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The Plus Travel Jura Trip

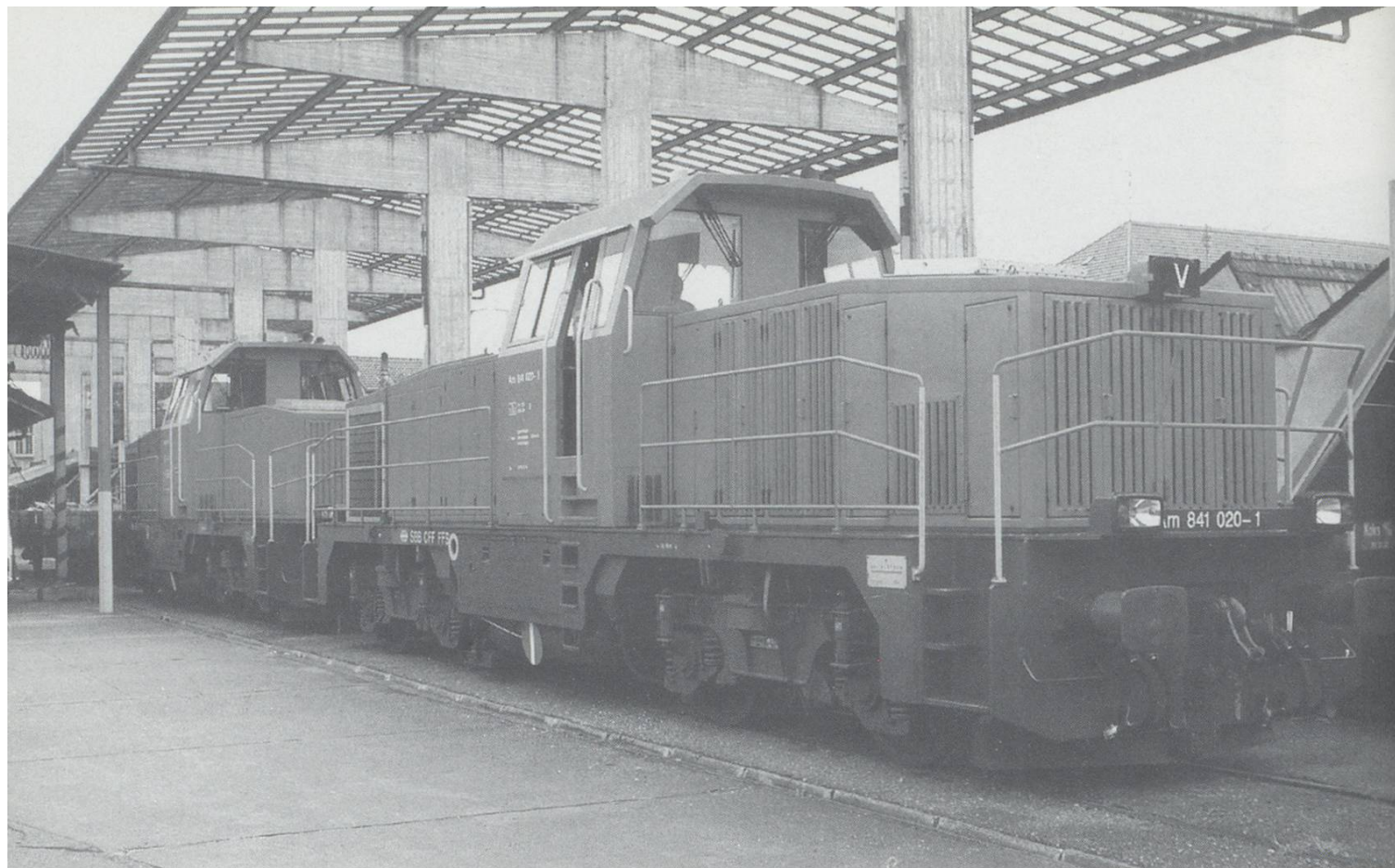
by John Jesson with additional material by Alan Pike OBE

A small group participated in this tour, which was based at Olten, from where there is easy access to much of Switzerland, although much of the tour was around the Jura. Members arrived at Olten by various routes, from London, Birmingham and Amsterdam, mostly by air. Rumours that I arrived by stagecoach are without foundation. We all finally met up at the Hotel Astoria in Olten, less than 10 minutes walk from the station, on the Saturday evening.

The first full day was, of course, Sunday 13th, and started with us all standing at the end of the platform at Olten to witness 141R1244 passing through with a special. We then travelled to Delémont, via Solothurn and Moutier, the service from Moutier to Delémont being hauled by 460.034 in "Zugkraft Aargau" livery. The shuttle service between Delémont station and the roundhouse was being operated by "Zephir" and a couple of 4-wheel coaches, while the first steam trip to Glovelier left behind SBB A³/₅ 705. In the roundhouse were a selection of steam locos, together with a Bahnshop stand and a lot of second-hand magazines. With only an hour at Delémont, there was little time to browse before

heading back to the station (on the shuttle) and joining the second steam service to Glovelier, which was hauled by the C⁵/₆ 2978. Connecting at Glovelier was the metre gauge Ballenberg G³/₄ 208 steam loco with a variety of coaches. The loco gave a spirited display up the gradient towards Combe-Tabellon - until it ran out of steam. After two stops on the grade and some more energetic running, the loco was declared a failure at Combe-Tabellon, and assistance was requested. This arrived some 75 mins later in the shape of CJ De⁴/₄ 411 - very rare haulage indeed. However, before the arrival of the loco, refreshment had arrived by road and wine was dispensed to everyone. The journey to Saignelégier was rapid. Probably 208, still attached to the rear of the train as far as Pré Petitjean, had never travelled so fast in its life!

At Combe, Alan had prevailed upon the Chef du Train to ask for a message to be passed to the CMN, as we were scheduled for a visit to the little works and depot at Les Ponts de Martel. We had worked out that we could still make it and, at Saignelégier, Alan was able to confirm that the message had been passed, and that the



later time was acceptable. We completed our CJ journey to La Chaux de Fonds and had time for refreshment before catching CMN railcar no.8 along the pleasant valley (the only source in Switzerland of peat) to Les Ponts de Martel. Sure enough, we were met there and escorted round both the old and new depots. A project in its very early stages is to use the chassis of metre gauge railcar no.1 to make a new standard gauge control trailer for the CJ, to replace the one involved in the collision at Porrentruy some while back. After the visit, and drinks at the open-air buffet, a Postbus took us to Neuchâtel and the train back to Olten.

Bright and early (09.00) on Monday morning we met our SBB contact on Olten station and were taken on a tour of the signalling centre, starting with a brief resumé of general railway operating principles and Swiss signalling and continuing with a visit to the operating floor. Three operators and a supervisor control all operations in and around Olten. They can do this from their seats, using computer consoles, although we were told that routes can also be set up by push buttons on the main display panel which dominates the room. Parts of the area are being "shadowed", using a different computer control system. The Olten station announcer is also located here, and the young lady deserves great credit for

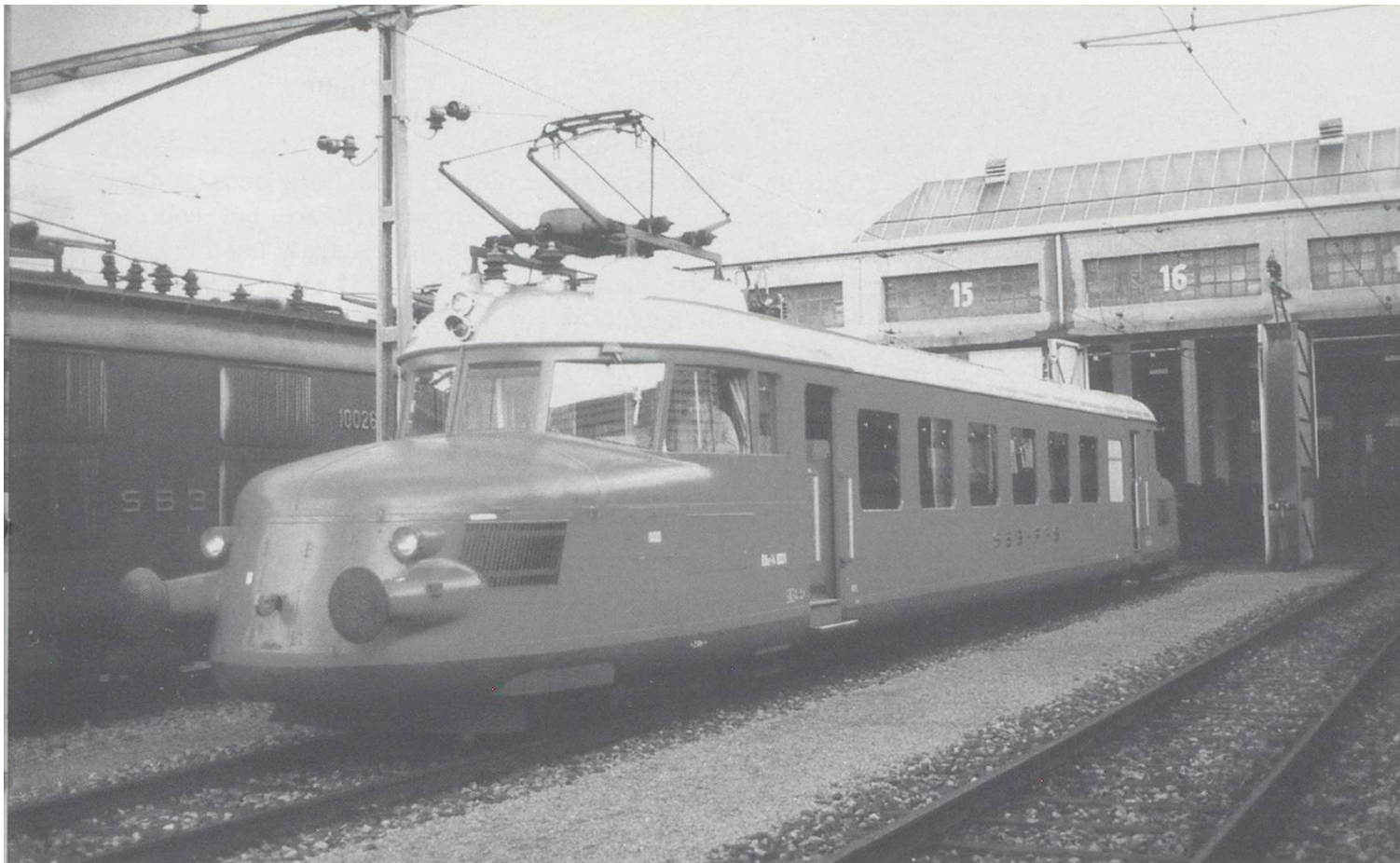
Previous page: 2976 at Delemont about to take the train.

Above: Class Am 841 at Olten Depot 16.7.97

Photos: John Jesson

managing to continue her work with half-a-dozen people nattering behind her chair. As well as the announcements, she is responsible for the platform indicator displays, which is done by feeding punched cards through a gizmo on her desk.

This was followed by a visit to Olten Works, where we were able to examine the work being carried out on a variety of tractors and rolling stock. The differences between overhaul periodicities for the different types of passenger stock is remarkable, varying between 250,000 Km for the light-steel stock to no less than 2 million Km for the latest double-deck stock ! The traverser at one end of the works marks the "no-mans-land" border between the works and the depot, and the whole complex is quite long - long enough that we were grateful for the lift back to the main entrance in an EC coach hauled by the Olten Works Tm^{IV} shunter, 9685. The trip should have continued with a visit to the depot, but the paperwork had somehow got lost, so a more leisurely lunch than expected was taken before occupying the afternoon with a round trip via Liestal, Waldenburg, Balsthal and Oensingen.



Before the ride from Balsthal, we were conducted round the workshops and yard of the OeBB and given the opportunity to examine the interior of the preserved salon coaches. In the yard was the recently-restored RFe4/4 601 and several flat wagons carrying various parts of the "Seetalbahn Krokodil" 15301, which it is hoped to have back in working order next year. On the "down" side, one of the two Ce2/2 shunters, 103, is terminally ill, and is unlikely to run again, while the closure of both large factories on the line has drastically reduced income from freight traffic, which is causing financial headaches.

Tuesday was a do-as-you-like day. As far as I was concerned, this started off as a day in Basel, but turned into a ride round when I decided to join forces with Neil Wheelwright. The first plan - to ride a Panorama coach over the Gotthard - was stymied when we found this advertised facility to be missing from the train. The next plan was more successful. We took the German ICE from Basel to Zürich, then a double-deck IC set from Zürich to Interlaken Ost. I was very impressed by this stock. The quality stands out and the design is superb, although a little strange in places. I can understand the desirability of curved bench seating around a small table in the 2nd class, but not in the 1st. The connections at Interlaken for the Brünig line are not good, but the local to

Above: The Party's "shuttle" from Biel Station to the Depot 17.7.97

Photo: John Jesson

Meiringen gave us time there for a quick photograph of the MIB railcar and a coffee before joining the through train to Luzern. Unfortunately, Modellbahn Boutique was closed for holidays, so it was straight back to Olten without any goodies.

The rest of the party accompanied Alan on a journey through the Jura to some parts that other tours do not reach. But first, a return visit to Delémont enabled the party to travel in the Uerikon-Bauma Bahn Czm1/2 steam railcar No.31 to and from the Rotonde where it was possible to catch up on the few items missed on Sunday. Again, no locomotives were positioned for photography which was a pity given that it was a fine, sunny day.

A line not frequently used today, largely because the French connection has been severed, is that to Porrentruy from whence it was hoped to enjoy a ride in a standard gauge railcar of the CJ. Not so. This swanned off to Boncourt mainly to pick up CFF staff and a Re4/4" took a single coach to Bonfol where it had to run round for the return journey. After photographing the locomotive stock, all three of them, lunch was sought but everything, including restaurants, was closed for lunch. Fortunately, some refreshment had been taken at

Porrentruy.

Back to Delémont and across to La Chaux de Fonds on the CJ this time to press on to Le Locle to sample the CMN metre gauge outpost for the 5 km. run through pleasant country to Les Brenets very close to the French border. We understood that the whole line was operated and managed by the very pleasant man who drove our railcar. One of the two small tank locos. "Le père Frédéric", was inspected in its glass case near the station. The other loco., "Le Doubs", is on the Blonay-Chamby railway. Return to Olten was via Biel and the main line.

It had proven to be difficult to organise the next days feature - a ride on a Cisalpina - owing to the timetable changes. In the end, we decided to travel to Brig via Bern and the BLS, which gave us a couple of hours to kill at Brig. This allowed time for a walk to the mouth of the Simplon tunnel and a couple of photographs before a quick lunch and the 13.02 Cisalpina to Spiez. Personally, I was not impressed. The tilt worked, and didn't upset me, but the toilets didn't work, everything rattled and creaked, and the standard of internal finish left much to be desired. To finish the job, the outside of our coach had been graffitied. My own view is that the British APT knocked spots off it, and that was 25 years ago. On arrival at Spiez, we were met by Herr Walter Kleine, an old friend of the SRS and now retired, who walked us to the BLS Works and accompanied us around. We had the opportunity to examine and compare the old and new locos (Re $4/4$ and 465), both inside and out, and to take as many photographs as we wished. Outside the Works were Ce $1/4$ 313 and 316, Ae $4/4$ 251 (which is unlikely to be used again) and Bern Gaswoks E $3/3$ no.1, which was unfortunately in the shade. Our return to Olten was supposed to be via the RBS buffet train from Bern to Solothurn, but our train from Spiez was late enough to miss the connection, so the SBB obliged all the way to Olten.

As a change from the main line atmosphere of Wednesday, Thursday saw us travelling on some of the local lines in the area. We started off by changing at Langenthal to get to Huttwil, where we were met and conducted around the workshops. A surprising amount of work is done here, and the shops included LHB G $3/4$ no.11, ED3/3 of the Huttwil-Wolhusen-Bahn which featured in most MEGA events and three other steam locos which

were in various states of repair. Outside the shops were a couple of the old (1933) Be $4/4$ locos, 104 and 106. These are not often used, but kept for emergencies, when they are usually used in pairs. Also outside was Ee $3/3$ no.151 on a short freight. Although the pantograph was raised, the loco and its train hadn't moved when we left, and the comment was passed that the loco was not particularly liked. We were also able to photograph De $4/4$ no.266, which was parked just outside the station.

Our journey on from Huttwil was by one of the through EBT trains to Luzern, where we had time for lunch before a trip to Beinwil am See. This was probably our last chance to travel over the old route (with the reversal at Emmenbrücke), as the new formation is laid in and mostly "wired". Not only will the tiresome (from a railway operating viewpoint) reversal be eliminated, but also several level crossings. The new line rejoins the old south of the sizeable industrial and farming centre of Hochdorf. The short wait at Beinwil gave little opportunity to "watch the working" before we were off again, on a Postbus to Menziken. From the SBB station we walked the short distance to Menziken Burg to join one of the new WSB Be $4/8$ railcars in the smart red, grey and white livery. The journey to Suhr Ausweiche takes about half an hour, and we alighted here in the hope of catching the strangest of the shunters of the WSB, no.50, which looks rather like one of the old City & South London Tube locos. Luck was with us, but the loco was not in a good position for photography. However, it was also possible to examine how the SBB and WSB, who both use overhead wires but at completely different voltages, manage to cross their wires over each other at the level crossing at the South of the station. A Freys Chocolate train was waiting to leave, a train which included an Hbis wagon fitted with a refrigeration unit and redesignated Hbilss-uvy. An SBB RBe $4/4$ and Bt took us on the short journey to Aarau and refreshment before continuing on the other branch of the WSB to Schöftland, then a bus to Sursee. Seen at Sursee was a shunter of the Sursee - Triengen Bahn, an unusual sighting so late in the day.

The weather, previously somewhat variable, took a turn for the worse on Friday, when we set off to have a look at the VVT facilities at St.Sulpice. Our route was direct to Neuchatel, then by NPZ to Buttes, returning on the same train to Fleurier. The



NPZ set included one of the self-service mini-buffets recently converted from EW-II AB coaches. Although we patronised this facility, few others did, but no doubt the usage is heavier when commuters are travelling. The coach bears a stylised bird logo on the outside and the words "Colibri Bar", and proved very welcome on a distinctly cool and damp day.

A wait of some 40 minutes at Fleurier gave the chance, during a short bright spell, to photograph the RVT Ce⁴/₄ no.1, in its dark green livery. Green may be old-fashioned these days, but it has its attractions to those of us who "grew up" with that colour. Shortly before the bus was due, the next train to Buttes arrived, formed of one of the RVT 2-car units, with a pair of bogie open wagons in tow. These were detached at Fleurier and worked to St.Sulpice by no.1. Pity we hadn't known - we might have been able to cadge a lift !

On arrival at St.Sulpice, we walked to the VVT depot and workshops, where we were expected. It was wet again so in some respects it was as well that the large collection of locos., including a Polish tank engine, could be inspected in the depot. After the tour of the depot, we were taken to the VVT buffet, where drinks and a snack were waiting. Afterwards, the bus took us back to Fleurier, and we retraced our journey as far as Biel, where we were met on the platform by a Biel

Above: The upper deck on IC2000 stock in First class, note the small group seating area, 15.7.97

Photo: John Jesson

driver for a visit to the depot. We then had the surprise of the tour sprung on us. The driver said there was transport waiting to take us to the depot (which is some way from the station, and in a triangle of railway lines), but we could not see what it was because of several trains blocking our view. We walked through the subway and came up on platform 1, to find the "Red Arrow" RAe²/₄ 1001 waiting for us. ("We're looking after it for a while, so we thought we'd use it.")

At the depot, we were given the opportunity to examine and compare locos and shunters of different eras and types, including the preserved Be⁴/₇ 12504. One interesting little item spotted was Tm^{IV} 8763, which had just been released from the works in red livery, and bore the release date of 24/07/97. That day's date was 18/07/97. Outside the depot, the rescue train was opened up and we were shown the comprehensive variety of equipment carried on these trains - all mod cons, and everything in its place. We also visited the little signal box that controls the depot complex (and gives a good view of the main line). The journey back to Biel station was again in the "Red Arrow". Another driver heading for the

station hitched a lift with us, but we were held outside the station for so long that he began to get concerned about being late, so our guide used a nearby telephone to call the main signal box. While this was being done, we could see a row of tail lights in the station - and they didn't seem to be going anywhere. Shortly afterwards, we were allowed to run into an occupied platform to disembark. It was 16.45 now, and the 16.30 and 16.37 trains southbound were still there. We took some refreshment and returned to the platforms. The same trains were still there. We did not find out what had gone wrong, but delays were in the region of an hour and gave rise to some interesting workings. For instance, at Solothurn, an EBT 2-car unit was waiting to follow our train as a stopping service to Olten while, at Olten, 460.088 was found running-round a train of EBT coaches which had arrived as another SBB stand-in.

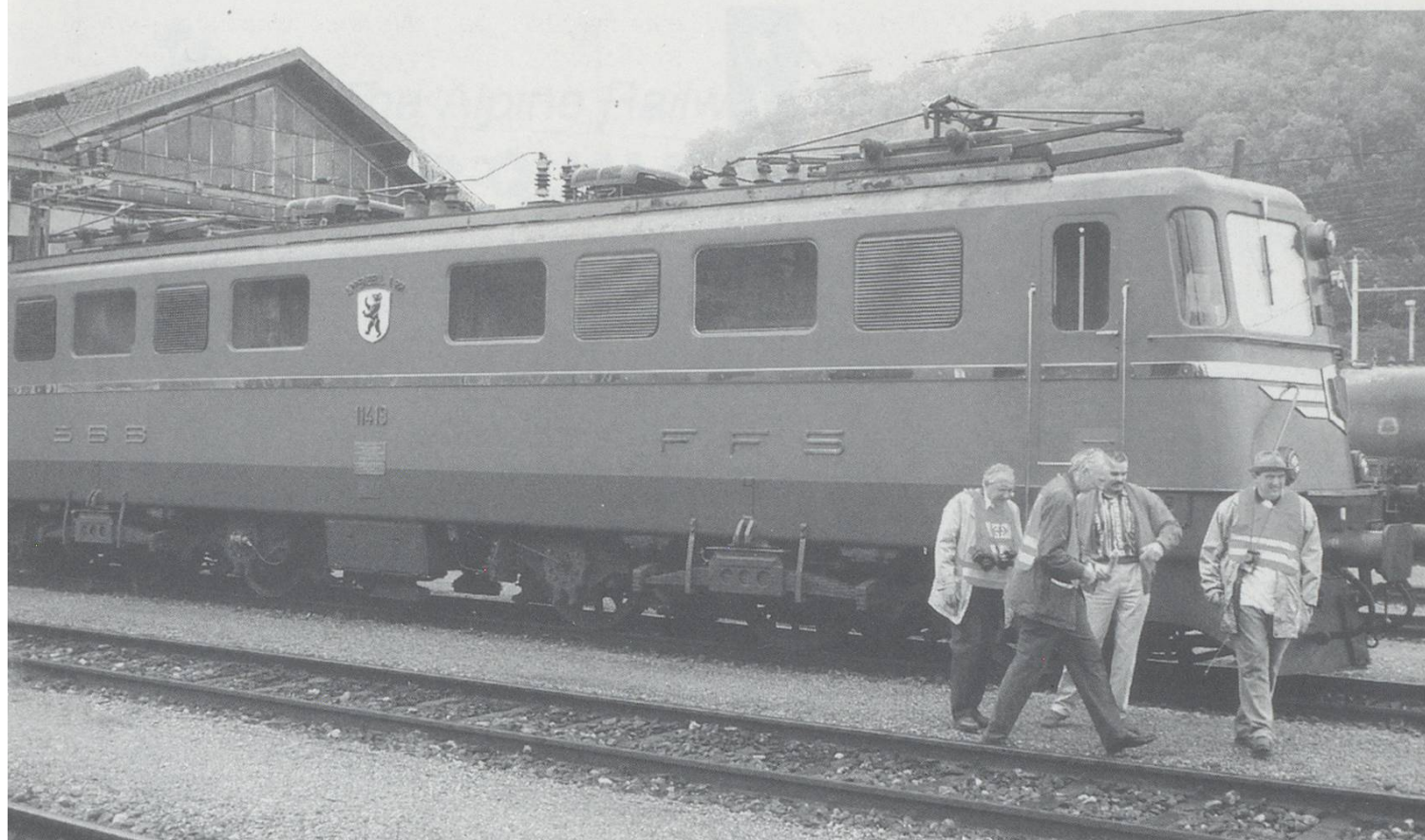
Whilst noting these unusual workings, it is probably also worth noting that the push-pull sets, both single-deck EW-IV and the double deck IC stock, have to be strengthened for much of the time. This seems to be normally done by attaching another control trailer and 2/3 coaches to the existing control trailer. The attachment is usually of EW-IV stock. Occasionally, an attachment will be made on the rear of the train, when the loco is propelling. On one occasion, a single coach had been attached - a restaurant car. One hopes that this was a means of getting the coach somewhere, rather than being meant to provide sustenance to the train passengers. Another item of note was that the BLS 465's seem to be widely used on freight and passenger work on routes well away from the BLS. The later batch (009 - 018) are owned by the SBB, but the usage is not limited to these ten. During the week, 465.001 was seen working with another 465 through Olten on a freight, with 465.002 on a heavy steel train over the Lötschberg, and on its own on a freight at Olten, which had come off the Biel route.

It would be nice to say that Saturday dawned bright and clear for the high-light of the tour, but this was unfortunately not possible. Nevertheless, we set off in the rain to Luzern, where it was still raining - but not hard enough to deter the taking of photographs of the "Churchill Arrow" which was forming a special to somewhere. No doubt we will find out where it went, as two SRS members were observed joining it. (Spies are everywhere -

especially this year.) We were joined at Luzern by Peter Berger, the Engineer of the LSE, and his wife, and we boarded a very uncrowded boat to Vitznau. Waiting at Vitznau, outside the depot, was no.16, which was then moved onto the turntable for a short while before coupling to the waiting stock to form the steam service to Rigi Kùlm.

Our journey with no.16 brought back all the delights of travel in one's youth - wooden seats, opening windows (on hinges, no less), the smell of smoke and steam, and the surging motion often associated with steam traction. Although it was still 10/10 cloud, the visibility was very clear, and there were some superb views over the lake. All too soon, though, we ran into the cloud and that put paid to the views. A stop was made at Freibergen for water just before reaching the cloud. At Rigi Staffel, those with the right tickets could transfer onto another train, worked by no.7, with its vertical boiler. After the passengers had been sorted out, no.16 set back and then ran via the connecting track onto the ARB line. The two steam trains then ran together to Kulm, with first one, then the other, overtaking. In good visibility, this would have given the opportunity for some fine shots from both trains, but not today. Lunch was taken at the hotel before returning by way of Arth-Goldau and Luzern to Olten.

Following the loss of the Olten depot visit on Monday, Alan had been in touch several times with Plus Travel to re-organise it for the only time made possible by our schedule, Saturday afternoon. Their efforts had been successful and, in fact, this was a better time. There were less movements to keep an eye on, and more locos on depot. Once again, transport had been arranged between the station and depot, this time RBe⁴/₄ 540.007. We were briefly shown the drivers signing-on facilities at the depot, and the notice cases which advise drivers of various matters of which they need to be aware. We had a brief discussion on the standard and new colour-light signalling, from which it became clear that the driver showing us round preferred the older system. Incidentally, this driver had volunteered to show us around, even though he should have finished his duty shortly after we had arrived. This attitude towards their work showed in several ways, not least that Olten's vintage Ae³/₆¹¹ 10439 is maintained by a group of Olten drivers in their own time. The depot is quite large and includes wagon repair facilities. From the station end of the depot to the far end is quite a distance,



but we were shown to the absolute end by squeezing into the cab of Ae⁶/₆ 11419 "Appenzell I.Rh." for a ride in the dry. At the end of our visit, we were ferried back to the station in the RBe and, for the last time, we headed back to the hotel.

On the Sunday morning we all said our farewells before setting off for home via various routes. Those of us who were travelling to London had half a day to kill, which we did with a trip to St.Gallen on the new double-deck stock. At long last, the old semaphore signals at the North end of St.Gallen have been replaced with colour lights (new style), and rebuilding work is being carried out on both tracks and platforms. The Birmingham contingent was travelling on a later flight, and took another tour around the Jura, getting in a run behind the Portuguese Mallet on the CJ and covering some new ground, before also heading for Kloten.

All in all, this was a most enjoyable tour. It was a pity that more people did not participate, but the small group probably resulted in more advantages for those that did. The weather could not have varied more, with everything from heavy rain and thunderstorms to brilliant sunshine. From a personal point of view, my only regret is that one of my slide films (needless to say, one of those taken

Above: Olten depot, Alan Pike, Neil Wheelwright, our guide and Henry Venables. 18.7.97

Photo: John Jesson

on the sunny day) got itself lost somewhere between me and the Fuji laboratory. The considerable work put in by Alan Pike and Yvonne Koerkel (at Plus Travel) to organise the trip and keep it running smoothly was greatly appreciated by all, and our thanks go to both - your efforts were a great success.

Note by AJP. Henry Venables nobly agreed to record locomotives seen on the trip (he will tell you that he was pushed!) and Neil Wheelwright supplied haulage information. I shall assemble this as soon as I get a few days free. Anyone interested can then ask for a copy. Watch "SE" for an announcement. Participants will get one as soon as it is done, of course.

Finally, my thanks go to the many members of the railway staff who generously gave their time, to long suffering people in Railtour Suisse who converted the planning into reality and, not least, the participants who were a great bunch to be with and who presented me with a large bottle of a clear, strong, Swiss liquid for which I developed a liking when working there.