

Zeitschrift:	Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber:	Swiss Railways Society
Band:	- (2005)
Heft:	[1]
 Artikel:	Gotthard memories : John shares some of his vast slide collection with us
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DOI:	https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-854819

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GOTTHARD MEMORIES

John shares some of his vast slide collection with us



One of the Re 460 locos in advertising livery nears the end of its journey over the Gotthard at Silenen, only a few minutes from Erstfeld. This is one of the easier locations to reach, almost alongside the main road and with a bus stop only a few metres away from the side road leading to a bridge. Another bridge, seen ahead of the train, also gives some photo opportunities, although these have decreased in the last few years with more building work.

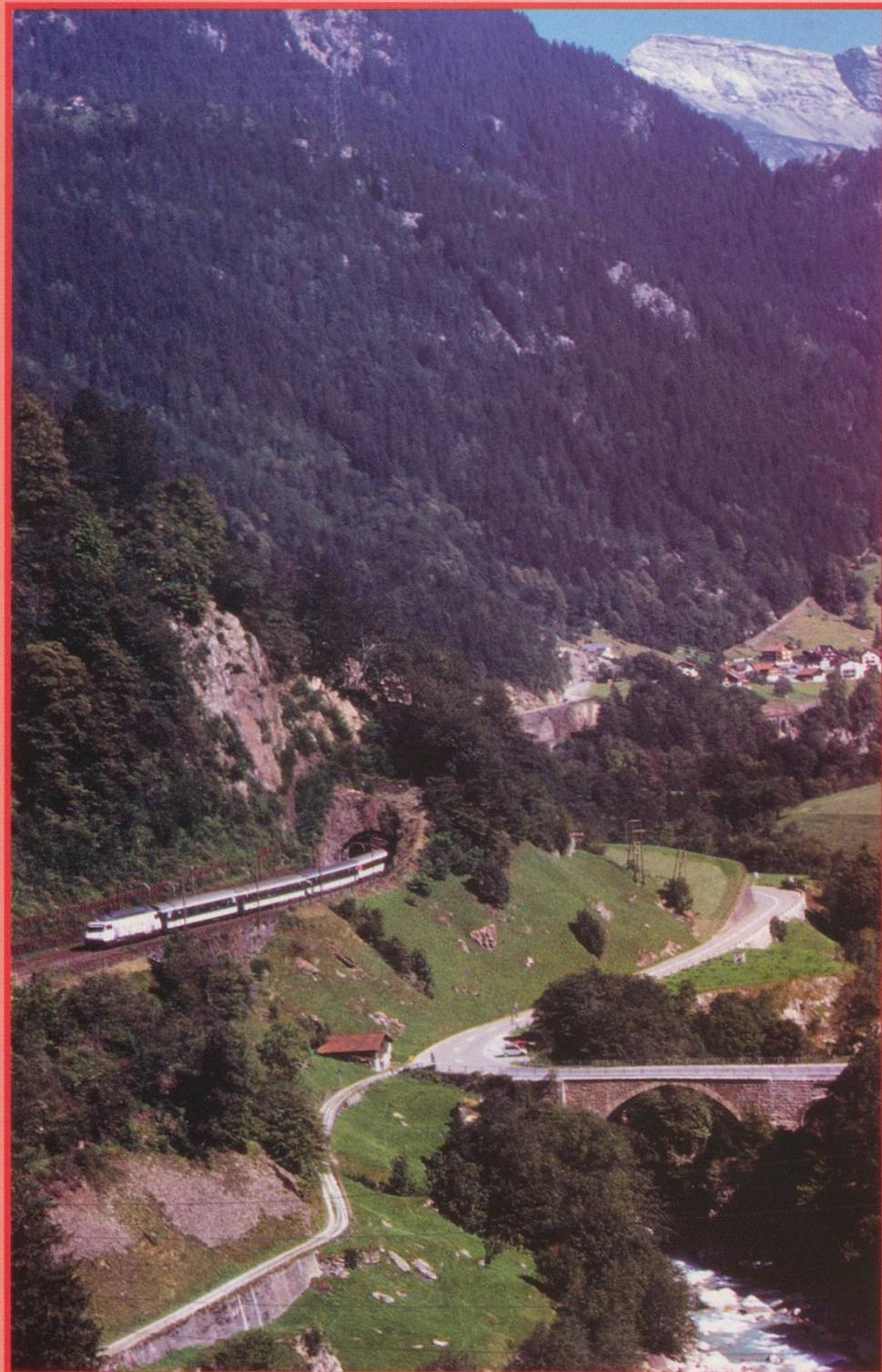
ALL THE PICTURES IN THIS ARTICLE ARE BY JOHN JESSON. IF BRANCH ORGANISERS WOULD LIKE TO PRESENT THE SLIDE SHOW THEN PLEASE CONTACT JOHN VIA THE EDITOR.

A friend introduced me to the Gotthard in 1966. In those days, things were a little different from what they are now. No motorway, car trains through the tunnel and what can now be considered as vintage locomotives and rolling stock. In the next 20+ years, I revisited the line several times, but never to record it in detail. Whether it was the announcement of the building of a base tunnel, or some other prompt, I do not know, but I got the urge to see the Gotthard in more detail than the trains offered.

Slowly I have built up a collection of slides of both the railway and the surroundings. This has been made much easier by the abandonment of the local train services and their replacement by hourly bus services on both ramps. The buses stop more frequently, giving a direct service to good starting points for a day's walking and photography. They are also

there when staggering back to the main road having done, perhaps, a bit too much in a day.

One aspect I had never considered was what I would do with all these pictures. Never, that is, until I was stuck for another talk for the Bath & Bristol branch. For several years, Roger Ellis has invited me to give illustrated talks on my wanderings. Up until now, these have been nostalgic in character, covering the 60's and 70's in (mainly) Britain, Austria, Germany and Switzerland. They included a number of instances of locomotives and stock now long gone and of steam in everyday use. Inevitably, the stage has been reached where many of the photographs I could show could well have been taken just a short time ago, even though they may have been taken 20 years in the past, as they show vehicles still in use today.



Between Intschi and Gurtnellen, the main road crosses the river Reuss. The bus stops at the corner, from where a path leads steeply uphill to Dangel. This view of the start of the path and the railway can be seen from one of the hairpins. One of the more recently applied advertising liveries is carried by the Re 460 working a southbound passenger train, seen emerging from the 88m Intschi tunnel. The path offers several other railway views before climbing further to Ober Gurtnellen.

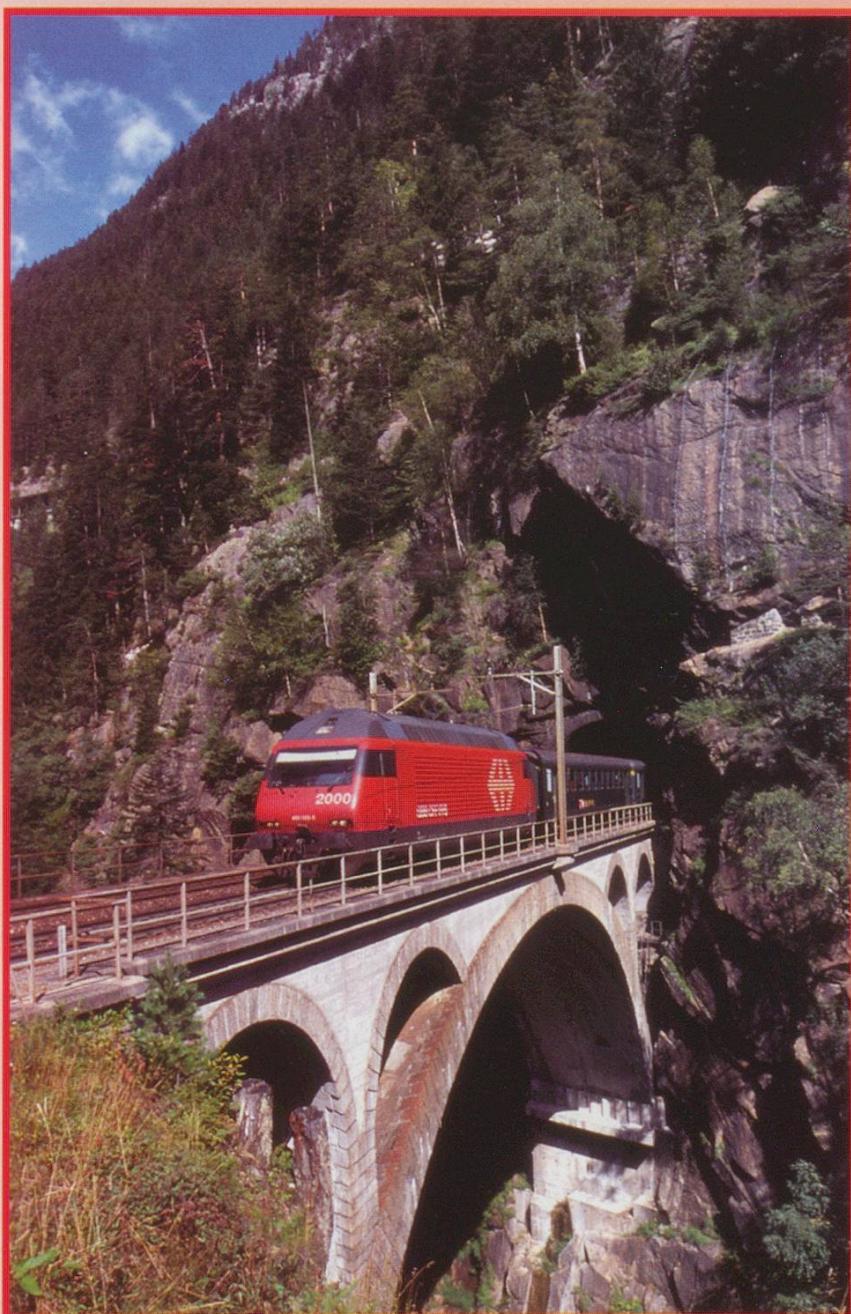
more than a single route through the mountains. There are all sorts of places that are within easy reach of the main valley, and well worth a visit. Public transport, either bus, funicular or cable car, runs to most of them; the rest are accessible by walking. Once I started, I realised there were a number of possible "side trips" I would need to take, as well as finding some of the more esoteric vantage points from which to photograph the railway. The third factor is leading me to revisit some previously-used locations to get better shots.

Fortunately, I found that my photographic coverage of the north ramp was already

On reflection, the answer was obvious, and I started putting together a set of Gotthard slides. Three things soon became apparent. First, one set of slides would not be enough, second, my coverage of the route was nothing like as complete as I had thought and, third, many of my existing photographs were little more than snapshots. The number of slides grew, so that two sets became necessary, then four, split north and south ramps, and lower and upper sections. The lack of coverage was, at least in part, because the Gotthard is much

fairly complete, and I managed to finish off pictures for the lower end this year, with the upper end not needing too much to complete. The south ramp needs a little more work. It also needs the Sasso della Boggia cable car to be operating, which it wasn't this summer.

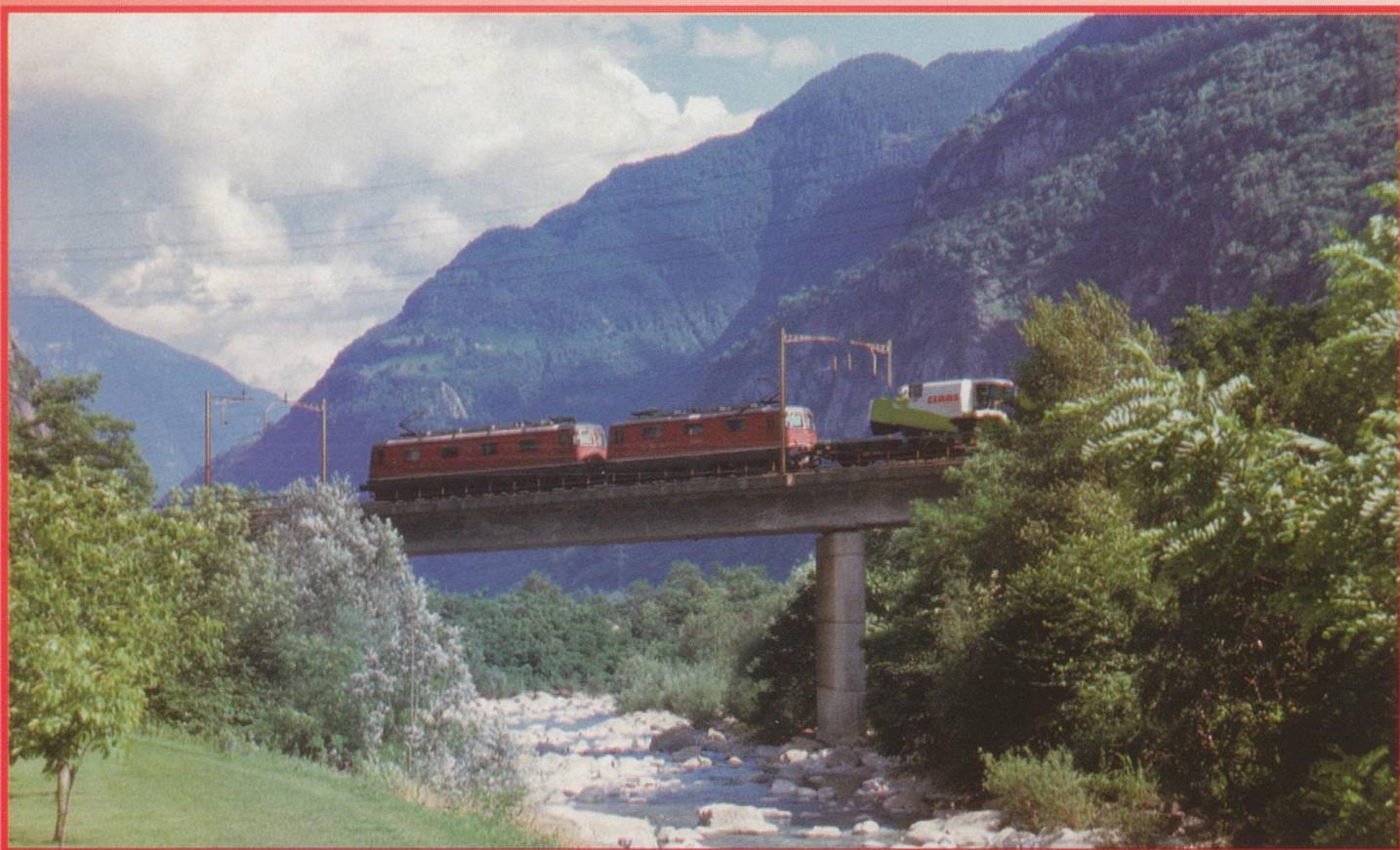
Why, you might ask, am I telling you all this? The answer lies with one of our worthy Presidents, Mr Alan Pike O.B.E. Seldom has the alternative meaning of those initials been more appropriate (Agreed – AJP). I was discussing all this with Alan and he suggested



ABOVE: A northbound freight, hauled by a single Re 460, passes the power station at Pfaffensprung, between Gurtellen and Wassen. At this point, the railway and motorway are at the same height, but on opposite sides of the river. This shot was taken from the path that runs on top of the motorway avalanche shelter. The same motorway has proved both a blessing and a curse - in this case it is a blessing, as the path follows almost entirely the gradient of the road and gives good views of the railway. Access to the path, which runs from Wassen to Gurtellen, is at each end and also at Pfaffensprung.

LEFT: The Meienreuss river, tumbling down from the Susten pass, is crossed three times by the railway in the course of its gyrations at Wassen. This is the bridge at the highest level, with a southbound passenger train emerging from the Leggistein tunnel directly onto the bridge. From Wassen, a road climbs steeply into the Meienreuss valley, and a narrow path leads from one of the hairpins towards the bridge. The path is meant for railway maintenance workers and ends at the railway itself but, as can be seen, offers this view while remaining a safe distance from the line.

writing a short illustrated piece for "Swiss Express", so here it is. Roger has insisted, as the father of the project, that the Bath branch gets the first showing. Quite right, but if any other branch would like to take a trip over the Gotthard, I will try to arrange my shifts to suit.



ABOVE: Approaching Giornico, a southbound freight crosses the river Ticino. Several of the bridges on the southern part of the route have been replaced with rather utilitarian concrete structures. The main road (and bus stop) is a few steps away, and refreshment not much further. Giornico is well worth exploring as it has some rather attractive old stone buildings and bridges, as well as the well-known churches. It also has a secret gem hidden in the vineyards on the opposite side of the river from where I am standing.

BELOW: The Biaschina spirals are to the south ramp what the Wassen loops are to the north. This is the Pianotondo viaduct, on the highest level, with a northbound freight, headed by the usual Re 10/10 power, crossing it. To get to this location requires some stiff uphill walking, as it starts from river level. Although the views are worth it, the location from where I took this shot is not much fun as it is underneath the motorway. There are other viewpoints, though, that are more pleasant. A powerful telephoto lens is essential at most of the locations in the Biaschina to gain the best advantage from them.





ABOVE: A southbound Cisalpino leans into a curve between Rodi and Ambri. The path is an easy one, close to the road, but far enough away not to be disturbed by traffic. I had been relaxing on a grassy bank when the train surprised me. Jumping up, steep bank, tilting train – the end result shows with the angle of the catenary masts. Moral – use a tripod and set up the shot beforehand.

BELLOW: The first of the R.Ticino bridges after leaving the Gotthard tunnel is the Stalvedro bridge, just past Airolo. An Re 10/10 heads a train of bogie open wagons over the bridge and is just about to enter the Stalvedro tunnel. Despite the apparent tranquillity, the motorway is just out of sight at the bottom right of the picture, and I was sitting on a huge pile of rocks on a building site. It's easy to reach, though. Exit Airolo station on the side away from the station building, turn left and keep walking.

