

The other side of the fence

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Mike's Via Mala shows just how effective his observations on the other side of the fence have been

The Other Side of the Fence

by Mike Polglaze

Photos by C.J.Freeze

When modelling the Swiss scene, one of the biggest problems, I find, is obtaining information. Not about the railway, there are usually plenty of books available, but about the details on the other side of the fence.

Unless you want to model a pure railway scene, you will need to include some Swiss countryside, which is very different from ours. Not many of us, alas, are in a position to pop over to Switzerland on a regular basis and have to manage with infrequent visits, such as the annual holiday, which, if the family tag along as well further reduces any gricing time. Fear not, much information can be gleaned away from the railway, thus leaving you free to enjoy your particular railway to the full on the half day allocated to you. I offer a few tips on gaining a bit of extra gricing time, particularly if you are using your own car:

1. When anyone wants to stop for a visit to the

toilet, remember most stations have one. This is most useful in a strange town.

2. Again, in a strange town, there is usually ample parking space at the station.
3. Many Swiss stations have excellent restaurants which are often cheaper than the local hotels and just as good or better.
4. When writing the obligatory holiday postcards, remember most stations have a stamp machine and postbox.
5. Many stations will exchange money or traveller's cheques.

However, we digress...

Trying to remember details seen several months later is not easy. What I do is to carry, in



Chalets by the Untersee, Arosa, showing an attractive grouping of houses and road.

addition to the camera, a small pocket notebook. I use a Twinlock 5in x 3in and jot down rough notes and/or make sketches of anything I see that might prove useful at some future date. Once I return home the notes are converted into more readable English, so that when I want to model a particular scene, I look up the notes to see what I've got on the subject. Let me hasten to add that railway notes are also included. The main headings I use are :

Roads and road signs

Buildings and structures

The countryside

The following notes are compiled from my observations.

Roads and Road Signs

Whilst the Swiss use the familiar International road signs, they also have a considerable number of their own internal ones. One International sign that differs appreciably

between UK practice and the rest of Europe is the Road Works Ahead. In the UK the man faces left, whereas on the continent he faces right. There may well be other subtle differences, something to look for on a long road journey. Being a multi-language society, the Swiss use visual signs in preference to the written word on their internal signs, otherwise everything would end up in three or four languages which would no doubt confuse the locals, let alone visitors!

If you see car parking spaces painted blue rather than white, beware; you will be in a disc parking zone. (Discs can usually be obtained from local banks). A sign seen frequently on mountain roads is a yellow posthorn on a blue background, this means that postbuses have priority. Not that many would care to argue with such a large vehicle on a narrow mountain road! The end of priority is marked with the same sign, defaced with the usual diagonal red line. A sign with black and white diagonal lines means



Stored timber under the eaves of a building at Nessental

reduced road width.

Advanced warning signs for roadworks are varied. The basic sign is often three or four planks, about 3-4m long, painted with 300mm red and white bands, set vertically by the roadside. I've seen them stuck in a 200 litre drum with the Road Works sign fixed centrally, about halfway up. Depending on what sort of work is being carried out, other warning signs, such as traffic lights, speed restrictions, etc, are hung below the road works sign. One I saw on the Grimsel Pass was a plain yellow triangle which I was told meant that although work was being carried out, it wasn't actually blocking the carriageway. Working areas are often marked by red and white planks set into posts and can be arranged horizontally or diagonally, depending no doubt on the number of posts on hand at the time.

Signs painted on the road surface are as numerous as in the UK, but differ even though in many cases the meaning is the same. The

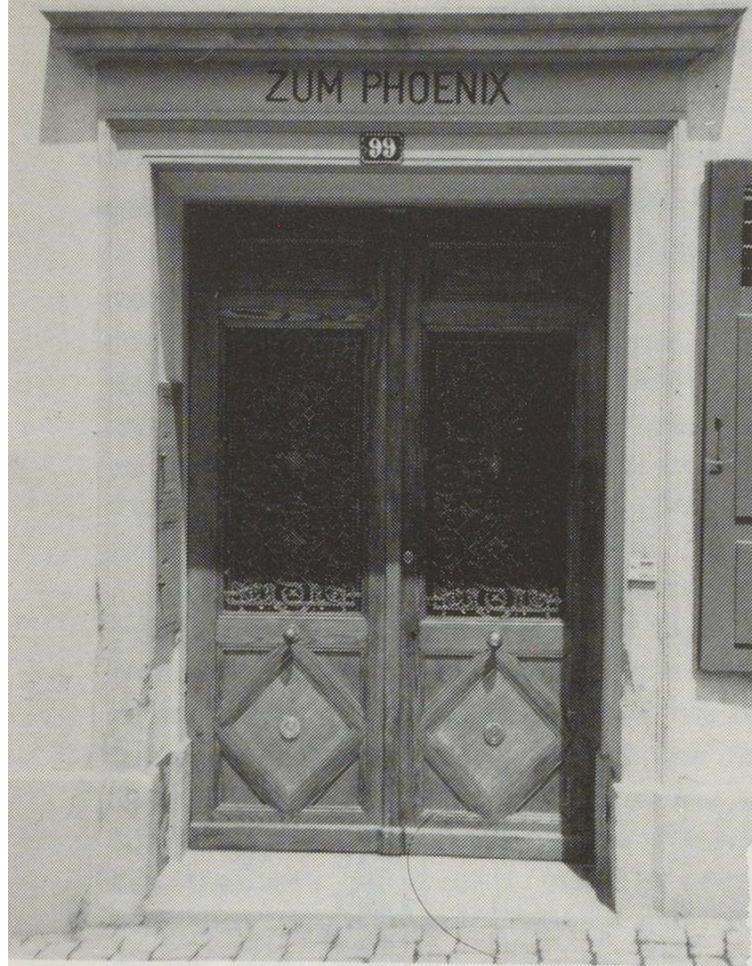
Give Way sign is made up of a row of small solid white triangles, the apex pointing towards oncoming traffic and preceded by a similar large white triangle as found over here. A yellow cross followed by a yellow line [x-x-x...] means no parking. This is often to be seen around station areas, as are large yellow rectangles with the word BUS, also in yellow. Some of these bus bays also have yellow diagonal stripes across them.

Buildings and Structures

Whilst the plethora of kits on the market solves many problems concerning model buildings, these can be considerably improved with detailing and weathering. One obvious addition would be the stack of firewood around the wall. Swiss calendars frequently include shots of buildings from which a lot of detail can be gleaned, but it is still worth your while making a few notes. The colour of doors and shutters, roof details, gardens etc etc are always of

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A doorway in Stein-am-Rhein

interest.

A very common structure in Switzerland is the electricity supply pylon, rarely to be seen in model form. Visitors often complain that they spoil the view, but how else can one carry power supplies across mountain ranges? Bury them? Fancy having to dig up a faulty cable halfway up a mountain in mid-winter! I think we must accept them as part and parcel of the Swiss scene. There are many and varied types and are mainly of steel construction, though some can be concrete. Many cables are also carried on wooden posts, in certain areas these are not set into the ground, but are bolted to a concrete spur set firmly in the ground. Thus, when a pole is swept away by an avalanche, or demolished by a wayward motorist, a replacement can be quickly bolted in place and power restored, saving not only a good deal of time, but a lot of hole digging as well. I use Sommerfelt FO wooden catenary poles, which come complete with a "concrete" base. The method of attaching the cables to the posts

varies considerably, a quick note or sketch is always useful.

Countryside

Going walkabout in Switzerland is not only a very pleasant way of spending a day, but is also a good opportunity for making notes on the countryside and its buildings. Look at the way paths are laid out, and how routes are marked out; splashes of paint in a combination of colours daubed on stones, trees, fences and so on. This is fine until a tree falls down or something gets swept away and the marking disappears - Murphy's Law sees that this usually happens by a junction in the path! Another common sight is the heap of timber, stacked and waiting to be taken away for fuel. These piles are often to be found close to rivers, where the wood has been washed down by the spring thaw.

I have only mentioned a few examples of the things a modeller should look out for in his travels, but it is very much a matter of individual choice what you collect. Not only are these notes useful, once you get home and read though your notes it seems to extend the holiday. Finally, I'm quite prepared to be taken to task over some of the details mentioned, some things have to be arrived at by inspired guesswork, then details do vary in different Cantons.

On my next visit to Switzerland, a list of details to check will be put down beforehand in my trusty notebook. Trying to remember what you wanted to know when you're over there is just as hard as trying to remember what you saw when you get home again!

VACANCY

The Swiss Railways Society has a vacancy for an Hon. Secretary and is looking for a volunteer. Applicants should advise the Chairman or retiring Secretary at once. The post involves preparing minutes of Committee meetings (3-4 a year) and the AGM, providing reports for Swiss Express, writing to various individuals and other societies and dealing with enquiries from prospective members.