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SWISS POST CELEBRATES GOTTHARD 125

Michael Farr

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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 featured 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.

Geschichte des Baus der Gotthardbahn

Der Bau der Gotthardbahn wurde 1872 nach langwierigen Diskussionen über die richtige Liniennutzung und zudem nachweislich 1849 mit dem Ministerialbeschluss in Anagni genehmigt. Im Mai 1882 fanden die Eisenbahn-Schicksalsverträge in Luzern und Mailand statt. Am 1. Juni 1882 wurde die Gotthardbahn feierlich eröffnet. Der Gotthard-Schneisektunnel war der längste Eisenbahntunnel der Welt. Dieser Rekord wurde erst 1906 vom Simplontunnel überstrichen. Die Vignette zeigt das Denkmal des Künstlers Vincenzo Vela beim Bahnhof von Airolo. Es erinnert an die Opfer des Eisenbahnunfalls.

Storia della costruzione della ferrovia del Gotthardo

Dopo lunghe discussioni sulla gestione della linea ed un accordo stipulato nel 1849 con il Regno d'Italia e nel 1871 con l'impero tedesco, nel 1872 fu lanciata la costruzione della ferrovia del Gotthardo. Nel maggio 1882 si tennero le cerimonie di inaugurazione a Lucerna e a Milano. Il 1° giugno 1882 la ferrovia del Gotthardo entrò in servizio regolare. Il tunnel, lungo 15.003 m, era il tunnel ferroviario più lungo del mondo. Questo primato fu superato solo nel 1906 dalla galleria del Sempione. La vignetta raffigura il monumento del tunnel che si trova presso la stazione di Airolo.

La construction de la ligne du Gotthard

La construction du chemin de fer du Gotthard débuta en 1872 au terme de longues discussions. En effet, le tracé de la ligne fut l'objet d'une grande controverse dont l'aboutissement fut marqué par une convention signée par les Chances de fer du Gotthard avec l'Italie en 1869 et avec l'Allemagne en 1871. L'inauguration eut lieu à Lucerne le 1er juin 1882 et à Milan en mai 1882. Le tunnel le plus long du monde, le tunnel ferroviaire du Gotthard, fut achevé le 1er juin 1882. Ce record fut battu en 1903 par celui du Simplon. Le monument inauguré sur la ligne du Gotthard, conçu par l'artiste Vincenzo Vela, se situe près de la gare d'Airolo. Il rend hommage aux ouvriers tués lors de la construction.

History of the construction of the Gotthard railway

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 vignette shows the memorial at Airolo station, designed by Vincenzo Vela and erected in memory of the workers killed during the tunnel's construction.