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It hardly seems 12 months since I last sat down to write my "end of year" notes. And what a year it has been!

I don't think that many of us could have envisaged that the financial turmoil of 2008 would continue, and worsen, in 2009. If you have been fortunate enough to have been able to venture into Europe this year you will certainly have felt the effect that this has had on your pocket! This fall in value of the pound has also made subscribing to *Eisenbahn Amateur* more costly. Remember though if you wish to receive this excellent magazine the deadline for signing-up is fast approaching. However let us hope that the worst is now over and on behalf of all of the Society's Management Committee may I send you very best wishes for a Merry Christmas and a healthy and more prosperous 2010.

One group that must have felt the effect of the fall in value of the pound (and dollar) were the 28 or so people who joined Roger Ellis on his "Erstfeld Visit" in September. I am told that this was most enjoyable so a great deal of thanks is due to Roger, and also John Jesson who assisted with the organisation. However thanks must also go to various people or organisations in Switzerland who helped make the visit such a success. These include the proprietors and staff of the Hotel Frohsinn; the Verkehrshaus in Luzern for arranging the visit there; and to our local member Bryan Stone who acted as guide on the day. Last, but by no means least, thanks also to the Luzern and Erstfeld Model Railway Clubs for their hospitality in welcoming the group to their premises. Well done everyone! Roger has suggested that he may organise another visit - but not in 2010!

Finally, you will read elsewhere in this issue Alan Pike's report of his attendance at the SVEA Annual Meeting earlier this year. In the past the Society's Chairman has been invited as a guest of SVEA to attend the dinner on the Saturday evening and also the rail trip on the Sunday. However, like our own Society, SVEA are having to look at means of containing their costs and, understandably in the circumstances, felt unable to issue such an invitation for 2009 and probably for the next few years also. Fortunately, Alan had arranged to attend the meeting, in his own right and at his own expense, and he agreed to represent the Society for which we are most grateful.

WHY SWITZERLAND?

The telephone rang in my office overlooking the Houses of Parliament one afternoon in late 1974. I was asked to go right away to the office of the Director of the Nature Conservancy Council who had a visitor from a Swiss organisation supported by the UK. Would I attend an interview board in Switzerland for a new post?

Early morning three weeks later I was in a sleeper rolling down from Vallorbe to Lausanne, thence in an 'omnibus' to Morges. Lausanne depôt was impressive; Ae3/5 and 3/6 'petit Sécherons' - 'croc's; first series Ee3/3s; SLM/BBC Ae3/6 and 4/7; relatively new Re4/4s... The interview was the next day; I was staying a few hundred yards from Morges station so off I went to observe, and to 'do' the BAM. Interview over it was back to Lausanne to observe again before boarding the sleeper home. I did not expect to get the job - but I had glimpsed Swiss railways.

Early morning three weeks later I was in a sleeper rolling down from Vallorbe... I had the job, and I was hooked!

Alan Pike OBE - SRS Joint President