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Access from the city is by S-Bahn line S3 to Wabern bei Bern, with trains every 30-minutes, three stops and a 9 minute trip from the Bahnhof in the direction of Belp. Alternatively, Tram Line 9 runs to Gurtenbahn, the penultimate stop on the route to Wabern, again a journey of 9 minutes from Bahnhof. A longer uphill walk to the base station makes this second option just a little more strenuous. The web site at www.gurtenpark.ch includes pages giving information on the funicular, which shows in translation as "Belt conveyor"! At the top there is a wide range of facilities, including an extensive 7¼" (184mm) gauge miniature railway featuring a 130m rack section. Both steam and battery electric locomotives are used. Operation is seasonal and weather dependent. Details are given on the above web site. There is also an observation tower, the effort required to climb its 123 steps being rewarded by a much enhanced view.

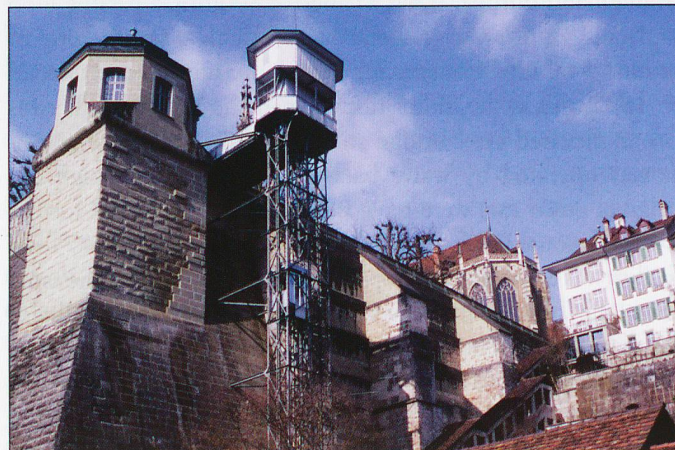
Matte Platform Lift

As a postscript, those interested in funiculars may also wish to experience Bern's Münsterplattform lift, known locally as the Senkaltram – vertical tram. The Münsterplattform is a small park occupying the area of the former graveyard on the

south side of Bern Münster, or cathedral. It affords commanding views across the city and river and is popular with locals as a venue for pétanque and other games. In the southeast corner is a Personenaufzug or lift, dropping down to the Matte area of the city, close to the river. While not a funicular, the lift is an unusual public transport facility.

It opened in 1896, with the counterbalanced cars raising and lowering passengers through 31m, thus avoiding the many steps that make up the alternative route. Although not initially popular, being regarded as something of an eyesore, it transported 60,000 passengers in its first year of operation, despite several interruptions due to technical issues. In 1910 one cabin was locked out of service as an economy measure, to be replaced in 1920 by a 2,100 kg counterweight, which established its present-day configuration. There have been several major renovations in the intervening years. The lift is now used, ten-at-a-time, by about 850 passengers/day. It operates from 06:00 (07:00 on Sundays and holidays) through to 20:30. The fare is CHF1.20 (with few concessions) payable to the attendant. The Swiss Travel Pass is not recognised. There is a very informative web site at www.mattelift.ch. This is in German but it translates particularly well. 

DMB Car No. 2 descends past the crossing loop, June 2011



Bern Matte Plattform Lift with a glimpse of the Münster, February 2011

The European Rail Timetable

Robert H. Foster

I was sad to read Bryan Stone's article in the March *Swiss Express* of the demise of the SBB/CFF/FFS printed Kursbuch. It appeared for the last time covering the period from December 2016 to December 2017. This follows a similar decision in Great Britain a few months earlier. Bryan kindly obtained a copy for me at Basel SBB and mailed it on, as I concluded that it would probably have sold-out by the time of my April visit to Switzerland.

However, for those who still wish to plan a journey using a printed timetable (as I do) the European Rail Timetable (ERT) is an excellent substitute. I never plan a continental – or indeed British – rail journey without it. Even though I buy the majority of my tickets over the Internet, I always have the relevant page(s) of the ERT open at my side when doing so. In its 28 pages covering Switzerland, the level of detail in the

ERT is remarkable. Not only does it include all main line services, but also many branch lines and a good selection of mountain and private railways both in Switzerland and throughout Europe. For example it includes the three metre gauge lines radiating from Aigle; the well-known mountain railways serving the Jungfrau, Gornergrat, Brienz Rothorn, etc.; it includes all distances in kilometres, and has sections covering other countries of the world - these appearing on a rotational basis. Its 600 pages include maps of each country and of the location of stations in principal cities, plus numerous other items of relevant information, including how to get by public transport from airports to principal stations.

I first encountered the ERT, then known as Cook's Continental Timetable when, as a schoolboy in 1972, I travelled from (Victoria)-Oostende to Basel Bad on a German

Student Travel Service charter train. Needing to continue to Grindlewald to join a family holiday, I visited a local travel agent who pulled from a shelf a well-thumbed book with an orange cover; he went almost immediately to the page and told me that once I got myself to Basel SBB I wanted the 16.16 – and if I missed that the 18.04 – to Interlaken Ost, both having a quick connection to Grindlewald. He



was correct, although I did narrowly miss the 16.16. This was of course ten years before the introduction of the Taktfahrplan, brought to fruition by my great friend Samuel Stähli, with whom I would spend many happy times before his premature death in 1988. Having made a note of this extraordinary timetable, next year as a student I went up from Cambridge to the Thomas Cook office in Berkeley Street, London to make sure of purchasing one. I pored over it for two enjoyable weeks after exams, before setting out with a month's Inter-Rail pass costing £33, and £60 in travellers cheques. I covered over 30,000 miles. This gave me knowledge of European railway geography and operations that has never left me. I still have that pass. As I had used up all the spaces for the journeys, I got some supplementary pages one afternoon at Zürich HB. From there I went to Scandinavia via Stuttgart, where the departure time of the overnight train to Hamburg was shown as one hour different from the time appearing in Cook's timetable. Yet Cook's was correct; the departure board wrong! I have had an unshakeable faith in the accuracy of the Cook's/ERT ever since and have never been let down in almost 250,000 miles on the continent, although the same cannot be said of the trains themselves - Switzerland usually excepted!

An electronic timetable does not have the detail or the versatility of a printed version. I give some examples. Travelling a few years ago from Locarno to Vitznau (for the Rigi), the SBB website routed the journey by a combination of train and PostAuto. Yet the ERT showed that by alighting at Flüelen, it was possible to reach Vitznau only a few minutes later by boat – moreover a paddle steamer. Our train was the only semi-fast Gotthard train with a restaurant car, indeed chosen for that purpose. We had aperitifs climbing the Sudrampe, consumed the main course and wine through the tunnel and descending the Nordrampe, followed by sweet and coffee on the Vierwaldstättersee. One journey I do almost every year is from Genève or Basel via Zürich to Tirano, involving the 11.58 Chur-St. Moritz, the rear vehicle of which is a very charming restaurant car, free of the commercialised atmosphere of the Glacier and Bernina Expresses. From Zürich one can take the 10.07 or 10.37. I normally take the

latter and have always made the 6 minute cross-platform connection at Chur, but last year took the 10.07. When asked by the conductor our destination (we had passes) he insisted we should change at Landquart. Indeed some St. Moritz passengers did so. It took some time to convince him that as we were intending to have lunch in the restaurant car of the 11.58, we intended to continue to Chur. Moreover via Landquart we would not have reached Tirano any

sooner, and had a much longer wait at Samedan. Another good example of the inflexibility of the electronic timetable occurred last year. Wishing to travel from Lugano to Erstfeld, and planning the journey before the appearance of the ERT containing the December 2016 timetable changes – this time unusually significant in Switzerland for obvious reasons – the SBB electronic timetable suggested routing us via Arth Goldau, doubling back to Erstfeld, arriving there just a single minute before the train over the classic route – which would partly have destroyed the object of the exercise. The train we wanted from Bellinzona appeared when I inserted “via Airolo”. Of course all is set-out crystal clear in the ERT, which has a separate table for the old line, as it does for the Lötschberg.

In addition to showing the boat schedules on the principal lakes in Switzerland (and Lake Como which is my usual destination), the ERT includes selected PostAuto routes, and indeed selected bus services in other countries as on the Mediterranean coast between St. Raphael and Toulon, where the railway runs inland. It also shows dates of operation (although not a particularly relevant feature as far as Swiss trains are concerned) which are necessary for France, and to a lesser extent Germany. Many trains that operate on only certain days of the week may well not appear on a random electronic search. Moreover, the websites of some countries draw a complete blank beyond the usual booking horizon of three months, which at long last appears slowly to be moving to 6 months. As Mark Smith of that unique railway website seat61.com says, even an ERT several years old is better than relying on electronic means to plan a journey, because it gives the overall picture of train services which a website never can.

Having celebrated 140 years of publication in 2013, Thomas Cook hived off the timetable to the editor John Potter and the editorial staff, who now produce the ERT in exactly the same format as previously. The paper version is printed six-times annually, although the December issue remains current for the whole year as do most services. A digital version is produced every month. The ERT can be obtained from www.europeanrailtimeable.eu or by telephone from 00 44 (0) 1832 270 198. 