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GROSSES BLS EISENBAHNFEST - BAHNOF FRUTIGEN

Boyd Misstear reports on the
BLS 100th Anniversary
celebrations



Ae 6/8 No 205 Swiss Class Train at Frutigen during the BLS100 Festival.

Photos by: Boyd Misstear, except where noted

Over the weekend of 29-30th June 2013, the Bern Lötschberg Simplon Bahn (BLS) celebrated in style the 100th anniversary of the opening of the direct Bern to Brig route through the Alps, that connected with the existing Jura Simplon Railway's Simplon Tunnel. This had opened for service with a single bore in 1906, having taken 7 ½ years to build – then the longest railway tunnel in the world at 19.7km.

Although the weather on Saturday 29th was uncooperative, compared to the following gloriously sunny Sunday, dignitaries arrived in style aboard two special trains. First into Frutigen was the “*Swiss Classic Train*” of 10 gleaming coaches pulled by historic Ae 6/8 No.205. Shortly afterwards, and to the delight of those assembled in the rain, came another Ae 6/8, No.208, hauling three coaches of the newly renovated and remodelled “*Prestige Continental Express*”, including “*Le Salon Blue*”, “*Le Rubis Noir*” and “*Le Diamant*”. HO-scale modellers may be interested to learn that the first two of these coaches are available as a set from Roco.



Given the very wet conditions a team of kind and helpful BLS staff were on-hand to hand-out distinctive lime green BLS collapsible umbrellas to provide some level of protection against the very wet conditions. The BLS Band, who later retreated into the dry of the Lötschberg Tunnel Rescue Train Shed, offered up rousing renditions of national musical compositions that enabled dignitaries and enthusiasts, employees and visitors, everyone young and old, to get the first of two memorable days off to a great start. A number of ladies and gentlemen were present in suitable period costumes, with the added intention of promoting the “*Belle-Epoque*” film and photographic festival to be held in Kandersteg between 19-26 January 2014.

See www.kandersteg.ch/de/belle_epoque

A large map erected outside the station, together with smaller handouts, helped everyone to realize the size and scope of the planned celebrations in and around the Frutigen Station complex. Events and displays were taking place on both sides of the main line and these could be accessed by either the underpass or by a shuttle fleet of BLS “*Busland AG*” coaches. There were stalls under tents offering a variety of local produce to buy or eat. There was food-a-plenty to sustain everyone as they moved from one exhibit area to another. One stall keeper however seemed doomed to little sales on the first day - but made up for it the next. Ice cream! Exhibits extended from sales of railway memorabilia (clearly the BLS had taken the opportunity to have a corporate clear-out – much to the delight of many enthusiasts, and causing some to wonder how to carry items home), to a ‘BLS Historic’ display of stationary locomotives and rail cars. These were located


Ae 6/8 No 208 approaching in the rain.

Photo: Bryan Stone



next to the recently renovated original station building, resplendent with its dark wood panelling and light brown walls on the upper story, with white on the ground floor. A Stadler simulator, to train drivers on modern electric locomotives, was also present. For young children there was a BLS miniature railway to ride on.

For a CHF10 supplement the BLS offered

a special train schedule between Frutigen - Blausee Mitzholz - Kandersteg, using either Ae 6/8 (Nos.205 and 208) in 9 or 10 coach SCT compositions; Ae 4/4 No. 251, 4 EWI coaches; and BN Be 4/4 No.761 in two tone green plus "Brownie" Re 425 No.172. In the yard, a modern Am 843 offered children the opportunity to drive up and down blowing its horn - to their delight and the probable dismay of the many staff located nearby! Amongst the latter were BLS and other personnel from manufacturers demonstrating a wide array of capabilities; including fire and accident response; pollution spill control, along with righting and re-railing wagons and passenger coaches. There was even a driving trailer over on its side at some 60 degrees, supported on bales of hay, showing its underbelly for all to see and featuring in an exercise to show how recovery teams operate. The historic side of BLS Marine was not left out, as they had an interesting photo exhibit. Also present were enterprising local community interests from wood carving through to a radio controlled model glider aircraft club. Despite some indications earlier in the year that due to cost considerations the BLS were contemplating cutting back on the celebrations, there was absolutely no sign that this had happened and the organizers can be justly proud of the show that played out through both rain and shine with reported attendance of some 18,000 over two days, being testament to their achievement. Further Jubilee Year celebrations are planned by the BLS. Details may still be found at www.bls.ch/100. 



ABOVE: A warm welcome from the train conductor.

1. Cut out figures in period costumes stand in front of an original platform trolley.

2. A small train ride for small children. Photo: Bryan Stone

3. BLS accident re-railing demonstration at Frutigen.

4. The original station building at Frutigen.

5. A BN Be 4/4 railcar joins the celebrations at Frutigen.