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TRAVEL IN ANOTHER CENTURY

Fred describes a trip from a bygone age

Under the heading of believe it or not the following might make interesting reading, or at least raise some interesting thoughts about the exchange rate. It dates back to when I used to take small groups to the Oberland for perfectly normal holidays in the fifties but managed to keep them mostly rail based. There was also the little matter of the willing co-operation of a fellow conspirator in the form of the late Hans Mossimann, owner of the Hotel Krone in Spiez who I had trained well.

Incredible as it might sound the 10 days from Liverpool Street platform and return could be done for £ 55.00 inclusive. This was a really inclusive price in that it covered cabins on the ferries, meals on the trains and at the resort, and an area season ticket for the Oberland plus some francs as spending money. The enclosed might give a clue as to how it was done. Needless to say the bonus was that I made a profit on the deal and got a free holiday.

The itinerary went roughly as follows:

Friday evening meet at Liverpool Street for the Hook Continental, go on board the ferry at Harwich, dump luggage in cabin and then have what is now referred to as a "Welcome Drink" in the bar.

Saturday. Find reserved seats in the Lorelei Express and then to the NS dining car for breakfast; lunch being taken on the DSG car at time convenient to the crew. Arrival at Spiez was around 7.30 p.m. to be met at the station by hotel porter complete with trolley for luggage. At the hotel Hans would have a delectable meal waiting as a fine introduction to Swiss hospitality, and after that hand out the paperwork, area seasons, provisional itinerary, and a local guide for those who wanted to go it alone, etc.

Sunday. An organised trip to Bern with a "tageskarte" for getting around and a gentle amble round the old town, lunch being taken on the Gurten while Bern was admired from on high.

The rest of the week was for all the usual trips in the area, the destination being chiefly dictated by weather conditions; no good going up the Niesen in pouring rain or heavy cloud! The only exception was one day reserved for an organised trip to Luzern, via the Brünig of course, for a wander around the old town and over the Bridge. Surprising how long the latter took, anything up to an hour as all the paintings were studied and translations of many of the scripts provided. If you wanted a museum visit or lake steamer trip, that was extra. Needless to say another exception was the Jungfrau; anybody who wanted to go there had to pay the surcharge.

As to food, a packed lunch could be provided on request at no charge and dinner was arranged in the station restaurant at Spiez where a good Swiss meal was guaranteed and I could be assured of having no complaints. It also meant I could have a chat with the BLS crews eating there to catch up on the latest railway news.

Sunday. This was arranged as a grand finale with a slight overdose of alpine scenery following the now usual circuit via Domodossola and Locarno. This was of course spiced up with the information that they were about to travel through all three major alpine tunnels during the day, part of which would be in Italy which they had never expected as a bonus country; that spiel always went down well. Those were the days when the Rhone glacier was a lot more impressive than it is today and with the FO using the old line via Gletsch presented a fairly spectacular sight.

Monday. Return by Lorelei with lunch and dinner on the train, then night ferry to Harwich and breakfast on the train to Liverpool Street.

I never had any trouble finding customers for these trips, probably because of the free and easy suit yourself atmosphere; either stick with the group or go it alone. With a few exceptions it was all paid for and some of the shops even gave the groups discounts on their souvenirs. I never actually lost a guest but occasionally one might get temporarily misled through wandering off unannounced to a toilet or becoming too entranced with a view.

A bonus for me was to watch some of the reactions such as in Bern where for the first time they met trams that did not rattle or crawl along in a series of lurches, and of course in those days they were liable to be surprised by a train running down the middle of the street en route to Solothurn. Intragna on the

Centovalli generally produced a few shocked looks when I pointed out the spindly bridge they were about to pass over. The introduction of newcomers to rack railways could also prove entertaining, there they were in what they took to be a normal train, then suddenly the front end started to aim for the sky at an ever increasing angle that was most unnatural and raised the question "Should we panic?" I leave it up to you to imagine the comments when they first saw the Niesen funicular.

All that for £55.00, and for me never a dull moment. Anybody care to hazard a guess when this was?

Note from Editor- I have a question: was Herr Mossimann of the Hotel Krone a relative of Anton Mossimann, the world famous chef? Another interesting question would be how much would this trip cost now?



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Two views of the new bls Regio-Express between Bern and Luzern. Above, ex SBB Re4/4 IIII0 leads a typical set above and below the driving trailer leads the set. Both photos © bls. Much more on this in the next issue.

