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FALLING FOR THE FALL

Martin and his wife Sue celebrate 25 years together



If you tell someone you holiday in Switzerland they assume you like skiing. You then explain that you go in the summer and invariably they reply dismissively "Oh, I like to go somewhere hot". At this point I think about telling them I've been in Interlaken, Weggis, and even Davos, when the temperature's been in the low-mid 30s (and even higher at Lugano), but then I think it's their loss, let them go to Benidorm, and leave more space for SRS members in the Promised Land.

But it was only last year that the prospect of an *autumn* holiday took hold. The seeds for this had been sown in 1979. Sue and I had got engaged so there was a wedding to be arranged but as Sue was a teacher there were limitations on when a holiday could be taken. December would be cold and grey, and would clash with Christmas; Easter 1980 seemed a long way off so it had to be the autumn half term – the last week of October.

Roll forward 25 years and we were (and are still together – despite understandable concerns that I might be trying to keep Bemo in business single-handed. What in recent years has become an annual Swiss holiday had already been lined up for the summer of 2004. But our Silver

Setting the context and scene for the article on 27th October 1979, Martin planned the article that long ago.. Behind the happy couple a 'proper' bus (RF491 for the benefit of London Area members) – even though it lacks a post-horn.

Martin took all the pictures in this article, other than this one which although organised by Martin was taken by his best man.

Wedding anniversary seemed a good excuse for a second holiday. The only problem – apart from the money – was a concern about the weather. Gerald Savine assured us that he had had good weather in Switzerland in October, so we took the plunge and booked a few nights at the Rossli Hotel in Unterseen – a five minute walk from Interlaken West.

As the plane took off on 23rd October there was a slight air of apprehension. The weather in Birmingham was distinctly average; what would it be like in Zurich? Of course, we needn't have worried. The sun shone and it rapidly became clear that the glorious autumn colours would provide an excuse for rattling through a few more films.

However, there are potential pitfalls with a holiday at this time of the year. Even the Swiss need a holiday; hoteliers, for example, go away in November. During late September and October some of the lake steamers and various "string bahns" begin to close down following the peak summer season. So your itinerary needs to be planned carefully. No problem though if you are content to use normal railway services (even those in mountain areas such as the Jungfrau).

In our case scrutiny of the timetables had revealed that Sunday 24th October would be the last day of the season for the Schynige-Platte Bahn and the only day while we were there when we could travel on Lake Thun. As the ships on Lake Brienz had already finished for



RM 526582 at Thun, 24th October 2004. The modern styling may not have been to everyone's taste at first but the design does 'grow on you'.

the year, and there is nothing more relaxing than a ride on a Swiss lake 'steamer', we opted for Lake Thun.

Even then, the timetable was not very helpful – just a single return working was on offer, starting from Thun at lunchtime. Still it gave us time to explore Thun beforehand which, shamefully, I've not really done over the years – except

when the STI trolleybuses and their associated trailers were on offer! As with many Swiss towns that often appear to be just somewhere to change trains and take the odd photograph at the end of a platform, there are several attractive streets and buildings. It's well worth walking up to the castle, a vantage

point for excellent views across Thun and over towards the Niesen.

By lunchtime it was 'shirt-sleeve' weather. We were near the front of the queue for the boat and even though, as usual, a crowd appeared from nowhere and worked their way on board ahead of us as soon as the gang plank went down, we still got good seats at the front of the

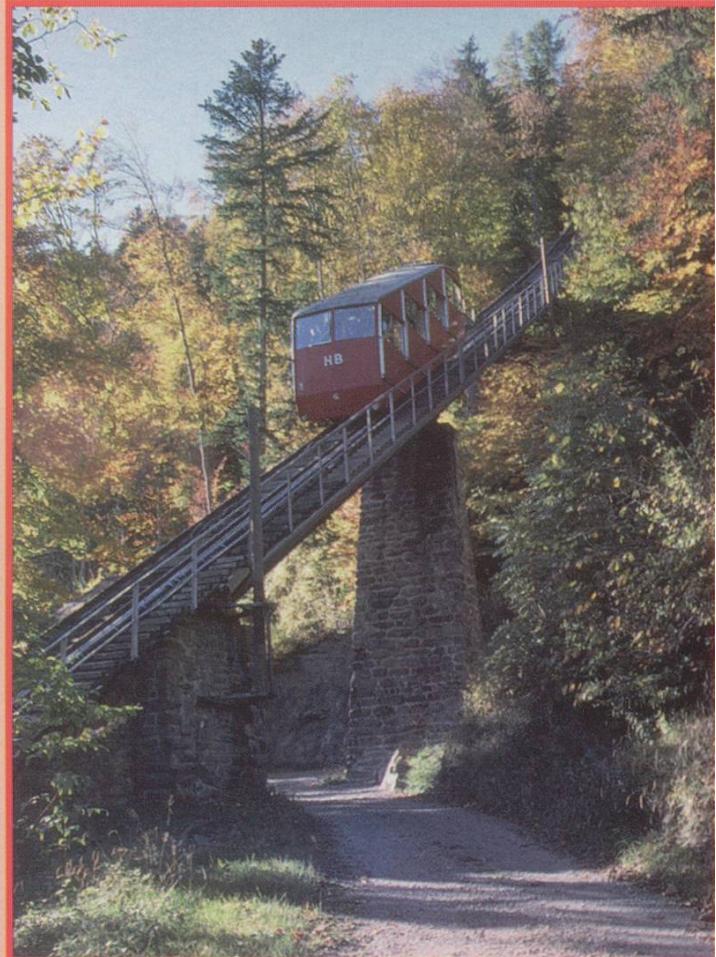
View from the Harder, looking down on the western end of Lake Brienz. 24th October 2004



“Bubenberg” (from memory). We have “done” Lake Thun many times but the journey never palls. The combination of chalets, autumn trees, and distant views of the snow-covered Eiger, Mönch & Jungfrau was a delight.

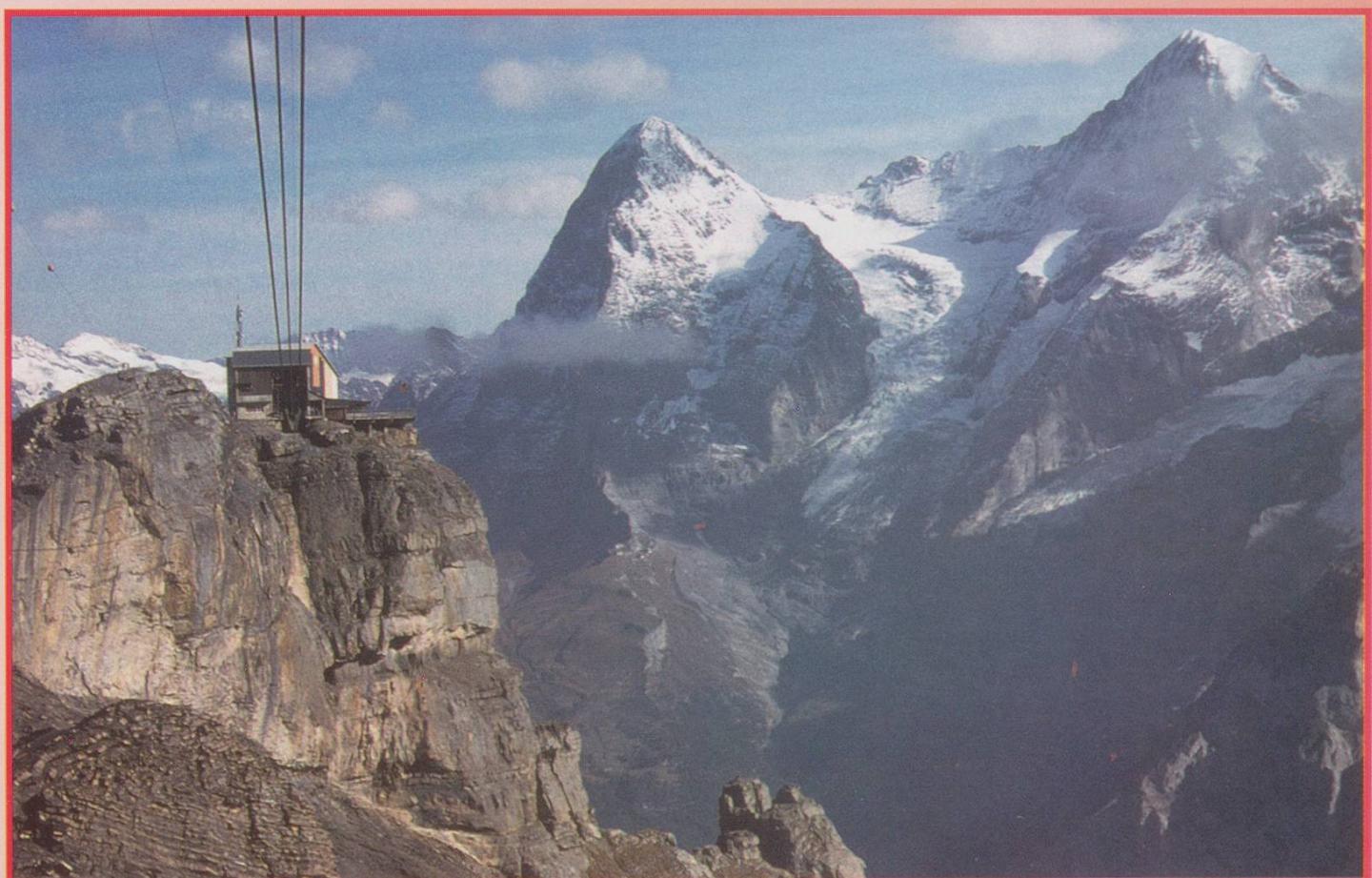
In the afternoon we took the funicular up the Harder. Again, the ‘post-card’ view up the Lütschinetal is one we have seen several times but this time everything was clearer without a summer heat haze. Although we had return tickets we decided on the spur of the moment to walk back down to Interlaken. You don’t need to be Edmund Hillary to do this but good shoes are recommended if – like us – you take the steeper *bergwege* short cuts down instead of the more easily graded *wanderwege*. Much of the walk is in woodland but there are some excellent views out across Ringgenberg and Lake Brienz towards Iseltwald. And there is a good vantage point for seeing the Harder Bahn, just above the passing loop.

The next day was Sue’s birthday so, with the prospect of good weather, we set off for the Schilthorn – a destination Sue had missed out on the last time the family went that way. The



Harder Bahn, near the passing Loop, 24th October 2004

Birg, with the Eiger and Mönch beyond, as seen from a cable car below the Schilthorn, 25th October 2004





Gunten, with the Eiger, Mönch & Jungfrau in the distance, 24th October 2004

first surprise, after leaving the BLM train/tram, was that Mürren seemed like a ghost town. Virtually nothing was open and just a handful of tourists. But it meant the cable cars up to Birg and then the Schilthorn itself were not as congested as trains in the Tokyo rush-hour. There was a bit more snow at the top than in the summer but still very little. As with the Harder, the clearer air under a well-nigh cloudless sky offered an incredible 360-degree panorama.

Returning to Mürren we chose to take the path back to Grütschalp, always a lovely and easy walk. This highlighted one minor problem because of the time of year, however. The shadows soon lengthened and the sun began to go down much sooner than we were used to in summer-time Switzerland.

The following day was wet. Not torrential but the steady light rain one gets in mountain areas from time to time. We opted to go to Lenk – Sue had never been there and it had been almost thirty years since I had. The through journey from Interlaken West to Zweisimmen was made behind BLS Ae4/4 251 in its HAG

livery. In fact I saw this many times during our stay: it has since been withdrawn for preservation. Incidentally, modellers might like to be aware of a shop we stumbled on in Lenk with a display of what seemed to be special adaptations of proprietary models. (I've since found this is included in the SRS list of model shops but for ease of reference, turn right immediately beyond the station building, straight over at a road junction in about 100 yards; the outlet was on the right hand side in about another 150 yards.)

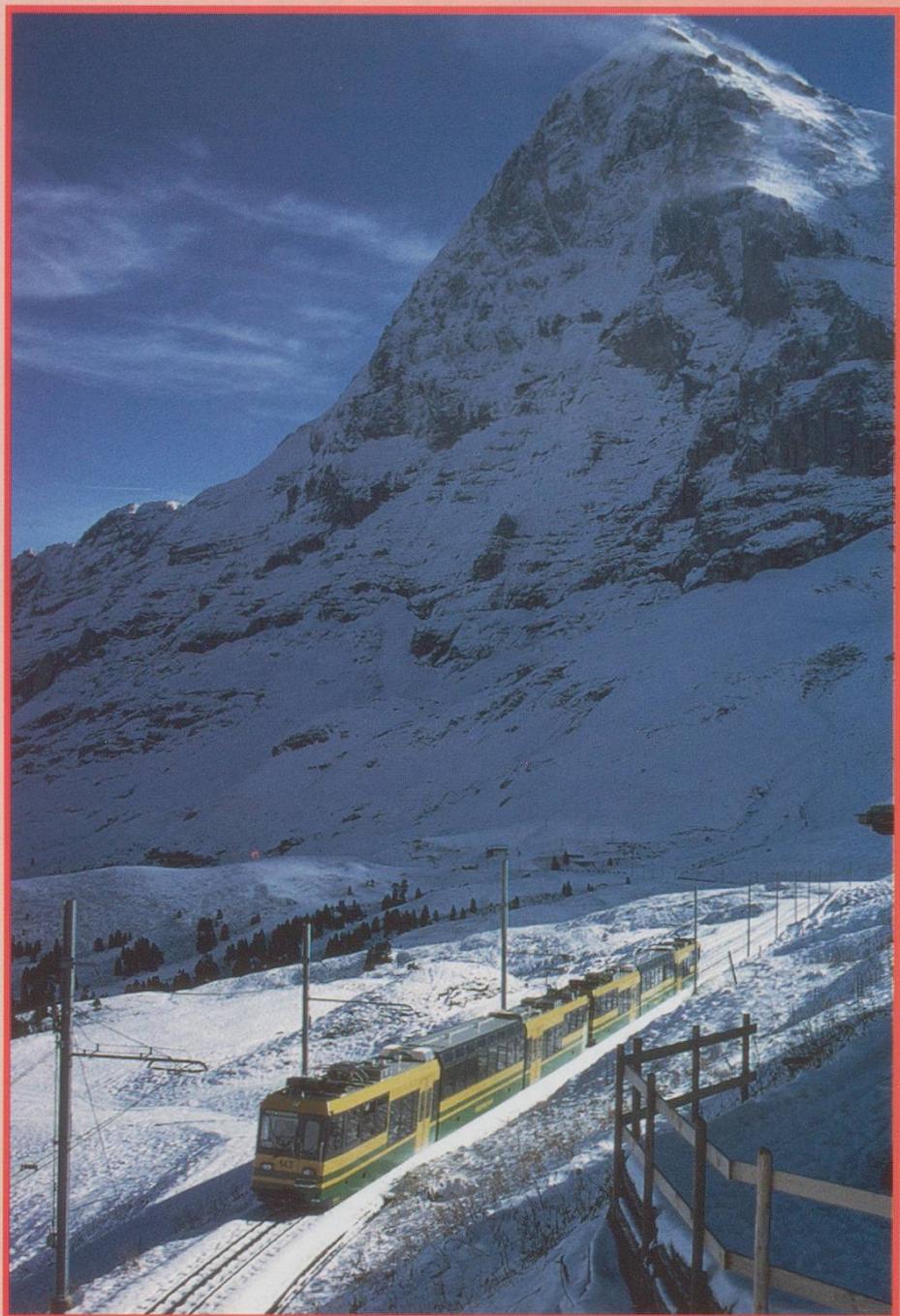
The next day, the 27th, was our anniversary. The weather didn't look too promising to begin with – cloud hanging in the valley – but we had to make the most of it and we hadn't yet renewed our acquaintance with Wengen and Grindelwald. So off we went, and as the train approached Wengen a chorus of 'oohs' and 'aahs' greeted the unfolding scene – brilliant sunshine as the train emerged above the cloud line, and snow at a much lower altitude than two days ago.

We broke our journey at Wengen – is there a view from a parish church anywhere in the world to rival the one here? Then onward and

upward and in no time we had reached the snowline – a dusting at first but by Kleine Scheidegg about three inches. It was bitterly cold, with a wind blowing straight through the station from the Jungfrau direction, but it was all much too interesting to remain indoors. By the side of the awful tepee a young family were busy building the basis of an igloo though either boredom or the need to catch a train put an end to this enterprise.

For 'anoraks' such as myself there was the sight of a pair of new Wengernalpbahn EMUs, 142 and 143. These worked up from Grindelwald and another of the type would later take us down to Grindelwald. Time was when WAB sets would always comprise three carriages on the Lauterbrunnen side and only two on the other. But here was a six-car working for Grindelwald. In accordance with the current fashion in the Swiss rail industry, each carriage seems to have floors and windows at a different height. It must be admitted that the centre cars offer tremendous all-round views though it is disappointing not to be able to lower a window to admit mountain air and take a photograph without the risk of reflections.

While we were staying at Weggis in 2003, the BOB had had its head-on crash at Gsteigwiler. In terms of power cars the two victims had been 305 and 313; both now appeared at Grindelwald, each sporting the new blue-and-yellow livery. Indeed, one or two BOB sets seem now to be wholly in this colour scheme, and most sets seemed to be running as conventional EMUs with a driving trailer (at the Interlaken end). It has to be said that if ever a line was



WAB 143 and 142 begin the descent from Kleine Scheidegg towards Grindelwald, 27th October 2004

suited to orthodox multiple unit working, it is the Berner Oberland Bahn, even though the reduction of photographic opportunities with power cars at the leading end may disappoint some of us anoraks!

Our anniversary was completed on our return to the hotel by flowers and champagne orchestrated by Louise, one of our daughters, on behalf of her brother, sister and maternal grandmother.

Our last whole day in Switzerland began with the Brünig line as far as Brienz and a potter amongst the woodcarving outlets. We followed the road back along the lake-shore to Oberried.



There were also some railway photographs! Presumably bound for Bönigen Works, Ae6/6 11445 "Frauenfeld" brings an empty stock working through Interlaken West on 27th October 2004.



ABOVE: BLS 485003/10 and 14 (plus a DB 185) provide superpower for a freight over the Lötschberg, 26/10/2004. BELOW: Zweisimmen, 26/10/2004. Proof that there is still a bit of freight on the MOB. MOB GDe4/4 6001 in the distance.



At first there are very limited opportunities for photographing the railway but from Eblingen onwards there are some possibilities. By now the sun was out and on returning by train to Interlaken, we then took the postbus up to Habkern, which we had last visited as an engaged couple. Habkern remains remarkably unspoilt despite being so near Interlaken. Plenty of traditional chalets on view and everywhere the sound of cow bells to linger in the mind during the coming winter!

We returned home the next day, stopping off on the way to look round a bit of Bern. This was the first day that we had the sort of gloomy weather we had feared beforehand. But since we had by then had a marvellous few days, we weren't at all worried. The only thing left to worry about, in fact, was how Sue could get the flowers back through airport controls in this post 9/11 world (or 11/9 as it should more correctly be). However, the Swiss authorities were not at all concerned and the flowers remained on display in our home for several days.

So if you have the chance to go to Switzerland in the late autumn, take it. You may find there are some journeys you would like to make but can't, and of course the light does begin to go in the afternoon. But you will see the country in different conditions and without the vast hordes evident in high season.