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Readers may remember the holiday section in the June *Swiss Express*. Michael Cross describes his footplate ride on the Brienz Rothorn Bahn.



Michael Cross waits on the footplate of BRB no. 12, an oil burner, ready for departure.
Photo: Mrs Cross!

Before setting off for our annual holiday in Wengen, I contacted the Brienz Rothorn Bahn with the view to experiencing a footplate ride. Their publicity leaflets mention this opportunity, and it was also recently noted in *Swiss Express*.

I sent a Traveller's Cheque for SF50 as a deposit, to be countersigned on arrival at the BRB booking office. Prior reservation is necessary by local visit or telephone call to establish a departure time and the rostering of an appro-

priate locomotive. Such cab rides can only be made on their latest oil-fired, single-manned steam-powered traction.

My trip departed from the lower station at 13.05, Friday 7th September 2001. The special pass allows you to travel with the driver during the ascending journey only. Return is on "the cushions" or rather where cushions might otherwise be!

The weather on that day was atrocious, cold wind and driving rain. Indeed several departures had been cancelled. So, apart from one "mad" Englishman, the payload mainly consisted of the inevitable intrepid Japanese.

The loco awaiting my pleasure was No.12 *Kanton Bern*, and I climbed eagerly aboard to pose for the essential photograph, taken by my wife. I took up the absent fireman's position on the left-hand side, to be surrounded by a warm glow, except for a cold wet face. The driver's name sounded like "Bert", but once we were in motion conversation was virtually impossible.

The loco's oscillation, rapid exhaust beat (reminiscent of a traction engine under heavy load) and the general clatter on the footplate reduced communication to hand signals only. Views of Brienz and the lakes and mountains were effectively concealed behind clouds of mist and rain. Never mind, the immediate foreground was the purpose of the mission. The driver was constantly busy, his hands flying expertly to the regulator, oil supply, draught control and reverser.



Bert, the driver, has his hand on the regulator.

Photo: Michael Cross

coach through rain streaming down the end windows was, naturally, an anticlimax. However, the rhythmic motion of coupling rods, valve gear, lubricators etc. performing their ritual dance is quite absorbing.

Having "splashed down", almost literally, at Brienz, I called up my "Vielen dank, aufwiedersehen" and "gute reisen" to "Bert". I then paddled across to the landing stage

We had a clear run through Geldried, due to the reduced service. We then entered the Planalpfluhtunnel with its brief views of Brienz far below. Travelling on the loco instead of in a coach reveals how close to "the edge" we all are sometimes. Put your trust in the Lord and your faith in Swiss civil engineering.

Within the tunnels, the exhaust creates a distinct cacophony and aroma. However, the latter is not as nauseous as the diesels in such a confined space. The driver was anxious to convey the merits of oil-firing, when we crossed a lonely coal-fired No.7 swathed in mist and sulphurous smoke. Water was taken at Planalp, our guard attending to the supply. Meanwhile "Bert" passed an experienced hand over the bearings, with an oil can at the ready in the other.

After about an hour's "it's steep, but we'll do it", and passage through the final tunnel, the powerful loco propelled its two coach train into the summit station. This is a very bleak spot in such squally weather and, not wishing to be marooned, I descended on the next available train. I did manage to pay my respects to the BRB's original engineer and contractor who are commemorated on a nearby plaque. Viewing, and listening to, the loco from the

and boarded the DS *Lötschberg* for another moving experience.

Watering the loco as viewed from the footplate.

Photo: Michael Cross

