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GOTTHARD 125

Memories of the celebrations in the summer of 2007

John Jesson



RAe 4/8 'Churchill Arrow' passing Hägrigen.

PHOTO: John Jesson

June

The true anniversary of the first scheduled passenger services on 1st June 1882 was marked officially by a special train double-headed by A3/5 705 and C5/6 2978. It travelled from Basel to Erstfeld (where it stabled overnight) on the 31st May. On Friday 1st June, in almost constant rain that failed to deter the many photographers, the special worked south over the line to Bellinzona returning north the next day in cloudy, but dry, weather. The two Swiss steam locomotives were not the only special workings over the Gotthard that weekend, others being worked by the restored 4-voltage TEE RAe set 1053 and the German 2-10-0 50.3673.

Erstfeld depot was open to the public, with locomotives old and new on display including Ae 6/6 11402 "Uri", recently repainted in its original green livery and transferred to the SBB Historic fleet, together with a variety of engineers' equipment.

September

The really big celebrations were held over the weekend of 8th and 9th September, and it is probably fair to say that only the Swiss could have done it. The amount of organisation it took was incredible as many concerns were involved, both national and private. To bring everyone together (some business rivals) and for it all to run as smoothly as it did was a tremendous feat. For ease I have broken-down the various features of the weekend into separate sections.

The Specials - Pride of place (of course) goes to the purely Swiss steam special headed by C5/6 2978, which worked south on Saturday, returning north on Sunday. Re 4/4ⁱⁱ 11161 piloted the southbound train through the summit tunnel and was again the pilot for the return journey, this time from Lavorgo owing to a problem with the steam loco.

The most unusual special was from Prague, hauled by a pair of Czech 4-8-2s as



C 5/6 No 2978 simmers gently awaiting its next turn.

PHOTO: David Jones

far as Erstfeld. The original intention had been for the steam locomotives to work the train throughout to Bellinzona, but they were too large to fit and they also had a long fixed wheelbase that may have had an effect on the track. Arrival at Erstfeld was very late Thursday evening, but was nevertheless met by quite a number of enthusiasts. On the Friday morning the coaches went south, hauled by SBB-C

liveried 610.496.

Another double-headed steam special was worked by a pair of German Pacifics, 01.202 & 01.1066. This worked south on Saturday morning, about 20 minutes behind the C5/6, but did not return until Monday morning. Worthy of note was the banking loco for the Pacifics, ex-Bodensee-Toggenburg Be 4/4 14, which had worked its own special from north-east Switzerland.

Other specials included Ae 4/7 10997 and BLS Re 4/4 190 to Luino, Historic Fleet RAe TEE unit 1053 (Basel – Biasca) and the “Churchill Arrow” RAe 4/8 1021 (Zürich – Locarno).

Erstfeld - Not only was the depot open, but the freight loops were also part of the area



*Ex-Bodensee Toggenburg
Be 4/4 14 at Rapperswil.
PHOTO: Peter Mann*



A line up of locomotives outside Erstfeld Depot.
 PHOTO: Phil Weaver



Wassen Church clothed in red to celebrate the 125th anniversary.
 PHOTO: Peter Mann



Re 460 giving cab rides passing Re 4/4 11120 at Erstfeld Depot.
 PHOTO: Phil Weaver

used for the display of rolling stock. A wooden walkway was built from the southern end of the island platform across the loops to the exhibition area, so visitors did not have the long walk between the station and the more usual depot entrance. This effectively reduced Erstfeld to a 2-track through station, with the outside of the island platform usable for the terminating local services from/to Zug.



'Limmat' and replica vehicles
 PHOTO: Phil Weaver



An assortment of old and new stock was on show including the two Czech 4-8-2s.

Historic locos BDe 4/4 1646, Ae 3/6ⁱⁱ 10439, Ae 8/14 11801, Be 6/8ⁱⁱⁱ 13302,

Ce 6/8ⁱⁱⁱ 14305,

Ae 4/7 10905,

Be 4/6 12332,

Ce 6/8ⁱ 14201 and

Fe 4/4 18518.

Ae 6/6 11402 was

there as well, but

was one of the five

locos using the

turntable. As well

as those on the

turntable trips,

modern traction

was represented by

Re 6/6 11646 &

620.058, 482.037, 610.463, 843.004

(Infra), 843.074, and a FLIRT unit.

Snowploughs Xrotm 95, 97, 98 & 104,

engineers vehicles 232.020 & 234.104 and

a selection of freight vehicles finished off the display.

Cab rides were offered from the back of the depot to the head shunt at the south end, then back onto the old turntable where all the riders had to hop out the loco before re-boarding for the ride back to the starting point. Some locos used were

RABe EC 1053 leaving Erstfeld on 8th September 2007.

PHOTO: Phil Weaver

Preparations at Biasca on 7th September with Hupac Taurus ES 64 U2-100 and Bm4/4 18403

PHOTO: John Jesson



Re 4/4ⁱⁱ 11120 and Bm 843.077. Also "Limmat" and four of the replica vehicles of the "Spanische Brötli Bahn" gave trips between Erstfeld and the tunnel workings at Amsteg. There were also a variety of exhibition and sales stands, and food providers present.

Biasca – The display here, although smaller than Erstfeld, was no less interesting, including some of the Historic Fleet that had worked south over the Gotthard on the Friday together with a display of modern



ABOVE: A Vespa delivery vehicle in SBB livery numbered Am 810 001-8 at Biasca.

PHOTO: Christopher Lacey

locomotives and freight vehicles. These included a Siemens "Taurus" from Hupac, ES64 U2-100, and examples of SBBC classes 482, 484 and 840. As at Erstfeld, examples of engineers' vehicles, modern freight stock and a TiLo FLIRT rounded off the display.

The older locos were Be 4/6 12320, Ce 6/8ⁱⁱ 14253, Ae 4/7 10976, Ae 3/5 10217, Re 4/4ⁱ10001 and Be 4/7 12504.

An engineer's vehicle fitted with a hydraulic lift platform

was in use to give visitors a high-level view of the site.



ABOVE: Italian 'private' company FNM Bo-Bo E600-3 at Luino.

PHOTO: John Jesson

BELOW: A modern Italian locomotive E402. 154 at Luino.

PHOTO: John Jesson



E3/3 8501 and a train of 2-axle coaches from "Club San Gottardo" provided trips along the yard. Again, access from the station was by means of a wooden walkway from the island platform. The difference here was that the walkway was half-way

along the platform, which was still in use as the terminating point for the TiLo local; a buffer stop" was provided, in the shape of a Re 4/4ⁱⁱ. Being Switzerland, the loco was manned and visitors were able to see for themselves what the inside was like.

Incidentally, the only barrier between the arriving and departing TiLo locals and the exhibition site was a line of poles joined by red/white tape. Sales stands were present - while not as numerous as at Erstfeld the choice was different - and the food was better!

Luino – A Sunday-only exhibition was located here reached by an hourly shuttle from Biasca worked by pairs of the new class 524 TILO "Flirt" units. Again, a mix of old and new provided plenty of interest. A variety of Italian electric locomotives included some of the current fleet (E402.154, E633.238, E636.284, E645.084, E655.162) and two of the old E428 2-D-2s (E428.174 & 208), while FNM Bo-Bo E600-3 was also present. On the turntable was Swiss Be 4/6 12339, while SBBC and Railion both showed examples of the locomotives used on their operations in Italy (E484.008, G2000.35 SF). Two elderly FS coaches, in need of some restoration work, were in a large shed while, just outside, was a FS Breuer-type tractor (ABL.4734). This was in working



The Italian FS locomotive E428.208 at Luino.

PHOTO: John Jesson

order, and shuttled along a short length of track every so often. Steam was represented by a FS 625 class 2-6-0 (inside cylinders, outside valve gear), but not in steam. Both of the German Pacifics worked specials from Bellinzona, possibly the first time that such locos had been to Italy, with the plan being for them to return Sunday evening double-headed. Sales stands were almost non-existent, but the station buffet was open and their food was excellent. The waiting room, a large and lofty area, had a stage erected at one end and was decorated with Italian flags - very impressive. No walkways here - everyone just walked across the tracks. When there was a train

Ae 4/7 1095 at Erstfeld. PHOTO: David Jones





Re 4/4ⁱⁱ 11161 and C5/6 2-10-02978 at Airolo priorto heading north into the Gotthard Tunnel.

PHOTO: Christopher Lacey

movement, it was done with much blowing of whistles and at low speed (this included the arrivals and departures of the Biasca services).

The Service - The usual hourly IC semi-fast service was augmented by a host of extra trains on both Saturday and Sunday. Many of these originated at Rotkreuz but, in the mornings, there were also through services from Luzern, Zürich, Basel and Chiasso. For returning passengers in the afternoons, a similar arrangement applied. The end result was that the service was at least doubled between Erstfeld and Biasca.

The arrangements did not end there, however. Many of the trains were worked by unusual traction, such as SBBC freight Re 482 and Re 620. One northbound IC was observed on Saturday morning worked by three Re 4/4ⁱⁱ. Some of

the EC Cisalpino services were worked by the hired Re 484s in CIS livery hauling CIS-liveried coaches. These locos are normally restricted to the Simplon route. Several of the extra trains were formed of double-unit ICN sets, a foretaste of their introduction into regular service over the route. Whether it was done officially, or was by the contrivance of the line controllers, an unusually high proportion of the Re 460s were carrying advertising liveries. The remaining Re 4/4ⁱⁱs in Swiss Express livery (11108, 11109, 11141 at the time) are frequently to be seen on the



Re 4/6 at Erstfeld.
PHOTO: David Jones

Gotthard, and were there over the weekend, providing yet more variety.

The Footpaths - The principle had been to identify paths that gave good views of the railway. On the northern ramp, this has been achieved with well signposted paths, viewing platforms built and some trees to improve views from these. At points along the routes, explanatory signs have been provided, usually a photograph of a point of interest or railway activity together with a brief explanation in four languages. Most of the routes use existing paths and tracks but, where the Fellitobel joins the Reuss valley (between Intschi and Gurtellen), two new footbridges have been built, one each across the Reuss and the Fellibach, and an old disused pathway has been resurrected to reach another high level path with an excellent view of the Secken viaduct. The south ramp offers less opportunity for extensive walking and the nominated paths are limited to the areas of the Dazio Grande and Biaschina. Although the paths, viewing platforms and explanatory signs are present,

the signposting was not. In some cases, the paths are completely unmarked, even with the usual footpath signs.

What else? - Near Erstfeld station a community hall housed a superb modular HO scale model depicting the Gotthard in its pre-electrification days. The tunnel workings at Erstfeld, Amsteg and Pollengo were open, served by connecting buses from Erstfeld and Biasca stations. During the weekend Postbuses operated an hourly service between Göschenen and Airolo over the Gotthard Pass, calling at the summit. Several landmarks were clad in red material. The most noteworthy of these was the church at Wassen. Almost everyone to whom I have spoken thinks the effect was awful and wonders what in the world were the publicity people thinking of. There is another aspect though. By doing something as outrageous as wrapping a church up in red, the attention of the media was caught, and this ensured lots of publicity for the Gotthard celebrations. After all, in a way, the Gotthard Pass IS Switzerland.



German 01 202 and 1066 double head a train into the first loop tunnel at Wassen south towards the Gotthard Tunnel.

PHOTO: David Jones