

Storm damage in the Gotthard area

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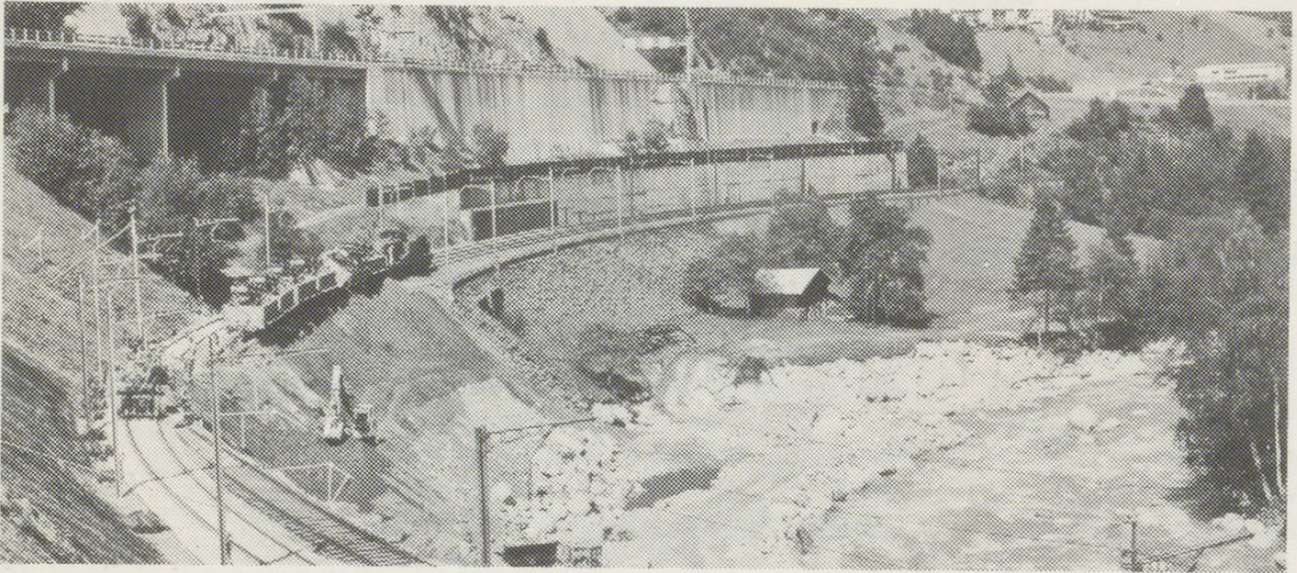
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STORM DAMAGE IN THE GOTTHARD AREA

By The Editor

Throughout the time which is euphemistically called "Summer", the weather over the whole of Europe was to say the least rather unpredictable, and on the night of the 25th/26th August the storm reached a climax that was to cause havoc throughout the whole of the Gotthard valley.



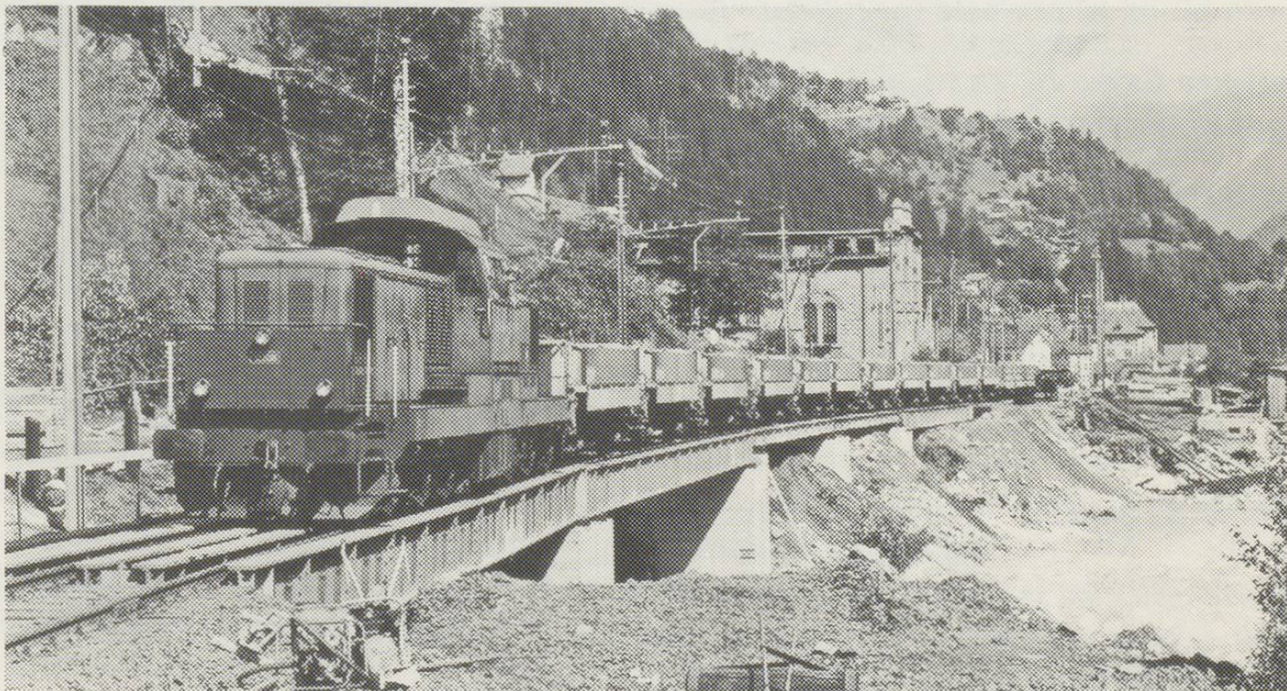
Below: SBB Loco Bm6/6 No 18506 with ballast train at Wattering, near Wassen. 9 Oct 1987. Photo Hp Hwler Schweizer Eisenbahn Review.

The devastation starts in the valley near Hospental just 3Km west of the town of Andermatt, when torrential rain caused the Gotthardreuss to change from an ordinary river into a raging torrent filled with debris from the higher slopes. The river twisted about 5Km of the track of the Furka Oberalp by taking away the foundations and flooding the surrounding area, leaving the track looking as though some giant hand had smashed it first one way and then the other. The route for this river is via the Schöllenen Gorge and down into the Gotthard valley. The chaos that this swollen river was to cause had only just begun, as the next area to suffer was the Andermatt to Göschenen line of the Furka Oberalp as it descends down the 17% incline of the gorge. The first casualty was the Sprengi gallery which suffered total destruction over a section measuring thirty metres in length, also the metregauge track was buried under 2 to 3 metres of rock debris. Likewise the Sprengi tunnel is filled with debris to a height of between 2 to 3 metres. The high power cables of the 66Kv and 11.5Kv catenary supply, which ran down the gorge, were also put out of action. The river, being fed by other streams coming down from the Oberalp, gathered momentum as it fell the 340 metres down through the narrow cliffs into the area of Göschenen. It was here that the debris laden river took away the footbridge alongside the railway bridge by the Gotthard tunnel, and damaged the underside of the railway bridge which carries the four lines from the tunnel. The whole area was awash under fast running water for quite sometime, which is quite difficult to visualise as the whole station area is perched on the side of the mountain. The only way between the towns of Göschenen and Andermatt is by autobus

operated by the PTT and the Furka Oberalp, which at weekends is supplemented by coaches from as far away as Luzern.

Below Göschenen the problem became more severe, as the line which was involved was the main north south artery of the Swiss State railways which runs through the Gotthard. This line carries approximately 230 trains per day over the mountain route loaded with 151,000 passengers and 67,500 tons of freight. The main twin track railway line from Göschenen to Wassen suffered no major damage, but as it left the 1100 metre long Wattinger - Kehrtunnel at the 60.5Km marker, the river had gouged away the foundations of the embankment under the tracks. About 150 metres of the twin tracks were left suspended over the river, also gone were the catenary posts and wires for the southbound track. Further north from the Wattinger tunnel at the 55Km marker, which is about 120 metres south of Gurtellen station, the river had broken through both tracks again. The river had eroded the foundations of the trackwork for a distance of about 100 metres and had torn a hole that would have to be bridged before the train services could be resumed.

It was possible to arrange for the PTT bus service to cater for the local passenger service between Flüelen and Göschenen, which also connected with the bus service up to Andermatt and to the trains running to the south. But the through freight service was a major problem, with a large amount of it being diverted onto other routes which in themselves were already fairly congested. During the period from the 25th August until single line working was restored on the Gotthard on the 12th September, approximately 40 trains were re-routed via the BLS line from Domodossala to Bern, 8 trains routed via the Mt Cenis and 4 trains via the Brenner Pass each day. EC/IC trains headed by SBB Re6/6's became a common sight on the Lötschberg line. In the Tessin region and cut off from the rest of the SBB were 57 locomotives. (27 Re6/6, 7 Ae6/6, 12 Re4/4I, 1 Re4/4II and 10 Re4/4III.).



SBB Loco Bm6/6 No 18506 with 1200 tonne ballast train crossing the 5 temporary bridges at Gurtellen. 9 Oct 1987. Photo Hp Huwyler, Schweizer Eisenbahn Review.

As soon as the scale of the problem was realised, the Swiss Army were called in to assist the SBB in restoring the service. The break at Gurtellen was the worst to deal with, as this involved the building of concrete supports and the laying down of 5 emergency heavy duty bridging units. Diesel locomotives of the type Bm6/6 were drafted in to haul the 1200 tonne ballast trains required for this area. A large concrete restraining wall was being built on the river side of the tracks to protect the rails from any future washaway. Once the wall was complete the area behind it would be filled in and the track relaid so that normal service could be resumed. At the site of the first washaway near Wassen, the whole of the area was dugout so that the tracks could be relaid on a slightly larger radius. The embankment was also repaired and the whole site was cleaned up very quickly indeed, with traffic running on both tracks by the 24th September.

STOP PRESS

SBB Brünig 100 year and BLS 75 year celebrations, 1988.

Details of the above celebration which are taking place between 12th and the 21st August 1988 (10.00 to 18.00 hours) have just been received. For those who have not booked their holidays I list them below. For those that have booked, may I suggest a quick trip to the travel agent, after reading this article, to arrange a change.

Interlaken West.

An exhibition will be held for standard gauge Foreign and Swiss rolling stock.

Interlaken East.

An exhibition for narrow gauge rolling stock.

Special rail trips.

15 August: an historic train journey from Bern to Brig.

16, 17 and 18 August: a nostalgic journey from Bern to Briez by train and lake steamer.

16 and 18 August: rail trip to Stresa in Italy.

19 August: Panorama trip on SBB Brünig.

Weekend get together for rail fans on 21 and 22 August: rail rally to Interlaken and steam excursions.

Locomotive parade. 14 August: Electric Locos through the years.

20 August: Steam locos both Swiss and Foreign.

Historic coaching stock will be used on the Spiez to Interlaken service during Rail-in 88. Model railway exhibitions and shuttle train service between exhibition centres. Special trains will run from Germany, France and Swiss stations.

A catalogue will be available in **June**, for the sum of SFr 2.00 from Rail-in Club, CH3800 Interlaken.
