Steam and sausages to the summit

STEAM AND SAUSAGES TO THE SUMMIT

Malcolm Bulpitt

Two trains on the climb to the Rothorn summit.

The early train from Interlaken was worth it. We had to be at Brienz before nine if we wanted to take part in a tour around the steam sheds of the Brienz-Rothorn-Bahn (BRB), which had been specially organised for the SRS group that had gathered in Switzerland at the end of last August. Bryan Stone, our Swiss News Editor, was on the platform to meet us and through his connections he was able to lead us into the holy-of-holies, as the BRB team prepared their locos for another busy day on this famous 800mm gauge tourist line. Everything was surprisingly relaxed as the engines were 'traversed' around and moved out into the sunshine of what was turning into a perfect day for mechanised mountain climbing.

It was a Wednesday, and during the summer each mid-week the BRB runs an additional departure at 10.00, after the first of the normal service trains has departed, which uses one of its oldest locos and a matching vintage coach. This has limited accommodation and most of the available seats were taken by the 20+SRS team on this morning. It is an amazing experience to be sitting in a historic wooden coach as you are being pushed by 120 year/old engine No.2 for 7.6km, gaining some 1700m in height, to reach the 2244m summit of the Rothorn. Following an energetic start from Brienz we wound up through the wooded lower slopes of the mountain until after 3.6km we came to a halt in the loop at Planalp where we all disembarked to enjoy the view and to enjoy a drink and a snack - for this was the "Sausage Train" one of the special excursions that the BRB now organises each year. Cooking away in the warm water of one of the loco's side tanks were good Swiss sausages, which the crew then served up to the passengers in a hunk of bread that had been baked in the shape of the Apt rack that the railway uses to scale the heights. To wash down this meaty treat we were given bottles of what was euphemistically called non-alcoholic 'beer'; it was quite pleasant but perhaps something was lost in the translation!

Rejoining the train we entered the upper, much more open and bleaker,

Group photo at Planalp.

section of the climb to the summit. Our trip was on a gorgeous day, but I suspect that traversing these open alpine pastures with less than good weather in our vintage coach would not have been so much fun, although in the modern coaches the BRB run on normal service trains inclement weather should not be a problem. Several alpine farmsteads could be seen together with the small groups of Swiss brown cows, happily browsing on the alpine herbage, which were the reason for families to spend their summers a thousand or more metres above their homes in the valley below. Arriving at the summit hotel, efficiently run by the BRB itself, we had ample time to enjoy refreshments and the expansive view over the Brienzer See backed by the serried ranks of alpine peaks that stretched as far as the eye could see. All too soon it was time to return back down the hill to the lower terminus and the warm, sunny lakeshore. It was a super trip that can be recommended to anyone and thanks must go to the BRB's General Manager Simon Koller and his team who worked to ensure that this trip was truly special. I would urge any Society member who has not used Switzerland's only steam powered mountain railway to go soon. 🇨🇭
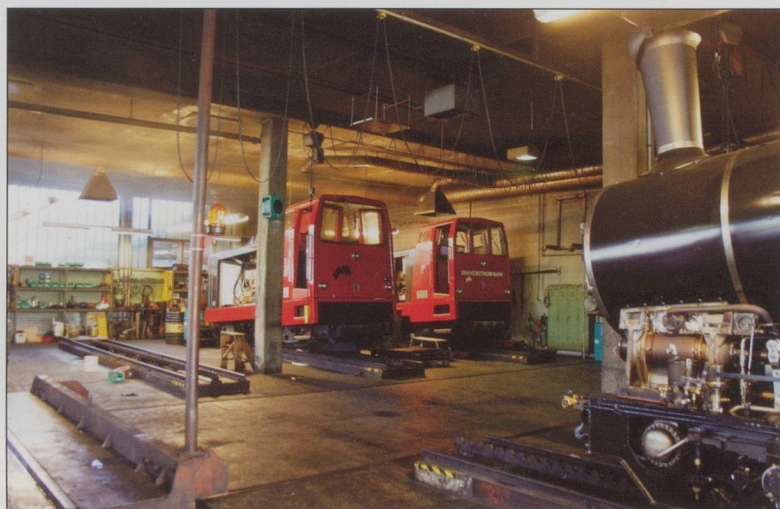

TOP: BRB loco No 6 inside the Brienz shed.

BOTTOM: Two BRB diesels and one steam loco rest in the shed at Brienz.

PHOTOS: Malcolm Bulpitt

SPIEZ... AGAIN

s'Murmeli

Funny place Spiez. Things happen before our very eyes. Last November I arrived from Frutigen at 13.42 for the 13.54 to Bern. Between Platform 5 and 3 the subway and conflicting crowds took 4 minutes, going to the right end took another three – two minutes if you know how! In Platform 1 there was a curiosity; a dead 'Lötschberger' with a Re4/4 II at each end, being pushed and pulled to the workshops. When I suggested that there was surely a good explanation for this the rear driver assured me that in this case the railcar had suffered a total brake failure. Two quick pictures and they rolled out, right across the south end, and behind me there was now a Nina with 'Versuchsfahrt' on its display. This means a trial trip. I was tempted (who wouldn't be?) to couple this to the bicycle sign. I was still wondering when my Bern Pendelino, the newest 610 005, rolled in on the second – amazing. I never found out if they were really testing bicycles, but the thought pleases me still. 🇨🇭

TOP: BLS No 190 at Spiez with a failed passenger train.
RIGHT: Trial trip ?? For Bikes ??   PHOTOS: s'Murmeli