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Steaming Brienzen

Bryan Stone



Ballenberg Dampfbahn No 208 crosses a ZB service train in Brienzen.

All photos: Bryan Stone

Really Brienzen, in summer, is always steamy, with the Rothorn Bahn and two scheduled calls of the great steamship 'Lötschberg' on the doorstep. The Tourist people enjoy using the name, but every three years it means much more. Then, on the first weekend in July, the 'Swiss Steamdays Brienzen' takes place, a happy and informal meeting of all sorts of 'steamery'. Since Johanna and I are at that time usually on holiday in Brienzen, we get to enjoy it inside and out.

Much of it is around the station and landing stage, and along the promenade. Steamrollers and traction engines, historic farm and country machines; a 7¼ 'steam' miniature railway for the young at heart; a steam-enveloped spirits still from the Ballenberg museum, and others are there to be seen.

An Aveling Barford steamroller and water cart trailer.



There is no admission or gate, one just turns up and wanders around. In that way visitors get to see more, and to talk with exhibitors. Steam launches, usually around half-a-dozen, give modestly priced trips on the Brienzensee, and are elbowed out of the way with impertinent whistles when the stately 'Lötschberg' twice-daily puts into the BLS landing stage.

Two steamrollers were on show in steam. One a fascinating compound engine built in Germany, with a double piston and one crosshead, like the Vaclain US compound engines of Baldwin; the other warmed my heart being an English machine built in Kent by Aveling-Barford at Rochester. Like all of this company's products it sports the County's prancing horse symbol and its proud 'Invicta' motto,

A steamroller by Zettelmayer, Trier.

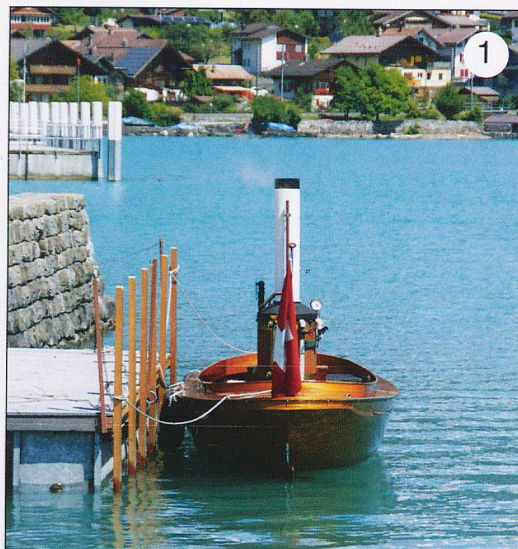


that our Editor who is a Man of Kent!

The Brienz-Rothorn-Bahn is of course involved, and runs scheduled trips up to Gäldried the first, and very pretty, crossing place on its line. For a modest price therefore, there is a 20-minute ride each way and time to get off there, not normally allowed. The BRB also offers guided depot tours, always worthwhile, because one or other locomotive are always in hand, despite the demand on good days. Conductor Martin Biber was leading these, followed by a large and varied group who were not all obviously rail fans! The BRB had an unexpected bonus: both of its serviceable HG2/3 locos, the 128-year-old Nos. 2 and 5, were in service together on the Steam Days, something I had not seen in several years. General Manager Simon Koller said it didn't pay, people only came to take pictures, but there still seemed to be a lot of passengers about and trains were full.

At the Zentralbahn station, the main attraction was Ballenberg Dampfbahn G3/4 No 208, running to Meiringen and to Brienzwiler on scheduled extras. For CHF10 these were a bargain. No.208 was being seen for the first time by many, since its return from a 5-year overhaul, following the Interlaken depot fire. It is now a superb little machine, lively, good riding, and mechanically practically silent (your correspondent still remembers the fearful neglected clatter of BR engines in 1960). The Ballenberg President, Roger Henchoz, told me that his dream is to offer in 3 years' time, a Brünig pass trip with his HG 3/3 rack locomotive No.1068, also severely burned at Interlaken and now being slowly rebuilt. No 208 came first, and all praise to them.

Finally, there was a discovered treasure, 'Ticino'. This is a tiny metre-gauge 0-4-0T engine, built in 1889 by Jüng in Germany. It only weighs 6.5t, and was built as a contractor's engine, one of a number used on the grading of the Ticino river in the 19thC. It was running in Brienz on light track, which was brought, along with the engine, by road. 'Ticino' was restored to working order by Martin Horath in Goldau, and is fully certified for 11 atm. boiler pressure, giving 50 hp. A mechanical feature is Walschaerts' valve gear, already used in Switzerland in 1874, but in Britain scarcely applied until 25 years or more later. 'Ticino' was in regular use until 1941, then set aside and stored. It belonged to the Travaini family in Mendrisio, and in 2016 Martin Horath obtained it on loan. Within a year he had it in working order. Now it makes occasional appearances, including at Whitsuntide on the Blonay-Chamby. Its very survival was not known to many, although it is listed in the Moser-book, '*Dampfbetrieb der Schweizerischen Eisenbahnen*'. It is now a jewel, as your correspondent could verify during a 300m footplate trip! 



1. A small steam launch at the pier in Brienz.

2. The surprise little 'Ticino' on temporary track.

3. However, Bryan is dressed as a "tourist", checks out the footplate of 'Ticino'.

4. Bryan Stone's wife Hanna stands beside BRB No.5. She is dressed to create that period feel, unlike Bryan!

