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EDMONDSON'S FAREWELL

No more card tickets for Swiss transport

Michael Farr

There was sad news at the end of last year for fellow collectors of the often colourful card tickets used by Swiss railways since English Quaker Thomas Edmondson sold his patents to the Swiss Northern Railway 160 years ago. With the changeover of the timetables on 10 December 2006 transport enterprises were forbidden to print any more of the Edmondson style tickets for through journeys, known as Direkten Verkehr or DV. They will then have a year to use up existing stocks, with a final cut-off date of 9 January 2008.

The reasons given are that Edmondson tickets do not meet today's requirements so far as forgery security is concerned and the high production costs due to the small quantities now required. They also comment on the difficulty of obtaining spare parts for the old Goebel and Beweg printing machines. In the UK Edmondson ticket production is now in the hands of enthusiasts, even though some are operating a commercial business, who need to be as adept at repairing geriatric machinery as at the intricacies of printing!

Most Swiss outlets now have some type of computerised system and SBB has a facility for pre-printing small quantities of tickets on the standard "mountain range" security paper where such equipment cannot be justified on cost grounds. Generally, these tickets will be designed for validation by passengers in the ubiquitous orange boxes to be found at most station

entrances. After computerisation with the ESG and later Prisma ticket systems in the late 80s and early 90s SBB had retained two of the old printing machines in the basement of their offices at Wyler, Berne. Edmondson tickets could also be obtained from the Rhätische Bahn's office in Chur and the independent printers, Gebrüder Aeschbacher who have a factory by the station at Worb.

The new rules do not affect tickets for purely internal journeys and so it is to be hoped that the small number of preserved lines which use them (such as the Blonay-Chamby) will continue to do so – so long as they have a source of supply. Perhaps one of the societies running preserved lines in Switzerland will be able to follow the UK's lead and acquire one of the Goebel machines so they can continue to provide tickets for special internal traffic.

It will be interesting to see if the few Post Offices which sell tickets for Postbus services will change to new style ticket, or if sales will in future be handled only by drivers. Until now the Stanserhorn Bahn with its "old-tyme" funicular from Stans to Kälti (and cable car to the top) has remained true to Mr Edmondson's invention and it is to be hoped they, too, will continue to do so to carry through the "old-tyme" theme.

Accompanying this article are a few of the more varied tickets – in routing and colour, which I have acquired during the past five years or so.

