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Autor: Farr, Michael
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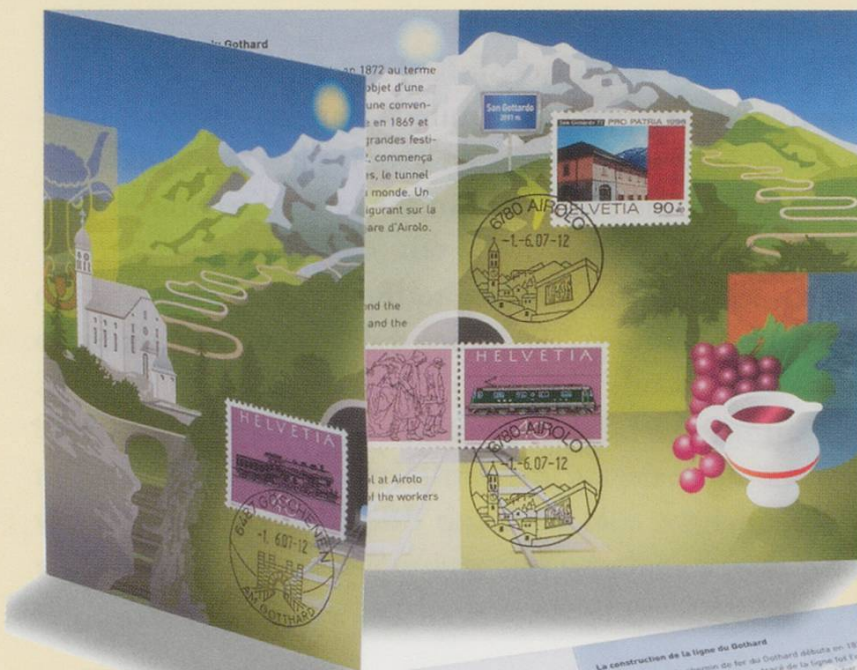
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SWISS POST CELEBRATES GOTTHARD 125 Michael Farr

Stamp pictures © SWISS POST.



Stamp collectors have an attractive souvenir of the Gotthard birthday celebrations in

the form of a "combi-folder". Printed in colour with specimens of actual stamps attached and then cancelled with the Airolo postmark (on 1 June 2007), it gives (in English as well as three of the Swiss languages) a succinct history of the start of the line.

"Following a long and drawn-out debate about the route, and the signing of state treaties with the Kingdom of Italy in 1869 and the German Reich in 1871, construction of the Gotthard railway finally began in 1872. Inaugural celebrations were held in Lucerne and Milan in May 1882, and on 1 June 1882 scheduled services on the Gotthard railway commenced. At the time, the 15,003 metre Gotthard summit tunnel was the world's longest rail tunnel – a record held until the Simplon opened in 1906."

The folder has been designed to emphasise the inter-cantonal nature of this railway line. It does, of course, feature the little church in Wassen (Canton Uri) which

travellers glimpse from three levels as the track gradient rises/falls.

The stamps attached to the folder are reprints of the two 40c values issued in 1982 for the centenary of the line which were features in my article in the September Swiss Express. A non-value central pane features the memorial at Airolo station remembering the workers killed in constructing the tunnel. To mark the Ticino canton at the southern end of the railway, Swiss Post has reprinted one of the Pro Patria series issued in 1998 showing a typical Ticino "boccalino" and attached this to the folder.

None of the stamps is available in mint condition and the take-up of the limited number of folders produced means that if you want one for your collection you will have to buy it from a dealer as Swiss Post has no more in stock.

We are grateful to Peter Walther of Swiss Post for his help in providing the illustrations for this article.

