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MIXED TRAINS

Bryan Stone
All photos Bryan Stone



This is a slide view in 1970 of DZe 6/6 No 2002 of the MOB on the then midday mixed train from Zweisimmen, approaching Saanenmöser. Everything in this view is now lost, including the view of woods and fields.

What was already a creaking anachronism in Britain, was in Switzerland of the 1980s still widespread reality. Mixed trains, carefully marked in the timetable with a 'G' (Güterzug) or 'M' (Marchandises) and almost always 2nd class and weekdays only (though I did find one on a Sunday!), meandered, not only on bucolic branch lines as you might expect, but also through some of the densest timetable pages like Lausanne – Geneva, Brig – Sion, Altdorf – Luzern, Altdorf – Erstfeld and Zug – Luzern. Both SBB and BLS had them, and also BT, SOB, MOB, RhB and the Brünig Line. Often they ran at 05.00 in the morning, but sometimes at midday and not always both ways. They provided a leisurely but unpredictable journey; the Kursbuch explanation for 'G' or 'M' reads, 'Freight train without any guarantee for connections or for adherence to the timetables'. So there!

When checking the 1980 timetable for my article in edition 100 I found 69 such trains on a normal weekday (and surely missed some). Some ran a long way, taking half a day, like Brig – Spiez.

And there was the legendary 'last train', 'G' 15787 which stopped at various stations from Basel dep. 23.34 to Zürich HB, arr 00.55. Train 'G' 32896, the 23.28 Zurzach – Koblenz, had a booked run of only 6 minutes, but of course it could take longer. The key to understanding is that mixed trains, as defined by Swiss law, are freight trains, part of the local pick-up system, serving stations and industrial sidings. Some of these, however, had a passenger coach, perhaps only part-way, for schoolchildren, workers at a factory, or late home-goers. Just sometimes, they looked like a real passenger train with a long rat's tail of goods wagons. They appealed to the observer because the trailing load often needed a real locomotive, not a railcar. They had additionally to stop in platforms and observe passenger train regulations. Power might be anything handy which would go, as on the EBT or BT, or a stately Ae4/7 or Ae6/8. The RhB often used Ge6/6 crocodiles, the MOB their big DZe 6/6, 2001 and 2002.

Sadly, they have nearly all vanished, partly because of line occupation, partly

since many stations no longer handle freight. However, the Fahrdienstvorschriften (FDV) - the Operating Rules for railways, part of Swiss law - still contain a rule 5.1.3.2 on 'Inclusion of occupied passenger vehicles in goods trains: In goods trains, occupied passenger vehicles are to be marshalled next to the power unit'. This was not always so, but with the continuous brake on all vehicles this was much less dangerous than the corresponding mixed

trains in Britain with unbraked goods wagons in tow.

As far as I can see from the current Swiss timetable, two mixed trains remain, both on the RhB. One, M 4009, leaves Landquart Mon-Fri at 4.51, arriving Davos Platz at 5.56. The other, M 4109, leaves Chur at 4.58 on workdays, non stop to Thusis, then all stations to Samedan arriving 7.01. How about a good summer morning picture from a member staying in the district?

1. Ae3/6 II 10448, on mixed train from Basel, at Stein-Säckingen in 1965.

2. 1692 seen at Etzwilen, is on the last day of the passenger trains between Singen (on the DB) and Etzwilen in June 1969. The mixed train stands in Etzwilen station, with diesel railcar Dm 2/4 1692, after setting down the school children from Ramsen.

3. 1692 in Ramsen, is the same train approaching Ramsen from Singen, and school children waiting.

4. Ae3/6 i 10708 on morning mixed train from Pontarlier at Les Verrières, March 1967.

