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Ae 6/6 Swansong

Steve Tinsley



Cantonlok No.11402 'Uri' proudly shows off her age! - seen here at Erstfeld with classmate No.11411 'Zug' at one of the regular summertime Saturday morning running sessions, 02/08/14. All photos: Steve Tinsley

This article is not intended as a technical report, nor a detailed history of the 120 Ae 6/6 class locomotives of the SBB – this information is expertly covered by Bryan Stone and Paul Russenberger in the June 2014 *Swiss Express*. This article is merely a recollection of my memories of the class in its later years.

My first trip to Switzerland, post childhood, was on honeymoon in 1993, but it was to be some 10 years later when my interest in Swiss railways began, by which time the class Ae 6/6 locomotives were already 50 years old! Although the class had been built for the Gotthard and Simplon routes, by the time I had started to pursue them, they had been relegated to secondary duties and rarely appeared on the “mountain routes”. Among my first photographs of the class was of No.11450 at Arth-Goldau, not realising at the time that this would be the last photograph of the class in service that I would take. It was complete with crests and original nameplates – Cargo liveried examples appeared in later years with what I assumed to be replica nameplates, all the original plates being removed for safekeeping.

In 2006, I embarked on my first “lads trip” to Switzerland with my good friend Alan Wardman, staying in Brig for 3 nights, the primary objective of the trip being to photograph the BLS

“Brownies”, which we believed to be in decline – how wrong we were! On this trip we saw the occasional Ae 6/6 but they seemed to appear more by chance than by expectation. Brig often produced a class member, which worked a westbound pick-up goods in the afternoon. Odd examples were also noted at Spiez and Thun and on one occasion crossing the Kander Viaduct. Unfortunately, by the time I had mastered the controls on my new camera this engine must have been nearing Kandersteg! In 2007, the focus of the “lads trips” turned to the Gotthard route, as a result of reading an article in *Swiss Express* on the subject, written by David Adams, meeting David for the first time that very summer in the bar of the Hotel Frohsinn at Erstfeld – where else? This hotel was



11487 'Langenthal', leaves Brig station prior to taking out the afternoon westbound pick-up goods, 08/08/06.



No.11446 'Bellinzona' and classmate No.11432 'Stars' head a southbound stone train to the Gotthard Base Tunnel worksite at Bodio. No.11446 worked as far as Goschenen before returning north, 25/06/08.

to be the destination of choice for many years to come. Scheduled workings for the Ae 6/6 class over the mountain route were very rare indeed, however in the summer of 2008, the construction works associated with the Gotthard Base Tunnel did produce a regular Ae 6/6 working, this being a double-headed combination working a stone train from Huntwangen-Wil to Bodio. Such workings still exist today, being in the hands of an 'Re 10/10' combination and serving the Ceneri Tunnel worksite.

Although our trips to the Gotthard focused mainly on the North and South ramps, we did have the odd day trip to places such as Pratteln. This station at the eastern approach to Basel Muttentz yard proved to be a "hot spot"

for the class, noting nine different examples in only a few hours as they worked freights in and out of Muttentz. Killwangen-Spreitenbach, situated at the western approach to Zürich's Limmattal yard was another "hot spot" for the class and this was often a calling off point for us as we headed up to Zürich Airport on our way home. In 2012, our "pilgrimage" to the Gotthard did not go as planned, arriving to find the line totally blocked just north of Gurtnellen due to a rock fall, resulting in us having to re-plan our whole trip "on the spot" or rather "in the bar"! For full details see December 2012 *Swiss Express* and John Jesson's article "Plan B". However, we were lucky enough to have the use of a mini-bus for one of the days and with John Jesson as

navigator, we headed north towards Brugg and the Botzberg Tunnel. By now Ae 6/6 appearances were becoming a rarity, though on that particular day the three members of the class that we did see were in all the different liveries – green, red and Cargo – quite a bonus!

From 2010 onwards, as new motive power arrived in Switzerland, along with a general downturn in freight, more and more members of the class were being "switched off" and could be found stabled in sidings and yards – very few of these would escape the cutter's torch. Anyone



Cantonlok No.11419 'Appenzell I. RH', heads through Pratteln with a train of vans in the direction of Brugg, 27/06/08.

travelling through Biasca around this time would be able to see no less than twenty-one of the class awaiting such a fate, and my records show that none of these made it into preservation, perhaps becoming a source of spares at the very best. This certainly showed me that you don't realise what you have until its (almost) gone!

My latest copy of the Platform 5 *'Swiss Railways European Handbook No. 5'* tells me that fourteen class members have been preserved and of those, seven are still active and presumably certified for mainline use. No.11402 "Uri" based

at Erstfeld has on occasions been hired out for banking duties over the Gotthard North ramp, with enthusiasts being invited to "ride the footplate" at considerable cost! It is still possible to see the remaining seven active members in service throughout Switzerland, as they are often called upon to work charter trains. Hopefully this article has been an enjoyable read, and hopefully it will inspire others to share their memories of these iconic locomotives - you have 50 years worth of material untouched! ■

- 3. 610482 'Delemont' returns to Erstfeld, light engine, prior to taking up her next duties, 18/09/09.
- 4. No.11407 'Aargau' heads a Schaffhausen – Chiasso charter through Erstfeld. Classmate No.11402 "Uri" can just be seen in the far distance, 03/09/11.
- 5. No.11431 'Sarnen' stands at the end of a row of no less than 21 class Ae 6/6s at Biasca – all of which were bound for the cutter's torch, 22/06/10.
- 6. Cantonlok No.11404 'Luzern' passes through Pratteln on the Brugg lines with a mixed freight, 27/06/08.
- 7. Immaculate 610439 in Cargo livery complete with 'Schaffhausen' nameplates, hauls a northbound container service through Pratteln, 27/06/08.

- 1. No.11427 'Stadt Bern' leads a train of cement tanks out of Basel Muttenz yard, 27/06/08.
- 2. No.11465 'Oerlikon' approaches Killwangen-Spreitenbach with a mixed goods bound for Zurich Limmattal yard, 25/06/10.

