

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

Artikel: Observations on our Swiss holiday 1997
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-854510>

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Observations on our Swiss holiday 1997

by Margaret Smith

The timing of our summer holiday is always determined by A-level results day which meant that my husband and I would be unable to attend some of the events of the 150th celebrations scheduled for the middle of August 1997. However we did manage a stop at Baden on our way back to Zurich Flughafen on 8th August.

The weather was not as good as on our previous visits which led us to alter our plans on several occasions, sometimes on the spur of the moment! Thank goodness for the Swiss Pass! We were made aware of the almost countrywide renewal of track, overhead line equipment and station re-building on our very first day, travelling from Zurich to Davis via Filisur. We had a ride from Chur to Arosa on the second day, as the weather was not conducive to mountain viewing. It did improve enough for us to wander around Arosa, where we saw more examples of the re-use of wooden masts and new steel ones, both showing new and old catenary. Having read that the new 11KV system has now opened, I am pleased that we managed another run before this took place.

We were unable to obtain tickets for the special steam train on Sunday 27th July when we

enquired at Chur. We had contacted the Swiss Travel Service to obtain our Kursbuch in early June and they were not as helpful as on previous occasions in supplying information, merely directing us to make the arrangements on arrival in Switzerland. We did pick up a leaflet which gave the approximate timings of the special running from Landquart to Davos and helped us plan our route to see the train. It was hauled by RhB Dampflokk 107 with Baby Crocodile 411 as pilot. We think there were quite a few unhappy photographers when this pairing appeared. We had gone down to Klosters, where the station re-modelling programme for the Vereina tunnel construction was well advanced. The catenary and signalling were complete. The underpass to platforms 2 and 3 was under construction and only the trackwork to platform 2 remained to be laid. Some of the people waiting to see the train had travelled long distances, including one from Austria. At one stage there were two local passenger trains in the station as well as the steam special. We travelled back to Davos having watched the special depart and passed it in the station loop at Davos Wolfgang. Later on we saw it leaving Davos Dorf.

The next day when we travelled on the Heidiland Bernina Express, 411 was at the head of a mixed cement train at Davos Platz, so we deduced that the run back to Landquart the previous day had been with just the steam locomotive. We were shunted on to the locomotive at Samedan for the run over the Bernina, not the loco onto the train. Street running is not confined to the Chur-Arosa line as we discovered stretches in Tirano and Le Prese, and all three lines radiating from Aigle in Western Switzerland. Both electro diesels Gem 4/4 Nos. 801 and 802 were working on the Bernina line. We can confirm that fly - shunting is alive and well in Switzerland having witnessed several instances in St. Moritz.

We went on the line out to Scuol-Tarasp where we had a good view of the southern portal of the Vereina tunnel and the newly constructed station at Sagliains. There was further evidence of OLE and track renewal work on this line not just near Sagliains. We experienced some delays near Preda on the Albula line due to engineering work.

Our routes for going from one resort to the next are never the most direct and so the journey from Davos to Luzern took us via Landquart, Pfaffikon and Arth-Goldau and thence up to Rigi Kulm. We saw the steam-shuttle from Staffel to Kulm which was hauled by Lok 16 not No. 7. There was a big board at Staffel telling the story of the latter's return to steam and use on the line from Vitznau. The steam shuttle used the Vitznau-Rigi platform and track from Staffel to Kulm, with the electric trains of both VRB and Arth-Rigibahn using the Arth tracks between the same two points. We took the VRB down to Vitznau and then the vessel "Europa" to Luzern.

Breakfast being served from 7 a.m. was a distinct advantage when planning our trips as it meant we were able to combine several destinations in one day. On 31st July we went up Pilatus from Alpnachstadt and then the cable car down to Kriens. We used the 09.15 sailing from Luzern, which was undertaken by the paddle-steamer "Unterwalden". If you haven't experienced the "shrinking" of this vessel to enable it to negotiate the bridge over the narrows near Stansstad, then you've missed a treat. This was one occasion when a cine-camera was needed, but we managed a sequence of stills which illustrate the procedure. Masts and engine-

room vents are lowered, being on hinges and finally the bridge sinks gracefully into a well. Viewing this from the pier at Stans on a return trip later in our stay was like seeing a newly launched paddler.

The ride up Pilatus was interesting as we stopped in mid-section to let off a lengthman and then set off again. Not bad for a ruling gradient of 1 in 2. Unfortunately, the weather at the top only allowed us a limited view, but nevertheless we carried on with our planned descent via Kriens. The trolleybus ride back into Luzern gave us a view of several rail-connected factories, with obvious street running, but we were not able to determine whether these were in regular use.

Our travelling wasn't over for the day even then as we decided to take the LSE to Engelberg. En route, we passed a piggy-back train of standard gauge cement wagons on metre-gauge bogies and a mixed gauge freight at Horw.

We didn't altogether trust the notices at various locations that transport services would run as normal on the National holiday, 1st August. But we needn't have worried as it was just like any other day except for the parade of ships to the firework display at Brunnen in the evening, of which more later. The weather was not kind to us and we ended up rather wet when we visited Einsiedeln, travelling on the Voralpen Express which ran via Rotkreuz and not Kussnacht. On visiting the Verkershäus the next day we discovered that there were major engineering works between Meggen and Luzern. At Arth-Goldau, we were rewarded by the sight of Krokodil 13302 with rather a large number of HV-vested personnel in attendance. We assume it was working, although we departed before we could find out. A Cisalpino set went through. We were surprised to see the 11KV jumpers over the top of the coaches.

We changed at Biberbrugg for Einsiedeln and made our way to the Abbey where High Mass was in progress. As a musician I was very interested to hear plainchant used liturgically. People of all faiths and none were made welcome. With the weather remaining inclement we decided that a walk was not a good idea and after a very nice lunch in a local hostelry, took the train back to Biberbrugg, and thence to Wädenswil. Then came one of our spur of the moment changes of plan - we hopped on a double-deck unit to Zurich

and went back to Luzern from there.

The hotel was very accommodating and served us dinner in record time so that we could see the departure of the ships to the firework display at Brunnen. D.S. Unterwalden was at the Sweizerhofquai with D.S. Schiller at the Nationalquai, both of these berths being on the opposite side of the lake from the usual Bahnhofquai. The other 3 paddle-steamers were tied up there with 3 of the larger motor ships at the outer berths beyond. The 'scotch' mist had already descended but there was enough visibility for us to see all vessels depart after an exchange of whistles. The 'Stadt Luzern' led followed by 'Schiller' and the other paddle-steamers and the 3 motor ships brought up the rear. It really did look like a mother duck leading her ducklings as they ended up in line astern.

The following day we went to the Verkehrshaus and were impressed with the new displays, demonstrations and inter-active exhibits. If you haven't been since it was re-vamped, then it is well worth seeing. Our advice would be to go early in the day, before the crowds arrive - the torrential rain may have had some influence on attendance on the day we went - and don't try to do it all in one day - we came out after three hours suffering from brain saturation!

We had a sail on the lake in the afternoon, picking up D.S. Schiller at the Verkehrshaus-Lido pier. I was pleased to have managed a trip on this paddle-steamer as she is now out of service for a major overhaul until at least 2000.

We were in debate as to what to do on the next day as there was a lot of low cloud. We decided to risk going up the Stanserhorn and duly used the 09.15 sailing of D.S. Unterwalden to get us to Stansstad. We walked up to the railway station and caught the local train to Stans from where we took the funicular and cable-car to the top of the Stanserhorn. The attendant was obviously making comments about how silly we all were to go up a mountain shrouded in cloud, though with our limited German we weren't able to appreciate all his jokes. But it wasn't long before we were out of the cloud and into brilliant sunshine with views all round to Pilatus, Bürgenstock and the Rigi amongst other peaks above a sea of cloud. We were also able to trace the surviving track of the original funicular railway which was abandoned after a disastrous lightening strike in 1970 which

set fire to and destroyed the summit hotel. Outside the cable-car station, there is a display of the winding gear which was salvaged complete with a plaque with explanations.

Our return route was via a boat-hopping trip to Meggen, with a walk up to the station, where along with passengers from the train shuttle from Immensee we took the substitute bus back to Luzern.

You will have realised that we never go in straight lines when there are railways to be explored and the route to Glion above Montreux provided us with an excuse to travel the Brunig line to Interlaken. The 08.54 departure was 3 minutes late - probably booked to passengers in the guard's journal! The panorama coaches on this service were refurbished with top drop light windows. I wanted to visit a certain shop selling Swiss embroidered blouses conveniently situated on the street between Interlaken Ost and West stations. Mission accomplished, we caught the 11.34 to Spiez, having observed that the middle road at West was now a siding facing Spiez. On arrival, we found that the same set had become the 12.02 to Zweisimmen, so we rescued the seats we had vacated two minutes before! Our train from Zweisimmen to Montreux was a local and we took full advantage of the opening windows for cooling and photography. It was also much less crowded than the Panoramic trains.

On 5th August, we went to Geneva where there were several SNCF locos and TGV sets. I was saddened to see the state of the two "preserved" paddle-steamers on the lake, the "Geneve" and "Valais". They were both very dilapidated and deserted. We sailed on two of the active paddlers, DEPV Italie and P.S. Savoie and felt they did not have the same amount of tender loving care that those on the Vierwaldstattersee have.

The following day we inspected the rebuilding of Montreux station and were amused to see that there were still tracks running into tarmac. Not all the sidings and bay platforms had acquired buffer stops! We decided to sample the lines from Aigle which are marketed under the "Transports Publics du Chablais" title. It includes both trains and buses. Our ride up to Champéry provided further examples of street running including one turning right across a dual carriageway - just like a tram! At Monthey-Ville a reverse is necessary, where the power car had to run round because there was no



driving compartment in the trailer vehicle. Having sampled the views from the top of the cable-car we made our way back to Aigle and took the second route up to Les Diablerets. By this time a full scale thunderstorm was in progress so we sprinted across the road and caught the Postbus to Gstaad. On the way we encountered a mud slide in the process of being cleared away, in typical Swiss fashion. The 17.00 Montreux-Zweisimmen was observed at Les Cases with one Panorama coach and freight wagons on the back. We completed the trio of lines from Aigle the next day to Leysin. At one stage a parked lorry had to be moved before the train could proceed through a particularly narrow street. The station at Rennaz was constructed out of an old coach body.

Our final journey in this region was on the line to Les Pléiades from Vevey. The visibility was not too good but we did make out Lac Lemman through the gloom. There was a special train in addition to ours, with a rake of coaches of assorted vintages.

After despatching our Flyrail baggage on the morning of our last day, 8th August, we took another devious route to Zurich. Stops were made at Bern and eventually, Baden. There was single line working near Grand Vaux for tunnel works. At Bern we watched full PTT vans being fly-shunted over several hundred metres. We found Gleis (platform) 0 at Aarau - an influence on the new platform W at Leeds which is in the course of construction? - and arrived in Baden in the middle of a thunderstorm! The formal part of the

Previous page: Bendi-bus with Spanisch Brotli-Bahn loco Limmat and coaches painted on the side at Baden yard 8th August 1997

Above: RhB 'Baby-Kroc 411 and Dampfzug 107 at Klosters on the 27 July 1997

Photos: Author

anniversary proceedings for the Spanisch-Brötli-Bahn had not long finished, so we thought it would be an easy matter to visit the exhibition train which we could see alongside the goods shed. But there was a distinct lack of any signposts and it was a case of following one's nose. When we finally got on board it was worth the effort. The film show was good and was self-explanatory - no language was required. There were model trains representing various institutions. "Swiss Express" was included on the monitor but we were unable to see any evidence of it. George and Robert Stephenson were credited and there was a laser show dealing with electrification and the use of rail rather than road. There was also a map showing the major rail improvement works. Outside in the yard, there were two Ae 3/6¹ locomotives within yards of each other; the plinthed 10601 and 10700 providing power for the exhibition train; an Re460 with one of the new double-deck coaches attached, various mostly refreshment stalls which included some original Spanisch-Brötli-Bahn and a "bendi-bus" with the original train depicted on the side. We felt this was a fitting end to our 1997 Swiss holiday. Now we have to decide where to go the next time!