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TRAINS AND BOATS AND ... BALLOONS!

The weekend of 21-22 May 2016 was a busy time for Jim Cook.



A panoramic view of the whole fleet.

Photo: courtesy of CGN

Based near the Montreux Oberland Bernois (MOB) station at Chernes, above Montreux, on Saturday 21st May I firstly sallied-forth to Gstaad to join a special event celebrating the 40th Anniversary of the introduction of the MOB's 'Panoramic Express', a concept since copied by such metre gauge railways as the MGB and ZB. The panoramic coaches were introduced in 1976 to mark the 75th anniversary of the 1901 opening of the MOB's first section between Montreux and Les Avants. Indeed it was 1976 when I first visited the MOB, little suspecting that I would be writing this forty years later. My recollection is of one daily return service for the new coaches – a morning departure from Montreux to Lenk with time for lunch before returning in the afternoon. In the early days I recall that the train was often hauled by double-headed BDe 4/4 Class 3000 automotrices. In due course the 'Super Panoramic' train, with the first generation of 1st Class observation cars at either end, entered service, followed by the Pininfarina designed 'Crystal Panoramic' train with similar observation cars. I remember travelling in an early 'Super Panoramic' train when the Conductor provided free coffee and croissant to us in the leading "nose". Alas, today there is a CHF15 supplement to the 1st Class fare to sit here - and you pay for your own coffee and croissant!

I return to 2016. Apart from the obligatory refreshment tent and stalls, plus a bouncy castle modelled on the Gstaad

Palace Hotel, a 1976 vintage 1st Class panoramic coach As110 in its original dark blue livery took pride of place. Admittedly it was rebuilt in 2008 but, wandering inside, one would never guess its age! Also present was 'Super Panoramic' observation car Ast 116 (1985), in which visits to the driver's compartment in the roof were allowed, and it was relaxing to lounge in the grandeur of 'Golden Mountain Pullman Express' coach Ars101 (1914). This operates with sister coach Ars102 on the MOB's seasonal 'Train du Chocolat' between Montreux and Broc Fabrique. Also on display was 1983 loco GDe 4/4 No.6006 (in a livery advertising 'Aigle les Murailles' wine) that had hauled these exhibits to Gstaad. This was formerly TPF (GFM) No.102 'Neirivue' and sold to the MOB in 2007. The future was also represented in the guise of new 'Alpina' unit No.9002 consisting of Be 4/4 No.9202 and ABe 4/4 No.9302. These have seats-with-tables in both classes and unrestricted window views - UK rolling stock designers please note! Four of these units are destined to replace the four ABDe 8/8 Class 4000 units (1968), which to many of us are the MOB. Meanwhile, the Blonay Chamby Museum Railway graced the day by providing its own historic MOB composition - automotrice BCFe 4/4 No.11 (1905) and trailer coach BC4 No.22. This composition worked an hourly shuttle service to Rougemont in parallel with an 'Oldtimer' Saurer postbus provided by Nostalgiefahrten of Gelterkinden. However the very last Rougemont shuttle service of the day

was advertised as running through to Chamby something I took advantage of and was treated to announcements advertising the unusual stopping pattern of "Rougemont and Chamby only". Although tempted by the wooden seats of coach No.22, I settled on the plush, padded, second-class seats of a real compartment in No.11 within which you could lower the windows. Not being part of the usual "service pattern" it was amusing NOT to cross trains at the usual places of Flendruz and Montbovon, but "The old and the new" at Gstaad, namely 'Alpina' unit No. 9002 on display on the right whilst MOB automotrice BCFe 4/4 No. 11 runs around its coach prior to its departure for Chamby. Photo: Pascal Wilhelm



to exceptionally cross at Château d'Oex and Allières instead. We paused for 12 minutes at the new island platform at Château d'Oex, not yet in full operation pending the enhanced 2018 service to Interlaken, so it was amusing to be one of the first passengers ever to alight at the new platform. After shaking hands with the train crew at Chamby I observed Nos.11 and 22 being shunted onto the BC platform, thus clearing the main line for the up and down trains scheduled to cross circa 17.58, one of which took me down towards my base in Chernex in readiness for the next day's adventure.

Sunday 22nd May was the day of the CGN's (Compagnie Générale de Navigation sur le lac Léman) Naval Parade at Morges, being held in conjunction with the 100th anniversary celebrations of the CNM (Club Nautique Morgien), and featuring five of the fleet's 'Belle Epoque' ships. A fine morning saw me descending from Chernex to Montreux by MOB in time for the 11.00 special departure from the "débarcadère" by the flag bedecked m/s 'Vevey' (1907). This had started its day at Le Bouveret and after a further call at Vevey it sailed non-stop to Morges. Meanwhile s/s 'Simplon' (1920) was picking up participants in Genève and Nyon; the s/s 'Savoie' (1914) at Genève and Rolle the s/s "Rhone" (1927) at Lausanne and St Sulpice and the non-Belle Epoque m/s 'Lausanne' (1991) at Lausanne and St Prex. Meanwhile s/s 'La Suisse' (1910), the 'Bateau Amiral' of the fleet, was specially conveying CNM members.

With a good seat on deck, and the first bottle of wine of the day, the hills above Montreux and Vevey were scoured for a puff of steam from the Blonay-Chamby, and a red car on the mile long Vevey – Mont Pèlerin funicular. Whilst hugging the shore of the UNESCO world heritage site of Lavaux, which is the stretch of vineyards west of Vevey, I spotted the 'Train des Vignes' descending from Puidoux Chexbres. At Rivaz, a passing Class 523 FLIRT operating on the S2 service to Villeneuve, joined in the festivities by hooting three times to which we responded in kind. However a passing S3 service to Allaman only hooted once - I shall have to have words! Past Cully the line from Bern appeared up high from the east, and due to the virtually simultaneous departures from Lausanne a few minutes before noon, I observed the race between a Brig bound train on the coast line and a Luzern bound train climbing above it. Thanks to the mirror nature of the Swiss timetable, a few minutes after noon, the reverse happened westbound. With the novelty of NOT calling at Lausanne Ouchy, we continued to Morges, where apart from 'La Suisse' all of the above boats called in-turn at its débarcadère to pick up passengers who could choose to travel on their favourite vessel. As 'Vevey' docked at Morges 'La Suisse' arrived from the west with, in her wake, an entourage of 150 yachts, manned by children,

This is one of the new TPF units that's being used on the S60 route from here at Montbovon to Bulle.

Photo: H. Marriott



The lucky passengers aboard the 'Simplon' get ready to release their balloons.
Photo: courtesy of CGN

rather like a mother duck being followed by her ducklings. 'Vevey' then headed west and off St Prex we changed direction and awaited the other boats. With 'La Suisse' taking the lead we returned in an arrowhead formation towards Morges accompanied by much prolonged hooting.

The 'Lausanne' positioned itself off the quay as one after the other the five Belle Epoque boats completed two circuits of the bay area, accompanied by much waving by those on land and on the water. Eventually the five boats positioned themselves side-by-side and, in parallel, headed towards Morges "quai". Thankfully they remembered to stop and commenced prolonged hooting, the signal for all the ship's passengers to release 2,500 balloons (one colour per boat) on which we had attached labels. Any labels returned would go into a draw for prize 1st Class CGN tickets. All five boats then went into reverse gear and retired to more open water, followed by each one returning to Morges to disembark their local passengers before heading back from whence they had come. The family reunion of boats was over.

I enjoyed a second bottle of wine as 'Vevey' returned east where I eventually disembarked at Montreux. The masses left the débarcadère, leaving the few in the know to observe the ritual of the Captain initiating the hooting which signals departure, the gangway being rolled onto the "quai", and the paddles starting to turn, creating that magical foam which continued as the boat glided home to Le Bouveret. 

