

Zeitschrift:	Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber:	Swiss Railways Society
Band:	- (2011)
Heft:	108
Artikel:	Steam returns to Luzern : Bryan Stone reports on the Verkehrshaus der Schweiz opening a new railway
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DOI:	https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-854715

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STEAM RETURNS TO LUZERN

Bryan Stone reports on the Verkehrshaus der Schweiz opening a new railway



VHS Director, Martin Bütikofer cuts the ribbon for the first train run.

PHOTOS: Bryan Stone

At the Verkehrshaus der Schweiz (VHS) on the 21st June there was a party - with speeches and Apéro of course - for the re-opening of a steam railway. This was the friendly old Gartenbahn in a new life. SRS members may recall that this was formerly just outside the rail exhibits hall, but the VHS reconstruction plans made its retention there impossible so three years after closure it is back with a new site, a new alignment and with a completely overhauled historic 9" gauge locomotive. Some 3,000 members of the VHS had contributed to the new project and so there was an invitation from Members' Secretary Anita Steiner to share the fun at the inauguration. About 60 came, including your correspondent. The new alignment starts in the corner near the original British-built paddle-steamer 'Rigi' of 1847, also being restored, and makes a 310m circuit around the Shipping Hall, the Hans Erni water gardens, past the picnic place and back again. When the Hans Erni Museum gardens are opened shortly there will be a new station there.

This little railway has its curiosities. The engine will of course catch the eye, but is less than conventional as it models an American logging machine, a 'Climax' B Class 0-4-4-0. Now why should that be? The Climax engines (over 1,000 were built by the Climax Manufacturing Co. in Corry, PA), were relatively effective but nowhere near as ubiquitous as the Shay logging locomotives of Lima, of which many still survive. Few Climax engines do, though I saw one at work in Lincoln, NH, some years ago. The connection is with a great Swiss engineer and steam lover, Casimir von Arx, of Suhr AG, who had acquired a 2-cylinder steam donkey engine for a ship's anchor chain. The configuration reminded him of the Climax, which had inclined cylinders driving a jackshaft with



One young passenger enjoys a rather cramped cab ride. gears to a Cardan transmission serving two bogies. He built the locomotive in 1972 with Gebr. Häflikon in Dullikon, around the cylinders and motion which he had in-hand, and it is a masterly reconstruction. So if anyone asks what CvA on the tender stands for you now know. She is beautifully finished and decorated, runs like a sewing machine, on 10 bar pressure, with Walschaerts valve gear, burning coal: weighs about 700 Kg in working order and handles a 1 in 50 grade (original Climaxes did that with ease!). Although she can run at 15 km/h, the VHS won't try it.

So we have a real Swiss-built steam engine to work our VHS Gartenbahn, and that she is a 'Climax' makes her all the more remarkable. At the event I had a chance to meet, and introduce the SRS to, the new VHS Director, Martin Bütikofer, whose first year this is. Martin made his speech thanking the many who contribute both in the public eye and also behind the scenes. Then just like launching a new TGV service he cut the tape, the Alphorn players hooted melodiously, and we settled down to a convivial evening. Being on holiday in Brienz I had to leave earlier than I would have wished but, as always at the Verkehrshaus, it was good to be there.