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FROM GREEN TO WHITE

David reprises an earlier holiday but at a different time of year



ALL PICTURES IN THIS ARTICLE TAKEN BY DAVID BAKER.

LEFT: Fasnacht Group revelling in Luzern on 24.02.04.

BELOW: Icing on the couplings at Luzern Hbf on 23.02.04.

NEXT PAGE TOP: Trogenerbahn 21 heads up the road towards Speicher on 24.02.04.

NEXT PAGE BELOW:

Appenzellerbahn driving trailer entering Gais from Appenzell on 24.02.04.

In summer 1996 I had what I described later in *Swiss Express* as "My dream fulfilled". This was a ten-day holiday in a green Switzerland exploring its railways.

Eight years on and I had the urge to revisit some of the places again, but this time to see them in snowy conditions. I managed to obtain a pass out from the "Lady of the House" and with Kursbuch to hand set out to plan a five-day itinerary in February. The plan was to use the darker hours at both ends of the day for travelling from, and returning to, a base at Luzern giving a chance to see and, hopefully, photograph the places and railways only to date seen in the green. Once again my brother offered to accompany me and we chose a First Class Saver Program Swiss Flexi Pass taking 5 days out of the allocated month as a cheaper option than either the 4 day pass plus "pay as you go" for a day or the 8 day pass. This offered a 15% discount for two persons travelling together.

Day One had to give sufficient time to visit the second-hand bookshop at the rear of Luzern Station and to book-in

at our hotel at a reasonable hour. However, after a four o'clock rise, when we arrived at Manchester Airport at 0600 hrs our plans were immediately shattered, the 0830 departure had been put back to 0955 and we finally left the ground at 1020 hrs. Our pilot informed us that a flash snowstorm at Basel had delayed the flight to Manchester, but at least we knew that there was some snow about, although on landing at 1315 there was little to be seen at Basel. The Kursbuch was needed already and a more direct route was planned to Luzern via Burgdorf and Langnau. The bookshop was disappointing and I found only one item to purchase, before signing in at the hotel and looking for somewhere to eat. Not as straightforward as we thought! The centre of Luzern was packed with revellers celebrating *Fasnacht*-a Shrovetide Festival, and





fancy costumes and musical instruments abounded in the streets, apart from those who also packed out the restaurants. We finally managed to dine, before rejoining the revellers at the lakeside. And then to bed!

After an early breakfast we set out on a very cold Shrove Tuesday morning for St Gallen in order to visit the Appenzell area. I had never been up to Trogen and we joined the Trogenerbahn up to the terminus. In fine, cold weather we then walked back down to Speicher, ready to catch the next down train. There was no stock showing in the workshops area, a disappointment! A quick snack was taken in St.Gallen and then we joined the narrow-gauge Appenzeller Bahn, heading for Gais. On the



THIS PAGE TOP: Transports publics fribourgeois and formally GFM RABde 537 171 La Sarine at Bulle on 26.02.04.

way a shunting reversal was made at Teufen in order to pick up the Bibliothekswagen (Library) to be taken up to Gais. I had my first sighting of a new Appenzeller Bahn livery as we waited for the next trains to Appenzell and on to Wasserauen. Snow levels were good at Wasserauen, but apart from the Ebenalp chair-lift all seemed to be closed. So in a slight snowfall we headed back down to Herisau and the standard gauge lines. Our next stop was Rapperswil for an evening meal and we joined the Voralpen Express, arriving with time for a walk around the 13C wall and to see the sun set on Schloss Rapperswil. In a pleasant, but packed restaurant we were surprised by the entry of a small but noisy, musical group celebrating *Fasnacht*. The main celebration was in full swing back at Luzern with many colourfully dressed bands starting a mass parade in Bahnhofstrasse. It was bitterly cold as they set off over Seebrücke toward Rathausquai. We eventually adjourned to the hotel for a warm-up and the odd drink before a late bedtime.

Graubünden was planned for Day 3 and with little time for delay on the way we changed at Arth-Goldau, giving us just enough time to look across the platforms at the ARB railcars at the end of the station before our train for Göschenen arrived. An FO-liveried railcar was waiting there to take us up to Andermatt. Here we had 20 minutes, time for a few photographs and then up the famous slopes to Nätschen and Oberalppasshöhe on the way to a changed Disentis. I found both the new MGB identity and the new station roof at Disentis/Mustér very acceptable; the photos I had seen possibly came from disgruntled photographers who looked for poor results, I am usually the one who prefers the old ways. The RhB took us on to Reichenau-Tamins and up to a changing Filisur. Does nothing stay the same anymore? However, not everything had changed yet, we still had to wait for the up-going train to depart in order to “Überschreiten der Gleise”, still not “Verboten” here. The new track extension



Chemins de fer du Jura GTW 633 arrives at Le Noirmont from Tavannes on 27.02.04, the final day of the trip.

now reaches a certain well-known hotel. Our next planned halt was at Klosters, packed to the brim with dreaded skiers, snowboarders and their equipment and our first class passes proved most valuable on the run down to Chur and our chosen restaurant. We returned to a ghostly quiet Luzern in the dark, a markedly different place from the two previous nights.

A dull start on the Thursday and we were away early at 0734 hours on the SBB narrow-gauge Brünig line bound for Interlaken, from where we made a snappy change for Spiez. The downside of Swiss transport connections is that they don't allow much in the way of time for photography. It was still murky and snowing when we arrived at Zweisimmen to change to the MOB, but we did manage a few photographs in the falling snow. Our next planned stop was at Gstaad and we caught the "local" which terminated at this posh resort. Time for a coffee before rolling on in the snow to Montbovon and a train headed by GFM

liveried railcar No.151, waiting patiently when we arrived. Again no time to hang about and we were heading for Bulle and the unknown. We had the time to walk around the town centre and find a restaurant for a further coffee break before joining a standard gauge railcar in the TPF livery, plus tanker and goods wagon. It appears that another change of company name has overtaken the GFM, which is now part of *Transports publics fribourgeois*, in a not very distinguished livery. We now had an interesting 20 minutes in conversation with a lady, of seventy years or so, who spoke only French, even though living relatively close to a German speaking area. My 50 years plus schoolboy French was stretched to its limits but with occasional assistance from two local youths we got by very well. It was now getting on towards dusk as we returned via Bern to Luzern.

Our final day dawned brightly as we left the hotel, after settling our account, to catch the 0746 for Olten. We had decided to visit the Jura region on our way back to Basel Air-

port and our connections at Olten, Bern and Neuchâtel went to plan as we looked forward to a short break at La Chaux-de-Fonds, prior to our final narrow gauge railway trip on the Chemins de fer du Jura. We played a sort of railway leapfrog by getting on and off at Le Noirmont and Saignelégier on our way to join the SBB at Glovelier, enjoying the finest weather we had all the week. Leisure maps at the stations showed the cross-country ski-runs, *Langläufe*, in the area. This exercise looks far more appealing to me than pitching oneself down a mountainside and then having to go back up to do it again. However, it seems a few years too late! Finally, then, the SBB took us to Delémont and Basel Hauptbahnhof before the bus run to the airport and our flight home to a snowy Manchester.

What conclusions have I drawn from this trip? The statistics show that with careful planning a great deal of ground can be covered using a Swiss Pass. We had travelled some 1160 miles in what was barely four full days and utilised a dozen different railway companies from one side of Switzerland to the other. The opportunities for photography were limited to station locations because of the time on board trains and the modern air-conditioning in many carriages. Where opening windows were available it was too cold and draughty for any other passengers for me to use in most cases. However, I thoroughly enjoyed the short visit and envy the contributors who seem to spend a larger amount of their time in this lovely country. Who knows, another eight years?



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