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Heading into the Unknown

David Hitchin



ABOVE: Showing that the loco David saw at Zurich in 1996 still runs, Re 4/4 II No. 11121 is at Amsteg-Silenen in July 2015.

Photo: Phil Weaver

LEFT: A double headed Brunigbahn train pauses at the lakeside station at Brienz.

Photo: courtesy of the LMS Society

trip, and he became the only person in the group that knew the ultimate destination. Even their individual tickets only showed the group name, date of travel, and date of issue on them - no destination was shown.

Then one of the group appeared checking the tickets of each suitably, and sensibly, attired hiker. I asked my companions if he was the group leader, but there was no response, so I then asked if he was 'The Chief' but still received blank expressions. Now I tried asking in my best German only to be met with a burst of laughter as I had apparently asked if he was 'Godfather'. As this sombre looking man approached us they explained what I had called him, but he fortunately also found it amusing and began laughing. I still have difficulty with this strange Swiss humour! This 'leader' then questioned why I was in their reserved coach, but my now friends told him to go away - and he did. Shortly after this episode one of my travel companions produced a large packet of photographs to show his colleague, but managed to drop some on the floor. As I helped to retrieve them I exclaimed "Ah! Modelbahn" and having established my interest in the subject I was included in the photo circulation. The hiker with the knowledge of English explained that they were of his own huge and highly detailed layout, which he had been constructing since his retirement.

We all too soon arrived at Luzern where I bade farewell to my new friends prior to reviewing the rail activity in the station, and the parallel trolleybus and shipping activity outside before returning to find my Brünigbahn train. Pausing to take a picture of another Re4/4 I, No.10003, at the buffer stops I heard some delightful traditional Swiss singing and yodelling. To my surprise I found that it was the members of the 'Mystery Hiking Club', giving an impromptu choral rendition that echoed around the train shed and had attracted a fair sized audience. As this finished they made their way over to a waiting LSE train to which an extra coach had been added, so their mystery hike was going to be in the Stans or Engelberg region. There are so many pleasant surprises in Switzerland!

It is always a pleasure to receive 'Swiss Express' as it revives many special memories of past visits to Switzerland. The September 2016 issue was no exception; especially Jakob Jäger's article 'The Land of the Geriatric Hiker'. I will explain. In 1966 I made my first visit to Europe, three lads in a Morris 1000, and when passing through Switzerland I became overwhelmed by its charm and beauty. I had to return - but it took 27 years! In June 1993 I spent a week based in Zürich and on the Wednesday I arrived at the Hauptbahnhof in time for the 09.07 to Luzern. The lengthy train, headed by Re4/4 I No.11121, was already crowded with passengers. However, the coach behind the loco still had some spare seats so I boarded and found a four-seat bay where two elderly Swiss gentlemen were sitting facing each other adjacent to the window. I tried my rather poor schoolboy German asking if the other seats were free - "Ja es ist frei" came the reply. I said 'Danke' and sat down, only to be told that it was not free by the same man who had just said that it was! As I stood up I apologised, but then he said that it was free! After a couple more bouts of bobbing up and down I realised that I was the centre of their strange humour. All was resolved with laughter and a handshake after they realised that I was English and one of them immediately switched to English when talking to me. As we zipped along I discovered to my surprise from my two companions that I was in a reserved coach that had been hired for a party of some 40 male pensioners who all belonged to a long-established 'Mystery Hiking Club'. They informed me that they contributed on a regular basis to a fund that covered the cost of transport and ancillary items for their periodic outings. One member in turn was designated to organise their next