

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: - (2008)
Heft: 94

Rubrik: Members' letters

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MEMBERS' LETTERS

From John Morgan – By email

The arrival of the March Swiss Express reminded me of a major change in the 2008 Kursbuch which I think needs to be brought to Members' attention.

The Bernese Oberland is a major destination for many travellers and with direct connections between Zurich Flughafen and Interlaken it has been a very convenient way to travel there, however, the seven daily connections previously listed on Table 310 have now been reduced to none at all!

Changing in Berne is now necessary and this need not be a major problem, but unfortunately those connections are rarely on adjoining platforms and this can be difficult when luggage is involved so further consideration to an alternative route might have to be given.

There is one solution that I use myself and, indeed recommend. Fly to Basel Mulhouse, catch the No.50 bus outside the airport to the SBB station (it runs every 15 - 20 minutes and costs around 2 to 3 SFr), or take one of the many taxis that cost around 40 SFr. At the station you then have a choice of up to thirteen direct trains to Interlaken - and, of course, back again at the end of your holiday. Many of these are international trains from/to northern Europe and provide an excellent service just when you want it - 11.30, 12.01, 13.01, 13.30, 14.01 - need I go on. Also they all stop on platform 1 at Interlaken West allowing immediate access to taxis.

If you travel 1st class - recommended – I suggest that you return from Interlaken West and not Interlaken East. Joining the train at the East terminus probably allows you 15-20minutes to get your luggage on the train, but it is a very long walk to the 1st class coaches. However, these coaches stop opposite the kiosk at Interlaken West and the 2 or 3 minutes available is more than enough time to get your luggage into what are usually 95% empty compartments. This is OK for the 20 SBB trains each day, however there is one proviso. The five daily DB ICE trains (Nos. 272,276,278,372 and 374) have the 1st Class accommodation at the front of the train so these are very inconveniently placed in the A and B Sectors at Interlaken West. It is a long walk to these Sectors and in inclement weather you can get very wet.

Another travel tip. If again you are travelling from Interlaken, and you want to go to Zurich, change at Thun and not Berne. The connecting train from Brig arrives nominally 2 minutes later (but often sooner) on an adjoining platform and it's a very easy walk across. On my most recent trip this year I noticed that train intercom directs passengers to this interchange facility.

The Kursbuch offers a miracle of information, but the world comes to life when you do the actual travelling. I always work out my travel plans in advance but there is one snag. I cannot find any listed information regarding the end of the school day when trains are invaded, usually only for a few stations, by excited pupils. No, they never use 1st class accommodation - at least when I'm there!

When in Switzerland I always aim to cover as many rail lines as I can, and I would be interested to hear of other travel 'tips' that SRS Members may have for short cut timings.

From G.J.Hopkins - Tettenhall.

I found George Hoekstra's article in the March Swiss Express very interesting and I have re-read it more than once. In it he correctly points out where we in Great Britain have gone wrong with our national transport infrastructure.

I retired from British Rail in 1993 (having started with the GWR in 1945) and even at that time the longer serving staff in the industry were quite concerned as to how the travelling public who paid our wages or salaries were being treated. Gone were the days of running an organisation that considered that it had to give punctuality along with polite and good service - this was primarily due to the introduction of a management organisation that had little or no grass-roots experience. As both directors and senior management who had come up through the ranks, and knew how to run a railway in an efficient and businesslike manner in order to serve the public retired, their places were taken by graduates who were intelligent yet unknowing about the industry itself.

Apart from the politics of the situation I believe that many of the current problems that are inherent within the British railway industry can be laid at the door of the management structure that has been overlaid upon it. The current crop of franchise operators, as was the case in the last years of BR, may have senior personnel of little or no experience. At BR staff and management were promoted too quickly and these people instructed long serving personnel, who had years of experience, what to do. Accelerated promotions that favoured academic qualifications rather than actual experience were a recipe for trouble and in the worst case can be disruptive for customer service, staff relations and safety. This is a scenario I can vouch for as during my career I was both an Instructor and Supervisor and I saw at first hand what was happening in the lead-up to privatisation.