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Autor: Morgan, John
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TRAVELS WITH A KURSBUCH

John Morgan



RM Bahn emu at Burgdorf on 3/10/2005.

PHOTO: Mark Barber

I am probably not the only member of the SRS whose holidays in Switzerland seem driven by the need to try and take up as many as possible of the travel options the country offers. Accompanied at times by my wife Marion I have been doing this for some 30 years, using the essential Swiss Pass and always returning home through Zürich Flughafen with a sadness that is tinged with anticipation for the next visit.

Retirement has brought reduced finances, but travel freedom. Basing my current visits at the 17thC Gasthof Hirschen in Interlaken Matten (www.hirschen-interlaken.ch), with its views of the Jungfrau, I find that it is possible to easily cover many different parts of the country. Unfortunately some areas such as the western Jura or the Graubünden are just too far for day trips from this location, and another obvious downside of Interlaken as a base is the need to repeatedly travel on the same set of lines to reach transport centres such as Berne or Luzern. My constant travel companion is the Kursbuch – heavy though it is. It is essential if one is to make the most of the Swiss Pass and cover all the highways and byways it opens up.

Rather than simply travel along the fast

main line on trips to Bern in order to reach more distant destinations, I long ago learnt that by changing at the charming town of Thun many different journey opportunities open up. Using service S3 from Thun on the BLS (formerly the GBS – Gürbetal-Bern-Schwarzenburg) local line through Belp to Berne the route passes through quiet countryside and near the small airport that serves the capital, although sadly the service to London City is no more. Staying on the S3 route past Bern and reaching Biel/Bienne there are journey opportunities south to Lausanne and north to Basel. Also by changing at Thun another route is to Solothurn via Konolfingen and Burgdorf on the RM (Regionalverkehr Mittelland AG). This trip is through pleasant rolling countryside and provides some surprising panoramas such as the one that unfolds as the train climbs out of Konolfingen and turns through a full 180°. Both Burgdorf and Solothurn are busy junctions that offer onward travel opportunities to other equally interesting parts of the country.

Perhaps travelling on the slow trains that serve the less frequented parts of Switzerland is one of the best ways to get to savour its

subtle nuances. Schwarzenburg in Canton Fribourg, at the end of line S2 from Bern, is not on a frequented tourist trail but like so many other small Swiss towns it has its own charms. Travelling up the line there is a spectacular crossing of the River Schwarz on a tall bridge just before the appropriately named station of Schwarzwasserbrücke. One of my clearest holiday memories is from a cold and snowy January trip along this line when, from the passing train, children could be seen using Zimmer frames as they learnt to ski in a school playground. *Priceless.*

In addition to my current Kursbuch another constant companion is the Bradt Travel Guide Switzerland Rail-Road-Lake by Anthony Lambert (ISBN 1-84162-132-6) that highlights many of these out-of-the-way routes. It is also useful as it suggests on which side of the train you should sit for the best views. I also rely upon the Schweers + Wall Eisenbahnatlas Schweiz (ISBN 3-89494-122-7) but to constantly carry it around is probably a book too far!

If the editor agrees I hope to continue my travels with a Kursbuch in a future edition of the magazine.

TOP: BLS loco 465 018 at Burgdorf on 5/11/2005.

PHOTO: Mark Barber

MIDDLE: An ICE waits at Interlaken West before making its last short journey to Interlaken Ost. May 2008.

PHOTO: Tony Bagwell

BOTTOM: RBS No 66 is seen at Solothurn en route to Bern.

PHOTO: D Edwards

