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# Fifty Years of the Blonay-Chamby

Peter King



RhB No.181 at Blonay running round the shuttle train to the museum. Photos: by Robin Oakley taken at 50th BC anniversary weekend

The Blonay-Chamby has long been my favourite Swiss steam railway, in joint first place with the Brienz-Rothorn Bahn. I had not been to Switzerland since the 2007 'Gotthard 125' celebrations - steam both ways over the route with the A3/5 and C5/6, absolutely splendid - plus a side trip to the Blonay-Chamby. So another Swiss visit was overdue, and what better occasion than the Blonay-Chamby's 50th anniversary weekends.

Their "Mega Steam" event took place over two three-day weekends in mid-May. For the Whitsun weekend I booked into the Hotel Les Négociants in Vevey. Handily placed in a quiet side street just five minutes walk from the station. Even better, just one minute from the Place du Marché, a big square giving directly onto the lakeside waterfront and splendid views of the mountains. The hotel had an excellent restaurant, packed out in the evening with locals. And on two corners facing the hotel, two good bookshops - one second-hand.

Blonay is some 250m above Vevey and Le Léman, with Chamby a little bit higher up a nice steep climb. The weather on Saturday 19th May was mostly sunny and warm, with fine views overlooking the lake and mountains, interrupted briefly by a crashing afternoon thunderstorm, complete with ten minutes of intense hail, but clearing quickly afterwards. The railway operated an intensive steam service from about 10.00 to 18.00 with the trains and the depot/museum well patronised and photographers out in force. About half the trains ran with two locos, sometimes double heading, sometimes one at each end. At

about midday they sent up one train headed by seven locos. A spectacular sight, but I didn't think to count how many carriages were attached!

I spent much of the day at the depot where the intensity of the train service required a constant hum of activity, with services arriving and leaving and locos shuttling to and fro. The coaling site, just at the junction of the spur up to the depot, was equally busy. There were ten locos in steam altogether, five resident and five guests. The Blonay-Chamby's own locos operating were: Brig-Furka-Disentis No.3; Ferrovie e Tramvie Padane tram loco No.4; Lausanne-Echallens-Bercher No.5; Bière-Apples-Morges No.6, and Sudddeutsche Eisenbahn Mallet No.105. The guests were: Furka-Oberalp No.4; Tramways de la Sarthe (MTVS) tram loco No.60; La Traction Portuguesse Mallet No.E164; Brunig-Ballenberg No.208, and privately owned 0-4-0T 'Ticino'.

For me the highlights included: seeing the two Furka locos



BFD3 at Blonay running around the shuttle train to the museum.

together; MTVS No 60's sparkling brass dome and shining green livery; a slightly scruffy 'Ticino' bustling around as yard pilot; Mallet No.E164 reminding me of happy visits to North Portugal in the 1970s. The running locos were in smart, shiny, virtually ex-works condition, although E164 runs in a matt rather than gloss finish. Little 'Ticino' looked just nicely well worn, a proper little working loco. It was featured on P23 of September's *Swiss Express*.

The overall atmosphere was busy, efficient, lively and friendly. Refreshment tables had been set up inside the depot, and were kept busy supplementing the regular café. The shop had expanded outside and was doing a vigorous trade. I bought what turned out to be, an excellent double DVD of their 40th anniversary events... and a large number of Swiss railway postcards showing scenes from the 1960s onwards. A fine day was completed by a sunny evening lakeside stroll, just in time to see "p.s. Italie" arriving smoothly alongside the Vevey landing stage, then off and gliding away into the distance. Altogether a splendid day in my book - and I think for everyone else at the Blonay-Chamby too.

On Sunday I went via Lausanne, Bern and Winterthur to the Dampfbahn-Verein Zürcher Oberland (DVZO), for a return trip from Bauma to Hinwil. A 40-minute trip each way over 11km of, in places, a quite steep and pleasant winding country route, with trains crossing half way at Bäretswil. All trains were well patronised at this smart, efficient, and friendly operation. The DVZO station at Bauma is impressive and spacious, open at the sides, a three road covered area, with a high roof sheltering various carriages/wagons and doubling as shop and refreshment areas. It is an original wooden framed building from the Basel station of the Swiss Central Railway (Schweizerische Centralbahn, SCB) of 1860, re-erected many years later at Bauma by the DVZO. The locos running were Ed 3/4 No.2 'Hinwil' and E 3/3 No.8518 'Bäretswil'. Electric shunter No.354 was station pilot at Bauma. As the train taking me back from Winterthur to Lausanne via Neuchâtel offered on-board dining, a leisurely late lunch with a local beer passed the time quite agreeably.

Monday was another sunny day, just right for a trip to Brig, then over the Lötschberg via Kandersteg to Spiez. I was pleased to see that the BLS chocolate Bo-Bos were still running the car shuttles; also four of them were parked quietly by the station yard wall at Spiez. Interlaken and Brienz followed, although I did not have enough time to travel on the BRB, but I happily watched loco No.16 gently propel a train out of the station before I caught a warm if breezy afternoon lake cruise on the p.s.'Lötschberg' to Interlaken, before returning by my earlier route.

Returning to Genève on Tuesday, along with thousands of



Aigle – Leysin carriage 21 inside the museum.



RhB No.35 (BB10).



RhB No.9214 Xrotd 6/6 rotary snow plough, with the plough rotating, hence the railing in front.

others, I found that due to French air traffic controllers playing their usual games many flights were cancelled. I was pleasantly surprised that Easyjet offered me a one night stay in a four-star city centre hotel, a dining voucher for the hotel, and a 24-hour Geneva local transport pass. As I had no commitments the following day I re-booked on a late flight back to Gatwick and spent a pleasant few hours sampling the impressive Genève tram network. I was delighted to see trams on Line 18 showing their destination as "CERN" – a tramcar to the Large Hadron Collider, splendid! 🇨🇭