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Luzern – Switzerland's Sheffield?

BLS Cargo Re4/4 No.171 'Darlingen' at Luzern HB March 2015.

Photo: Bryan Stone

It is probable that few, if any, of the many thousands of tourists who visit Luzern each year to enjoy the lakeside promenade, the Old Town, and ride on the fleet of lake ships, realise that it is a quite industrialised city and one of the centres of the Swiss steel industry. In suburban Emmenbrücke, some 3km from the steamboat piers, there is a large industrial site where a number of associated organisations produce many types of specialist steels, as well as re-processing scrap steel into rolls of metal that can be used again. The Emmenbrücke complex is the home of Swiss Steel!, its subsidiary 'Panlog', and a number of other companies all involved in various branches of the metal industry, with most of them coming under the banner of the Swiss-based multi-national Schmolz and Bickenbach AG.

The industrial complex covers a large site either side of the Kl. Emme River and alongside Swiss Highway 10. It has a whole network of sidings that are worked by Panlog's own fleet of four diesel locos. It has three 2010-vintage 86t Voith Gravita 10BB 1200kw/1600hp heavy Bo-Bo engines capable of moving a full size freight train, and a Krupp-MaK 560kw shunter built in 1986. All are in a smart blue/white livery. Panlog claims that 63% of all the scrap steel coming into its site arrives by rail and a considerable amount of finished products also leave that way. The industrial branch leaves the SBB's main line to Olten just north of Emmenbrücke station and crosses the busy Gerliswilstrasse on the level. The line is served by a number of sidings in the vicinity of the station. As the junction with the main line faces south all trains from a northerly direction heading to/from the site have to reverse here to gain access. At times some trains heading to the south via the Gotthard have to be worked down to Luzern HB and reversed there from where they can head to Arth-Goldau. Earlier this year

due to track works en-route some workings that were reversing had to head north to Olten before gaining the Gotthard route. Until the end of January 2016 the BLS handled these daily workings of trains carrying scrap metal from Italy and the Ticino, and returning empty wagons. From 1st February SBB Cargo took over the contract and these workings using EAOS gondola wagons (some hired in from the AAE leasing company) could be seen reversing in the busy Luzern station. An unusual sight amongst the busy parade of passenger trains. 

BELOW: Panlog Voith loco crossing the Emme in the site.

Photo: Panlog Voith

BOTTOM: SBB Cargo Re4/4 II No.430 355 at Luzern HB 03 March 2016.

Photo: Bryan Stone

