

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: - (2014)
Heft: 117

Artikel: A grand day out!
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-854095>

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A GRAND DAY OUT!

Mike Ellis

If something's worth doing, I always say it should be done in style. And so it was when Helena and I were planning our wedding event early in 2013. We were looking for a venue where we could invite 36 guests, family and friends, for a day to celebrate our recent marriage and provide all concerned, a day to remember. Having evaluated some local OK-ish ideas and locations we then considered the Brienz Rothorn Bahn although not exactly local, it's about 90km away, but central for nearly everyone invited.

Contact and arrangements were easy, disconcertingly so, as I didn't expect things to be so straightforward acting as a customer and not strictly as an employee. Arrangements included the charter of a train with a coach matched to our group size. The paired locomotive was No.5, the last of the batch delivered to the BRB in 1892 along with the coaches. Our request for a 'Sausage Stop' in Planalp was incorporated in the schedule, along with catering and overnight accommodation in the Hotel Rothorn Kulm, for those wanting to make a weekend of the trip. 'One-stop-shopping' in the true sense, and painless to organize even down to the flowers arranged on the loco by the local florist!



So it was that on the 13.07 2013 (yes, all prime numbers), that we all met at the BRB station on a morning blessed with superb weather to match the occasion. Welcome coffees and Gipfeli were on hand from the Station Buffet and our guests were therefore occupied whilst I took my 'Girls' up to the workshop yard (where else?) for a photo shoot. Following



the photo session our descent down from the yard to the station became a great PR stunt, as there just happened to be a coach load of Japanese guests ready with cameras waiting at the ticket barrier, our train being well decorated was correspondingly photogenic. Our train, being a charter with extended stop booked for Planalp (and on a busy day) was the third in a series of three trains stacked up in the single platform at Brienz. The station was so full that they had us backed right out onto the stops at the main street, great for photos but highly distracting for the traffic slowing down to watch. The group photo was therefore taken from the middle of the road with traffic blocked in both directions!



Because we had a photographer organized I wanted to get a good action shot of our departure. Our slightly stressed driver Kurt was willing, but was also well aware of the time constraints for passing oncoming traffic at Geldried (the first passing loop). The agreement was he would give us a good start but the young lady with the camera would have to run and jump onto the coach balcony with the conductor... No big deal – she made it!

Once Kurt had N°5 warmed up and notched back, she settled into her characteristic rhythm as we journeyed up through the back gardens of Brienz and into the dense forests up to Geldried. As expected we were being waited for by oncoming traffic and so were able to pass non-stop through this first loop and on up to the series of tunnels below Planalp. The noise, smells, and sights one experiences during this section of the journey are the 'real feeling' when a steam loco is pounding its way up the 1 in 4 gradient. It was therefore a very excited and animated group that wondered what was going on as we passed through Planalp, stopped, and then set back into the down side of the passing loop and finally parked. Disembarking was amusing to observe whilst high heels and tight skirts were tested to the maximum!!! With great interest our party started to watch and wonder as Kurt, and our Conductor Doris, proceeded to cook and serve the famous BRB cheese sausages with patented Rack-Bread. Washed down with the local 'Twister' apple juice the mood was truly set for the day and we were all definitely 'on-a-roll'. The planned 45 minutes were soon up however, and, to avoid congestion on the 'up fast' we were soon on board once again and underway to Rothorn Kulm.



The section above Planalp opens out onto the alpine meadows and provides the wondrous views both upwards to the peaks and downwards across the valley and its lake towards Interlaken. Our guests were soaking it all up, expectant of what was to come. Crossing the Chüemad meadow and then the Kühmatt Tunnel we arrived at Oberstafel loop, where once again, we were able to pass waiting trains, full of clicking and flashing cameras, catching our excursion at every angle. The non-stop tempo soon had us crossing Dirrengrind, (site of the legendary derailment), and entering the last section traversing the craggy landscape of the Rothorns' upper reaches, the hotel building getting ever nearer. The final series of avalanche galleries and tunnels at Schöneegg open out to the final approach onto the summit station Rothorn Kulm, 2244m above sea level and over a mile

above this shimmering turquoise of Lake Brienz far below.

High heels and short skirts were once again put to the test as our group proceeded to the hotel and the sumptuous meal Sandra's team had prepared for us. (Following the main course by-the-way, we all had to take a very sedate walk up the final slope to the summit. Not just for a last group photo but also to make space for dessert – but that's another story).

Our thanks to the BRB team, in particular Doris and Kurt who together made the event a truly **'Grand Day Out!'** 

Editor's Note. Mike Ellis lives in Switzerland and acts as BRB's sales representative for English-speaking regions. He also undertakes marketing, translations, web editing, writing articles and conducting workshop tours and footplate trips for the railway. For further information on the BRB contact him at michael.ellis@brb.ch or at www.brienz-rothorn-bahn.ch .



MIRACOLO DI COMO

Mario Gavazzi reports on the rebirth of a favourite paddle steamer

For a lot of Swiss the Italian Lago di Como, and its namesake town, are considered to be almost a part of their country. Indeed Como almost considers itself Swiss. In a recent unofficial referendum carried out by a local newspaper, a large majority of the town's citizens suggested that they would like the



100 years old and so young - *PS Gallia*, fastest steamboat in Switzerland!

Photo: Mario Gavazzi

location to be annexed by Switzerland! At its nearest point the border is only 2km distant from the town and its beautiful stretch of water. Consequently many Swiss steamship enthusiasts are as interested as their Italian counterparts in the shipping services that use the lake. This interest from Switzerland was apparent on Friday 19th July when the town of Como was en-fete to celebrate the re-inauguration of the 100-year-old *PS Patria* after more than 22 years out of service. The official ceremony was organised by the Provincia di Como in the beautiful 17th century Villa Gallia located near the lake at Como. In an interesting coincidence a few

days later at Luzern another ceremony was held to mark the centenary of the SGV's *PS Gallia*. The Swiss and Italian steamship enthusiasts have to be thankful to a number of organisations for the superb restoration of the *PS Patria*. Foremost were the Provincia di

Como, and its President Leonardo Carioni, plus the Association Famiglia Comasca and its President Piercesare Bordoli. The restoration work was supported by financial help from the Italian Department of Infrastructure and Traffic, the administration of Regione Lombardia and the foundation of the Bank Cariplo. It is hoped that the first regular sailings of, and visits to, the restored ship *PS Patria* will take place next year. The administration of Provincia di Como have opened a «facebook piroscrafo Patria» where all the historic details and current information about the project, sailings, etc. can be seen. 