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"SEE AMID THE WINTER'S SNOW"



Bryan Stone describes his Swiss Christmas travels

As Swiss people do, on Christmas Eve we had enjoyed a family dinner by the wood fire and the Christmas tree. Helen and I had then gone to a midnight church service in Basel while Susan, my younger daughter set off by road to her home 70 km away. By 01.30 it was snowing steadily.

Christmas morning. It had snowed all night; and now we two were invited to Susan and my son-in-law's for the day. Avoid the roads said the radio at 08.00. We were taking the train - 10.28 from Basel. I live in a village served by a tram line 10 km from the City. Christmas Day is Sunday service, so I tramped early through the snow to my station just to be sure that all was well. Dornach via Basel SBB said the indicator, in 7 minutes. A wave to the tram driver (we mostly know one another) and I rode with some 20 others towards Basel, more joining us on the way. Christmas morning the shops are closed, but trams and buses are running, and outside Basel SBB was a small team keeping an eye on them. All seemed normal. 'Yes' said the engineer 'one or two frozen doors, but no real problems yet'. The points are electrically heated.

I was now early, so looked round the station. A shunting team with 922 004 was adding cars to standard formations on the winter sport routes, although the early skiers had already gone by then. Old 11109 came in from Luzern, still in Swiss Express colours, the oldest Re 4/4 II at work and leading a charmed life. Two German ICES rolled in from Zürich and Interlaken to form the next trains to Germany. There they might have trouble: lines had been blocked. 'Attention', an announcement... the 10.01 to Bern would be delayed...now leaving at 10.06. Passengers for Olten should take the 10.03 Luzern train; and connections for Lausanne were assured by the 10.03 Biel/Neuchâtel. Nothing drastic there. The TGV from Paris to Zürich was 30 minutes late: heavy snow in the Vosges. Everything else seemed safe, so I went to Platform 7 for the 10.28, 10 cars, fairly well filled, and a 460 Class. Helen arrived with the fresh coffee as agreed, and we were off to Olten, with a 9-minute connection for Herzogenbuchsee, again a 460, not many passengers today. Langenthal had a nice surprise; apart from a busy ASm local, three old Ae6/6

were 'at anchor' in the yard over the Christmas weekend; they would need some digging out on Monday morning! One was 11419, last seen with Malcolm (the Editor) in Yverdon yard during the sugar beet season. A year before she had been stored out of use; apparently there was life in the old dog yet.

Eighteen minutes from Olten we stopped in Herzogenbuchsee and my son-in-law Thomas met us; a 10-minute '4-wheel-drive' to the next village, and we were having more coffee, a country lunch and a snowy walk with three Irish Setters. We were on the 16.34 back to Olten and Basel that afternoon, full of peace and goodwill to all.

The TV news later reported a lot of accidents on the motorways. Swiss public transport had worked well on Christmas Day even following heavy snow - as it should.

A few days later our snow in the lowlands was being augmented by fog and freezing rain so I set off to the mountains. A through train to Spiez; BLS 161 on an Interlaken - Zweisimmen; and the 'Goldenpass' (former MOB) to Lenk-im-Simmental where the weather was splendid and I met-up with local SRS member Beat Feller who was working that day. He is responsible for Driver Training on Goldenpass at Zweisimmen and he was driving one of the two parallel shifts on the Zweisimmen - Lenk line. It's a tough assignment - as the pictures make clear! Heading home my connection back from Spiez to Basel was a 610-Class 'Pendelino'. It ran punctual to the minute - I obviously hit a good day.

TOP: Basel SBB. Weihnachtsmänner, go shunting.

BETWEEN: Two 'Goldenpass' trains at Zweisimmen.

INSET: Beat Feller in his hi-tech driving cab. PHOTOS: Bryan Stone

