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PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

David Marris

Following on from David Adams article in the September Magazine on Swiss Reliability we publish this short item on how it sometimes goes wrong – even in Switzerland

On a somewhat better day than David's trip, a train in Golden Pass livery descends from the Brunig Pass.

PHOTO : Tony Bagwell

We were in Switzerland during August 1984 when the weather was not at all favourable. One morning, as it was raining exceptionally hard in the Bernese Oberland, we made the decision to travel to Lucerne in the hope that there would be clearer skies there. We caught the 09.37 Brunig Line service from Interlaken Ost. Just beyond Lungern, at about 10.50, we were halted by a red signal. On our right the land rose steeply through woods whilst over to the left was a short steep bank with a road below it, followed by a further steep wooded area down to the Lungerersee.

As we waited I noticed that mud was slipping down the hillside to my right with increasing intensity. There was no doubt that it was going to hit the train and did so a few moments later, with the 1st-class coach nearest the engine taking the brunt of the impact and being tipped at an angle. Fortunately the couplings all held firm and the somewhat shaken occupants of this coach were moved back into our coach. Clearly there was no way this journey could continue and were assured by staff that arrangements were being made to "rescue" us.

By 12.30 a locomotive had arrived from Meiringen, the upright portion of the train was uncoupled from the derailed coach and taken back to Lungern where buses were waiting to take passengers on to Luzern. However, concluding that by the time we got to Luzern it would almost be time to return to Interlaken, we decided we should return to our base. The guard advised us to stay on the train as it was returning to Meiringen where we could change on to another service to Interlaken. He also told us to

visit the ticket office in Interlaken where they would consider a refund. On our return I did as he suggested, explaining which train we had been on. With no hesitation whatsoever the staff member gave us a full cash refund of our day return tickets there-and-then. Typically for Switzerland the whole situation, from the mudslide to the refund, was dealt with speedily and with the minimum amount of fuss.

Moving on to June 1997 we were involved in another incident that could have had far more serious consequences had it not been for an alert staff member. Again staying in the Interlaken area we decided to take another Brunig Line train to Brienz where we took the PS Lötschberg, sailing on to Geissbach before walking back to Brienz for an Interlaken train. This train stopped at Riggisberg, the last stop before Interlaken, where there is a passing loop and immediately beyond the station a short single-track tunnel. As in many Swiss stations the signalling is controlled from a panel in the station building. Our train started moving off from the station when suddenly a member of station staff ran waving and whistling out from the room with the control panel. The train lurched to a very sudden stop. A few seconds later another train came out of the tunnel and raced through the station on the main line. I never did find out what actually caused the situation to occur, but had the driver of our service not been aware of the station staff's frantic actions the result could have been rather nasty. Thankfully all subsequent trips in Switzerland have been incident free!