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CHAIRMAN'S THOUGHTS - Paul Russenberger

"Come and meet my ski instructor, he knows about the Swiss Railways Society," said my wife, Judith. This was too good a chance to meet a Swiss who had heard of the Society. Unfortunately he hadn't, but it didn't matter as, like all Swiss, he was intrigued to learn that a society exists in Britain to study something Swiss. It was the looks I got from the rest of Judith's ski class that seemed to say: "Your wife has been normal company but you must be insane." Suddenly I needed to explain myself. To most people a train is a train is a train. The intricacies of gauges, liveries, signalling, voltages and rack systems are of no interest to the passenger. So it should be because trains are a means of transport and transport is a means to an end.

One lady was fixing me with a particularly penetrating stare and I had already decided not to make a fast exit when she asked, "But what do you do?" Since I had already mentioned the Branches and *SWISS EXPRESS* I had to add something more. "Well," I said, "suppose there was a Society to study Swiss flora and fauna, that would meet to have talks and discussions on Swiss flora and fauna. We discuss Swiss trains." Honour was satisfied on both sides. It can be difficult to explain what we do. Drawing a similarity with another "conventional" hobby may be a suitable way.

Your Editor has kindly allowed me to delay writing this because of my going to be introduced by Alan Pike to the 'Schweizerischer Verband Eisenbahn-Amateur'. It was an interesting visit to Le Bouveret, which will be reported fully in the next issue, but what again struck me so strongly was the Swiss enthusiasm to encourage an interest in Switzerland in those who are not Swiss.

No doubt many of us will be visiting Switzerland in the coming months – and some of us will be meeting in Luzern (see elsewhere!) – but whatever you do, enjoy the country, its scenery, culture, museums, walking opportunities and, above all, yes, I'll write it, its railways. Let us know what you observe for *SWISS EXPRESS*, if something particularly fascinates you, find out some more and write about it.

SECRETARY'S NOTES - Brian Hemming

The Spring Meet and Annual General Meeting which was held at Altrincham on 17th March will be but a happy memory when this issue of *Swiss Express* reaches you, and for those who were unable to attend here are a few words to bring you up to date. The activities started on the Friday evening at the hotel where our members Sue Knight and Chris Harnett of MITV entertained us with a fascinating selection of archive film. On the Saturday morning it was down to business early with layouts and sales stands being erected and much activity with early arrivals catching a glimpse of the goodies on offer. The doors to the Spring Meet opened officially at 11:30 and much activity continued until the start of the AGM at 14:30.

Immediately prior to the formal proceedings of the AGM, the 21st Anniversary of the Society was celebrated by our Joint President and a founder member, Roy Dunglison, cutting a cake especially prepared and decorated by Jan Howsam. At the AGM there were no nominations for the Committee other than those for the incumbent members, and so we were re-elected en bloc for another year. As on two previous occasions all the Officers presented written reports which were available to all those present as were the Accounts for the year 2000. Minutes of the AGM are now available from me and can be sent, together with the Reports and Accounts by post on receipt of a C5 stamped addressed envelope or as an e-mail attachment by contacting me at srssec@email.com.

The activities closed with the traditional dinner on the Saturday evening where our guests were the Swiss Consul General and his wife. The after dinner entertainment was a teaser of a quiz compiled by Manchester Branch member Charlie Hulme.

The whole weekend was organised by Dave Howsam ably supported by members of the Manchester Branch which includes many wives and partners. Those of us who attended were particularly appreciative of all the hard work put in to make the weekend such a success. Thanks to all concerned.

One important note to make in your diaries is that the 2002 AGM will be held at the Midland Hotel, Derby on Saturday 23rd March 2002. It is felt that returning to this central venue will provide the best opportunity for members from all over the country to attend. Details will follow in due course, but similar