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ALL PICTURES IN THIS ARTICLE ARE BY MICHAEL FARR

Cama: Ex-FL ABe 4/4 No 3 ready to return with the mid-afternoon train to Castione-Arbedo

much grander plans for the original Bellinzona-Mesocco railway to continue to Thusis, and many members will have seen the late Mike Polglaze's former Rongellan layout picturing how part of the northern section "might have been".

Each year, one of the leading supporters of the FM, Giangiorgio Helbling, advertises sets of the previous year's tickets in *Eisenbahn Amateur* – and as a keen collector of Swiss transport tickets I have been sending off the few Fj24

travellers asked for a set, with which he normally returns a copy of the timetable leaflet. I booked my September holiday at Orselina, above Locarno, to coincide with one of the eight Sundays a year that the FM operates, and I was delighted to be able to meet Giangiorgio, as well as the rest of the enthusiastic band of supporters.

Three trains a day are operated when the weather is fine, as it fortunately was for my visit. As Castione-Arbedo is now (in British railway parlance) a ghost station, with only one morning and one evening FFS service calling (and these are operated by buses!) one needs to catch either the Mesocco/S. Bernadino (940.30) or Airolo (625.09) bus from outside Bellinzona station.

Several vehicles are stored in sidings at Castione, some sheeted-over and others which have received attention from vandals, though not as much as one would expect in the UK. Although I am no expert on Swiss railway rolling stock, fellow passengers assured me that one of the vehicles was a former Bellinzona-Mesocco power car. Despite surreptitiously



Many readers will have noticed the metre gauge vehicles stored on sidings at Castione-Arbedo station as their fast train rushes through on the way to or from Bellinzona; most of you will know they belong to the Ferrovia Mesolcinese.

My interest in tickets had alerted me to the existence of this line, happily still using Edmondson cards printed for them at Chur by the RhB, which operated passenger services on this isolated part of their network until 1972. In the way of Swiss railways they continued to offer freight services from Castione-Arbedo to Cama and a band of enthusiasts formed the Ferrovia Mesolcinese (FM) or Società Esercizio Ferroviario Turistico (SEFT) to operate occasional passenger trains. At one time there were



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S. Vittore. The driver carefully drew ex-AB ABe 4/4 No 41 up to a lineside pear tree so he could pick some fruit for dessert! Unfortunately for the photographers this cast a shadow over the train.

lifting the tarpaulin they were not able to confirm its identity but no doubt one of our SRS experts can shed light on this. My old copy of the Platform 5 Swiss Railways book indicates that RhB had one BDe 4/4 No. 491 operating at the necessary 1500v DC for the Bellinzona-Mesocco line; perhaps it is this vehicle.

Next to this vehicle was a blue and white trailer car carrying the initials LCD, the former Lugano-Cadro-Dino line which used to depart from the yard outside the main line station at Lugano and had a connection from what is now the FLP, Lugano-Ponte Tresa. Both the LCD and the Lugano-Tesserete are included on Lugano area holiday season tickets in my collection dated 1949 and 1971, but now buses cover the route, departing from the site of the old station. (The seasons also offer a 50% reduction between Bellinzona and Mesocco.)

On the day of my visit to Castione the morning train was operated by the FM's former Appenzeller-bahn ABe 4/4 car No. 41, hauling one coach, one luggage van and the FM

Güterwagen Gb 71, a box van in bright yellow advert livery. Models of this van are on sale at the society headquarters at Cama and the purchase of one has no doubt started me on the rocky road to ruin by introducing me to Swiss railway modelling.

Interestingly, one of the postcards on sale at FM stations shows ex-Appenzellerbahn ABe 4/4 car No. 42 working the trains to and from Cama and not 41 which was operational on my visit.

The railway offers a full range of tickets, but for someone planning to make more than one return trip the best buy is the day ticket, costing CHF 18, or CHF 14 with a Swiss card entitling half-fare. The main station building at Castione-Arbedo has been hived off so the FM's tickets are sold from an adjoining brick building, which includes loos and storage space for the society.

Just before 10.50 and with all passengers aboard, the level crossing barriers across the adjoining main road were activated by pressing a button in a panel on the doorway of the old

station building and we set out on our voyage of discovery. I was delighted to find two fellow Brits on board, one of them SRS member John Davey from Bristol, all of us ready to enjoy the trip along the Mesocco or Misox Valley, typically Swiss and typically attractive. An on-time departure seems to allow a few minutes at the main intermediate stations, S. Vittore and Grono, for photo stops. At the first-named the driver stopped the cab strategically alongside a pear tree and picked the fruit; unfortunately that meant the front of the train was in shade!

The RhB operated a works at Grono and the building was still standing; indeed we were told that they still employ two members of staff, one of whom was on board our train. A steel fabrication factory a little further along the line had some heavy girders loaded on board a flat truck, but I suspect that this was for convenience of moving around the works rather than ready for despatch, though there was still a siding connection.

On arrival at Cama it was clear that there was no possibility of restoring the track further. A piece of rail acts as a stop block and beyond that new roads and houses cover the trackbed. The waiting room has a shop well stocked with postcards of transport subjects (which Giangiorgio regularly offers in *Eisenbahn Amateur*), souvenirs, a huge range of second-hand magazines and the Bemo FM van already mentioned.

The morning departure from Castione waits at Cama for about 1½ hours, time enough



S. Vittore: Ex-FL ABe 4/4 No 3 pauses on its return to Castione-Arbedo. Some spare stock is stored in the loop here.

for passengers and staff to visit a local restaurant. The British contingent found its way to a restaurant where all tables for the hot meal were taken but they rustled-up some ham, bread and gherkins washed down with a very palatable white wine, which we managed to devour just in time to catch the train back at 13.10.

We were running a little late on this journey and the station stops were fewer and shorter. John Davey alighted at Grono to catch a bus up the valley to investigate what remained of the railway on up the valley as he returned to Thusis and his hotel in Luzern. He has since told me there is much to see of the railway both en route and at Mesocco where the station and shed still stand and much track is in situ; per-

haps he can be persuaded to tell us about this in a future issue of Swiss Express. (Ed. Note – Readers are directed to John Jesson's article on researching the Misox in SE December 2000)

My other companion had decided to walk back towards Bellinzona to see what remained of that former section of line while I had decided to make a second trip to Cama.

How pleased I was with my decision, for they shunted out their other operational car for the first afternoon train, due to leave at 13.58. This is the former FL No. 3, an Abe 4/4 originally built in 1912 but rebuilt (again according to Platform 5) in 1954. The FL, Ferrovie Luganesi, is the old title for what is now the FL(ugano)P(onte Tresa) and the FL's name lives on above the door of the restaurant at Lugano station, which was formerly the FL terminal building.

On the first of the two afternoon journeys (both operated by FL No. 3 on this day) there is barely enough time at Cama to run round the train and return to Castione. Thus less time was permitted at the intermediate stations for photo-stops in order to ensure we reached our destination on time.

After watching the 15.47 train depart I caught the bus back to Bellinzona. I gather that this last FM journey is generally the quietest of the day and they offer a special cheap price of CHF 2.50 to groups who

want to include a one-way trip in their itinerary. On this particular day there were no takers for this offer but it appeared that several local families had taken the opportunity to ride on the trains throughout the day.

It is most interesting to compare Swiss railway preservation with that in the UK. I am sure that the authorities are more co-operative there but the success of a project relies entirely on the enthusiasm of usually a very small band of dedicated supporters. Certainly the FM deserves to succeed as a metre gauge line in southern Switzerland, so I appeal to SRS members to take a trip if you are in the area on the appropriate dates for 2003 – which I am sure the editor will publish as soon as they are known.



Cama: Ex-AB ABe 4/4 No 41 has run round its train, dropped off the van and one coach and is ready to return to Castione-Arbedo.

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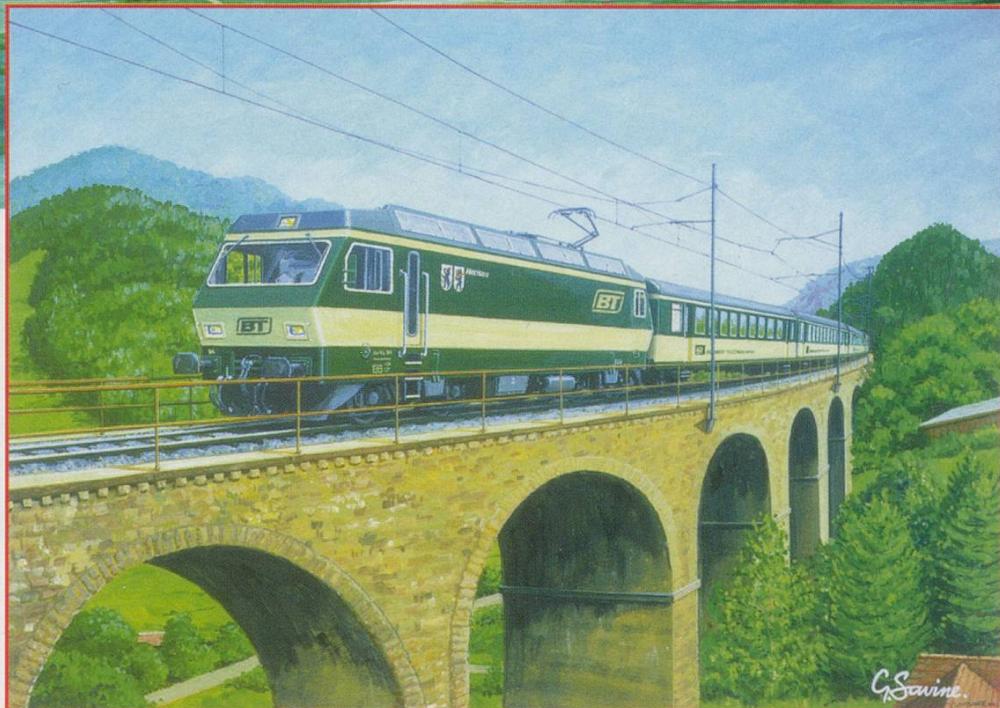
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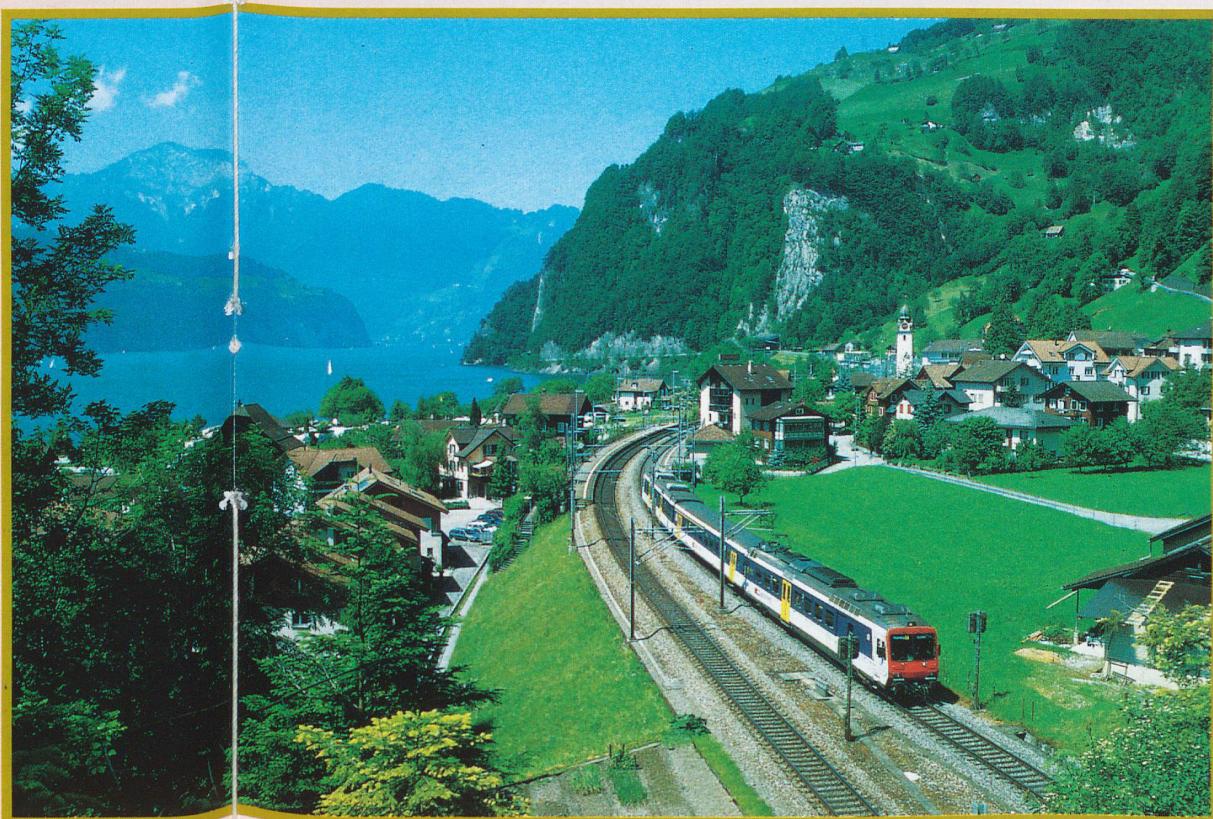
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TOP: A BLS ABDe 4/8 no. 750 waits in Reichenbach. 10/8/01. Photo: Phil Weaver

MIDDLE: A BOB train near Interlaken. Photo©STS

BELOW: Four pictures taken at Filisur by David Edwards, in the snow on 05/03/02.



David Adams wonderful picture which won the 2002 Best Photo competition. SBB RBDe 560 039 is seen departing Sisikon with the 1407 Zug-Erstfeld Regionalzug

The Annual competition for the best photograph and article this year produced quite a coincidence. The winner of the best photograph is David Adams composition above featured in December's magazine. The runner up is Brian Mason with his picture of the RhB's G4/5 on the centre spread. The winner of the best article is Brian Mason, from the same issue with his article Rhätische Raritäten. The runner up is David Adams with his article from December, Sisikon-Flüelen. Both photographs accompanied the respective articles!

Dave Howsam compiled the results from the renewal forms. Many thanks Dave.

