

# The BRB moves forward : Bryan Stone reports from the Brienzer Rothorn

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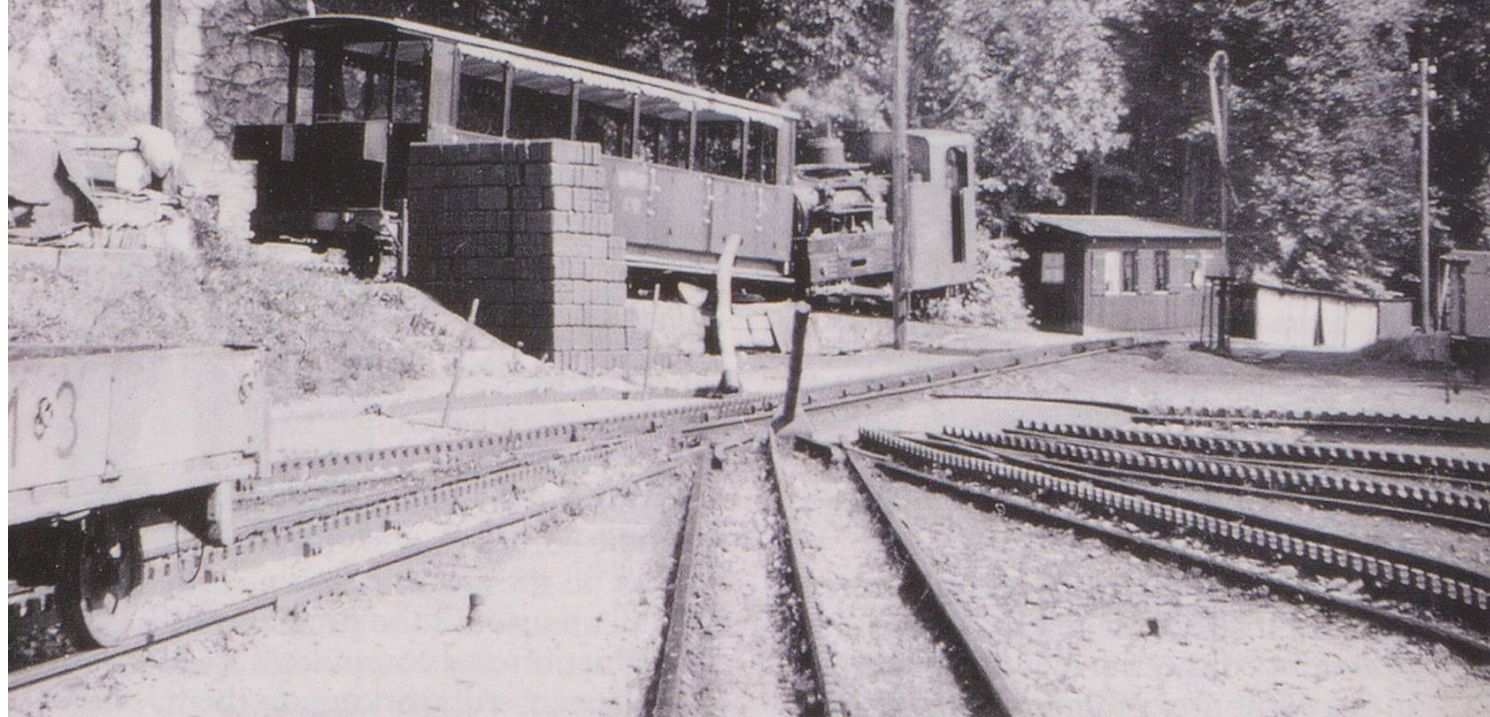
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# THE BRB MOVES FORWARD

Bryan Stone reports from the Brienzer Rothorn



An old view of Brienz depot.

ALL PHOTOS: Bryan Stone

Simon Koller, General Manager of the Brienzer-Rothorn Bahn (BRB), is an inventive person. He has already tried to ensure that throughout the summer season good days will find not only the four newest rack locomotives plus one of the 1933 engines, but also one of the 1891/92 engines, either in traffic or in reserve. His aim is not to have to use the three diesels on his steam railway except in extremis, such as when large numbers of passengers arrive together; a very rare breakdown occurs; or when sudden bad weather means evacuating the mountain in a hurry. In 2010 BRB No 2 was the scheduled 119-year old, normally with Driver Flück in charge.

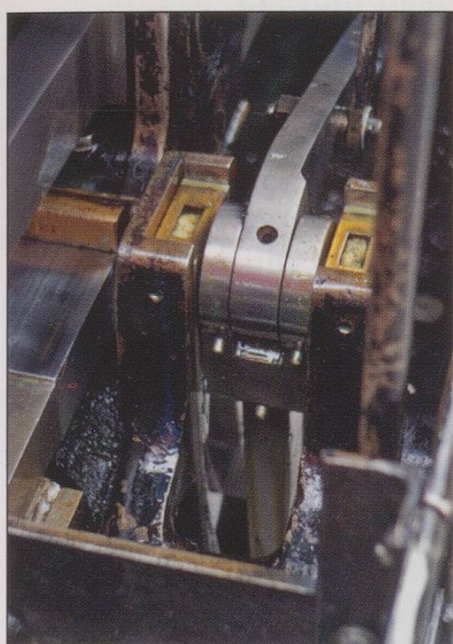
An extra marketing initiative is the new (ex-timetable) service which ensures that at least once a week anyone in the Brienzersee region can be sure of finding a veteran locomotive in operation, as each Wednesday morning at 10.00 two ancient open cars are taken up the mountain. The "old-timer" trip costs CHF10 extra including a half-

hour stop at Planalp where sausages are cooked by the boiler, to be consumed with bread baked in the shape of a rack rail and cold bottles of alcohol-free Mountain Twister beer. Driver and fireman pull on white gloves and serve up to 35 guests, and then, with all proper regard for other trains in their 'slots', it's '*Bitte einsteigen*', and the ensemble puffs throatily up to the summit, and, after a pause and a few drops of oil, rolls steadily down again, while the counter-pressure brake joggles us down in safety.

Driver Flück oiling round No 2 at Rothorn-Kulm.



Not many know that the oldest BRB engines (along with the similar No 5 at the Schynige Platte, and No 2 at Monte Generoso) are in fact a tribute to British ingenuity. Built at Winterthur by SLM, founded by Englishman Charles Brown in 1870, these engines use a variant of Joy's valve gear, once the preferred solution on the great LNWR and LYR in Britain, and also often used in marine applications. It was patented by David Joy of Wilson's of Leeds and takes its return drive from the middle of the connecting rod. At SLM Brown found



*Die blocks and slides of the Joy Valve gear on No 2.*

that with simplification it could be compressed into the short length of his 1890s 'kneeling cow' rack locomotives, where the cylinders were in the centre and drove the rack wheel axles through

huge and heavy rocking levers. Joy's valve gear is still there to see in all its sliding and dipping motion, as No 2 puffs uphill on a Wednesday morning. Get a seat at the rear, by the engine's smokebox, and you can watch and listen in awe.

Joy's gear disappeared in Britain as the need to drill holes in connecting rods, just where they were most stressed, made it unsuitable for more modern designs but the last Super D, No.49395, is still running on the North York Moors showing what it was like. Of course, on BR, finding someone who still knew how to set it was difficult, as the unusual roaring and gasping of BR's



*On board the Salon Rouge.*

last Super Ds in the 1950s showed. They could have sent for Driver Flück from Brienz, who is a master of the art.

BRB No 2 got another airing on July 16th last. This time it was the inauguration of the BRB Salon Rouge, an early car rebuilt as a salon with tables and a bar, and facilities for hot and cold food, and large supplies of the obligatory white wine. I went up on this trip, with Herr Koller in charge, and was amazed to find white linen and a 10-course menu to keep our minds off the heat and the coal dust. We had a great time, only marred by a curious incident at lunchtime where No 14, a 1996 engine, suffered a brake blockage while propelling two carloads mainly of a Japanese agency group, and, in full view, blocked the Ober-Staffel loop for half an hour. In many years it's the only time I've ever seen a breakdown. There was no panic. No 16 was taken down to pick up the crowd, all very cheerful, No 2 went into the loop and awaited a

*BRB Manager Koller and 119-year-old No 2.*





You can hire the Salon Rouge, and No. 2, for a party, and arrange desired levels of catering, but this inaugural trip will long be remembered.

Veteran No 2 worked all last summer, and probably 2011 too. No 1 and No. 5 are in the workshop, both going concerns, but No. 3 and No. 4 – the other 119-year olds – are set

*Sausages at Planalp station on the BRB with Loco No 2.*

aside as unserviceable with No 3 presently off the premises. They could be repaired at great cost, and perhaps one day will be, but the money is now better used on the renewal of the permanent way, some of which is still that which was laid in 1891/92. Its time has come, but the BRB, for all it's anxiety about the economy and vulnerability to bad weather, is doing great things.

delayed uphill run, and a steady supply of refreshments kept us well occupied. We were, after some improvisation, dead on time at Brienz and I caught my express to Basel by seconds; but then, this is Switzerland. Diesel No 11 was dispatched off the works train to rescue the 'sinner'.

*Brienzer-Rothorn-Bahn No 6 going uphill in Planalpflüh Tunnel, seen from following train at Geldried, on 6/6/ 2010.*

