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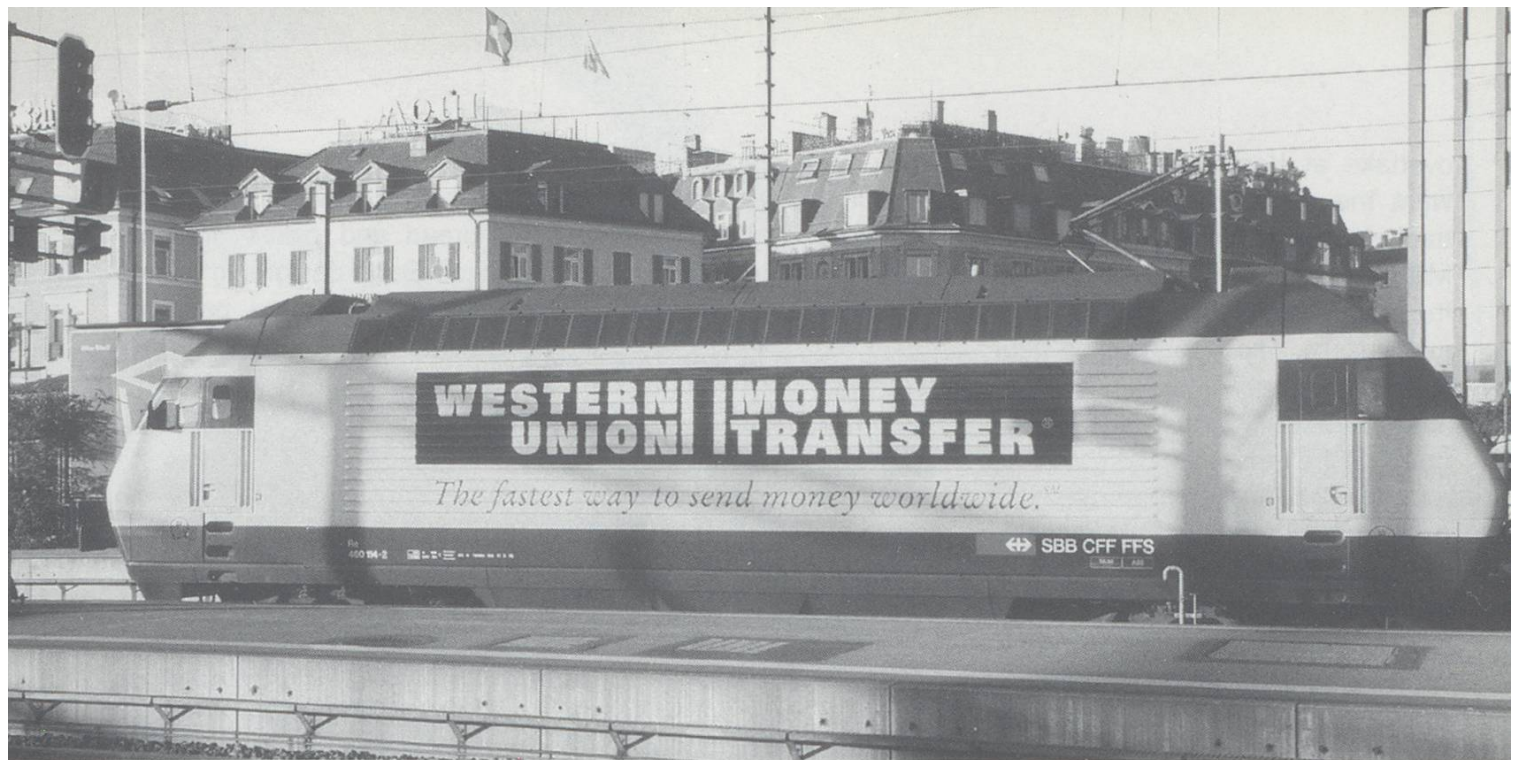
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SWITZERLAND 1997 - 150 Jahre Schweizer Bahnen

by P.J. Weaver

On reading about the various events due to take place in magazines from early 1996, the decision was taken to have the family holiday in Switzerland again in 1997. But when and where to go, that was the \$64,000 question. As the last two times we took the family were in August, and both were hot and sunny, August was the natural choice. Where to go? We love the Bernese Oberland. No contest. The other holidays were self catering, so we wrote off to 3 or 4 tourist information offices for lists of apartments to rent. We decided on Frutigen, as it is not a main tourist centre, and was therefore slightly cheaper and, more to the point, was well served by trains. We decided to go from 2 - 16 August so that I could catch the main event at Zurich on 9 - 10 August. This, unfortunately meant I would probably miss the Bodelibahn 125 at Interlaken on the 16th, if the flight timings were wrong, which of course they were. We wrote to 5 or 6 apartment owners, and eventually chose one. Some were booked up a year in advance. We booked a two bedroom downstairs apartment for four of us for the grand sum of Sfr.50 per night. When we booked there were about Sfr.1.90 to the pound, so we budgeted for about £385. As we didn't have to pay until we arrived, and the pound had risen to Sfr.2.35, it actually cost us only £310. Not bad for a perceived expensive country. We obtained two FREE British Airways

tickets to Geneva, for my wife and eldest daughter, courtesy of Sainsburys and Air Miles. Myself and my youngest daughter actually found a charter flight through Plus Travel, from Stansted to Zurich for £75 each. As I wanted to travel around Switzerland quite a bit we looked into various ticket options. A 15 day Swiss Pass was decided upon for myself and my wife, Swiss Tourism were quoting £162, but told me it was only Sfr.306 in Switzerland and at Sfr.2.33 to the £, worked out at only £131. On a business trip to Geneva in June, I obtained the two Swiss Passes and the Swiss Family Card, so that my wife and daughter could just catch the train straight away to Bern, where we were going to meet.

We made various trips during the holiday. These included Locarno, Zermatt, Luzern, Domodossola and numerous local trips around the Bernese Oberland. I made a couple of extra 'Railway' trips. One to the Gotthard line and one to Zurich for the 150 show. On the day we went to Locarno, we decided to try and catch the Cisalpino. This meant 'going the wrong way' from Frutigen to get to Spiez, as the Cisalpino only stops at Spiez and Brig. Looking at the timetable, we had a two minute change at Spiez. The renowned Swiss punctuality ensued and we caught the Cisalpino with ease. The normal IC or EC train leaves Spiez about six minutes in front of the Cisalpino and I believe is planned to

overtake at Kandersteg. However, the day we went the overtaking took place on the double track section between Kandergrund and Blausee Mitholz. I made my way to the Gotthard line on the 12th August by way of Thun, Konolfingen and Luzern. I had about 3 - 4 hours on the line, stopping off at Erstfeld and Goschonen. The amount of traffic seen was phenomenal. I saw about 15 freight trains, mainly double headed and one was banked, in addition to the normal passenger service of two each way per hour. Moreover, part of the line was singled as the track is being lowered in places for, I presume, the larger HUPAC trains.

The highlight of the fortnight was the 9th August. I decided to catch the 08.50 from Frutigen. With a bit of luck I could change at Spiez and take the DB ICE, Interlaken to Berlin, to Bern and change there to catch my original train from Frutigen. This actually worked well, although I was slightly worried as the ICE left Spiez as it was about 6 minutes late and the timetable connection at Bern was 7 minutes. Arrival at Bern was only 2 down and my train was on the adjacent platform so my worries were in vain. I arrived at Zurich at 10.58. I spent 20 minutes or so on the end of the platform, seeing the 1947 Leichtschnelzug departing for Baden, with Re 4/4 10001 propelling it. I returned to Zurich on this train later in the day. I caught the 11.28 S3 service to Dietikon. On arrival the main platforms were very crowded. The reason soon manifested itself, in the form of the Spanisch Brotli Bahn. Unfortunately, much to the annoyance of most people, as it pulled into the station and cleared the single line the exhibition shuttle departed foiling most peoples' attempts of photographing it! The Swiss Pass was valid on the shuttle trains, so I caught the next one to Festbahnhof Ost. Here, adjacent to the SBB Junior Club stand, there was a Class 460 which you could board. I made my way eastwards to the loco and wagon repair shops where most of the SBB historic fleet of electric locos were on display. I had already seen Ae 3/6 10700 on the exhibition train at Dietikon. This was the first time that I could remember seeing a 'Crocodile'. All the locos were static but this didn't detract from the thrill of seeing them. There were also displays of wagons having their bogies removed and replaced. Outside there were various stalls,

including the PTT which were selling commemorative stamps and covers and food stalls mainly selling bread and cakes, lots of which had Spanisch Brotli Bahn designs in them. I made my way gradually down the yard, passing the modern exhibits: DB ICE, SNCF Thalys and TGV and the Cisalpino. They were all open but the only one I walked through was the TGV. I eventually arrived at the 'hump'. Here there were demonstrations of hump shunting using one of Limmattal's huge Co-Co diesels. You could also ride the hump for a small fee in a brightly coloured 4 wheeled open carriage. At the North Western end of the yard there was a display of every conceivable piece of railway engineering equipment imaginable. Most of these were giving demonstrations including tunnel inspection vehicles, overhead line equipment cranes, tamping and ballast cleaning. Had I realised earlier; tickets were available to gain access to the signalling tower controlling the western end of Limmattal Yard. After visiting some more stalls including the SBB shop where I bought a T shirt, I made my way to Festbahnhof West to catch the shuttle to Killwangen-Spreitenbach. Here again there were numerous stalls and Bar-B-Qs in the street outside the station and everyone was in a festive mood. I availed myself of a Feldschlossen and took in the atmosphere. I then visited the model railway. It was 'O' gauge and basically consisted of a large double track main line with passing loops and an inner circle with steep inclines and FO stock. One thing though was different and was something I have never seen before; mounted on a wagon and being pushed around the main line was a remote video camera. This was displayed in real time on a TV set giving a driver's eye view of the layout! I can't wait to see the same thing on a layout over here.

It was now time to depart. Re 4/4 10001 arrived and I boarded. Waiting in Dietikon was a train of vintage German stock ready to take German enthusiasts back to Frankfurt. When I reached Zurich the SBB orchestra were playing in the main concourse. Later that evening there was going to be a light and laser show but I wouldn't have been able to get home after it so I had to miss out. As I made my way back to Frutigen I reflected on what had been a fantastic day matched by the superb weather and to cap it all, it hadn't cost me a single Rappen. Pure Magic!