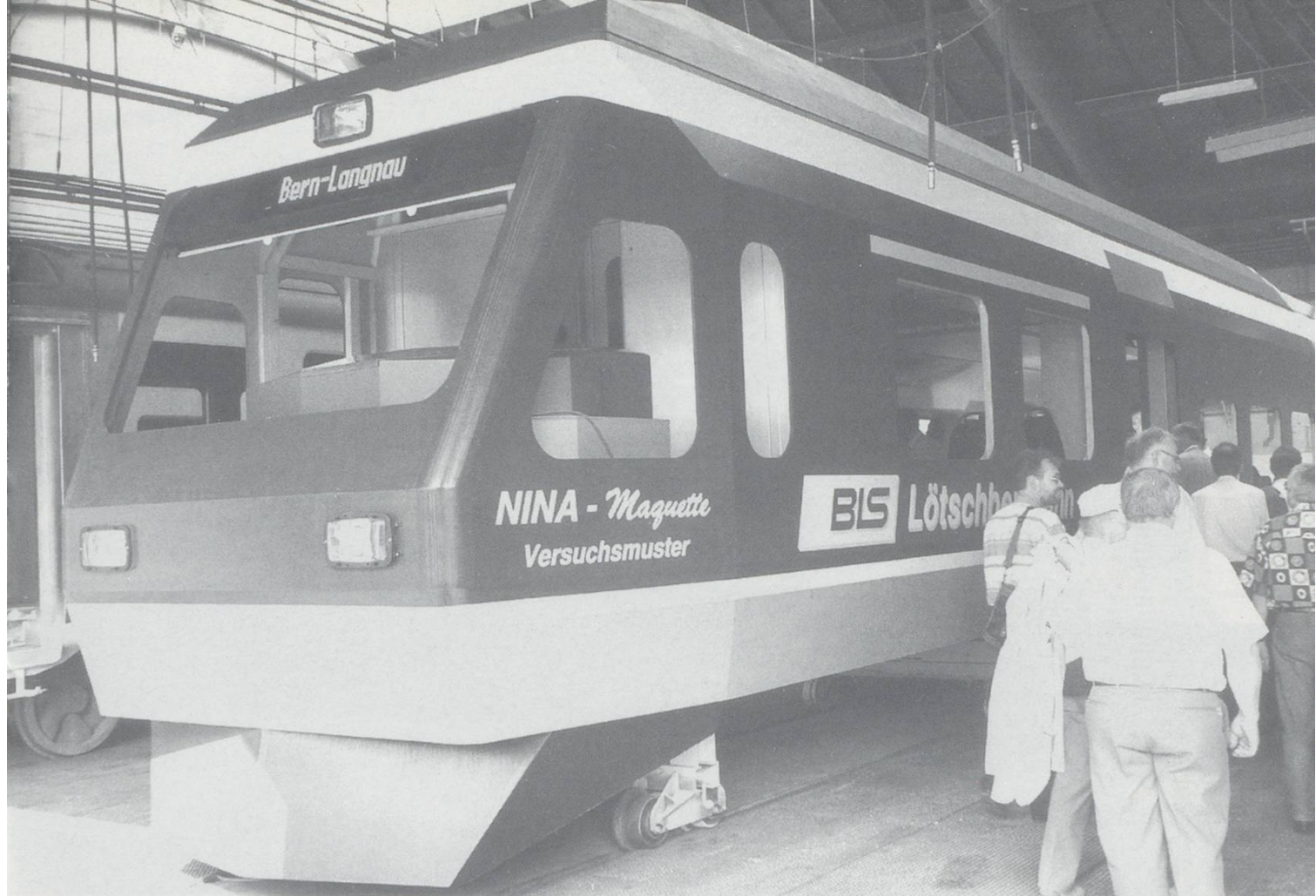
We stopped briefly at Interlaken Ost and then completed our 26 minute steam powered journey to Bonigen works. To see the old Bodelibahn route behind original steam traction was indeed a privilege which others would relish when *Zephir*

was used on special trains over the next two days.

Following arrival at Bonigen works there was a tour of the site which is certainly a lot larger than any of us expected. The 150th anniversary train and a wooden mock up of the NINA BLS low floor commuter train were among the exhibits. Over 120 BLS personnel work there on carriages and multiple units. The entire location looked very clean - we could not decide if this was simply for the open day or if it reflected usual working practises. The BLS band played and then more speeches followed after which a "grand banquet" was served in the new hall which tackles some of the major remedial work on the rolling stock. The day's events finished at 19.30 when the open train left for Interlaken Ost.

Saturday 16th

Another SRS member Phil Alexander accompanied us to Spiez where we noted the first part of the assembled loco parade headed by GBT 3. The six locos moved towards Leissigen at about 11.10 with the shorter second group



moving away a few minutes later.

Phil and Les decided to travel to Därligen whilst I wished to spend a little time at Leissigen where the locos were being held in the centre roads. There were about 60 photographers at Leissigen which was minuscule compared with Därligen where many hundreds filled the platforms, fields, roads and anywhere which provided a good view of the tracks.

Various special trains passed through Leissigen; a four car DB EMU, a double headed steam hauled (locomotives 1367 and 705) train from Zurich and a Marklin train which changed locos to a BLS Re 4/4 just outside Leissigen from the splendid Pacific loco which joined the rear of the second locomotive convoy at Leissigen. Both Zephir and GBT 3 were positively dwarfed by the Pacific. Earlier in this epistle I mentioned my lack of enthusiasm for steam power. This has now changed. The image of the double headed train passing at speed through Leissigen was superb and just the sight of the enormous Pacific resting at Leissigen was quite simply, marvellous. A helicopter hovered overhead for the Rincovision video recording which was heavily advertised at the day's events (I have now seen the tape - it is

Above: The mock up of the new BLS NINA set at Bonigen works. This is used to evaluate different seating control positions etc. prior to delivery.

well worth buying).

Between about 13.10 and 13.30 a Lokparade took place at Därligen. The locomotives ran from Leissigen in convoy and passed Därligen singly. They included; steam locomotives (Zephir and GTB 3), vintage BLS motive power (Ce 4/6 307, Ce 4/4 316, Ae 4/4 251, Ae 8/8 275, Ae 6/8 205) multiple units including STB BDe 4/6, Bde 4/6, ABDe 4/8 and RBDe 4/4 plus modern familiar types (Re 4/4 161, Re 465 001, and Tm 235).

I walked from Leissigen to Därligen and met Les Heath near the food tent. By now I had learned where to look for him! Phil, Les and myself decided to go to Frutigen to witness the revealing of a 150th anniversary Marklin livery on a Sudostbahn Re 4/4 IV. In my quest to buy a few goodies at the BLS info coach we lost contact with each other. On the first train to Spiez I met Dave and Janet Howsam who advised me Les and Nick were looking for me on the platform at Därligen. The accompanying photographs will show that its platforms had rarely seen so much activity!



Above: The side of the latest Marklin advertising on a Sudostbahn Re4/4 4. It shows over forty Swiss people of prominence during the last 150 years. Seen here at Interlaken Ost on the Sunday.

The Marklin charter train, pulled by BLS 275, was advertised as an Extrazug at Spiez so I used it for the journey to Frutigen. On arrival another brass band commenced playing and following another speech a blue sheet was drawn off the loco to reveal white ends with a mural of over 40 famous Swiss personalities depicted. The only face I recognised was Tony Rominger the cyclist but it soon became apparent that two of those who were featured were present at Frutigen. One was Peter Steiner known as "Cool Man" and the other was Miss Switzerland, Melanie Winiger. Guess which one attracted most attention from the photographers?

The BLS Works at Bonigen was open to the public between the hours of 09.00 and 17.00. Bus and train connections ran between Interlaken Ost and the works.

Sunday 17th

The three days of events continued: steam hauled trains ran between Interlaken West and Darligen, steam boats plied Thunersee and the 150th anniversary exhibition train stood in Interlaken West Station.

My intention was to travel back to Zurich using

the Brunig Panoramic Express 10.19 ex-Interlaken Ost but fortunately notices at local stations advised that because of heavy rains the line between Giswil and Saanen was blocked. When I read one of the papers on the return flight the extent of the damage became evident. I was just pleased the notice had been posted.

I caught the ICE Thunersee at Spiez, changed at Olten and was pleased to find that the Migros at Zurich Hbf was open on Sunday. Very useful for stocking up on chocolate! So, for me, ended a memorable few days in Switzerland. Thanks must go to; Mary, my wife, who gave me the permission to leave the country without her and Les Heath, Phil Alexander, Hans Kubler, Peter Senn, Hansueli Kunz, the Howsams and Robert Brookes who all joined in with the fun.