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CENTENARY STAMPS

Michael Farr



PHOTOS: Michael Farr

As well as the centenary of the Bernina line that was noted in the December magazine, the Niesen funicular also celebrates its 100th anniversary in 2010.

Swiss Post will mark the two events with an issue of stamps on 6th May but as the details – and designs – are not being unveiled until 26th March, sadly this misses the press date for the current issue. You will also be too late to order first day covers by the time the June Swiss Express appears!

If members want to obtain details, they can contact Swiss Post, Stamps & Philately, Marketing and Sales, Ostermundigenstrasse 91, CH-3030 Berne or by email at stamps@post.ch. If not already a subscriber to their excellent and free collectors' magazine, *Focus on Stamps* you may wish to order a copy. I anticipate that the new railway issues will be illustrated in its March issue and an order form will be included if you do not happen to be visiting our favourite country beforehand.

RIGIBAHNEN ROUNDUP

Ron Smith

The Rigibahnen (RB) reports that 2009 will have shown a modest 5% increase in passengers over 2008, a very creditable result in the prevailing economic conditions. The RB continues to press ahead with innovative ideas to attract customers such as the "RigiEvent" marquee at Staffel that brings attendees at conferences, product launches, weddings, etc. to their trains. Packages for monocyclists, apparently a growing sport, were introduced in 2009. However, riding down the Rigi on a one-wheeled cycle is certainly not many people's idea of fun!

In another move to boost ridership, along with business in the mountain hotels and cafes, the RB announced that from last December they are accepting Swiss Pass cards for free travel over their lines from Vitznau and Arth-Goldau to Rigi Kulm, and on the Weggis to Kaltbad cable car. Previously the RB only gave a 25% discount on its

operations. The change also means that the RB will be included in the Swiss Pass publicity.

Reconstruction of the Station at Rigi Kaltbad restricts the public steam trains using locos No.16 and 17 to operating on the Arth-Goldau route this summer. Departures to Rigi Kulm are at 10.15, returning at 14.05, and operate every Saturday and Sunday from July to September. Vertical-boiler No.7 built in 1896, and the highlight of the 2009 operations, left Vitznau on the 28th November and will be taking a well deserved rest in the refurbished Verkehrshaus at Luzern in 2010.

A series of other events also planned this summer including: guided natural and botanical walks: a Swiss Folk Music and Dance Festival at Rigi Staffel; early morning extra trains from Arth-Goldau on some Sundays to view the majestic sunrise from the summit; a Dixie and Swing weekend at Rigi Kaltbad; a weekend Alpine

Market, with products of the mountain farms. See www.rigi.ch for details of these and other events.

The construction of the current depôt at Vitznau included foundations that allowed for more levels to be added later. Planning is now underway to develop apartments over the car park that currently forms the roof level. Also at Vitznau the "Kiosk" shop that shared the booking office from December became the "Rigi Shop", run by the RB and allowing an integration of shop and ticket office, relieving an often overcrowded area and helping to enhance sales.

Although the Rigibahnen are almost self-contained with well equipped workshops at both Vitznau and Arth-Goldau able to carry out maintenance, repairs, etc, on occasion some specialist work has to be sent outside for attention. At the end of March 2009 railcar Beh2/4 No.2 dating from 1937 was sent by road to Stadler at Bussnang to be updated. Stadler are now the only rack-railway manufacturer in Europe, and carry out maintenance and repair alongside their busy production line of modern conventional rolling stock. Having received full maintenance, necessary repairs, and a general check of all systems, No.2 was de-rusted and partially repainted before returning to Vitznau last July. During the summer the Rigibahn staff were fully occupied with running their railway but once the peak season was over they finished refurbishing No.2 to get it back in service for the coming season.

Originally built seventy-three years ago by SLM/BBC No.2 weighs 16.7 tonnes; it is 15.4 metres long; its power rating is 450hp, giving a maximum speed of 19kph uphill and 12 kph downhill; and seats 64 people in the main cabin plus 8 people in the vestibules. After its updating this veteran should be ready for another long spell of service on the route to the summit from Vitznau. It says a lot about the original build-quality, and the Rigibahnen maintenance regime, that hard-used items of rolling stock in their eighth decade of operation, such as No.2, should be considered worthy of such a major rebuild.

COMPETITION

The RB has kindly offered a pair of adult day-rover tickets (valid to 13 December 2010) as a first prize, and a Rigi cap as second prize, to any SRS members who can correctly answer the following question: "Whose rack system does the Rigibahnen use?" Your entry, by either email or post, should be sent to the Editor (contact details on P3 of this magazine) to arrive no later than the 1st April 2010. The first and second correct entries drawn "out of the

hat" at the editorial meeting for the June Swiss Express will win these prizes. The usual competition conditions apply; editor's decision final; no correspondence entered into; no alternative prizes; etc. If you email please put "Swiss Express Competition" in the Subject box.

PHOTOS: Rigibahnen.

