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The Editor indulges himself again with a picture of his favourite loco, the BT Re 4/4. This time it's No.93 in the Voralpen livery. Give me the BT green and cream any day, and have you seen the cow livery? Ugh! Anyway No. 93 stands at St Gallen awaiting departure for Romanshorn in August '99
Photo: Philip Elwin

For our 1999 Summer holiday we stayed near Luzern as a change from our usual venue, the Lake of Thun. Although not exactly a radical move, we were just on the edge of Luzern in the excellent Hotel Seeburg and this new location gave us a different perspective on things and enabled us to visit an area of Switzerland hitherto only available as a long day out from the Bernese Oberland

Not having ventured along the SOB and BT routes before, the hourly Luzern - Romanshorn 'Voralpen Express' service seemed to offer some untapped potential and we discovered that a very relaxing circular trip is possible taking in the route Luzern - Arth Goldau - Rapperswil - Zürich - Luzern using the lake steamer service from Rapperswil to

Zürich and the double deck airport train to return from Zürich to Luzern.

Included in this journey is the renovated SBB Küssnacht branch from Luzern and the full length of the Süd Ost Bahn to Rapperswil with its amazing 1 in 20 gradients. The sharp climb away from Arth, leaving the Gotthard line way below, and the steep descent, with panoramic views to the north, from high above the Lake of Zürich down to Pfäffikon at the lake edge are very impressive. The first leg of the journey concludes with a run across the Seedam which cuts off the eastern end of the Zürichsee to Rapperswil. En route is the SOB junction station of Biberbrugg, where the Einsiedeln branch comes in from the east. It strikes me that this would make an ideal

model as you both approach and leave the station on a curve in the same direction, just like the average model, is quite compact and has the added attraction of a branch line with frequent connecting trains.

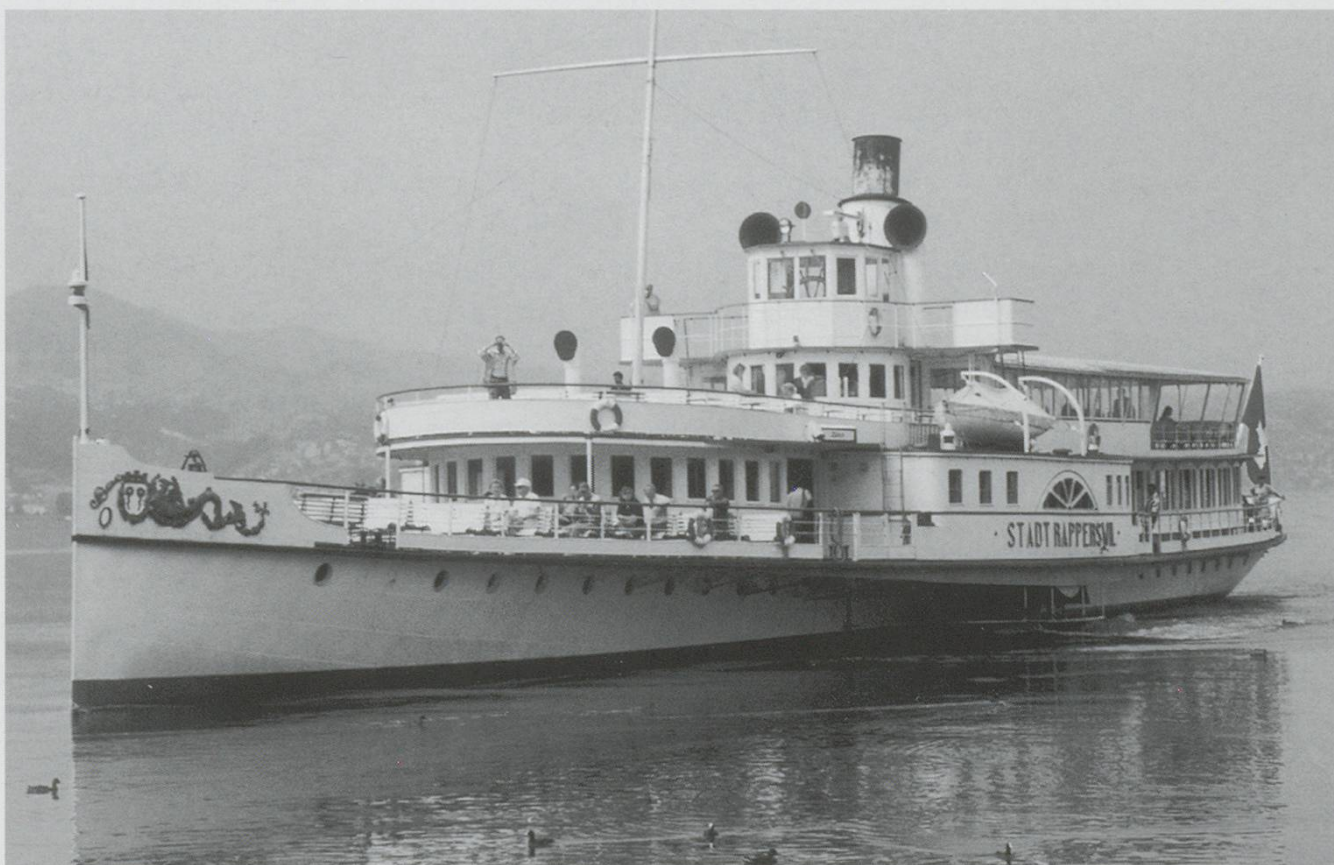
Comfortable modern locomotive hauled coaches in green and cream livery form the standard train sets, air conditioned of course so without those nice drop windows so useful for photography and observation, not to mention the annoyance of fellow passengers ! On the plus side, any strengthening stock (and there usually is an extra car) is standard lightweight stuff with "proper" windows. There is a good trolley service despite there being a 'Bistro' car in each train which I never saw actually staffed, indeed one of the machines located in this car swallowed my coins and failed to cough up with a drink most unswiss I thought !! Locomotives on the Voralpen service are either BT Re 4/4, SOB Re 4/4 (former SBB " prototypes") or SBB standard

Re 4/4's. In August there seemed to be little freight about but the SOB goods trains we did see were double headed by former East German machines.

In the high Summer the 09.45 out of Luzern connects at Rapperswil with a Paddle Steamer for the run to Zürich. The station and quay are close and being a level walk means that the 25 minute connection is more than adequate. It looks as though the old part of Rapperswil is worth exploring and we plan some extra time here on the next occasion. The station deals mostly with Zürich S Bahn services in what is very much a commuter area and so is busy but with little variety. The boat service at the east end of the lake is fairly sparse compared with the more popular tourist lakes like Lucerne and Thun but it is a pleasant run never the less and on a weekday in August quite lightly loaded. Much of the lake edge is residential and from time to time trains can be seen on both banks. S Bahn to

ZSG's Paddle Steamer, 'Stadt Rapperswil' at Rapperswil on a Wednesday in August 1999. The two Zürichsee Paddlers operate on Wednesdays in the high summer.

Photo: Philip Elwin



the north side and mixed S Bahn and long distance and International trains to the south side, about half way down the lake the steamer cuts between the route of the car ferries which connect Horgen to Meilen with a frequent two ship service.

The leisurely trip along the lake takes the best part of two hours calling at various towns along the way before terminating at the foot of the famous Zürich Bahnhof Strasse. In August 1999 this area was a vast building site. Our schedule allowed plenty of time for shopping and tram watching before taking a double deck airport train back to Luzern for dinner. One day I am going to find and ride on the Dolderbahn !

A few days later we again travelled with the 09.45 from Luzern, there are earlier trains of course but we were on our holidays! Obviously there was some operational problem on this day for the loco was still running round at departure time. The coaches had been pulled out of the platform by one of the resident Ee 3/3 shunters to release the train engine which turned out to be a red SBB Ae 6/6 which took us as far as Rapperswil where it uncoupled and went on shed. The replacement was the usual Re 4/4. This time we rode through to St. Gallen, the train continues eastwards from Rapperswil along the SBB to Uznach, where the signalling equipment stands on the open platform, and then strikes off North West on to the Bodensee - Toggenburg route heading for the Bodensee.

The heavily engineered single track BT line is noted for its viaducts, in particular the steel underslung truss over the Sitter valley which is more than 300 feet high. Unfortunately you can't see it from the train ! When not on a viaduct the line seems to be in a tunnel, the Ricken (Uznach - Wattwil) is over 5 miles long and the Wasserfluh (Lichtensteig -Degersheim) over 2 miles just

to mention the two longest. What seems to be double track between Wattwil and Lichtensteig is in fact parallel single lines with the Federal metals alongside those of the Toggenburg Company.

Arrival off this service is just before mid-day at St. Gallen and the train continues to Romanshorn on the Bodensee. This allows sufficient time for the dedicated traveller to ride the orange Trogener Bahn tram or to circle back on the Appenzeller Bahn via Gais to Herisau and pick up a return Voralpen service there. The TB and the AB routes leave from the street side of the substantial main station, but there is not much to see of them other than run round facilities which are little used and some spare Trogen trailer cars. St. Gallen is an interesting and historic old university city and well worth a walk round even if you don't have anything specific to visit. There is a city trolleybus service and some wonderfully complicated overhead wire junctions where trolleys and the Trogen trams share the same route. The single tram contact wire is lower than the twin trolley wires in case you were wondering how they avoid a short circuit.

St. Gallen station and train shed has just been renovated and carefully modernised in harmony with its original style. The site also retains a roundhouse, largely hidden from the platforms by empty coaching stock, and now in the hands of builders busy converting it to an art gallery.

We returned the way we had come but a possible round trip alternative is to return by way of Winterthur and Zürich on the SBB rather than retracing the outward route or even continuing forward to Romanshorn first and then back through Winterthur and Zürich. Needless to say, Swiss railways being what they are, there are so many possible variations for a circular return journey it would take many trips to exhaust them all!