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THE REVIEWS



Tramways and Light Railways of Switzerland and Austria (2nd ed.)

Richard Buckley. Published by Light Rail Transit Association. 180 pages A5 size, colour card covers, 26 black and white photographs & 20 maps, perfect bound. £12.50 (Obtainable at £13.50 post free from LRTA Publications, 13a The Precinct, Broxbourne EN10 7HY or at the Society AGM)

This LRTA handbook, first published in 1984, has been completely revised and updated in this its long awaited second edition and is correct up to late summer 2000. The Swiss content represents about two thirds of the book. Each country is divided into sections covering urban tramways and museums, other preserved trams and light railways. Very informative notes accompany each section including general information, summary tables, maps, a list of funiculars and those railways not included in the book.

The tramways sections are preceded by a summary table of all systems including first opening and last closing dates (where appropriate) and maximum route distance. Each existing tramway is dealt with in turn with descriptive text, a map (with route numbers) and full fleet details including trailers, preserved cars and service cars. Similar coverage are given to operating museum lines. There are also lists with brief details of other preserved trams and trailers.

Light railways are dealt with in the same format with the exception that general maps are included rather than one for each company. There are lists of the light railways that are included, the passenger operations that are excluded, closed light railways and funiculars. In each case the first opening and last closing dates (where appropriate) and maximum route distance are given. Each system is then dealt with in turn with interesting descriptive text, details of all powered and non powered stock and powered service stock. For the record, narrow gauge Swiss lines not included in this book are the BRB, BVZ, FO, RhB (except the Bernina line) and the SBB Brünig. The standard gauge operations of the CJ and GFM are also excluded as are the MC, OeBB, RHB and the main line operators. Strangely, and somewhat confusingly, the standard gauge Uetliberg line and shunting locomotives of the SZU are included but not the rest of the operation. Overall the text is informative and the fleet information, much enhanced by the inclusion of coaching stock, is accurate and up to date. The photographs are generally good although reproduction in some cases leaves a little to be desired and occasionally the captioning is incorrect.

This is an excellent book providing a complete reference to tramways and most of the non main line railways of Switzerland and Austria. It can thoroughly be recommended and will be a valuable addition to bookshelves. If there is any reservation it would be one also expressed elsewhere that for a book of this nature perfect binding may not be sufficiently robust to stand up to continual reference. The solution is to buy two and keep one on the library shelf - well worth it. We have arranged with the LRTA for a supply of copies of this book which will be available for sale at a special members' price at the AGM.

BRIAN HEMMING

Halfway to Heaven - Terry Martin

Pub: Rail Romances, PO Box 85, Chester, CH4 9ZH.

Hardback with full cover jacket. 332pp, semi-matt art paper, 52pp in colour. £39.50 plus p&p. Numbered limited edition of 2000.

Halfway to Heaven, not the Jungfrau or Alp Grüm but the Darjeeling & Himalayan. Why review it here? Spirals and the similarity in planning, building and operating in a harsh environment. This is a sumptuous book, exhaustively researched and chock full of information and fantastic pictures. Beautifully printed and a joy to read. Anyone who has an interest in mountain railways will not fail to be inspired. One small criticism is that there are no maps placing the railway in its northern Indian context as a whole. The other maps however are excellent. Expensive but worth it.

TOGGENBURG

Swiss Railways in the 60s - Vol. 4. Die Bundner Stadtbahn

Alan Snowdon, app. 60 minutes long. Available ONLY through SRS Sales. £10 inc. post and packing, see advert in this issue.

Knowledgeably narrated by Paul Russenberger and punctuated with some jolly music the video begins with a ride on the Albula in 1962 from Chur to St. Moritz behind a Ge4/4¹. An interesting selection of period views, disc signals, "Crocs" and general freight follows. A pot-pourri of exciting funiculars and cable cars/chairlifts round St Moritz is followed by a ride along the Bernina with one of the original power cars in green and cream to Tirano where we see an FS tank loco. Then the Diavolezza. Two interludes from 1978 take the viewer on a steam excursion behind 107 & 108 on the Landquart-Klosters-Davos-Filisur-Chur loop and includes the steamers being turned at Filisur. Diversions are taken at Davos (albeit 18 years earlier) on various funiculars/cable cars etc. This was the first time I had seen or even been aware of freight platforms on cable cars. The Arosa line is outlined in 1982 when the dc operation was still running and the journey finishes with a run down the Engadine behind an Abe4/4 railcar. It was interesting to see the number of sight-seers hanging out the train windows in the clips from the 60s. Tourism was vital even then.

As with all Alan's videos the interest is in the period content. MITV this is not, but they are always full of cameos and timepieces unavailable elsewhere. My favourite was the local waiting at a level crossing wearing what looked like national costume.

The video will be available from the AGM onwards and is well worth the tenner.

TOGGENBURG

Ride the MOB with Beat Feller

Zweisimmen-Lenk and Zweisimmen-Montreux - Alan Snowdon

VHS, 82 minutes long. Available ONLY through SRS Sales. £10 inc. post and packing, see advert in this issue.

For those who don't know, Beat Feller is a long serving driver on the MOB, not that he looks it though! This video takes us through a complete shift with him and has been produced by Alan Snowdon, a long time friend and well known to us as the producer of several videos from the 60s. An introduction of jolly music is followed by Beat preparing his train for Lenk at Zweisimmen. As we go down the branch the scene is dominated by timber timber everywhere. Hurricane Lothar, you will remember Beat's terrific article last year, has produced devastation and huge piles of cut wood for onward transport. Drivers on the MOB by the way are multitaskers. Not only do they drive but they sell tickets. General views are shown on arrival at Lenk. We then go back to Zweisimmen where Beat drives a GDe4/4 the whole length of the main line. Some of the views are taken from the luggage door because of the reflections caused by the sun as it begins to set. Colours are enhanced though, evening is always the best time for cameras, closely followed by the early morning. The trip shows views of infrastructure trains, the waste transfer depot and the various stations along the line, usually with a bus or buses waiting.

Beat fills out Alan's narration with snippets of information and correct pronunciation of station names. Remember this is a man at work and this compensates for the quality which is still reasonable considering the equipment and conditions. Lothar's damage is much in evidence on the main line as well. Stock is littered all over the place, almost every station has a loco or wagons. Final arrival in Montreux leaves one wondering if there is any room left.

The return trip is first in twilight and then in darkness. This time Beat drives, sells tickets, checks tickets, sets the signals and locks waiting rooms up. Is there no end to his duties?! The atmosphere is very much "At Work". The tunnel maintenance gang board and prepare for a night's work. Beat completes his duties very amicably; here is a man happy in his work. Driving a train along one of the most scenic lines on earth we might well say "and so he should!"

All in all a very enjoyable video, different to the norm and well worth a place in one's library. Many thanks to Beat, who is incidentally an SRS member, and Alan.

Available at the AGM and after from SRS Sales.

TOGGENBURG