

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: - (2017)
Heft: 129

Artikel: The last Kursbuch
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-853857>

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Bryan admiring his collection of timetables. All photos: Bryan Stone

The Last Kursbuch

Bryan Stone

The last printed official Swiss timetable, '*Amtliches Kursbuch/Indicateur Officiel*', appeared on 26th Nov. and is valid for 12 months from 12th Dec. 2016, at a cost of CHF16.00. The official side is quickly described; the last print order is for 25,000 copies, many of which are reserved for service points and official bodies - and it does not pay. It is published by the SBB in Bern but under national legal authority and with an obligation to incorporate all service times of all providers. It has been published, in various forms, since the 1850s. During the 1980s and early 1990s the print order was for some 500,000 copies. Up to 1988 it appeared twice yearly, summer and winter. Differences were extensive. It was sold at every booking office, and at many bookshops and newspaper kiosks. It had, like the telephone book, a place in most Swiss homes. Although passenger numbers have doubled since the 1980s, on-line information sites, Apps and I-phones have largely replaced the old Kursbuch. These were not the only reasons for its demise; there were others, often overlooked. For a start, it had also become its own worst enemy, with the last edition running to 6,000 pages in three cumbersome volumes, two of which were for PostAuto and other bus services, and the whole came to some 5 Kg. Then again, most older Swiss will recall some interesting school hours learning how to read timetables, looking up Rorschach to La Chaux-de-Fonds or St Maurice to Schaffhausen, with fares and excess baggage (the information was all there). It all came in handy for military service, usually in a remote place, for school and

ski camps, and it was a first-rate introduction to national geography, a powerful tool to cultivate awareness of 'being Swiss'. This has all changed.

Another setback was, unexpectedly, the Taktfahrplan, introduced in 1982. This had several aspects; one was the regular interval train service, which meant far less need to know when the next train left; on most lines they all had the same schedules. More insidious, the Taktfahrplan brought a new timetable layout; the old through tables and their familiar numbers disappeared, and new regional, fragmented tables took their place. These were in themselves clearer, but made finding connections more difficult (involving a finger in several pages and a notepad) and sometimes cut across established patterns of travel. Finally, there are today many more trains, and far more local buses. Bahn 2000, adopted by popular vote, imposed stable patterns of public service, and was widely supported by new lines and facilities. A timetable was, for most everyday journeys, no longer indispensable; people take the next train, knowing that the times and connections will work. There is another operational factor that affected the need for the timetable. The complex schedules of through coaches and international trains have largely fallen away, and many services are worked by fixed formation train sets. This and the Taktfahrplan together have greatly simplified and stabilised many services.

Your Swiss News Editor has almost a complete collection of Rail timetables from 1969, when he arrived in Switzerland, gaps reflecting absence or hindrance. I have not collected the

PostAuto timetables separately published from 1989; that was too much. I have also some much older timetables, including former private pocket editions, and am always searching for more, but from 1969 it is my own series. The older timetables were a joy to hold and consult on a winter evening, or in a Swiss hotel, like the old Bradshaw's. My winter 1969 edition before me is an example. It contains: the first 80 pages of introduction and notes, all in four languages; then a station index (Swiss, with altitude plus foreign); national tariffs and fares; special tariffs for services such as mountain railways and cable cars; details of sleepers and couchette routes and conditions; registered baggage; automobile-carrying services and more. Then there are 88 pages of international train timetables, all over Europe, Istanbul and Warsaw to Lisbon and London, starting with TEE services, and ending with Italy via Chiasso. In 1969 the legendary Stockholm – Rome Wagon-Lits sleeping car called in Basel from 02.24 to 02.47. Then follow 374 pages of Swiss trains. Who recalls the old familiar tables? A reminder: Table 10 Bern – Geneva; 20 Vallorbe – Domodossola; 30 Lausanne – Biel; 40 (BLS) Brig – Delle; 50 Bern – Zürich; 60-70 Basel – Gotthard – Chiasso; 80 Basel – Zürich; 90 Zürich – Chur and 100 Rorschach – Zürich. Know this, and the rest was easy. The pattern was really historical; it reflected still the private railways of pre-nationalisation in 1903. Connecting services and through coaches were extensively detailed, and the tables showed distances (tariff-km for calculating fares). Fascinating was always the detail of operating company, electric or not, and whether narrow gauge or with rack. It was all there. Now followed 32-pages of lake ships, more in summer of course, and 256 pages of PostAuto and other buses. Perhaps the greatest surprise comes last: 8 pages of the Swissair European air timetables at all Swiss airports. The whole runs up 838 pages, printed clearly on specially made light paper, and so 2.7 cm thick. It passed to every briefcase, or even in an overcoat pocket. All this information for just CHF3.50.

It could not last – change was inevitable. The salient dates were:

1982 - (summer edition) Introduction of the Taktfahrplan.


1988 - Annual timetable, then summer to summer.

1989 - Separation of rail and bus timetables.

2003 - Change to Winter start of Annual Timetable (UIC

international agreement), also International services fell away to separate booklets, partly because they were difficult to confirm in time for the timetable publishing schedule, and they often changed during the validity period.

What next? A public timetable is a legal obligation, as is its respect by operators. There will be local printed timetables, including those published by PostAuto. The official timetables will remain available on line (www.fahrplanfelder.ch) and can be downloaded as pdf files. This will also form the archive.

A tailpiece must follow. My special timetable is one published contrary to all rules and practices on April 6th 1980 and valid to May 31st. It was headed '*Interim-Kursbuch/Indicateur Transitoire*'. It contained 544 pages of train and ship services, including international rail connections and its introduction page starts – "In most European countries Summer Time applies from April 6th to 27th September 1980. This is an hour in advance of Swiss time." What had happened? The SVP, Switzerland's right-wing political party, had demanded a popular vote to prevent Switzerland adopting summer time with all its neighbours. They pleaded special hardship for farmers and animals. The vote was carried and the dilemma was perfect. On April 6th 1980, all connections across borders were broken; the ramifications on national lines were everywhere. A year later the dust had settled, but my Interim Timetable remains a treasure, if only as a reminder of contrariness. This interim edition, valid for just 8 weeks, cost CHF2.00. 

An RAe TEE at Basel brings back memories of time past.



Where's Heidi?

Where would you find this magnificent set of 5 bells? Answer on Page 46 