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Rail'N'Dixie Arth-Goldau / Konzertzug / Solothurn Stadt Fest by Ron Smith

Arth Goldau, named after the two towns that it serves, is always busy. It is a junction of several lines. Trains, national and international, arrive from Luzern and Zurich on adjacent platforms. These trains serve different stops on the Gotthard line to Italy, so passengers are exchanged in a flurry of activity. Trains in the opposite direction similarly stop in the same platforms for another passenger swap. Alongside are Sudostbahn (SOB) trains connecting with the SBB trains. The SOB services include the Voralper Express shuttling between Luzern and Romanshorn, as well as stopping trains. There are also SBB local trains running from Luzern to Fluelen and back. In between this activity, streams of freight trains cruise through in each direction. To complete the picture, the Arth Rigi Bahn rack line starts on a bridge spanning the Luzern tracks. Personally, with all this activity, I could not think of a worse location to stage a rail fair, but that is just what the SBB, SOB and ARB did on August 23rd.

We arrived just after two o'clock in time for the lokparade. However, speeches dragged on. In

the goods yard a good crowd waited patiently in the scorching hot sun. At the Southern end of the yard could be seen the locos, with steam and smoke rising slowly from a tank engine.

Eventually a loco started to move. This was the chrome jubilee Re460084-7 "Helvetia". This hummed forward past the crowd at about 5 m.p.h. The yard is ideal for photography with no clutter in the way, and the sun was shining perfectly on the front three quarters of each loco.

When the Re-460 edged to a halt near the ARB overbridge, the next loco slowly eased across the yard. This was SOB Re4/4 446448-3 in TELECOM white livery. The various ages of locomotion continued with a red Re6/6 11607 "Wattwil" followed by a red Ae6/6 11430 "Gemeinde Schwyz". Then came the huge Ae8/14 No. 11801, followed by the brown rod drive Ae3/6 No. 10439. The rod drive always fascinates, and even more so on crocodile 14253 as it ambled past. The SOB also provided a very strikingly liveried Lokoop 477910-4. Finally, with a toot, 0-6-0 tank E3/3 "Muni" trundled across, sparkling and gleaming immaculately.

With all the locos now crowded together, the interest moved to the centre of the yard where e.m.u. RBDe 560104-2 was to be named "ARTH" and a coat of arms affixed at each side next to the cab end. There were some more speeches, and then a masking taped piece of brown paper was peeled off to reveal the plaque. Then a priest gave a reading and speech, presumably blessing the train. The set was propelled by resident shunter 16345 as there are no overhead wires to this siding.

Now that the formal events were over, the crowds moved to the several tents set up, all of which included catering facilities of the usual type in Swiss events, namely bratworst and beer. Each tent had a platform where live jazz bands started playing. Jazz is not my favourite music, but it was great to sit in a tent with a cold beer listening and applauding the music, and occasionally getting up to step outside to photograph the procession of trains that are always running into Arth Goldau.

Included in the very reasonable admission fee of just 10 francs was the following:-

- entry to the jazz and rail festival.
- train travel to and from the event from Luzern, Zug, Rotkreuz, Altdorf and any SOB station.
- a circular trip around the Zugersee in the newly named unit.
- a trip behind steam either on the SOB "Muni" and old SOB coaches to Walchwil and back, or a shuttle up the Rigi as far as Numattli behind vertical boilered No. 7.

We chose the Walchwil trip and made our way across to Platform 3. Unfortunately, a SON local train was in the platform. The driver walked back and organised himself to drive it off from the other end, but was not quick enough, so an exasperated tannoy announcement said the steam train would now depart from Platform 2 instead, and "Muni" came bustling in with its' coaches. The run to Walchwil was uneventful, and the loco ran round smartly. We paused while a freight and a passenger train passed, then set off back to Arth Goldau.

Back in the yard, No. 7 came ambling down from the Rigi. It stopped to let the passengers off by the ARB sheds, then eased slowly further down into the SBB yard to take on the next batch of happy people. Other people were climbing into and through the locos which had steps provided

and SBB or SOB men on hand to ensure that no-one actually became too carried away and tried to drive one.

In the yard, the bands were playing away and some said that they were going to be playing well into the night. We toured the stands again, had another beer, and reluctantly made our way over to the main platforms for our train back to Luzern.

It was a memorable day, and we thoroughly appreciate the hard work and planning that goes into these events. It is a marvel that all this can go on, including dozens of people wandering around on the tracks, with a busy train service roaring past on the main lines. This is surely the fascination of Swiss Railways.

KONZERTZUG

Every year Luzern holds a music festival, starting mid August until mid September. There are various musical events in various locations, with the main concerts being held every evening in the Kuntshaus next to the bahnhof. This year, however, the building is being completely rebuilt and enlarged, and is a festoon of scaffolding. It looks as if it will be huge and will dominate that corner of the lake.

There is no alternative suitable venue in Luzern sufficiently large enough to take the full orchestras and capacity audiences. The solution was found in the disused steelworks at Emmenbrücke, which is virtually a suburb of Luzern. The building has been suitably adapted, but vehicular access could be a problem, so it was decided to utilise the goods siding into the works, and run a complimentary diesel shuttle train from Luzern and back again at the end of the concerts. Purchasing a concert ticket (with prices ranging from £10 to £100 per seat) gave access to the train.

The train itself was a pair of hired-in Siemens Duewag Regio Sprinters! They belong to the Durener Kreisbahn which operates in Germany, and still bore their "Rurtalbahn" branding, but were also adorned with huge "Konzertzug" lettering across the windows. The very low floor access would obviously be useful in detraining at the steel works. These A-2-A wheel arrangement articulated units have engines under each cab, 3+2 seating and lots of space for bicycles and luggage. What a surprise they were when I first saw them.

I was puzzled by seeing couples in black bow ties and posh evening gowns walking towards a platform which held a NPZ unit on a stopping train (to Lenzburg I think) so I walked over and found the special sandwiched between the NPZ and the buffer stops. An area of the platform was cordoned off and the concert goers were sipping wine from fine glasses and nibbling canapés offered by white shirted staff. The plebeians scurried by to catch the local which left just before 19.00 hrs - which is when the special left.

Exactly on time the local left, and immediately the diesel units quietly rumbled into life and slowly eased along the platform to the signal, and with minimum headway slipped out of the station and off to Emmenbrücke.

Only the Swiss could do this.

SOLOTHURN STADT FEST

As we changed trains in Olten and headed for Solothurn the clouds thickened and darkened and it started to rain. At Solothurn it was coming down heavily, but that did not spoil the day. Platform 1 was dedicated to a line up of motive power from the supporting railways, the SBB, Oensingen Balsthal Bahn (OeBB) and Regionalverkehr Mittelland (RM).

The first job was to go along Platform 2 and photograph the exhibits. At the end EBT 102 (Be4/4 of 1932) was coupled to a converted guards van which was beautifully done up to a coffee saloon, called "schmucktruckli". This reversed out of the station at regular intervals, served coffee while stationary on the bridge over the River Aare, and then trundled back again, in between the regular traffic. Next to it was Re4/4 460079-7 which was named "Weissenstein" in a ceremony at 13.40 hrs. Next in line were two coaches, one was a brand new double decker, and the other an old coach painted up in a bright livery which I would have to investigate later. Then there was a strikingly painted Re4/4 436111-9 in the new RM livery. This was followed by 10700, Ae3/6 in brown livery. In contrast the next loco was a brand new diesel, Am 841004-5, which dwarfed the little Tm shunter which was buffered up to the OeBB "Roter Pfeil" red arrow Rbe 2/4 202.

While I was busy doing this, a train eased in behind me, and to my amazement it was a Cisalpino tilting train! At two hourly intervals it

was giving rides to and from Olten for a special fare of 5 francs. While it was stationary we climbed aboard and examined it. It was disappointing. The seats were rather cramped, headroom restricted, and I kept kicking the plastic valances at the base of the seats. The tables have an extra bit which cantilevers up and onto the main bit to make it easy to get in and out, which I am sure will not last long in regular service. We squeezed past the other people and made our way over to Platform 1.

The Platform was packed with people and stands. There was a model railway layout in O gauge, with American outline trains circulating. This was from the Modelleisenbahnclub, Solothurn. Next to it was a model shop stall of Fischer Bernhard Modelleisenbahn. I managed to resist buying some Piko HO vans which were very reasonable, and before I got too interested in some second hand locos, I was quickly dragged off to the PTT stand. This was across from the blue coach, which a quick visit confirmed was set up with several PCs hooked up to the Internet. As the Internet is the same everywhere, we moved on to the coach next door, which was a new double decker. What a contrast to the Cisalpino! Very solid, very comfortable, and very roomy indeed for a double deck coach. I look forward to sampling one in action.

Back on the platform the SBB stand sold 150th anniversary items, and was very busy giving balloons to crowds of schoolchildren who added their names and addresses to a label, and let the balloons shoot up into the air. They dispersed rapidly in the strong wind. The balloon that travels the farthest wins a prize. One balloon was trapped in the catenary!

The RM stand provided interesting data about the newly combined railway companies, plus two unique 'fridge magnets' which now grace our kitchen here in Scotland. Armed with some of their "goodies" in an RM carrier bag, we moved on past the Imbiss stand which was serving Bratwurst and other sausages. The smell of the cooking was blown right along the platform and made us feel hungry.

Passing the travel stand, we spent some time looking at the post cards, books and key rings etc. on the Euro Vapeur stand. It was interesting to see photographs of their steam locos and special trains.

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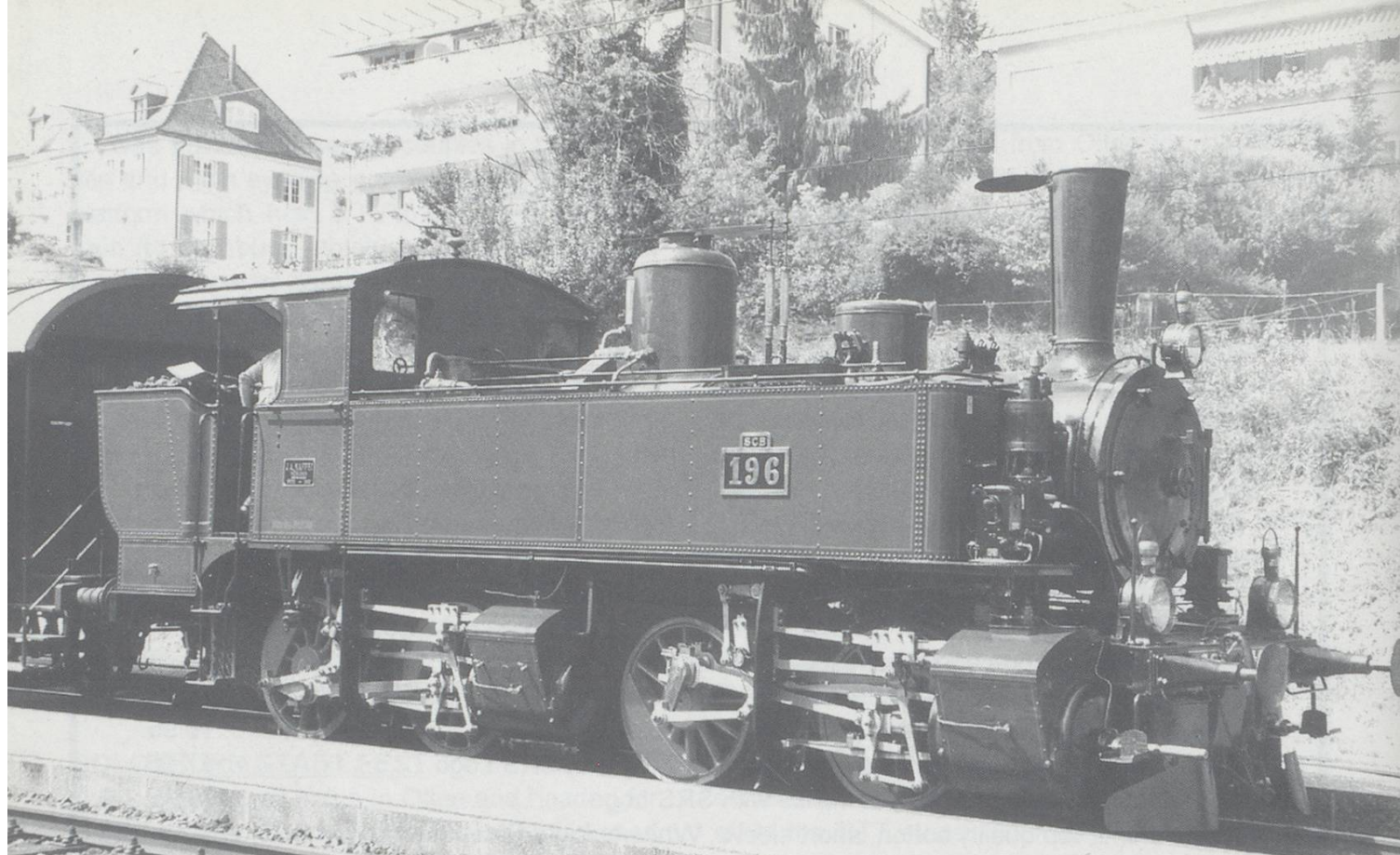
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Just down past the toilets, beyond the shelter of the canopy, a knot of people seemed to be taking a close interest in an ordinary red SBB Re4/4. Curious, I ventured out into the rain. The crowd was cramming into both cabs until a crew member called a halt, shut the door, and drove off! Amazingly the loco was shuttling through the station, back via the far loop, and onto the platform again, giving people the thrill of a cab ride. This was so popular that we never did get to the front of the queue.

Over the Regionalverkehr Bern Solothurn (RBS) metre gauge tracks I had spotted an elderly green motor coach moving about, appearing to shunt a two axle coach in matching lined green. A few hurried snaps were taken before retiring out of the rain. I mentally noted to go across to that side of the station and see what was going on, whenever it dried up. In the event we never did, unfortunately.

Back along the platform, we discussed whether or not to try the coffee shuttle behind EBT 102, dismissed the Cisapino shuttle as taking up too much time, and succumbed to the free samples of "Kemby" biscuits being handed out by the shop. Actually the rain was easing, so we decided to use our Swiss Pass to jump on a bus to the town centre.

Mistake. We got on the right bus, but going in the wrong direction. As soon as we realised this, we

got off at the first stop and crossed the road to wait 15 minutes for one going back to the station.

Back at the station we belatedly noticed a bus company stand outside the main building. They were just packing up. The lassie put us straight - unfortunately we had totally missed the town tours being provided as part of the Fest.

It was getting brighter now, so we walked over the river bridge and up to the cathedral and the very picturesque old town. In the middle of the square there was a large stage set up with a jazz band starting to play. Benches filled the square. At the back was a stand barbecuing bratworst. The square was filling up steadily. We wandered around for a while admiring the old houses, and then made our way back to the station.

The stands were being dismantled, and we caught the next express back towards Olten. On the way we passed the huge collection of veteran buses and lorries on display at a fair next to Oensingen station.

There was just too much to do and see in Switzerland this year!