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A DIFFERENT POSTAUTO

Peter Keating



Three axle Setra at Olivone.

Photo: Peter Keating

Prior to this year I had travelled by Post Autos over the majority of the Alpine Passes in Switzerland and all the routes were operated by the Swiss Post. A pass that I had not travelled over until last July was the Lukmanier Pass in an area of the country not frequented by too many tourists. I could see from the Kursbuch that from my base at Filisur it was possible to do the convoluted journey in a day. The first leg was by RhB train to Thusis, then a PostAuto through the tunnel under the Passo di San Bernadino to Bellinzona, an SBB train to Biasca and by PostAuto from there over the Lukmanier Pass to return from Disentis, via Chur, on the RhB. The route over the pass starts from Olivone in the Ticino and naturally I expected a PostAuto operated by Swiss Post to take me to Olivone where I could see from the Kursbuch a connecting service would take me to the summit of the Pass, where there was a short break with another change of vehicle, before descending to Disentis. Waiting at the due time Biasca Stazione I was surprised when a Setra of Autolinee Bleniesi (based in the town)

arrived for the journey to Olivone, a remote community of less than 1000 people some 900m high at the head of the Val Blenio. Until its closure in 1973 the 13.8km metre-gauge Biasca Acquarossa- Comprovasco railway, opened in 1911, ran along the lower section of this valley. Its route is now a cycle path. Following a seven-minute change at Olivone Posta I joined another vehicle operated by the same company for the 30 minute climb up the Valle Santa Maria to the 1916m summit of the Lukmanier Pass/Passo del Lucomagno. Here, on the cantonal boundary between Ticino and Graubünden amidst the bleak scenery of the high alps and next to the head of a large lake formed by the damming of the valley, I changed to the connecting PostAuto. This service descended 800m in some 20km down the Val Medel to Disentis and my train back to Chur and Filisur. The route over the Lukmanier Pass, although important in mediaeval times and once touted as a rival to the Gotthard by 19thC railway planners, is no longer a strategic one and the five daily PostAuto connections only operate from mid-June to mid-October, whilst the road is not always passable in winter. ☑

AND FINALLY...

Robin Sherwood asks: Do you know the Engstlenalp?

One of my favourite haunts is an almost inaccessible, but unforgettable, alpine valley, reached four times a day by PostAuto (CHF15 Alpine Supplement applies) from Meiringen, which ends, after winding slowly for 50 minutes up a narrow mountain road with lots of romantic Pee-Pa-Po hooting at the Engstlenalp. This is a true Alp - a kilometre-wide high meadow at 1834m where Wanderwege lead off in various directions. My favourite is the easy one that goes along the shore of the Engstlensee. It is in fact a thousand-year-old

mule track, the original trade route between Engelberg, with its wealthy monastery, the Grimsel and onward into Italy. There is the excellent historic Engstlenalp Hotel - Rösti is recommended - where the PostAuto route terminates, and the path to the lake and the Joch Pass to Engelberg go off behind it. Watch out for marmots: they are here in profusion, but difficult to spot. Away to the northwest is the steeply climbing cliff path to Melchsee-Frutt and Planplatten (Hasliberg) over the Balmereg, but this needs fitness and a head for heights. You need to



remember that 300 years ago, at this remote location, they dug iron ore at 2000m near the Balmeregg, and carried it for smelting by sledge to Mühletal on the Susten road, which

the PostAuto passed en-route. Life was brutal, and short, up here. This high valley has the stuff of history all around it, and an ethereal beauty of its own. ❏

Ivan Rodrigues – News from the Switzerland Travel Centre

2014 will see some changes to the Swiss Travel System products. There will be a new addition to the standard range, the Swiss Peak Pass, which includes the following mountain excursions: Allalin (Metro Alpin), Brienz Rothorn, Cardada, Corvatsch, Niesen, Rochers-de-Naye, Säntis and Stanserhorn. The Swiss Peak Pass will be available only in conjunction with a 4 or 8-day Swiss Pass/Saver Pass for a small surcharge (approx £20 for 4-days and £41 for 8-days). Most additional mountain excursions will still be offered at a 50% reduction. We hope that SRS members will be able to take advantage of the different peaks on offer and we look forward to seeing your photos from each mountain peak - the best ones showcasing the spectacular views may receive a surprise! Another change will be the reduction granted to the Saver Pass program. To date, 2-5 passengers travelling together at all times were entitled to a 15% discount on the price of an Individual Swiss Pass. This reduction will now be 10% and will come into effect for travel from 1st January 2014. The CHF prices for the Swiss Pass, Swiss Flexi Pass and Swiss Half Fare Card however, remain unchanged (GBP prices may alter slightly subject to currency fluctuation). For 2014 we have been informed that the Wilhelm Tell Express will no longer be operating its Premium Service. The Standard Wilhelm Tell Express, which comprises a lunch cruise on Lake Lucerne and a train trip by comfortable panorama coach along the legendary Gotthard route to the southernmost part of Switzerland, will still be available year round. STC are pleased to confirm that we will continue to offer SRS members a 5% discount on STS passes and on STC packages, including our Experience packages, Scenic Rail holidays and Tailor-made holidays in 2014. Contact us now to pre-register for your 2014 Experience and Scenic brochures. We look forward to

assisting you with your travel plans for 2014. Finally, STC will be participating at the Destination Show at London's Earls Court from the 6th to 9th February 2014 when we hope to see as many SRS members as possible. ❏

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