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THE LAST DAYS OF THE Ae6/6?



11515 arrives alongside Renens passenger platforms with containers from the Tridel incineration plant served by a 3.8km rail tunnel under Lausanne.

All photos: Gordon Wiseman

Gordon Wiseman reports on two days spent in November trying to photograph disappearing Ae6/6s and brings us up-to-date with these famous locos.

Arriving behind schedule in Genève from Chambéry I missed my ICN to Neuchâtel as the Swiss do not hold services at Genève for late-running SNCF workings as 'there will be another train along in a minute' so I left Genève on the RE to Lausanne. At Nyon the Am843 powered trip working from Genève, which also serves the stub remnant of the Nyon – Divonne-les-Bains line, was present, whilst further up the line at St-Prex another Am843 waited with just a hopper wagon and an Eaos Sugar Beet wagon. At Morges we passed a Bm4/4 top-and-tail with an Am841 on a 'red' train – perhaps a 'leaf buster' working. At Chavornay there was beet equipment, wagons and an unidentified SBB Cargo loco. More sugar beet loading was in progress at Epesses, but no loco, then as we pulled into Yverdon No.11634 was departing south with a cement train whilst SBB Cargo Re4/IIIs Nos. 11270, 11292, 11297 and 11305 were parked there along with two log carrying bogie wagons on transporter trucks in the Ste Croix tracks.

At Colombier, in the Neuchâtel suburbs, the regular Ae6/6 trip working was in the hands of the elusive No.11404, but

despite my best efforts (including riding out to Auvernier on a local to try and catch it as it returned light engine) I missed my last chance to photo it on this service. Back at Neuchâtel, previous observations suggested that there would be two Ae6/6 in the yard at this time of day, No.11404 and the loco off the Les Verrières timber train. I was somewhat thrown as there were three Ae6/6s visible in Neuchâtel yard, two Cargo locos and 11404. Hopeful that this engine would do either the Muntchemier or the Marin Epagnier trip workings on the line to Kerzers, I duly set off to Marin to ensure I was ahead of both the freight trips and the Re6/6 hauled 'Nespresso Express'. On arrival I was surprised to see Ee3/3 No.16386 as a resident shunter parked up in the siding with 4 ballast wagons – possibly to be used as barrier wagons for the Migros shunt. The presence of the Ee3/3, but absence of shunting personnel, initially made me concerned that the Marin Ae6/6 trip freight might not run. After just over an hour, spent eating a picnic lunch in unexpectedly reasonable weather, the afternoon Muntchemier freight passed, pleasingly headed by 610 463 as this is the N scale model that I possess. Sadly that was one more chance of 11404 being on a photographable freight working gone. Then No. 610 492 arrived on the Marin trip with Tm 232 225 and the single DB flat stanchion wagon that I had seen earlier in the non-electrified Prodega siding at St Blaise. The first thing the orange-overalled shunter did was to switch on the overhead on the Migros branch. He then set about unlocking the Ee3/3 and switching that on ready for its duty. The loco shuttled around to set back into the siding on the south side while 16386 set out to do the shunt up the steeply graded curved

siding to the Migros building before returning an hour later. More manoeuvres, as the operating rules require a train to arrive or depart from a main line road not a siding, before 610 492 departed for Neuchâtel. Back at Neuchâtel I had time to walk along the road on the north side of the main lines and the yard where, due to a lack of security fence, I obtained good photographs of 610 492 and 11404 then of 610463 returning with freight 61590 from Muntschemier. Finally 610 463 left on a Neuchâtel-Denges freight and Re4/4II went eastbound on a graffiti-free block Holcim cement train.

After returning to the family home in Genève I was dropped off the next morning at Genthod Bellevue to start my day, seeing the Am842 trip to Nyon pass me on time as I waited to board my train. I followed my usual Valais Ae6/6 photo routine of travelling all the way to Visp in order to check St Maurice for its Ae6/6 turn, and Gampel Steg for the Ae6/6 Sierre working. Both locos were parked in the expected positions, red No.11430 at St Maurice and SBB Cargo 610 492 (seen the day before) at Gampel Steg. In the circumstances I headed back from Visp to Aigle to capture No.11430 as it ran through early on the St Maurice-Villeneuve-Denges freight. I missed the following St Triphon-Denges oil train but overtook No.11430 during its shunting stop at Villeneuve, and was in place to see 11430 pass through Vevey station. In the hope of photographing loco-hauled rush hour passenger workings and trip freight activity before dark, I made my way to Renens and was fully vindicated getting images of No.11515 on Lausanne Tridel 'Binliner' shuttle, No.610 492 on the Sierre – Denges freight, and No.11351 (with Sudostbahn markings coming through faded paintwork!). A successful second day seeing some of the last regular workings of Ae6/6s.

At the December 2012 timetable change SBB Cargo – under severe cost pressure – did an emergency review of diagrams resulting in the remaining Ae6/6 diagrams being cancelled forthwith. Effectively an edict was issued by SBB Cargo that no Ae6/6 should turn a wheel, although some workings persisted after the edict was issued (supposedly emergency use) but these soon fizzled out. Locos remaining were divided into batches for scrap, for 'cold' store, and for 'warm' store. The latter were the locos with the most life left in them and they were dispatched to a sheltered siding at Däniken postal depot to be held in reserve for the Autumn 2013 sugar beet season. In a somewhat unexpected move this batch were allocated for a return to service last March. Remarkably No.11419 (a red 55 year old 'Kantonslok' complete with aluminium stripes) was included. On the 12th March No.11427 visited Kloten and Zofingen whilst No.11419 reached Solothurn from Limmattal, did the mid-day freight Solothurn to Oberburg and back and returned. In late March a few of the batch were returned to store having not been in active use, but at the time of writing (29/03/13) the two above were still working ex –Limmattal; Nos.11430 and 11517 were working ex Bülach on Huntwangen stone trains and No.11513 was working ex Lausanne-Triage. 



11430 passes Aigle with the afternoon St Maurice – Denges freight.



11430 rumbles through Vevey station with the afternoon St Maurice – Denges freight.



610 492 prepares to leave Marin-Epagnier with the afternoon trip freight back to Neuchâtel yard.



610 463 heads east through Marin Epagnier with the afternoon trip to the Vigier concrete sleeper works at Muntschemier.