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From: Richard Baker - Middlesex

For your convenience!

I enjoyed the very interesting articles in the *Swiss Express* for June 2002. Amongst these, I noted the advice by Keith Pennyfather (on page 29) about locked toilets on the RhB south of Poschiavo, because I was about to travel this route. Whilst I cannot claim to have made a specialist or exhaustive study of the subject, I can confirm that on the "Heidi Express" southbound on Saturday 6th July 2002 the toilets were not locked south of Poschiavo. Our stock consisted of carriages with the sealed flush system which "can be used whilst standing in the station" though the use of its flush makes a considerable noise which is very audible to the other passengers when the train is stationary! My researches suggest that the toilets with this system are always kept open on this route. Conversely I imagine the stock with the "open the pan and see the track" type of flush on the ordinary services are probably kept locked (and rightly so) in areas of street running.

As we were travelling on to Lugano with the coach, I took the opportunity to look round and photograph the Italian Railways station at Tirano. Seeing the toilets along the platform and about to board the bus for the long journey, I used these facilities. As I came out I was stared at and then harangued for using them, (in Italian) by someone who I think may have been a railway official (but who was not in uniform). My comments in German (he didn't seem to speak English and I don't speak Italian) seemed to placate him. Others using the station "facilities" there may find this information helpful.

Whilst the rail journey down through the Bernina is truly wonderful, the connecting coach trip onwards from Tirano to Lugano was incredibly disappointing and in no sense a pleasure. Traffic on the road through Sondrio was heavy and difficult, the urban development was very ugly, and when we were at last on the scenic part of the route, the standard of car driving by those coming towards us was truly hair-raising. We were treated to a number of very near misses on corners and in tunnels, and incredible slanging matches between our driver and other drivers as we sought to pass their cars. "Never, ever again" was my wife's comment as she gratefully left the coach at Lugano station! So it's back to the railways! Some further advice to those in need. There is (apparently) no "comfort stop" on the three hour journey, but one solution (which another passenger used successfully on our trip) is to whisper something about "desperation" and any of the usual multilingual words for toilet to the driver and to offer him a tip. He obviously knows a number of places (cafes, etc) "en route" because he stopped and solved the "problem" almost immediately!

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