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FIRST WORLD STEAM & TOURIST TRAIN CONGRESS

The First World Steam and Tourist Train Congress took place on October 5th to 8th at the Grandhotel Giessbach on Lake Brienz. As luck would have it Guy was attending and here is his report on the proceedings. Thanks are due to him for contacting me and offering his reporting skills.

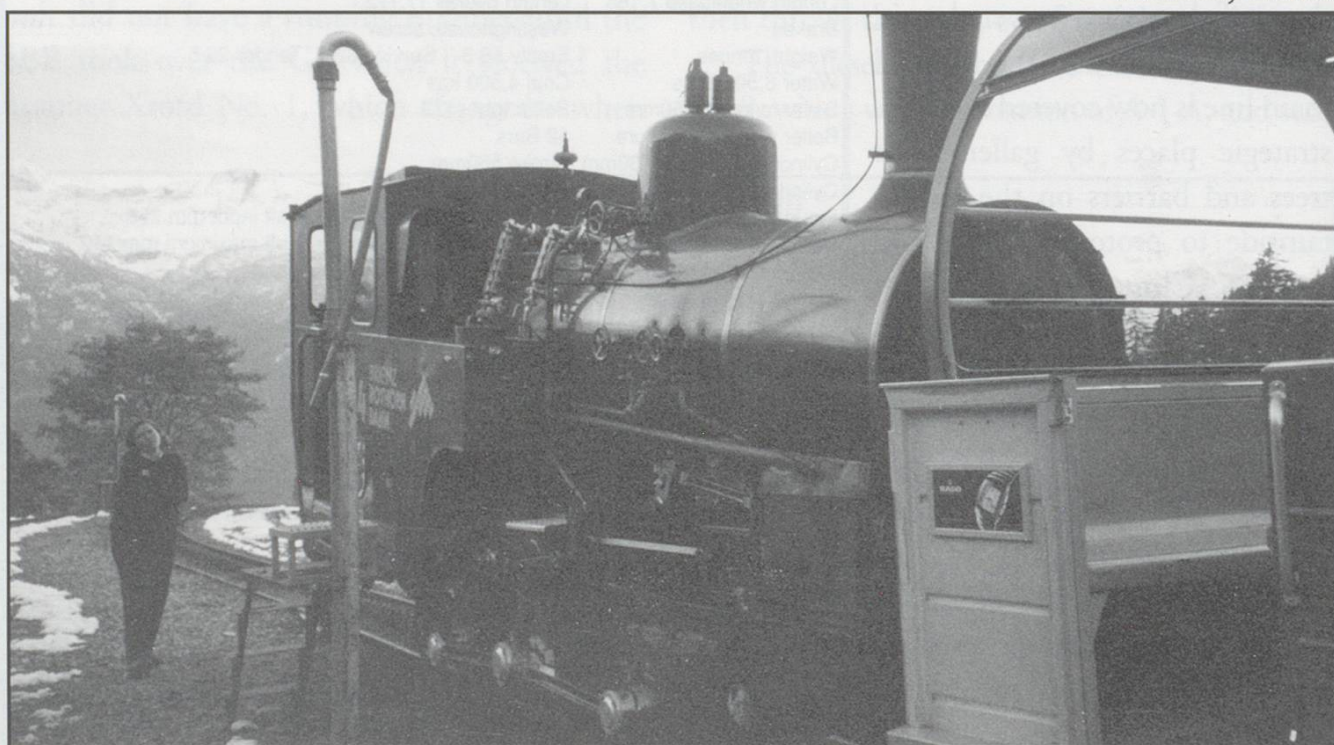
The idea of a World Congress of steam operators was initially proposed by personnel from the "Tren del Fin del Mundo" in Argentina, and this first Congress was largely put together by David Morgan, MBE, of FEDECRAIL (The European Federation of Museum & Tourist Railways), Christian Kiefer, Head of Marketing at the Brienz Rothorn Bahn (BRB), together with Roger Waller and Andrew Thompson of Dampflokomotiv-und Maschinenfabrik AG (DLM). DLM are the successors to the steam-engineering expertise and tradition of the SLM Winterthur works, and it was during Roger Waller's time at SLM that he initiated their revival of steam traction using modern technology.

The Congress attracted over 80 participants from around the world. The focus was on efficiency improvements in the running of existing heritage steam ship and train operations, and discussion on what role steam can play in commercial or semi-commercial ship and railway operations in the 21st century.

Delegates met at Thun on Sunday October 5th to travel across Lake Thun to Interlaken on the paddle-steamer Blumlisalp. From Interlaken, the journey to Brienz was behind steam locomotive 1067, the ex-Brunig line tank locomotive built by SLM in 1910, and now preserved in running order by the BDB Ballenberg-Dampfbahn at Interlaken. Poor weather necessitated the cancellation of the

The weather during the weekend was not good, as can be seen from the picture!, This was taken at the top of the Rothorn.

Photo: Guy Marriott



planned journey by steam launches from Brienz to the Giessbach landing stage, and then by funicular from the lake to the hotel. Instead, the transfers from Brienz were by road.

The well-restored Victorian-era hotel was an excellent venue. The spectacular Giessbach Falls alongside the hotel, and the restored funicular down to the lake (dating from 1879, and which is now Europe's oldest funicular), together with wonderful views across the lake to Brienz and the mountains beyond, fulfilled the best expectations of Swiss hotels. The location, the hospitality and the programme were all thoughtfully arranged.

On Monday October 6th, the Congress was opened by Christian Kiefer of the BRB, and he was followed by Eng. Sergio Rodriguez Zubieta from the "Tren del Fin del Mundo" on Tierra del Fuego in Argentina. Eng. Zubieta spoke of the recent work done by this steam tourist railway on Tierra del Fuego at the southern tip of South America in improving efficiencies in labour use, maintenance and consumables in their operation, in part through the adoption of suggestions from the respected Argentine steam locomotive engineer Livio Dante Porta, who sadly died earlier in 2003.

He was followed by David Morgan of FEDECRAIL, who spoke on "Challenges for the 21st Century". He identified the four principal threats to tourist railways as being increased safety legislation, insurance costs, environmental lobbies and increasing operating costs. The opportunities for tourist railways include better cooperation between competing tourist attractions, the regeneration opportunities for localities with tourist railways, and the latest innovations in steam operation.

The next speaker, Heimo Echensberger of the Association of German Museum and Tourist Railways, continued on the theme of modern steam innovations. His analysis identified steam's strengths and weaknesses, with the strengths including its appeal to the gener-

al public, and its potential for more power than is available from a diesel of similar size. Weaknesses include its perception as an outdated technology, the infrastructure needed for water supply, and the limited production runs for new steam locomotives, with consequent higher purchase costs than for a standard diesel locomotive.

A presentation after lunch on the first day by members of the 5AT project showed the design work done to date to construct a totally new steam locomotive of the same physical size as a BR Standard Class 5MT locomotive of the 1950's, but utilising the latest developments in steam technologies. Features of the design include high speed capability, simplicity in maintenance and servicing, low fuel consumption (diesel or gas oil), low water consumption, and an enhanced crew environment. However, sceptics point out that the design is not double-ended, and the water-troughs and turntables needed for operation over a substantial rail network have long gone.

For a more limited, but operational, experience with modern steam technologies the day concluded with a ride on the Brienz Rothorn Bahn behind locomotive no 14. This is one of the new rack steam locomotives built in the last few years by SLM Winterthur. These locomotives are one-person operated, run on light oil which gives excellent emission characteristics, have fully insulated boilers to maintain steam pressure over several hours, and include electric pre-heaters and sealed, maintenance-free roller bearings for axles and drive rods. The ability of the design to push two lightweight coaches with nearly 100 passengers up gradients of 1 in 4 at 12 km/h was well demonstrated as we surged up the mountainside from Brienz. An early-season snowfall had closed the line beyond Planalp, the halfway point on the line, but the wonderful sunset views over the lake and the mountains of the Berner Oberland as we climbed higher, together with coffee and schnapps at Planalp, adequately made up for

any disappointment at not reaching the summit of the Rothorn.

The morning of Tuesday October 8th was devoted to ships. Michael Lohnherr, CEO of the Saxon Steam Navigation Company, spoke of that company's operations based at Dresden, serving over 90 kilometres of the River Elbe with a fleet including nine historic steam paddleships. One of these is still coal-fired. He was followed by Roger Waller, the CEO of DLM, who spoke on "Modern Marine Steam Engines with Remote Control". Noting that there are still fourteen active steam paddleships in Switzerland, including the Blumlisalp on Lake Thun, he described the recent conversion of the Montreux for the CGN on Lake Geneva. Originally a steamer, the Montreux was converted and ran as a diesel-electric paddleship between 1961 and 1997 before her recent conversion back to steam. With remote control of the engine room from the bridge, staff savings are possible, and the advantages of steam are enhanced. These advantages, as enumerated by

Mr Waller, include longevity, silence, peak power availability, high reliability, quick reversing – and the attractiveness to the passenger who can safely and cleanly view the machinery.

The afternoon included presentations on steam in India, and a closing session. It was agreed to establish a Committee to study the feasibility for a worldwide tourist train organisation, and to convene the committee at York in the spring of 2004. The committee would also determine when and where to hold the Second World Congress.

Those who attended the Congress found it a very worthwhile opportunity to meet others involved in the same business, and to learn more about the current opportunities and developments in steam operation. It seemed only appropriate that the First Congress should be held in Switzerland – a major tourist destination since the commencement of the tourism industry in Victorian times, and a country with many opportunities to experience steam, both on rail and on water.



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