

# Holcim

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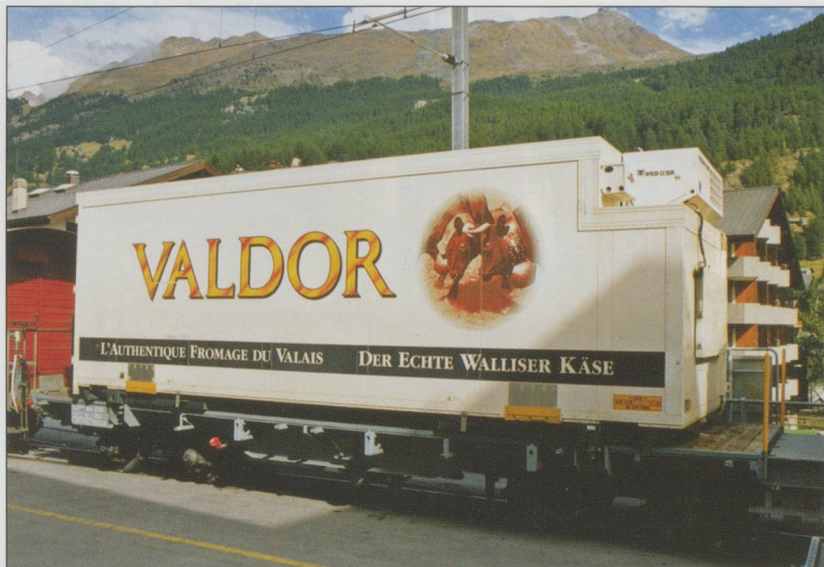
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wagons for containers and bulky loads. Everything from the containers to parcels will be carried on up to 38 trains a week, that have ample capacity to provide just-in-time deliveries and grow through targeting deliveries from the drinks industry, etc. Following this investment it is predicted that *Alpine Cargo* will break into profit in 2016. By enhancing the trans-shipment facilities at Visp *Alpine Cargo* sees the potential to eat into the road market share, possibly doubling the volume it carries, whilst improving customer service, protecting the fragile Alpine environment, and boosting the MGB's profitability. 

*All photos: Ron Smith*



## Holcim

Ron Smith

One of the largest internal customers for SBB Cargo is Holcim, one of Switzerland's industrial success stories. The company was founded in 1912 at Holderbank (AG) some 7km south of Brugg, and today it is a multinational producer of cement, concrete and aggregates. Its name, Holcim, is an abbreviation of "Holderbank" and "Ciment". The statistics are impressive. Holcim has three giant factories in Switzerland at Untervaz (GR), Siggenthal (AG) and Eclépens (VD) producing 2.6m tonnes of cement per annum; it has twenty gravel pits and quarries producing 56m tonnes of aggregates per annum; and forty ready-mix concrete plants producing 1.5m cubic metres of concrete per annum. It has terminals at Samedan (GR), Landquart (GR), Giubiasco (TI), Vernier (GE) and Münchenstein (BL), plus eighteen sidings in various other locations throughout the country. Holcim operate 900 wagons, of which it owns 550. These transport 2.9m tonnes per annum, and cover 380m tonne kilometres. The modal split is 48% by road, 28% by rail to terminals for road delivery to the end customer, and 19% by rail direct to the end customer's sidings. The rail use is split 50/50 between wagonload and block trains. The wagonload traffic includes bagged cement, gypsum and alternative fuels, with block trains conveying cement, sand and gravel, slag, shale, and fuel. Holcim believe in owning rail wagons as they then have independent utility of them; control their maintenance, and as the wagons are specific to them and their goods, they can optimise the payloads and achieve maximum utilisation of the fleet. They also control the "last mile" shunting as much as possible.

Locomotives at the Holcim works at Untervatz.

*All photos: Ron Smith*








**TOP & MIDDLE:** Scenes at the Holcim works at Untervaz.

**BOTTOM:** Holcim cement tank on RhBat Samedan.

massive Untervaz complex, there are also slave locos in operation. These anonymous block machines suddenly burst into life and start moving wagons, all by remote control.

With operations all over the world, economic downturns in one area can be offset with growth in other countries. Holcim are a very socially responsible company, and believe in sustainability, so plan to use rail more and more. Their bright liveried bogie tanks and open hopper wagons are a familiar sight throughout Switzerland. 2012 was their centennial year and they have produced a very good history of the company (in English and German) at [www.holcim.com](http://www.holcim.com). The accompanying photos were taken at Untervaz, which, being on the boundary of the RhB, has metre gauge as well as standard gauge tracks. 

## WEIACHER KIES

### Don Gatehouse looks at these gravel wagons

Anyone travelling in Switzerland in the last 50 years has seen them. In May 1962 the first 80-tonne bogie hopper wagons for gravel, left the shops of Schindler in Pratteln. Within 3 years seven block trains of 15 wagons had been delivered, plus a small number of reserves, and all were running a 24/7 operation. The retreat of the ice age glaciers was responsible for depositing large gravel reserves along the Rhein valley. The concrete makers, faced with a building boom, and with the 1960s programme to build the new motorway network, were happy to take delivery at strategic rail-served unloading points, as their contracts required. As for the SBB, they faced a challenge for this huge heavy-haul task; the solution was the Be 6/8 II Crocodiles. Although reaching the end of their useful life they were worked-over and enjoyed an Indian summer hauling 1,200t gravel trains until they could run no more, and were withdrawn in the 1970s. The first sets were painted red-brown, and lettered 'Weiacher Kies' from the first pit at Weiach-Kaiserstuhl on the line from Zurzach to Eglisau. Apart from accidental damage, none have been withdrawn, although new bogies have raised their speed from the original 80km/h, then no problem as the Crocodiles had a maximum speed of 75 km/h. Today this is an intolerable

limitation on pathing. Later variants allow 100 km/h loaded with a 90t weight allowing trains of up to 1,800 tonnes to be run. There is no sign of a fall in demand for gravel. Today at least 350 such 'Swiss Standard' bogie gravel wagons are in use, built first by Schindler and later Meyer in Rheinfelden, plus a number from other builders. There are