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**Autor:** Farr, Michael  
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# SHIP AHOY!

Michael Farr



*MS La Suisse, flagship of the fleet on Le Léman arrives at Villeneuve on its twice-daily tour of the Haut Lac. 21/07/09.*

ALL PHOTOS: Michael Farr

My childhood home was on the banks of the River Avon in Bristol and one of my earliest recollections is watching the paddle steamers of Campbell's White Funnel Fleet limp home from their wartime duties in mine-sweeping, still in their drab wartime colours. One by one, they re-emerged from dry dock with their white funnels and as I grew up trips around the Bristol Channel started an interest in paddle steamers. Later, on our very first Swiss holiday, I had the opportunity to sail on both the Vierwaldstättersee and the Brienzersee – and the memories came flooding back.



*The beautifully restored first class dining room on La Suisse. 21/07/09*

I was subsequently able to take part in three of the Paddle Steamer Parades organised by SGV, with the whole fleet of paddlers sailing in convoy out of Luzern and

then doing "formation dancing" in the middle of the Vierwaldstättersee. A highlight of our holiday in 2000 was to stay in both Luzern and Lugano, using the Wilhelm Tell Express – with its ship segment – between the two resorts. On that occasion, with the weather in the south being dull and damp, we made very good



*MS Milano has arrived at Porlezza on the Italian shores of Lake Lugano. 19/09/00*

use of our weekly tickets (which had cost less than CHF50) on the Lake Lugano boats, our favourite journey being the afternoon trip to Porlezza on the little *Milano*.

In recent years we have been taking our holidays in the French-speaking parts of Switzerland and we have become familiar with the fleet of CGN on Le Léman. One of Pauline's favourite trips is to take the mid-morning ship from Lausanne across to



*ms Schwyz passes the landing stage at Cham on Lake Zug, a much smaller operation than on Lake Luzern.* 23/09/04



*Passengers embark on ds Uri as she prepares to leave the landing stage at Luzern.* 22.09.04

the pretty French village of Yvoire and to have lunch in the restaurant by the lakeside. This year I caught the recently refurbished flagship of the CGN fleet, *La Suisse*, from Villeneuve. Unlike on the Vierwaldstättersee, CGN kept their paddle



*The Rütli makes shorter trips out of Luzern, such as to Wagner's house at Trieb.* 22/09/04

fleet going through hard times by converting them to diesel propulsion (still using Sulzer motive power) but thanks to huge support from both charities and their supporters they are gradually re-converting them to steam and refurbishing the passenger accommodation to a high standard.

The larger Swiss lakes have their own fleets – like Zürichsee, Thunersee, Brienzsee and Lac de Neuchâtel (with its canal links to the Bielersee and the Murtensee) – but some of the smaller ones also provide restricted services with smaller numbers of vessels. On the Lac des Brenets they will run all year, but only if at least ten people turn up, whereas on the Lac de Joux there is just one afternoon trip at weekends in the summer. Miss the 15.30 on Sunday and you have to wait for six days!

*. . . and so we bid farewell to ds Uri.* 22/09/04

