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MEMBERS' LETTERS

combined, well-integrated and organised public transport system it has to be designed to provide a solution when there are problems of this magnitude.

In my view SBB need to consider the lessons learnt and decide what they can do to deal with what is a familiar problem in the UK, and to a certain extent also here in France.

*Editors Note: Chris will be pleased to read the news item in *Sidetracks*.*

From Paul Grant – Toronto

It is two years since my last Swiss visit and in that time period many things have changed – yet others have not, with the Re4/4s still being the maids-of-all-work. Last time the Re6/6 seemed to be in retirement but on my trip this June there were a lot in evidence on all types of freight workings.

Going south of the Alps on the Gotthard route few ETR 470s were to be seen on Cisalpino services. The one I saw at Bellinzona was out-of-service and being hauled by a loco to an unknown destination. Rather than the full ETR 610 operation starting in June as scheduled Cisalpino services were going no further south than Lugano. The whole Cisalpino operation seems to have degenerated into a sorry mess. Speaking to SBB staff the subject of the ETR 610s was greeted with scornful laughter. One apparently well-informed person noted that Alstom are still stalling over installing items of operational equipment in the ETR 610s. Apparently the top brass at SBB have lost all patience with Alstom and want to find an alternative to the ETR 610s and to get rid of the ETR 470s – but, as the local guys pointed-out, who would want them?

In the Ticino I chose to stay just outside Bignasco at Cavergno the terminus of FART's Autobus Line 10 that runs hourly from Locarno. From there I took the four-services-a-day AutoPostale route up to San Carlo alighting at Foroglio to see the spectacular waterfall. This high alpine valley was another world. The communities have no electricity and are only inhabited from April to October. The bus too is only scheduled to run in this period. Despite its

isolation the restaurant at Foroglio served a superb lunch and the beautiful stone-built village cost me a whole roll of film – I have yet to go digital.

To explore the RhB I had based myself at what turned out to be a chilly Pontresina where we had -2c temperatures and white frosts in June! Interestingly both the Bernina and Heidi Expresses seemed to be the preserve of the older 600 series locos. During my visit the RhB appeared to have staff at only a few stations on the Albula and Bernina route. The only ones that seemed to me to be regularly manned were Thusis, Bergün, Samedan, St Moritz and Pontresina.

My third base was at Spiez where I have been a regular visitor since 1957. Watching operations at this station was always good but with the opening of the Lötschberg Base Tunnel it seems even busier. I fully recommend the new BLS trains now operating over the old line to Kandersteg, etc as their deep windows allow good views of the scenery. The single line route alongside the Thunersee to Interlaken seemed to be hopelessly overloaded, resulting in frequently delayed services. Little rolling stock now seems to lay-over in the sidings at Interlaken Ost with even the German ICEs being pressed into early morning/late evening Swiss service on return trips to Basel. On a trip back to Spiez from photographing Oberhofen Castle I managed to ride on the 103 year old *Blümlisalp* which was in wonderful shape. A great end to my Swiss visit.

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