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MOB – CATCHING IT BEFORE IT CHANGES.

Gordon Wiseman recounts a 2008 visit to his favourite line before it changed for good.



MOB "4000-series" ABDe8/8 unit.

The MOB, like many Swiss railways, is changing fast; so at Easter 2008, whilst based between Saanenmöser and Schönried our main aim was to catch the MOB close up before any more modernisation took hold. We discovered that we were just in time to see many "traditionally Swiss" things before they went forever. I had two main targets on the MOB – to see the wooden poles supporting the overhead wires and to see as much traditional MOB blue and white as possible. Especially the 4000-series units before they are, in my view, ruined by the addition of intermediate low floor coaches. The secondary aims were the nearby BLS for any "Brownies" and to see the short term scratch sets being used on the Lötschberg mountain

ALL PHOTO: Gordon Wiseman

route with any Ae6/6s as a bonus. We achieved all this with the help of another offer on Swiss pass – four-day 1st class ones for the price of 2nd class.

All our aims were largely achieved on the MOB with the 1968-built 4000-series performing admirably and looking shiny clean in the bright snow. I hoped there would be some old stuff out and about and was very happy that this did indeed happen. By a huge stroke of luck, in a short time spent at Allières whilst preparing for a scenic walk back to Les Sciernes, Motor-car No 28 (built 1924) arrived in bright sunshine on station snow clearance duties with staff that alighted and cleared the station platforms with brooms and a mini snow blower. One day at Gstaad, if my camera had been on hand, I could



1924 vintage De 4/4 No. 28 at Allières.

have taken a shot of No.1003 crossing the viaduct. In general I was pleased with the amount of traditional MOB blue and white on show, with the 4000-series units hauling blue coaches – though not on as many trains as I would have liked. I enjoyed not seeing too many modern

Ex-GFM (TPF) liveried GDe 4/4 locomotive hauling a "Classic" set of coaches.



8000-series locos, as well as being pleasantly surprised to see the two ex-GFM (TPF) locos still in their orange livery. It was amusing to board the 1st class coach in the "Classic set", that frequently showed up on services we used, soaked through, complete with muddy boots and Leki

sticks from a very wet walk, with every right to be there – only in Switzerland! I was also pleased to catch the remaining 5000-series blue set as it epitomised the "1970s" Swiss rolling stock style. It was



A few remaining wooden overhead poles.

running the Zweisimmen – Saanen school services. Call me boring but I don't like some of the new rolling stock designs or some of the "jumbled up" liveries.

Even on a line with supposedly "no freight" we managed to see freight activity, including a narrow gauge bogie flat wagon which had been unloaded off the standard gauge at Zweisimmen. There was also a set of Fad hoppers at Saanen (labelled Moretti + Sohne). The 3000-series units, mainly in all over blue, were being used as departmental vehicles, although 3001 retained its blue and white and

seemed to be a reserve Lenk unit sitting at Zweisimmen.

I am a great fan of the old wooden overhead poles and was just too late at Saanenmöser itself, as the new masts were up. Although the wires were still strung from the wooden posts, the new steel





Ex-GFM (TPF) liveried GDe 4/4 on "Golden Pass Express" duties.

overhead paraphernalia is much more obtrusive than the dark wooden posts, so the new masts dominate in photos with the wooden posts not showing up so well.

Near Les Granges (Chateau-d'Oex) there was a lovely photogenic section of the wooden poles but the bases were already in for new metal ones, whilst Saanenmöser and Gstaad stations were both undergoing a rebuild during our visit.

But, as I revise this article in 2010, a lot of our observations from 2008 are definitely still topical. A significant proportion of stock is still in blue and white, although the plan is to have all units in a version of the Golden Pass livery. The ABDe 8/8s are still running without the planned interspersed low

floor coaches and one ex-TPF GDe4/4 is still in its former GFM (TPF) orange livery. The amount of the route equipped with wooden poles has been reduced quite a bit since 2008, but there are still sections so equipped.

However work continues apace so regrettably things will have moved on by the time you read this. So, if you like the old wooden overhead poles – go right now!

Several trips on the BLS resulted in our seeing "Brownies" Nos. 166, 167 and 169 and sampling some of the various motley Re4/4II hauled sets that were working the Lötschberg mountain route that year (before the delayed Lötschberger units entered service). We also made it up to Solothurn to ride on some of ASM's traditional 1960s EMUs on the street-running Niederbipp line – these are also still running in 2010.

Editor's note. This is a condensed, and updated, version of an article Gordon wrote for Swiss Express in 2008 that became mislaid. We thank him for taking the time to revise it.

