

Day return to Switzerland - please

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal**

Band (Jahr): **6 (2000-2002)**

Heft 10

PDF erstellt am: **10.07.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-854969>

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A day return with a definite difference. Mark describes how easy it is to get to Switzerland. EasyJet timings from Luton and Gatwick make this kind of trip a distinct possibility. As an aside Ryanair take many daytrippers to and from Pisa out of Stansted for a day on the beach and I do remember the occasion when I went to Barcelona for lunch.

Over the years, as a family, we have perfected the art of the 'mad dash' as we call it. Working for erstwhile British Rail helped as, me being a reasonably senior manager we all benefited from an 'All stations and by ships' pass – first class of course! From his earliest days Nick (now 15) accepted that his parents would drag him off to Southampton, Bath, York or Edinburgh on a day trip from Surrey. Later Paris was added to the list of possibilities, regularly exploited.

In 1997, like many others, I left the rail industry for pastures new. In my case I went to work for British Airways, for new challenges whilst keeping in mind the travel possibilities this would give. Meetings were now in Hong Kong, Cairo and (tantalisingly) Zürich – if I was lucky I would get to see some of the local rail action whilst en route to a meeting, but often I didn't get out of the airport. Recently, however, the old 'mad dash' spirit came to the fore and I thought 'if I can go to Zürich for the day for a meeting, why not go for a fix of Swiss trains?'

There are different categories of staff travel in the airline business, most with the uncertainty of 'standby' travel. Standby is definitely not to be recommended if time is short but on less busy flights, with planning, it is possible to get a discounted rate and the coveted 'OK' status which means you get on the flight! So in early December I booked myself a return to Geneva for my first fix! Incidentally, the pricing structure on the 'low cost' carriers, usually based on the cost of each sector rather than the return trip, means that anyone can get a good deal on a day return trip with a bit of surfing!

Leaving Gatwick at 0800, arrival in Geneva was in plenty of time for the 1110 to Brig. I had set Montreux as my goal, for the run along

Lac Lemman, to see the MOB and hopefully to ride on one of the SBB's ICN tilting trains. An Re4/4 with Mk IV stock awaited and the run along the lake was still beautiful, despite the December gloom. At Montreux I stood and watched the connecting service to Zweissimmen depart behind Ge4/4 8002 in its new advertising livery. Watching it soar up the incline out of the station made me wish I had joined it, but I was then rewarded with the sight of two more Ge4/4's in their coats of many colours – last time I had seen any of them they had been in their blue and cream livery. Time to repaint the LGB model! A tanker train trundled through on the main line behind an Ae6/6 and I then wandered down through the town to the waterfront before my next train.

Preparations for the Christmas market were well under way, with the wooden chalets all built but yet to be occupied. As I walked along I thought I could see a railway coach, but surely not? When I got closer, there is was – a brand new bogie-less MOB observation car (BDs225) in the process of being kitted out as an MOB sales office. As I contemplated it, the sound of the still recently departed train echoed from the hills above the town, adding to the atmosphere.

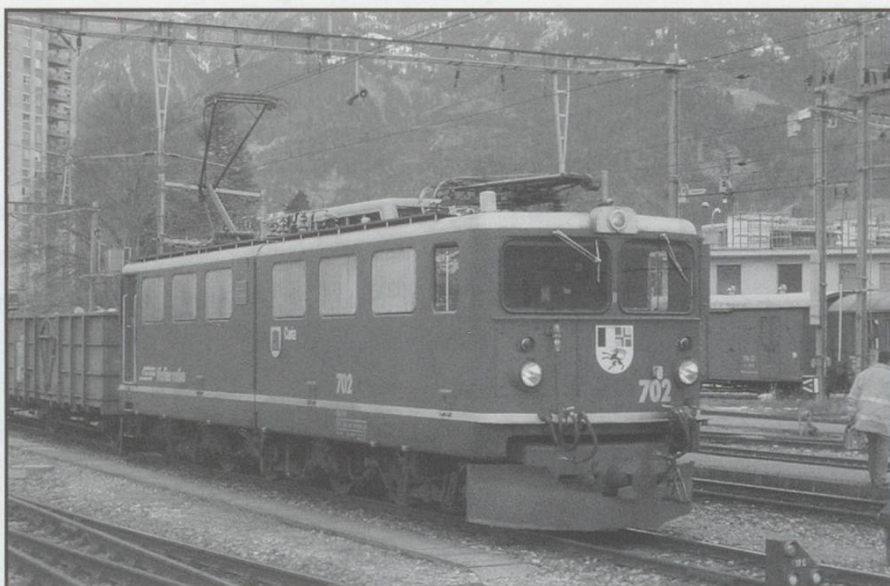
Returning to the station, the plan was to travel to Lausanne and the inevitable Re4/4 arrived with a train of 1960s stock. I remember on my first ever trip on a Swiss train – from Basle to Lucerne in 1969, thinking the coaches were rather basic. Little did I think I would travel in the same stock, very little altered, over 30 years later. At Lausanne, I satisfied my craving for a trip on a rack line with a trip down to Ouchy and back.

Lausanne to Geneva offers frequent trains, with a choice of stock for the enthusiast and my



ABOVE: 641 shunting - After arrival from St Moritz, Ge 4/4^{III} no. 641 *Maienfeld* shunts onto empty stock at Chur, 23/01/2002

RIGHT: Ge 6/6 no. 702 *Curia* stands at Landquart with a mixed freight heading towards Chur, 23/01/2002.



BELOW: Chur - Hauled by 626 *Malans*, the Arosa Express set trundles through the streets of Chur on its way to Arosa, 23/01/2002.



first chosen train produced the desired ICN. First class seemed a bit bland (reminiscent of BR/GNER Mk IV's) but the ride and performance is excellent. All too soon I was back at Geneva and after a quick stroll around the city, another train (460 powered) back to the airport. The day had been fun and successful – what could I do next?

Another opportunity presented itself in January, so I started thinking. My real

love amongst Swiss railways is the RhB – was it possible to get to Chur and back in a day? First step – check the flights. Arrival in Zürich at 1000, last departure at 1840. Allow for check-in, so need to be back at the airport by around 1745. This made Chur easily reachable (1110 from Zürich Hbf, arrive 1244, return at 1516), but what could I fit in whilst I was there?

I left Heathrow without any definite plan for the time in Chur. BA ran to time (as, in my experience, it usually does) and taxied into the terminal at Zürich past sad lines of Swissair aircraft laid up awaiting their fate. On to a Lucerne train to Hbf – double deck stock with a red 460 – and change there for the Chur service. Approaching the main station I was reminded of one of the differences between my profes-



ABOVE: Street running – It seems that even the locals forget that trains cannot stop on a centime or swerve when they are confronted with a Ge 4/4^{III} No. 631 *Untervaz* heads for Arosa on 23/01/2002, its driver totally unmoved by the encounter.



LEFT: Ge 4/4^{III} 651 *Pontresina* prepares to depart for St Moritz, 23/01/2002.

sional experience of shunting operations and the way SBB do it – an 8 coach train backing out of the station with apparently nobody at the leading end, and a driver happily driving his long train backwards at speed!

The Chur train was again a double-deck set with a 460 pushing, but with three coaches and a driving trailer at the leading end. A large number of people got out at Wädenswilj26

BELOW: Arosa Express forecourt – Ge 4/4^{II} 626 *Malans* heading the Arosa Express set awaits departure from Chur on the 1452 train to Arosa, 23/01/2002.



and changed onto the waiting SOB train – another line to be investigated sometime. By Pfäffikon (what a great name!) snow lay on the ground, and I was hopeful that Chur would be suitably wintry.

The early start (leaving home at 0500!) took its toll and I dozed off. We arrived in Landquart in hazy sunshine with not a snowflake in sight. There, however, was the best sight – the RhB connecting train to Klosters. I had calculated that I could get to Klosters (or even Davos) and back in the time, but another plan had formulated in my mind. At Chur I alighted, knowing that there would be two RhB trains in the station, and another outside. Both of the trains in the station had Ge4/4^{III}s, but both were in plain red – what happened to all the zany liveries? 652 I had seen before, in red then, but 642 had none of the advertising panels that I had seen in earlier years (anyone remember the Nokia rabbit?).

The real object of my quest was outside the station – the Arosa train. I never cease to be amazed, amused and even moved by the sight of a loco-hauled train running through the streets of a busy town. I had (again) calculated that a trip to Arosa and back was possible in the time – with 5 minutes in Arosa – but I decided to watch and photograph the trains instead. Walking up the street for a decent vantage point I got a couple of good shots, including recording one motorist's belated evasive action when he realised that a Ge4/4^{II} was neither going to swerve or stop dead for him! I now had a couple of hours to kill (with more Arosa line action if I wanted it) but I decided that I couldn't miss out on riding an RhB train. Landquart is on the RhB, and easily accessible from Chur...

Showing him a return ticket from Chur to Landquart, the RhB conductor was about to question why I was on his train when the SBB was quicker (evidenced by an Re4/4 sweeping past as we approached Untervaz), but decided against it as I resumed leaning on the open

window, savouring the atmosphere. Does anyone else regard air-conditioning as the death of the real train travelling experience? At each of the passing loops on this short section another train was waiting, one passenger (Ge6/6 *Davos*) and a couple of freights.

There was half an hour to wait for the return train to Chur, but Landquart was full of action. A crew was loose shunting wagons and a freight was being marshalled behind Ge6/6 *Curia*. A Ge4/4^I trundled up the yard and then disappeared light engine towards Klosters. Needless to say, passenger trains ran to the second and my return train to Chur arrived behind the inevitable Ge4/4^{II} – this time 618 *Ilanz*. Arrival back in Chur at last found a wacky Ge4/4^{III} – 651 *Pontresina*, with 641 in Co-op livery not far behind.

Time to photograph the Arosa train again, and then back to the station for the 1516 to Zürich. The original Ge4/4, 601 *Albula*, wearing its 50years/5 million km message was shunting stock in the yard as we pulled out. With characteristic efficiency, Zürich was reached exactly on time and the connection to the airport produced the first advertising livery 460 seen today.

So, was it worth it? I would say resoundingly YES! I may be lucky in that I can get cheap flights to indulge my passion for Swiss railways, but when time is tight I think I have shown that it is worth going for it, just for the experience. Given the chance, I would happily spend a week or so riding Swiss rails, with some photography and cycling thrown in. If time is short, however, I grab what I can! Maybe I have inspired some of you to investigate the potential too. Just make sure your wife understands.....

All the pictures in this article are by Mark Evans and are taken directly from a Photo CD supplied by a processor. Worth remembering. I will be experimenting more with this format in the future. If you do intend to submit using this format please give me a call beforehand to discuss the file size required.