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George Hoekstra

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the dozen or so members who have taken the time and trouble to write to me, expressing their regrets about my decision to step down as Your Own Correspondent of "Swiss Express". I am really most grateful for your kind comments. Also, in recognition of my efforts, the committee has awarded me Honorary Membership of the Society! I promise you, that I will continue to write occasional articles about topics that I hope will be of interest to you. As we say in Switzerland: Merci vielmal!!

George M. Hoekstra

A TALE OF 1000KM & 1000M AN UPDATE

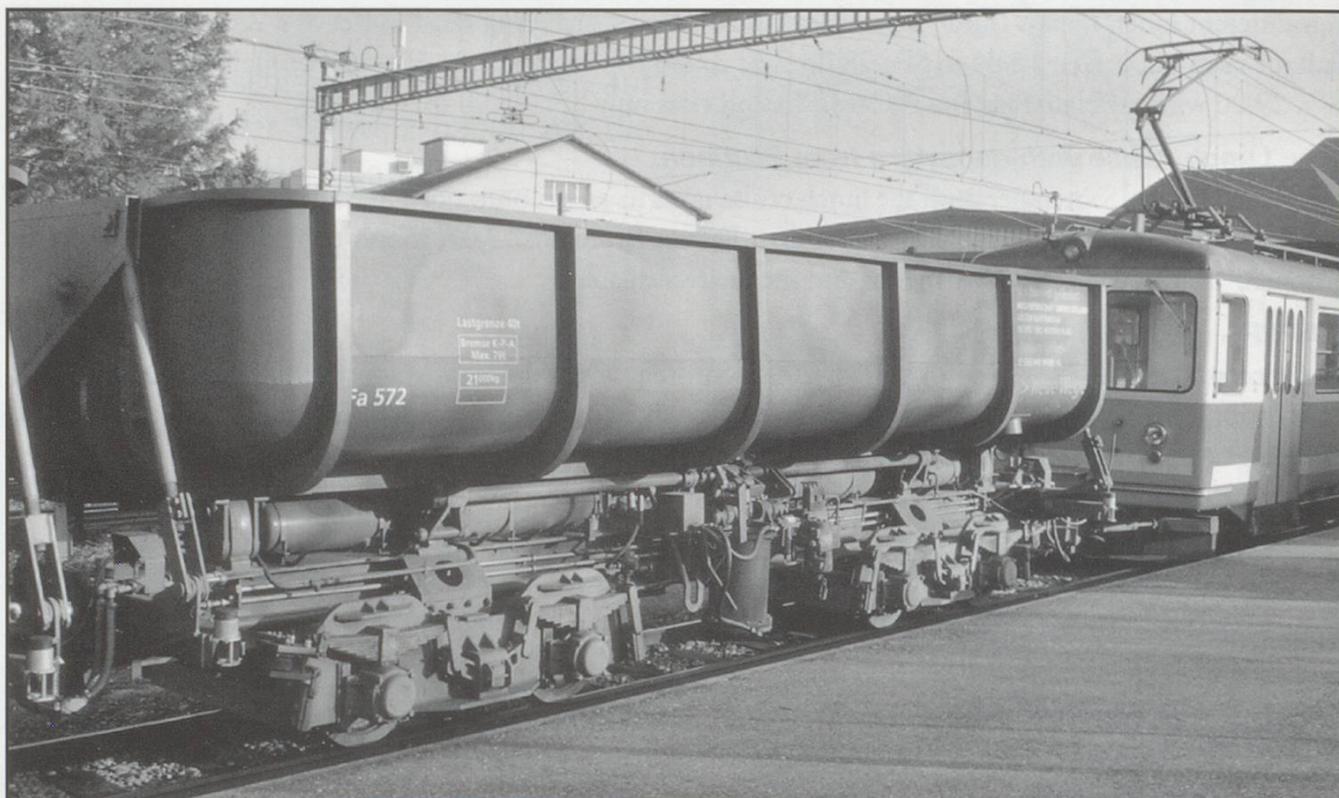


PHOTO 1: The gravel train, caught early in the morning waiting for departure at Täuffelen. Three of these converted hoppers are sandwiched between two older railcars, which are controlled together from either of the cabs. After the arrival of the modern Stadler stock, these railcars were no longer required for passenger use. The 50 mm (two inches) added on each side to the width of the bogies for the conversion from 900 mm to metre gauge are barely noticeable. The hoppers only open on one side - the other one.

ALL PICTURES IN THIS ARTICLE: George Hoekstra

A few weeks ago, a colleague and I had the opportunity to visit the gravel transport operation between Finsterhennen and Sutz on the asm (Aare Seeland Mobil) metre gauge railway. A short notice on this freight transport appeared in the June 2003 issue of Swiss Express. A mistake was made in the title, mentioning 100 mm, which messed up the "clever" title of 2 x 1000! Metre gauge, of course, is 1000 mm. The article highlighted the 900 mm gauge "Einseitenkastenkipper" single side hoppers

from the Lausitzer Bergbau in the ex-GDR, partly rebuilt in Meinigen and re-gauged to 1000 mm at the asm works. The Seeland region is very rich in gravel deposits. Several of the owners have pooled their extraction rights in the areas of Finsterhennen, Siselen and Treiten in order to operate more efficiently and ecologically: a lot of diesel fuel can be wastefully burnt by inefficiently operated plant. The combined pits are expected to yield about 4 million tons of "raw" material. This will be

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Not available on VHS.

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Also available on VHS (BP 941) £ 14,25, playtime about 50 min.

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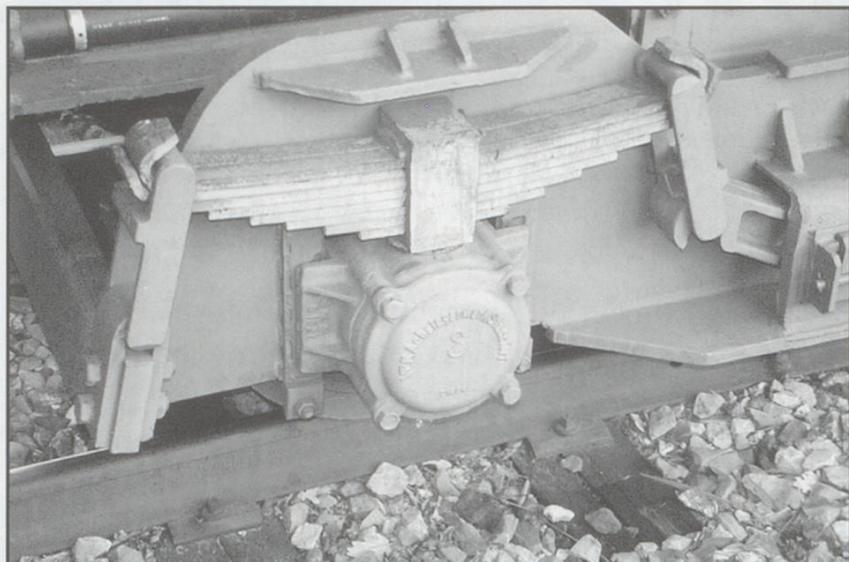


PHOTO 2: The ex-GDR origin of the hoppers manifests itself on the covers of the bearing-boxes: VEB (Volks-Eigenen Betrieb = peoples factory) Achslagerbetrieb (=axle-bearing factory) Stass / Tübingen. One of the new, longer, traverse carrier beams can be seen on the bottom left.

extracted over a period of about 25 years, so we are talking about quite a large operation. With innovative ideas, the railway managed to win the transport contract. It has made the asm one of the largest freight operators on the metre gauge. The alternative for this gravel to be transported on the road for all these years to the works at Sutz, where it is crushed and sorted, would be unthinkable. The road is only a narrow two-lane one and goes right through the middle of several small villages. The asm deserves a lot of credit for coming up with this innovative solution that has made the whole operation economically viable. By using existing resources wherever possible and adapting second-hand equipment for everything else, costs were kept low. If all the equipment had

been bought new, it would have been far too expensive. Only the two spurs at Finsterhennen and Sutz had to be purposely built for the operation. The Confederacy paid 46 % of the total cost of almost 4 million Francs for these tracks. The operation is described in the photo texts. I would like to thank Mr. Christian Ege of asm for his help in arranging this visit and access to the various sites for us. I must stress that these sites, as well as the railway itself, are all private property and members of the public must not trespass upon them. Industrial sites like gravel pits and crushing and grading works are very dangerous places, where large loaders and lorries run around at speed. They do not expect anybody to be wandering around on foot. Both of us are professional railway journalists, we wore high-visibility clothing and made sure everybody was informed of our presence by radio-link, before we even set foot on the site.

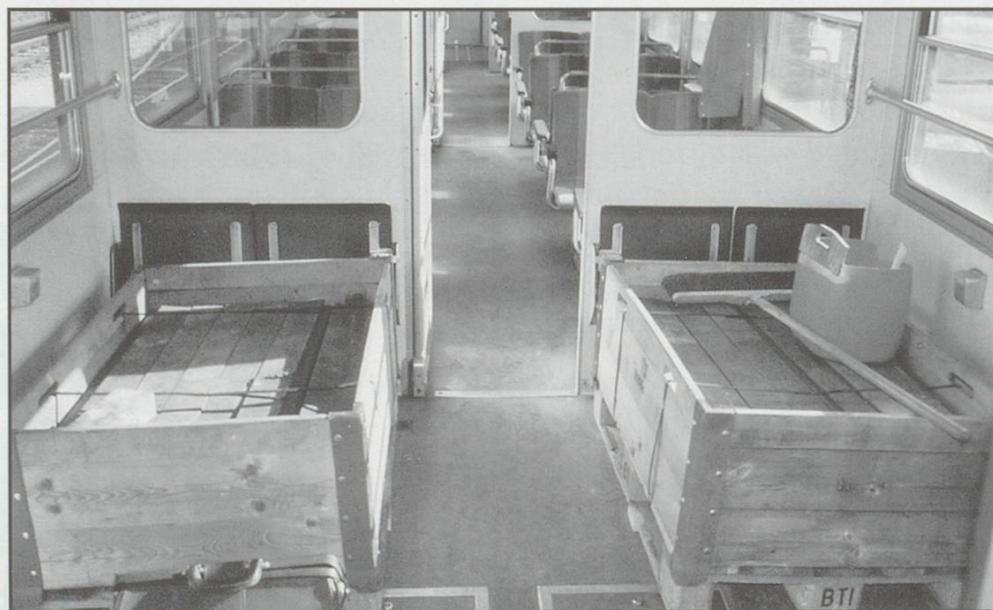


PHOTO 3: In order to get maximum effort out of the otherwise empty railcars, two pallet-boxes filled almost to the brim with tightly packed rail sections stand in the front and the back, right on top of the motor bogies. As this is Switzerland, a broom, together with a brush, pan and a bucket is provided to sweep away the gravel dust. And they use it: look how clean the floor is!



PHOTO 4V: The train standing on the loading spur laid into the gravel-pit at Finsterhennen. This is the opening side of the hoppers. A translation of one of the slogans on the side reads: 'gravel has a future - and so has rail transport!' Before loading commences, the overhead wires are switched off by the driver. The bunting is just there to warn drivers of the loader not to pull them down! The driver of the big loader, who is the only other person on site apart from the driver, needs only four dumps of his huge shovel to fill up one of the hoppers. As this is not a TGV, the open hoppers can be loaded with two humps above the rim. After loading is completed, the driver switches the current to the catenary back on, gets into the cab at the other end, informs the dispatcher by radio and sets off. As there is only one train at a time on the spur, it can freely move about as required for loading. Access to the main line is controlled in the normal way by a signal.

PHOTO 5: The train on the steepest slope on the run: I in 37!! We were in the cab on one of the runs and going up this slope, for the few minutes it took to reach the top, the needle on the ampere-meter was quite close to the maximum. There is a signal as well on this slope, but as all trains have radio contact with the controller at Täuffelen, every effort is made not to stop the gravel-train at this location! So far, it only happened once. The train did manage to start off again, but it did tax the two elderly railcars to the very limit!

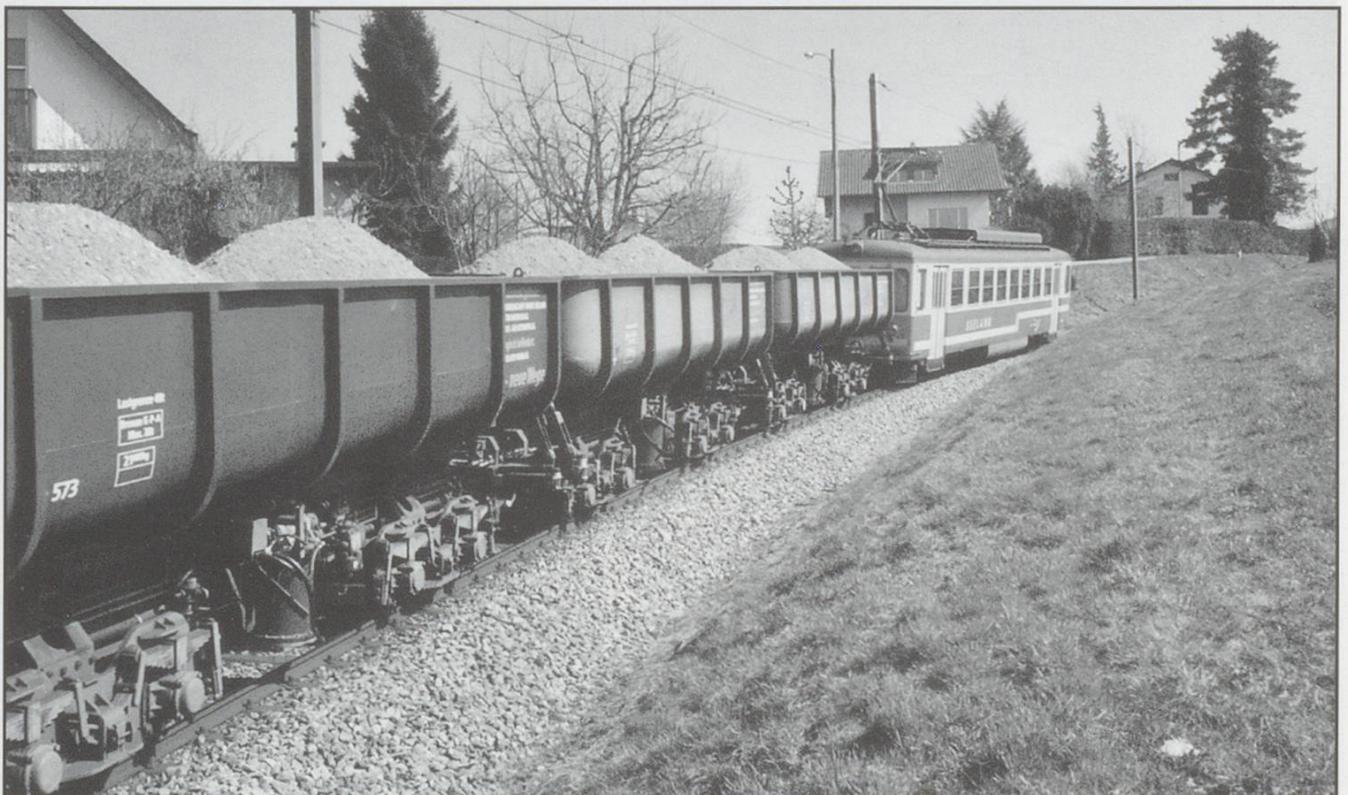




PHOTO 6: The train waits at Täuffelen to let a faster passenger service pass. The text on the side of the hopper translates into: 'gravel extracted with care is ecologically transported by Aare Seeland Mobil. New ways! (to do things)'.

PHOTO 7: The end of the line: the hoppers are unloaded at the works at Sutz. The driver of the train can be seen operating the hoppers by handheld controller. He gets instructions on the radio from the works supervisor about exactly where to unload. No extra staff are needed. After the unloading process is completed, he informs the supervisor by radio, walks to the railcar on the other end and informs the rail dispatcher he is leaving the site. When the train gets back to the main line, access is again controlled in the normal way by a signal.

