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● Erratum.

The gremlins have been at it again! This time it was some photo captions in the December issue that they took delight in playing around with. The photo on the top left of P28 was not of the BLM but showed a WAB train in the shadow of the Eiger. On P21 the Ae6/6 shown was not numbered 11646 but was No. 11466. Incidentally, one sharp-eyed reader believes that the TILO unit shown on P26 may have been photographed at a location other than Luino. Can David Carter enlighten us?

● SBB Timetable on line for iPhone.

From May 2008 the SBB timetable has been available for download to a mobile phone under the "CFF NaviGo" portal, whilst from November 2008 real-time information has also been available. Under the function "Take me home" (in English) the GPS system allows the SBB to tell you where your nearest station is and correlates it to a timetable that you may have already downloaded. Train delays, platform changes and so on are automatically sent to your phone or iPod. More information is available - in English - at www.cff.ch/mobileworld and www.cff.ch/navigo.

● 150th Celebration.

Around 100 prominent people stepped aboard an historic steam train to travel along the Zurich - Bern line to celebrate its 150th anniversary. The first complete rail link between the cities opened on November 15th 1858 after the construction of a bridge over the River Aare in Bern. Zurich passengers previously had to alight before reaching the Swiss capital and finished the journey by horse-drawn carriage. Elmar Ledergerber, the Mayor of Zurich, gave a send-off to start the celebrations at his city and the events closed with fireworks and the bridge in Bern being illuminated. A modern intercity train now takes less than an hour for the trip against six hours in the 1800s.

● Faster Lötschberg.

In December the Federal Transport Office announced that after further safety checks inside the 34.6 km tunnel, which was officially opened in December last year, trains may now travel at up to 250kph. Since its opening more than 33,000 trains have passed through the tunnel.

BLS, who operate the tunnel, have now provided the necessary safety certification allowing the higher speed.

● Extra Simplon Shuttles.

Following a 10-year break the car shuttle through the Simplon Tunnel was re-launched in 2004. Some 67,000 vehicles were carried in its first year and this number rose to 106,000 in 2007. Canton Wallis/Valais and the SBB have now announced a CHF10.6m programme to replace the existing rolling stock, and to enlarge the fleet. This will enable an hourly service, which will also be able to carry trucks up to 28 tonnes, to be operated from 2014. An additional train capable of hauling 40 tonne trucks may also be funded by the Canton.

● SBB encourages the girls.

On Thursday 13th November the SBB took part in the 8th National Girls Day, by inviting 700 girls aged between 11 and 13, plus their parents, to visit the SBB for a memorable day intended to show them career opportunities with the railway. Many events were planned, including an open door day at Login the railway training organisation at Olten. A virtual guide named "Zoe" was available to explain the possible jobs available, see www.cff.ch/zoe. The SBB has found from similar events over the past few years that jobs traditionally seen as male roles have proved to be attractive to girls. SBB policy is to positively increase the proportion of females in the workforce.

● New impetus for wagon load in Switzerland.

The Swiss government had provided a subsidy for national rail transport, but this was abolished for political / budgetary reasons. Now there has been a change of heart. The National Council (the Lower House of Parliament) voted in September 2008 to provide CHF40m per year from 2011 onwards for national rail freight, half of which is for wagon load traffic. This measure had to be ratified by the Upper House.

● Variable gauge rolling stock for the MOB.

The MOB has developed an innovative system of variable gauge bogies to enable their GoldenPass rolling stock to run through Zweisimmen from Montreux to Interlaken. We hope to have an article on the new system in the June magazine.

a miscellany of items

● No lift to Jungfrauoch.

Following a feasibility study the Jungfrau Bahn has decided to upgrade the existing railway infrastructure rather than spend upwards of CHF1000m on a proposal to build an express lift system that would have taken tourists direct from a location near Lauterbrunnen to the top of the mountain. The current plan is to spend some CHF100m over six years on new high-speed shuttle trains plus improvements to the track in order to increase service frequency. The object is to allow visitor numbers to the Jungfrauoch to increase from around 4,400 to 6,000 per day. It appears that the organisations who promote Swiss Tourism, especially in the Far East, wish to see the current 1hr 40min trip from Lauterbrunnen cut down in order to match the objective of many tourists from that region to simply to "tick-off" must-see destinations in as short a time as possible. However, it was realised that the cost of reducing the trip to a 20min. lift journey was too excessive. Apparently, in order to attract even more Asian tourists, we hear from reliable sources that it has been suggested to hotels in the Interlaken area that they should change their breakfast buffets to ones based on rice dishes – an idea that has, thankfully, gone down like a lead balloon in many quarters.

● Rigibahnen children's craft days.

On Sundays November 16th and 23rd 2008 the Rigibahnen organised a special event for children of all ages in their "Event" marquee building at Rigi Staffel. For a flat fee of CHF8 per child they and their parents could stay the whole day, making cards, presents, pictures, etc.

In conjunction with the bakers Pfenniger of Arth Goldau (the franchisees of the "RigiPic" restaurant at the summit) the children could make a local speciality of "Gritibanz" bread - this



is in the form of a man. The materials were provided and assistance given, with the bread then baked on site.

● Improved service on the TGV Lyria service between Genève and Paris.

The catering on the Genève to Paris TGV service it has been won in open tender by Elvetino SA. This is a Swiss company owned by SBB that has over a century of experience with train catering. Elvetino has 800 employees, and manages 80 restaurant cars and 118 minibars on Swiss trains, whilst since December 2007 it has operated the Minibars on the Cisalpino trains between Switzerland and Italy. The contract is for at-seat catering for first class passengers, who will have a choice of dishes in a three-course meal for a maximum of €24, and the Minibar trolley service. First class passengers will also be offered a choice of free French and Swiss newspapers. Currently there are seven daily TGV Lyria round trips on the route. From the July 2010 timetable change the service will be increased to nine per day in a complete re-cast of the timetable giving a more regular interval pattern. It is planned that TGV Duplex double-deck trains will also be introduced to ease the capacity constraints as the service continues to grow in popularity. It now has over 50% (57% in August 2008) of the market between the two cities and the planned increase in capacity is in expectation of winning some 70% of the market. Also, from the December 2010 timetable change, the journey time will be reduced by around 25 minutes to 3 hrs 4 min as the service takes the new line between Bourg en Bresse and Bellegarde. A decision is expected shortly on new rolling stock to be ordered to operate on the route from 2011.



● RALpin celebrates carrying its 500,000th truck.

RALpin, the specialist "rolling road" company that operates trains to/from Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany, to Novara, Italy traversing Switzerland, welcomed its 500,000th truck on 25th November 2008. The vehicle was owned by Italian company Pigliacelli and its driver, Isufaj Besnik, was presented with a giant Toblerone by RALpin managing director Rene Dancet. RALpin is owned by BLS AG; Hupac SA; SBB Cargo AG and Trenitalia SpA. Its first train, over the classic Lötschberg - Simplon route, was on 11th June 2001. In 2007 it transported 80,342 road vehicles, in 5,092 trains. In the first half year of 2008, 42,200 vehicles were transported, a 5% increase over the same period in 2007.

● SBB Cargo Deutschland starts to train its own apprentice drivers in Germany.

On 1st September 2008, the first trainee drivers for SBB Cargo Deutschland started their apprenticeship at the Verband Deutscher Eisenbahnfachschulen. Out of 95 candidates, 6 were chosen to take the three year course, which is in blocks of 4 weeks practical, 20 weeks theory per year. The trainees have already had cab rides from Duisberg to Cologne via Gelsenkirchen. After successfully completing the course and the exams the new drivers will operate trains for SBB Cargo in Germany. It is all part of the internationalisation of SBB Cargo which is necessary to provide the range and scope of services demanded by clients, and the company is expected to announce its partner for international operations in early 2009.

● SBB saves energy.

From 27th October to 7th November 2008 the SBB ran a campaign to save energy. Despite the growth of the SBB it plans to reduce energy consumption by 10% by 2015. The autumn 2008 campaign was focussed on saving electricity in buildings and as much as 20% was saved by reducing lighting and heating, and switching off unused electric and electronic equipment. In addition to saving energy in their buildings and installations the SBB aim to optimise operational power consumption through encouraging better driving techniques under a regime to be called "economy in energy". More information is available from www.cff.ch/environnement.

● New electricity power company formed.

In November 2008 a new company Nant de Drance SA was formed by the SBB and Atel Holding SA of Olten with a 40%-60% share split. The Canton of Valais is also interested in becoming a shareholder, and negotiations are ongoing. The new company has a capital of CHF50m and is to design, build and operate a 600MW pumped storage Hydro-Electric power station at the eponymous location. The power station will be located in the declivity between the existing two dammed lakes at Emosson and Vieux Emosson near Finhaut on the TMR-mc between Martigny and Chamonix. The whole construction will be 1800 metres above sea level, totally underground, and utilise a 5 km tunnel. The major works will commence at the start of 2009. The SBB requires additional peak power capacity for its own needs, as do the BLS and TRAVYS, due to high demand on both the transport and national networks coinciding.

● L'abonnement général.

It is now 110 years since the General Abonnement (GA) ticket was introduced in Switzerland. This gives unlimited travel on virtually all public transport for one year. When it was introduced the GA only covered the main rail network and was primarily used by businessmen, or commercial travellers. It was not until the start of the 1980s, when buses, boats and the private railways joined in, that the card was taken up more widely. In 1986, for example, 25,000 cards were sold but by 2008 the figure had reached 350,000. The GA costs CHF3,100 for 2nd class and CHF4,850 for 1st class – it can be paid for in monthly instalments. There are reductions for OAPs, children, families, couples, handicapped and students. There is even a card for dogs at CHF650. There is also the Abonnement demi-tarif costing CHF125 which allows you half price transport anywhere in Switzerland for one year. It also has a VISA card included on it (similar to an option on London's Oyster Card). If you really want to attract people out of cars onto trains, this is the way to do it, as of course once you have your card you want to keep using it.

Information supplied by:- Martin Fisher; Markus Gürbetal; Neil Wheelwright; Bill Weber; David Stevenson; Glyn Jones; Jungfrau Bahn; SwissInfo; Ron Smith and the SBB.