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Autor: Bagwell, Tony
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SOME DAYS JUST GET BETTER

Tony Bagwell



At the halfway terminus loop there's time for photos to be taken and passengers in the modern version wonder if they've suffered "time travel".

Headed for a week in Brig, followed by a week in Montreux, as a passenger in my daughter and son-in-law's car, I was a little disappointed to see that the weather forecast was rain and lightning from the first Sunday onwards. My plan was to be dropped off at Valorbe and catch trains on to Brig. Having discovered by mistake a few rural French roads between Dijon and the Swiss border, arrival at Valorbe was later than planned - although still in time for me to board a very scruffy train for Lausanne that gradually filled up with noisy teenagers heading for an evening out in the city. Changing there onto a Genève Airport to Brig IR train, I was somewhat shocked to see my coach was again a very tired looking vehicle, even having at least one missing seat. However things looked up when we received our usual friendly welcome at the Hotel Ambassador followed by a good evening meal.

Sunday morning dawned bright so we all decided we would head for Zermatt using a 'real' train - not a low-floor box on wheels - where you could open the windows. Heading off up the valley from Visp all looked well, but by St Niklaus the view ahead looked decidedly black and soon after the forecast came true. I can't say I recommend Zermatt in the rain,

though some tourists were heading for Gornergrat despite the web-cam at the top showing just grey cloud! Leaving the other two to look around the shops I caught the next train back to Visp. On the premise that if you go through a long enough Swiss tunnel the weather can sometimes change, I headed for the other side of the Lötschberg base tunnel. Exiting proved the theory partly right as it wasn't raining, and by Spiez the sun was nearly out. As it looked even better in the direction



of Bern, I decided to stay on the train and the sun was fully out as we arrived there.

This is when luck plays its part. Having got in the front of the train at Visp (usually quieter than the middle), at Bern I was some way from the stairs down to the subway and the main station exit. Going up to the footbridge and following the signs, I found the alternative exit from which I could see some smoke and steam across the road. My initial thought was that it must be some sort of traction engine but, as I got closer, I realised it was a steam tram and trailer coach. I watched it set off towards the city centre and took a couple of photos before spotting the board noting that trips were hourly and cost CHF10. Thus I waited for its return, found that the conductor spoke English, and duly took my place on the front veranda immediately behind the tram loco. Sadly this trip did not go down past the famous clock but even so I had a long ride out past the tram museum to a turn-round loop where we stopped for a few minutes to take photos before retracing our route back to the city centre. As I said to the conductor, I don't think I could see this happening in England. Then, having taken photos of the steam tram, a vintage electric tram and an old bus, I said my farewells and headed into the old part of Bern for an enjoyable afternoon, often seeing and hearing the tram on its later trips.

Two mornings later I was again going through the Lötschberg tunnel when, strangely enough, who should come down through the train as ticket inspector but the steam tram conductor. Oh, and by the way, the long-term forecast was somewhat pessimistic and the weather was far better than predicted. 



LEFT: This historic electric tram was running a shuttle to the tram museum.

TOP RIGHT: The driver of the modern tram acknowledges the "old timer".

MIDDLE RIGHT: Tram engine and trailer car 31 head off under the arch down the main street of Bern this time.

BOTTOM RIGHT: The steam tram waits for its next group of passengers ready to experience a bygone era.