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My Trip on the Glacier Express ?1993 ?1994

By Revd Canon John Edge

Articles in the Journal imply that except for those who follow the Railway walk from Kandersteg all things go smoothly for those of us who travel through Switzerland. I have written this article for those for whom it does not.

Some four years ago I had a two centre holiday based on Murren and Bergun in the Albulatal. My tour company advised me to go via Bern, Zurich and Chur. I worked out a far more interesting route personally which would allow me to revisit Brig in the aftermath of the disastrous flood and to see again the villages of the Goms through which I had walked in the 1960s on my way from the Rhone Glacier to Brig.

Lauterbrunnen was the only anxiety. I had once seen from the train to Wengen half a very agitated American party standing on the platform as the train for Interlaken left without them. This time all went well at Lauterbrunnen. I arrived at Interlaken Ost, checked the Abfahrt, went to the correct platform only to find it deserted except for a train which was out of service. Then I heard the announcement that the delayed train for Zweisimmen would be leaving platform 3 in three minutes time and that the express for Brig would be kept waiting for it at Spiez. I broke the record for the over sixties 50 yards carrying twenty kilos and arrived just in time. A min-bar went past. It was

the only mini-bar I was to see all day.

At Spiez all went well. We simply crossed a very hot platform. I found myself sitting opposite a sleeping young man wearing a heavy overcoat and clutching a blanket. He could have been the twin on my East Malaysian friend who, on a holiday in Davos, said to me in the Sertigtal that Switzerland was a very dirty place, and, seeing the astonishment on my face, pointed to the cow pats on the path. What was this young man doing on a train to Brig? Had he overslept? Should I wake him or not? And, if so, in what language?

Maybe if I had looked more carefully I would have found somewhere to leave my luggage at Brig, but the station and the town were far from recovered from their ordeal. I hauled my twenty five kilo luggage through the blazingly hot streets, skirting an enormous excavation in the main street, but at least The Simplon and the Du Pont were still there, restored and flourishing. I stopped to photograph a mysterious notice of a meeting point for La Societe des Suisses Explosifs on the Furka Oberalp platform and caught the slow train to Andermatt.

I think it was at Niederwald that I saw him. A train had stopped to let us through. On the permanent way between the trains was a young



man passionately kissing the door of the coach opposite ours, or rather mine for I was on my own. The passengers in the other coach peered out nervously at what was going on. Suddenly he swung onto our train, into my coach and sat opposite me. He swung up and kissed the luggage rack. He swung sideways and kissed the seat opposite. As we made our slow and solitary way up the Rhone Valley at intervals between kissing the window, the arm-rests and re-embracing the luggage rack, he told me that he had been called up to do his Reserve Service, leaving behind in his village his mother who had suddenly been taken ill. He had not wanted to leave her. I realised that I was the audience for a rehearsal of what he was going to do when he reached the barracks at Gluringen. Silently I wished him well, but openly behaved as if meeting someone who kissed the furniture frantically was an everyday experience for anyone who travels by Swiss Rail.

All went reasonably well, though with increasing hunger and thirst, until we reached Reichenau Tamins. I lifted my thirty kilos of luggage on to the platform, looked carefully at the Abfahrt, checked that the train for St. Moritz left at 17.03, and noticed too that trains only stopped for thirty seconds. Just after 17.00 a train drew in. I struggled on board the first coach, gratefully sat down and looked out of the window. I always enjoy looking at flowers. Strange, I had not seen those flowers before and those, and those. The

Previous page: A busy scene at Disentis as a Glacier Express waits to leave for Brig.

Above: A Glacier Express at Oberalp Passhohe.

penny dropped. I was on my way back to Disentis, but the Kursbuch was at hand. Yes, if I changed at Versam I could catch the Glacier Express which would arrive some twenty minutes later and get me back to Reichenau-Tamins in time to catch the 18.03 and be only some twenty minutes late for a much needed dinner. The ticket inspector arrived...He asked me quite reasonably why I had not seen the destination. I pointed out also reasonably that as at Chur the left hand side of the coach was against the platform and at Reichenau it was the right hand side there were problems. He agreed with me, consulted his Kursbuch and at Versam with thirty five kilos of luggage I descended upon an empty platform. With twenty minutes to spare I wandered idly around the station. I glanced at the Abfahrt. To my horror I saw that The Glacier Express only stopped there during the winter months. I fled into the Booking Office. The Station Mistress reassured me. The Glacier Express would stop. I still do not know whether that evening The Glacier Express made an unscheduled stop at Versam, but the Ticket Collector gave me a knowing smile when she came for my ticket, and this time I made sure that at Reichenau-Tamins I stood at the Chur end of the platform.

Editors Note: The letter with the article assures me that this all happened on one trip.