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Swiss News

Block oil trains in northwest Switzerland

Prior to being closed in March 2015 the Tamoil refinery in Collombey (owned by Libya) was importing through a pipeline from Genova in Italy some 2.5m tonnes annually of crude oil and refining it for Swiss national distribution. With the closure SBB lost a contracted volume of at least 5 daily block trains of tank cars of refined products from the refinery. The market needs were as before so replacement volumes are now being brought by tanker barges up the Rhein to harbours at Muttenz and Birsfelden near Basel. Volumes fluctuate, but at least 1m additional tonnes/year are to be imported using the Rhein, while a further additional million tonnes can arrive by rail in Switzerland, at Basel, Schaffhausen and Kreuzlingen. Since freight is an open market, operators other than SBB are also competing for this cargo. The Rhein harbours can handle these volumes, but undoubtedly a contest for train paths will emerge in the northwest, where the Bözberg line via Frick (which carries the main Gotthard freight flow) and the Hauenstein line via Olten (which takes most Lötschberg line freight) have already heavy passenger and freight traffic. Safety issues will also need examination, as each year over 500 additional tank ships will come up the Rhein and through the Basel city area to reach the harbours for transshipment. Still, freight train lovers will not be disappointed.

The Daillens accident

Although an increase in block oil trains is good news for railway operators, moving potentially hazardous liquids by rail can pose special problems when things go wrong. At 02.54 on 25th April a serious accident occurred at Daillens, junction of the Lausanne – Yverdon and Lausanne – Vallorbe lines. Fortunately there were no casualties, but the lines were closed completely until 4th May as some 500 m of track, and associated signalling cables, etc. were destroyed. In a mixed freight train of 26 wagons, running at about 100 km/h, the last six - all tanks or tank containers loaded with chemicals - were derailed, overturned and fell down an embankment. The scheduled train (No 60700) was made up in Muttenz yard Basel, for Lausanne yard, the derailed wagons all being for a chemical plant in Monthey, Canton Vaud. The severity of delays was due to some 24t of 98% pure sulphuric acid being released from one of the tanks, contaminating the ground, and involving sealing off and heavy protective clothing for all called to the site. The earth and ballast affected had to be removed, requiring construction by the Army of a field access road. The adjoining Daillens parcels post centre and intermodal yard had to be evacuated and could not operate. The immediate cause, though not the whole explanation, was quickly localised. On one axle of a VTG 4-axle tank car in the wreckage, a roller bearing axle cover, the bearing itself and a spring, were missing; some of these parts were found at the trackside some 500 m short of the derailment. Investigation of the circumstances is still in progress.

The route Olten – Biel – Yverdon – Lausanne is extensively used for freight trains. Diversions were attempted, using the Bern – Fribourg – Lausanne main line, which normally sees few freights. This route carries heavy

passenger traffic, and a 1 in 50 (2%) gradient from Lausanne to Puidoux-Chevbres reduces freight train loads by a third. Transit through Bern HB is also not easily planned, whilst a landslide on the Fribourg line during heavy rain did not help. Bus services were substituted for the twice-hourly ICN trains on the Yverdon line. Lausanne – Vallorbe – Paris TGV passengers and some TGVs were diverted via Genève. Transport of hazardous cargo is regulated by a UN Convention, to which European states and their railways are subject. Reporting procedures are strict, and cargo must be identified (UN Code, train message) to facilitate alarm in emergency. In addition, tank cars and containers have their own regulations on construction, safety fittings and inspection procedures. Train formation is not restricted; nor are barrier wagons and other measures required. Some special operational conditions are imposed, as for block trains of chlorine from France/Genève/Rhone valley. In Switzerland certain products, such as chlorine and ammonia, may not be moved by bulk on road. A joint industry/transportation group is working on eliminating risks by localising manufacture of some hazardous products at the point of use, rather than relying on long road or rail hauls.

New Bözberg Tunnel

In July SBB awarded a CHF145m construction contract for a new twin track tunnel to replace the existing Bözberg Tunnel. Construction is due to commence in early 2016 and when complete in 2020 the tunnel will enable lorry semi-trailors with a 4m corner height to use the route. Once the existing tunnel is taken out of service construction can commence on five emergency exit cross-shafts from the new to the old tunnel, with completion of this final phase of works scheduled for 2022.

Centenary in Vallorbe

The history of lines between Lausanne and France through the difficult terrain of the Jura Massive merits examination, for it was a mixture of grand strategies, which achieved little, and local machinations, which sometimes worked. A consequence was that in 1862 it became possible to go from Lausanne to Paris without changing, although via a long detour and a reversal in Neuchâtel. Building the line to Vallorbe started in 1867 and involved 1 in 45 (2.22%) grades, and a local line from Vallorbe (with reversal) to Pontarlier via Hôpitaux-Neufs completed a shorter, but also steep, cut-off avoiding Neuchâtel. It took 50 years for the next improvement when, following the opening of the Simplon Tunnel to Italy in 1906, the 7km Mont d'Or tunnel was driven through the Jura above Vallorbe and opened in May 1915. This became, after 1918, a major international route used by trains such as the Direct Orient Express, but WWII left the tunnel closed and damaged. In 1961 came the 'Cisalpin' TEE between Paris and Milan, more overnight expresses and heavy freight traffic. All this activity has now largely disappeared, with today some five 'Thalia' TGVs daily between Lausanne and Paris, but little else. The old line from Vallorbe to Pontarlier closed in WWII; a section in France is home to the Museum railway Coni'Fer, with regular steam trains using two ex-CFF/SBB 'Tigerli' E3/3 0-6-0Ts. Still, there was interest and energy for a major celebration last May of 100 years of the Mont d'Or tunnel, with rolling stock, special trains and dignitaries. Vallorbe is not without

interest. There is a museum of railways and iron-making in the town, and the station is a huge monumental building from the days when frontiers and railways meant stopping, douânes, examining and counting, and above all waiting. Now it is mostly deserted. The former engine shed was long used to store treasures from the Transport Museum and SBB Historic. Today's treasure is an unbelievable German 42 class Austerity 2-10-0, which has been rescued by Coni'Fer, and is well on the way to restoration.

Final demise of another line to France

Further to the east along the Franco-Suisse frontier that runs along the Jura Massive there was once a railway border crossing station at Pfetterhouse, on an extension of the line up from Porrentruy to Bonfol, that once carried on into Alsace. The 'international' line closed in 1970 although services had gone before that. The Chemins de fer du Jura (CJ) now operate a basic shuttle service over the 10.9km of this their only standard gauge line, between the two Swiss towns. Some years ago a former tip for dangerous chemicals was discovered some 2km north of Bonfol and over a long period this has generated regular block container trains of hazardous refuse that was being taken away, using the line, to be rendered harmless. At the end of 2015 the clearance will be completed and the track beyond Bonfol station to the clearance site, the last relic of the former link to the SNCF, will then be removed. The French track went years ago.

Also in the Jura...

From the introduction of the December 2015 timetable an unexpected innovation will be the extension of the Bern – Neuchâtel service to La Chaux-de Fonds. A joint SBB/BLS 30-minute interval service will be created with the SBB using FLIRT units (replacing the Dominos) and the BLS using their Class 465 locos and EWIII train sets. This stock will become available as the BLS will introduce Lötschberger units on the Bern – Luzern diagrams. Will the 'Kambly' train-set lose its advertising livery?

...and more



Chambrelieu Station.

Bryan Stone collection

Chambrelieu is not often in the news, at least since Canton Neuchâtel's voters turned down a rail project which would have made redundant its unique SBB reversing station. (For the sticklers, there is also a metre-gauge reversing station at Combe Tabeillon on the CJ – again in the Jura). In steam days there was a turntable at the end of

the stub track to ensure that the locos always faced the correct direction. Over the 1st May weekend the line from La Chaux-de-Fonds to Sonceboz and on to Biel had to be closed for renewals. The result was diversion of the quite heavy daily freight working from La Chaux-de-Fonds. So we saw an Re6/6 (normally never seen in Chambrelieu) rolling in downhill with a heavy train, running round, and crossing a Domino local train, before leaving for Neuchâtel, all naturally with the presence of the photographers who had been warned in advance.

Commuter numbers to rise significantly

SBB recently predicted that the number of commuters at Zürich Hauptbahnhof, will increase by 70% over the next two decades, but that the highest rise in commuter numbers is predicted in the French and Italian speaking regions of Switzerland, with up to 90% more train commuters by 2035. Across the entire Swiss railway network, the number of passengers is expected to increase by 30% by 2030. This will put more pressure on stations, which are often at their maximum limit.

SBB Historic

On 31st May the new location of SBB Historic in Brugg-Windisch was celebrated as part of the annual Open Day in the Bahnpark Brugg. See www.sbbhistoric.ch for the facilities in Brugg, where archives are now open, with literature, posters and photos and other collections can be visited. Much material is now accessible online.

Eppenbergtunnel

This major SBB project was launched on 2nd May by the turning of the 'First Sod' of the driving of the 3km long tunnel between Däniken and Olten. Serious boring will start in 2016 and will last two years, with services scheduled to start in 2020. This is a controversial project, but it was eventually realised that there really was no easier way to relieve one of the worst bottlenecks on the whole network. Along with other related works, on completion there will then be four tracks through this section. A 15-minute interval service between Bern and Zürich is planned, together with half-hourly S-Bahn services Olten-Aarau and a new service from Zofingen.

SBB Power Investment

In April SBB agreed a contract with power and automation technology group ABB, worth around CHF30m to help boost power and increase capacity on lines in South-west and Central Switzerland. The agreement, also in conjunction with Matterhorn Gotthard Bahn, will provide three new traction substations on the network in order to meet rising traffic volumes. The work will be completed by 2018.

SBB recruits outside Switzerland

Also in April SBB announced that it was urgently seeking to employ 40 fully trained foreign train drivers, mainly from Germany, due to the fact that over the last two years SBB has not been able to train enough drivers. Swiss railway staff provider MEV Schweiz has been charged with managing the recruitment. In November 2014 SBB reported that they had a shortfall of around 50 drivers/day. To solve the problem, SBB initially wanted to bring back retired drivers for the short-term and to offer more training places on the

long-term. During 2015 it is planned to train 169 new drivers, with an increase to 194 in 2016.

A serious incident at Erstfeld

On 13th May, as a southbound SBB freight was leaving under clear signals and taking the crossover from Track 2 to Track 1, which is the main running line, it hit a southbound BLS freight leaving Track 1. This had stopped for a driver change, and the attachment of an assisting engine. Having started to move off it had been stopped after drawing up to a dwarf signal, set properly at 'Stop', which protected the crossover that was set for the SBB train. Clearly the driver of the BLS train did not wait as intended, but read the next main signal as giving him authority to depart. This was a platform starter on Track 1, which had been cleared, after the crossover had been set correctly for the SBB freight. The collision was not then to be avoided, and falls into an unhappy pattern of such incidents, where trains converge because their signalled status is not clear. Apparently this situation is well known in Erstfeld and experienced drivers speak of a 'trap'. The layout is some 40 years old, and with the Gotthard base tunnel about to take away most of the traffic that passes through the station, there has clearly been reluctance to spend money on renewals and eliminating potential problem areas.

Other recent incidents

The Simplon Line between Lausanne and Lutry was closed in early May by a mudslide following a period of torrential rain. Although single line working was soon established it resulted in a week of cancellations, especially of IR trains, and severe delays. On 25th May the Schöllenen gorge, between Göschenen and Andermatt, was blocked by a rock fall. The MGB line was quickly reopened and for three weeks it was the only way to reach Andermatt from the north. Vehicle traffic was held back in Göschenen with travellers able to take the hastily improvised shuttle trains. At this time of year the Gotthard, Oberalp and Furka road passes are all closed. On 26th May, at Lauterbrunnen, a departing BOB set included ABeh 4/4 No.310, which was derailed because of a bogie defect on entering the rack section, which begins at the platform end. The sudden shock as the main train was already on the 1 in 11 gradient caused the train to divide. The automatic train brake acted at once, and there was no danger to passengers and staff, but there was some 5 hours of clearing up. Then on 4th June the Schynige Platte Bahn suffered a double derailment. At Rotenegg, the first crossing point on the rack line some 2km up from Wilderswil, a descending train (led, as usual, by a two axle locomotive) was derailed entering the loop, where an obstruction impeded clear passage over the diverging line. No-one was hurt and little damage was done. It was arranged for these passengers to be taken down by a train sent up from Wilderswil. However, another train descending from Schynige Platte arrived above Rotenegg, stopped before the loop, and was ordered back up to the middle station at Breitlauenen due to the blockage. Regrettably, before this could be done, a false manipulation allowed it to roll a few metres downhill, where it ran over a clamp that had been attached after the first incident to the rack rail. This derailed the locomotive causing it to fall against the cutting wall. This resulted in around 100 people trapped above Rotenegg. They were brought down with available trains to just above

Rotenegg, having then a half-hour walk to transport to Wilderswil. Twelve less mobile persons were evacuated by helicopter. Not a good day for the operators! In mid June, after heavy storms, services on the ZB Brünig Line were disrupted over four days. Landslides between Giswil and Kaiserstuhl, a not unusual problem, required that buses ran from Giswil to Meiringen over the Brünig Pass. Finally the run of bad luck culminated on the 22nd June with a serious fire in the basement of the Lausanne control centre, which had to close down and be evacuated. It took 75 minutes to extinguish the fire, and Lausanne station was closed for two hours; trains were affected over the whole region along Lake Genève and as far away as Neuchâtel and Bern, so it was some hours before the normal timetable could be restored.

Basel BVB Tram Line 3...

After many years of discussions and political uncertainty work has now started on a 3.1km extension of Line 3 from its present terminus on the French frontier at Burgfelden, to the SNCF station of St Louis on the Basel - Mulhouse line. From the scheduled opening in Dec 2017 every second tram will run through to St Louis Gare where a 740 place Park-and-Ride facility is to be built. The principal 'raison d'être' of the line is to offer an alternative to car-using French commuters who travel daily to work in Basel. The city, with its mediaeval street plan, has a clear policy of reducing urban traffic by 10% from 2010 levels; this means considerable further investment in the already well-developed BVB and BLT systems, but it must also encompass the conurbations that surround it in Alsace and Baden Wurtemberg.

...and an absurd Basel incident

On 25th April an absurd but devastating incident caused chaos for the SBB. In February an electric train heating connection in the sidings at the east end of the station was re-installed - but incorrectly. It escaped detection until a signals technician was testing the fire security of some connections, got an unusual indication and tried to isolate this socket. The result was a sudden earthing of all the power in-and-around the station: catenary; signals; lighting; information displays; IT systems; everything! The result was that one of Switzerland's busiest stations came to an abrupt halt for 70 minutes, apart for the French end which had its separate 25 KV supply for SNCF operations. No one was hurt, but there were red Swiss faces all around - and smug French ones.

Gütschbahn, Luzern

In 2008, after several changes in ownership, the Château Gütsch in Luzern was bought by a group of investors who renovated the hotel and restaurant, but decommissioned the associated Gütschbahn, dismantled the stations, and sold the Riggenschbach rack equipment to the Rigibahnen. The only car on the 330m long line that rose 84m, at a gradient of 531‰, also disappeared. Moving on, Château Gütsch, closed, changed hands again, then the hotel and restaurant reopened May 2014. It was planned that an inclined lift using two cars on parallel tracks was to be installed on the old alignment of the funicular, but it was understood that there was a problem with the necessary permits, and other approvals, even though Stadt Luzern has contributed some CHF1.7m to the project - to be paid in instalments as work progressed. However construction

work re-commenced in April with an opening planned during Summer 2015.

Bremgarten Dietikon Wohlen-Meisterschwanden (BDWM)

For over 100 years, there was a third, standard-gauge rail on the metre gauge line of the BDWM between Bremgarten-West and Wohlen, where a connection for freight operations to the Aarau – Rotkreuz SBB line was made. This rail was disconnected for removal on 28th June. This being Switzerland, a suitable public party was organised with three days of special trains including the Eb3/5 No. 9 from Zürich, and bm4/4 II No.1851 of SBB Historic. The BDWM's standard-gauge line between Wohlen-Meisterschwanden was closed in 1999, and the 8.2km track bed is now a cycle route, but railcar BDe 4/4 No.2 that used to work on it came from the DSF Museum in Koblenz to join in the 'celebration'.

Aigle – Sépey – Diablerets (ASD)

A trip up to Les Diablerets on 24th April found No.401 on the 10.54 from Aigle. The points and signals installed for automation of operations and block signalling were almost ready for their entry into service this June. Thus the last Swiss adhesion railway to run without block signalling, simply with telephone dispatching, eventually becomes like all the others. Even modernised, it is still one of the best rides going. A special exhibition for the centenary was staged this summer near the station in Vers l'Église.

Brienz Rothorn Bahn (BRB)

During a recent holiday in Brienz your News Editor met up with our friends Simon Koller and Mike Ellis at the BRB. As an outcome of the Roy Dungalson Bequest the SRS are providing a locally manufactured seat for the BRB to install at Planalp Station, following the necessary reconstruction at this location. Unfortunately the planned works had to be postponed from last year when the BRB's limited financial resources had to be diverted to essential track repairs. Construction is now in full swing as can be seen in the accompanying photo taken in July when a spell of excellent weather helped the contractor to move forward. It is hoped that the building work will be complete before the line shuts down for the winter so that the official opening will be able to take place next spring. More details to follow.



Work at Planalp on the BRB.

Photo: Bryan Stone

BLS reorganises signalling

We understand that Kandersteg box is to close on Sunday 6th September 2015 with its signalling operations being transferred to the Goppenstein box. However, this is a

temporary measure as eventually the control functions of the three signalboxes at Brig and Goppenstein will eventually be centralised at the Spiez Central Control.

Old rescues New

On the 4th July the 'Glacier Pullman Express' from St Moritz to Zermatt was held for some time at Visp due to an 'incident' further up the line. Progress onwards from there was slow as the train was held at all passing loops, finally pulling into a loop between Kalpetran and St Niklaus alongside one of MGB's latest units. It is believed that this had finally failed whilst en-route to Zermatt due to a software problem. It was then decided that the 'Express' should rescue the trapped passengers. This was apparently no easy task due to the high steps up into the old Pullman coaches, especially as one of the local passengers was severely disabled. The 'Express' eventually arrived in Zermatt two hours late. It would appear that there is a lot to be said in favour of older, simpler technology. The ex-FO HGe4/4 No.36 (1949 vintage) that hauled the 'Express' from Disentis to Zermatt, and the RhB Crocodile No.415 (1929 vintage) that hauled the first stage from St Moritz, both performed immaculately throughout the journey.

Gotthard Base Tunnel



Gotthard Base Tunnel liveried loco .

Photo: Bryan Stone

Full commercial operation begins with the timetable starting on 11th December 2016. Trial running starts in June 2016 with freight traffic and, from August, some passenger trains. On 16th August 2015 the approach line Brunnen – Altdorf – Erstfeld will be converted to ETCS Level 2, with the consequence that only ETCS-equipped rolling stock can then penetrate beyond Brunnen, even for the old Gotthard line. On 1st November 2015 this will also apply from the south when Bodio – Castione will convert to ETCS Level 2 operation. As already reported in Swiss Express a full 'opening programme' with private and public events will take place in early June 2016. An extensive public information programme is already running throughout Switzerland, including TV advertising, emphasising the mythology of the Gotthard Pass that is central to Swiss thinking. Two locomotives, No.460 098 and No.420 068, were recently named in Luzern at a 'one year to go' ceremony. On 1st June 2016 1,000 people chosen by lot, will ride the two official opening trains, then on 4th/5th June some 100,000 persons are expected at events at the two ends of the tunnel.

Ceneri Base Tunnel delayed

Although the Gotthard base Tunnel is to open in 2016 it has been announced that the 15.4km Ceneri Base Tunnel

will not be commissioned until December 2020, a year later than previously scheduled, due to a dispute over tendering. The delay means that it will not be possible to carry lorry semitrailers with a corner height of 4m on the Basel - Northern Italy corridor until four years after the opening of the Gotthard Base Tunnel. The delay results from the legal complaints filed by the failed bidders for the contract. The Swiss Federal Court subsequently overturned these appeals in September 2014, but this delayed the schedule by a year. Tunnel promoter AlpTransit has worked with contractors to establish whether the planned completion date could be met. However "intensive investigations" established that while a December 2019 opening date remained feasible, meeting this target could result in unsustainable risks to the project. It is understood that tunneling is proceeding well and that the first bore broke through in March, some 13 months ahead of schedule.

The 2016 timetable: some major changes

The Swiss timetables are planned by the Federal Transport Office, in consultation with Cantons and others, and appear on a two-year cycle integrating all forms of public transport. Every second year, therefore, there are more substantial and systematic changes. Exceptions can happen, as last year with a first stage of work around Zürich, and in Dec 2016 with the Gotthard opening described above. This year is however more dramatic than most. Two factors are principally involved; the full opening of Zürich's underground 'Diametric' line, and the start, at first mainly in the Lausanne area, of the 'Léman 2030' project. Firstly Lausanne: this will seriously affect virtually all familiar patterns in place since the 'Bahn 2000' timetable of 2004 with capacity being reduced for several years. For example, the two trains hourly between Genève/Lausanne and Zürich/Basel will only serve Zürich, but 30-minutes out of the present timings, with Basel having only an hourly connection from Biel. The resulting protests have filled the regional newspapers. The integration is here illustrated by a complete recast in centres such as Laufen (BL) of regular interval PostAutos (and the vehicle allocations and working rosters) to fit the new train times, along with repercussions to school and industrial working hours. Other routes through Lausanne, such as St. Gallen - Zürich - Bern - Genève, will also change, with all connections re-cast. The only advice here is from December look at the new timetables before taking things for granted. However, some local services in the area like NStCM, BAM, YStC and ASD will actually get more trains and better interval timetables.

The changes in Zürich result from IC and other direct trains being redirected from December through the 'Diametric' tunnel, so that St Gallen becomes the main start and finish point. Many services will change, both long-distance and S-Bahn. For example the hourly Basel - Zürich Airport direct trains will in future take the new tunnel and stop in Zürich HB, so no longer taking the cut-off north from Zürich-Altstätten to Oerlikon. ICE sets from the DB will in future be used principally from Basel to Chur, and less to Interlaken. As well as changes to IC and IR trains many local services are affected by knock-on effects, so again, we can only recommend looking at the timetable. Next year will, breaking the normal two-yearly stability, be influenced by the inauguration of the new Gotthard Base Tunnel; with Lausanne - Genève affected for several years, and the new

Eppenberg Tunnel just starting to be built near Olten, it will be some time before the customary and predictable calm is restored.

Albula line and new tunnel

SRS Member Werner Haas who lives in Bergün informs us that the information centre for visitors interested in the new tunnel (InfoArena) at Preda will have been completed in June. Also Werner, who is fluent in English, has passed the necessary examinations, etc. to become one of the guides on the construction site. Tours of the site, costing just CHF5, have been on offer on Wednesdays and Sundays during July, August and September. They are scheduled to restart next spring. Over recent months much preparation work for the boring of the new, parallel, Albula Tunnel has been going on. The alignment to the new portal, a few metres east of the existing tunnel, is being cleared; track and signalling being installed for the construction site, and for 10 days in early June a daily double-headed container train brought up materials and stores for the start of work. By the time you read this at the Preda tunnel portal everything will be ready for the installation of buildings, workshops, conveyor belts, etc. If you hope to call in to the centre remember that winter is hard at 1600m in the Graubünden so nothing can be done out of doors and the 'InfoArena' will close at the end of October, reopening next May. Admission is free. However, in the ski season that starts in early December, the Bahnmuseum Albula at Bergün station, where some details of the project, can be found is open, and in its café Gerstensuppe (a traditional and very substantial barley cream soup) can work wonders in reviving cold visitors.



Albula Tunnel Works.

Photo: Werner Haas

There is no smoke without... water!

On 28th February a special train headed by old steam friends A3/5 No.705, B3/4 No.1367 and Eb3/5 No.5819 of SBB Historic, ran over the SOB on a circular tour. The following train was a FLIRT electric multiple unit. Regrettably the smoke concentration in the 1.5km Rosenberg Tunnel just east of St Gallen station set off the sprinkler of a WC compartment on the FLIRT, so that 150 litres of water cascaded abruptly. It is not reported whether anyone was using the toilet at the time. February is a bad time for a cold shower in St Gallen!

Traction News

1: MVR/MOB, ASm and MIB

The order for eight rack-equipped Stadler GTW trains for delivery in 2017 to operate the lines above Vevey, and for the MOB local service to Les Avants, will mean that other modern stock will be disposed of. Early Stadler GTW units Be2/6 7001 – 7004 will be sold: three to the ASm for the Biel-Täuffelen – Ins line; and one to the MIB at Innertkirchen. This will add to the extraordinary catalogue of hand-me-downs from different railways that the MIB has used over the years.

2: CJ

Be4/4 No.642 (formerly a RhB Arosa line unit) was scrapped in March. Similar unit No.641 remains for the moment in service. The 'new' Be4/4 units Nos.615 – 617 have been operational since this spring. These had come from FW (where respectively they were Nos.13/12/11) along with FW No.15 that was withdrawn at the same time and has supplied many parts.

3: La Traction/CJ

The former Portuguese Mallet locomotive No. 206, a 2-4-6-0T compound engine, has spent some time in the back of the shed in Pré-Petitjean. The loco needs re-tubing to run again and work on this big job is now starting. In the meantime the 0-4-4-0T compound Mallet No.164 must handle the 2015 steam programme. Fortunately she is in good condition, as La Traction operations are very much in demand again this year, both their public and charter trains.



Portuguese Mallet locomotive No 206 on CJ. Photo: Bryan Stone

4: Ex. SNCF loco gone

SBB's Ee 934 558, which had spent some months mostly at a siding end near Basel SNCF, has now been withdrawn. This was one of the last ex-SNCF 4-voltage rod-drive 6-coupled shunters.

5. ÖBB Class 1063 for SBB

After trial use of one of these Austrian locos at SBB's Bussigny yard had been reported as unsuccessful, and the Class1063 returned to the ÖBB, we learn that up to five such engines will indeed be hired by SBB Infrastructure, for marshalling at the Lausanne facility. The hiring-in of these locos will continue until 2018, when an existing invitation to tender requires new locomotives to be delivered.

6. Jungfraubahnen

Newly ordered Stadler 3-car railcar sets, Nos. 219 – 222, scheduled for delivery by July 2016, will mean the end of

the familiar, elderly (1958), and slow BDHe2/4 200 series.

7. Class 540 officially gone from SBB

As reported in Swiss Express during the winter, the last 540s were taken out of service in December. A plan to hold a few in reserve has now been abandoned as their condition was poor. There remain, RBe4/4 No.1405 (a prototype of 1959) at the DSF museum in Koblenz (AG), No.540 069 with SBB Historic, and two escaped examples, No.540 019 and 074, now Nos.205 and 206, at the Oensingen-Balsthal Bahn and used fairly often for services.

8. An unusual failure

On 30th March the driver of No.460 091 on an RE between Bern and Olten, felt a light shudder on leaving Bern. Starting later from Herzogenbuchsee, a sudden jerk and grinding noise stopped the train. The engine was totally immobilised and had to be lifted at one end onto a diplory bogie to be moved. The gear drive to one axle had completely disintegrated, an unprecedented failure in 15-years' operating experience and apparently with no known cause.

9. Class 470s. The end of the line

In early May 2015 the existing Class 610s, and the newest batch now known as Class 503s (all Alstom Pendolini), took over as planned the full EuroCity services to Milano Centrale and, in one diagram, Genève-Venezia SL. The Class 470s were finally all out of service – much to the relief of the SBB's engineers – with rumours of possible sale to an un-named Eastern European railway still circulating. Your correspondent and his wife, on a trip to Venice, took the 12.31 Basel – Milano on May 25, with gleaming new 503 013, and had a supremely comfortable and punctual journey, as was the return with 610 105, 4 days later.



10. New Twindexx Express IR 200 long-distance EMU unveiled

The first completed IR 200 EMU was shown to the press at Bombardier's Villeneuve plant on June 8. SBB has 62 units on order with deliveries scheduled to be completed by 2020. At CHF1.86bn this is SBB's largest-ever rolling stock order, as well as being its first ever order for tilting double-deck EMUs. Subsequently static testing of the second train was taking place at a new purpose-built test hall at Villeneuve (VD), while the first train was moved to the Velim test track in the Czech Republic to undergo dynamic tests. Trials of the units on the Swiss network are due to begin within the next few months and a total of seven pre-series trains will begin testing by the end of next year. 

Swiss News is compiled by Bryan Stone and includes input from, Michael Donovan, s'Murmeli, Mario Gravazzi, Robert Amstutz, Ron Smith, Werner Haas, Derek Askew, Ernst Leutwiler, and others.