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DIGITAL RAILWAY PHOTOGRAPHY
Tony Bagwell

Sping Snow at Bernina Suot on 18/05/05.   All Photos: Tony Bagwell.

be all digital, using my new toy a Minolta 7D digital SLR. This has three lenses, a 17-35mm wide angle, a 24-105mm standard and a 75-300mm telephoto. Being a digital camera the focal length of all these lenses gets multiplied by 1.5 because the digital sensor is smaller than a 35mm slide frame. Thus I could cover a range from 25mm to 450mm – this should be enough for most situations. With this high-resolution camera even a 1 gigabyte memory card would only hold about 150 shots, so some other form of storage was needed. Thus my laptop and card reader came on the trip too

Some SRS Members will know that in addition to enjoying and photographing Swiss railways I also present PowerPoint Presentations to raise money for CLIC Sargent, the children's cancer charity. One of these took place on the Friday evening of the 2007 Autumn Event at Kingsbury Episcopi. With photography and railways being joint hobbies I thought that these could link together in an interesting manner for *Swiss Express*.

Wishing to develop up-to-date presentations that covered all of the RhB lines I set off the other summer with my friend Norman Solomon to enjoy both a holiday in the Graubünden and to come back with enough photographs to allow me to put together an interesting sequence on each of the RhB lines, plus the usual "fillers" of scenery, flowers etc. That meant taking a LOT of photos. Having taken slides on previous visits, this time it was to

(thanks Norman – you made a good packhorse). Now I would probably invest in one of the small portable storage devices but at the time they were very expensive.

Thus each day we would set off on our chosen route, camera bag at the ready, batteries charged and two memory cards empty. Many shots were taken from the train window and this is where digital comes into its own. If it's dull, you can up the ISO rating, effectively putting a faster film in your camera. The Image Stabilisation in many digital cameras is a godsend allowing you to take shots at much slower shutter speeds. You can see your results straight away and make any necessary corrections before you take the next set of shots, and you can bang away taking more pictures than with film and then delete the dud ones later. Mind you, if that dud one is a key picture, you can probably recover it when you get home

with whatever software you have (try Photoshop, Elements or CS, and particularly the Shadow/Highlight in Image Adjustment – it works wonders with a bit of fiddling). I took pictures in falling snow, rain and overcast, as well as the bright sunshine. You see, Switzerland is not always like the MITV videos.

As there were no steam or historic specials scheduled during our visit, I cheekily emailed the RhB to see if we could get into the sheds at Landquart letting them know I used the photos for charity. "Yes of course you can" was the reply so one afternoon the two of us had a guided tour into the holy of holies, the historic shed where the two G4/5s were resting – a more atmospheric scene you could not wish for. Then there was the Krokodil, the historic coaches, plus the modern workshops where you could have eaten your lunch off the floor. I was shooting pictures right left and centre. All in all, a great experience. But…on our return to the hotel one of the memory cards wouldn't read.

Normally we returned to the hotel and set the memory card transferring to the laptop whilst we had our meal. All the time we were eating that night, I was racking my brains to think what was different that day. I had taken a lot of photos in the morning on the way to Landquart, and then filled the card up whilst in the sheds and swapped to the second card. Ah, this was perhaps the first time I had completely filled a memory card. I returned to the room and tried again. The photos would show on the LCD screen on the camera, but not read into the lap top. I found one picture that I didn't need and deleted it in the camera. Still no joy. I deleted another, again no success. So with two spare slots on the card, I took a picture out the window, tried again and joy – it read. So be warned, take care if you completely fill a memory card.

My normal technique to sort the photos is to read them every time into the same temporary file. I then use the Windows viewer to look at each one and delete those I do not want to keep. I then set up separate files for each day, and within those, ones for each line or key
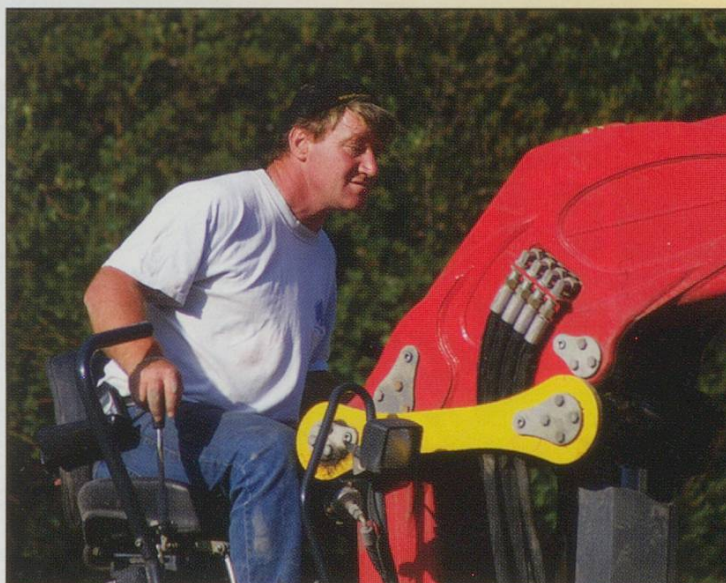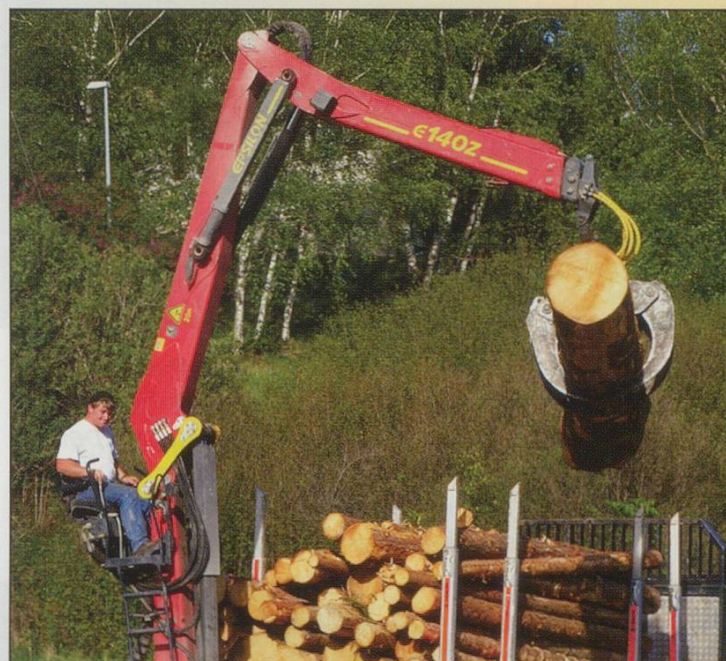
Sequence "Log loading at Tiefencastel on the evening of 19/05/05. The driver arrived with a lorry load of logs. Used its crane to load the rail wagon. Secured the logs and then completed the paperwork."
Only in Switzerland!

Sequence "9am on 19/05/05 at Richenau Tamins. Milk delivered to the station from local farms that morning is loaded by just one person onto a freight train in the station area." Swiss efficiency again, and local produce travelling by an environmentally friendly transport mode.

place. I then "drag" the relevant photos to their respective files, thus gradually emptying the temporary one. In this way, by giving the separate files descriptive names I can combine, say, all the photos for a particular line when I get home. You do not need to date and time your photos because all that information is captured as you press the shutter and stays with the picture, unless you alter the photo later. The final job at the end of each evening was to back up that day's output onto a CD. Only then were the cards put back into the camera and all the photos erased.

Thus I came back with about 2,200 photos, all stored on the laptop and backed up onto CDs. But what to do with them now? What do you do with your photos? Do they sit in a drawer, or album if they're printed? Do you ever look at them? If they're digital, can I recommend you make them into sequences so you and your friends can enjoy them in a better way. I'll explain what I did to the best of those 2,200 photos and you'll see what I mean.

Over a period of time, each was "improved" using Photoshop. Any exposure or colour correction was done, any blemishes removed (I did get a small piece of dust on the sensor whilst changing lenses one

day that resulted in a dark spot showing up in the sky on some images) and finally the image was sharpened if necessary. You may not need this if using a compact digital camera as sharpening is often done as the shot is taken – many bigger SLRs tend not to do this.

I then used a wonderful piece of software called "Pictures to Exe" to make up sets of pictures. Using this, you can group images together, rearrange the order they will be displayed and if you want, easily set them to music or a commentary. The programme can be downloaded from the web at www.wnsoft.com and you can trial it free with up to 10 images. If you want to buy it, the cost is about £16 and that gives you a "key" to allow more than 10 slides to be used. This software is very easy and intuitive to use. It allows you to make sequences that you run through using your mouse buttons, you can set sequences to appropriate music, and you can build fancy screen savers. There is a multitude of "Wipes" to go from one picture to the next, but I would advise about using too many of these as it can make your show very tiring to watch. I tend to stick to simple fades, with the odd special effect between key pictures. You can even convert your sequences to video files that can be copied to DVDs for playing on your TV, though you do loose some definition because your TV is probably not as good as your PC monitor. The beauty of the software is that the results are saved in two ways. Your initial project is saved, but this needs all the photos and music to be on the same computer and in their original locations. But you can "create" a slide show that is completely "stand alone" and that will run on any PC, so you can distribute copies to your friends. They don't need any additional software other than a version of Windows.

So for each line I built up a separate sequence. Firstly, for viewing on a PC monitor, or for use with a digital projector, the resolution of the pictures ideally needs reducing. Pictures to Exe will work with most resolutions, but to keep the final file to a reasonable size, and to aid speed of running, I reduce all my images down to 1024 x 768 pixels. All the slides relevant to that line were added, then sorted into the correct order for a journey along the line, and title slides added as necessary (again made using Photoshop). For a sequence that is going to be talked though, it is then a simple matter of setting the "Project Options" up so that the left mouse button goes forward one picture, the right mouse button back one picture, the fading method set, and that's about it. The "project" is saved and when I'm happy with it, I "create" the stand alone version.

For sequences of scenery etc, these can be set to music. Again the slides are added and ordered and suitable music is found. This needs to be in one of several computer formats – I use MP3. One of the tabs under "Project Options" is to select the music you want. Be careful to use copyright free music, or else get the necessary licence as I have done. You can then display the "timeline" pop-up, see the waveform of the music and start it playing. You simply click the appropriate screen button each time you want the slide to change. You can even pause the music, drag the transition points about and carry on. You can stretch or reduce the duration of the transition and even see a thumbnail picture of what you will ultimately see on the screen. It's great fun, but try to do it when you're not going to be disturbed, as once you get into the flow and beat of the music, it's better to keep going. I usually work out how many slides I'm likely to need and make sure I've a few more than that added to start with. Having made the music timeline, you can then delete slides from anywhere to get back to the final number you need.

I hope you find the above useful and possibly thought provoking. If members would like to see some of my RhB shows, if you are not too far from Taunton I could always come to your branch meeting. Remember any fees or expenses will go to CLIC Sargent. I can be contacted on 01823 253186 or via www.communigate.co.uk/twc/fadingimages or at fading.images@tiscali.co.uk .