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Swiss Winter Wonderland

Geoffrey Greer



The Grüttschalp to Mürren line is even more scenic in winter as can be seen in this picture of BLM 21 near Winteregg (29.3.2008). Photos: Geoffrey Greer

Having enjoyed reading the Carpenters' experiences on a visit to Switzerland in the severe winter of 1999 (see *Swiss Express* 135 – September 2018), our experiences of a visit that year might be of interest. Having been overwhelmed by the drama of the snow, and the beauty of the snow-covered mountains, plus our delight in walking the wide, 'prepared', snow-covered footpaths and marked snowshoe trails, means we have returned most winters since. Our February 1999 trip took us from Genève Airport to Brig and then up the south ramp of the Lötschberg where snow depths increased until we reached Kandersteg where a snow blanket engulfed everything. On arrival the owner of our apartment noted that he had never known such snow in all his time there. Little did he know that there was much more to come, and soon Kandersteg was to be only accessible by rail.

Our first day we revelled in this new experience, the children enjoying rolling in the deep snow as we explored walking in it. Snow was still falling during the children's first ski lessons, but the following morning the intensity of snow forced an announcement at Oeschinensee, the top of the "nostalgic" chair-lift (since replaced with a gondola), that

everyone should ride down as "We are closing the mountain!" Our children and their instructor duly appeared in a snowmobile for us to do as we had been instructed. In Wengen matters were worse as a fatal avalanche had destroyed the lower station of the Männlichen Cable Car. Eventually the snow eased, but there was only cross-country skiing to be had in Kandersteg the following day, although the road did reopen around then. The next two days provided very positive experiences leading us to become regular winter visitors to Switzerland. Our children really got into their skiing, and then on a day trip to Mürren we saw the very best of the Alpine winter on a glorious blue-sky day that was also full of railway interest. Setting-off on a Hamburg-bound train hauled by a brown BLS Re4/4, then changing at Spiez to an old BLS railcar, we reached Interlaken Ost. From there, a BOB railcar to Lauterbrunnen, then the Grüttschalp funicular, the BLM railcar, and the Allmendhubel funicular. After enjoying the sunshine and clear views of the Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau we retraced our steps with the railway highlight being BLS Ae6/8 loco No.205 heading us back from Spiez to Kandersteg.

We would recommend winter holidays in Switzerland to anyone even if you do not 'do' winter sports. The obvious locations are the Jungfrau and Zermatt areas along with Villars and of course, Kandersteg. Personally we love Riederalp/Bettmeralp above the Rhône valley accessed by cable cars from the MGB stations at Mörel or Betten Talstation. MGB trains run as frequently as every 15 minutes between Brig and Betten Talstation on peak winter Saturdays. Alpine Switzerland in winter is a wonderful experience. Go. 



BLS car train in deep snow at Kandersteg.