

A problem at Erstfeld

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Erstfeld 30/05/02 - Banking loco, Re4/4^{II} 11383, is about to be coupled to the rear of the S/B intermodal train when the problem is spotted. Photo: David Adams

Thursday 30th May was the fifth and last full day of my 2002 visit to Switzerland and I awoke to clear blue skies and a few fluffy white clouds hugging the higher peaks, "MITV" weather! Although the longest day was only just over three weeks away, the high mountain backdrop at Erstfeld (from which a party of eight or so Alpine Choughs descended at about 07.30 each morning and glided over the loco depot towards the river) kept part of the station in shadow until 09.00. However, from that time the sun was suitably positioned to take photographs from the north end of Erstfeld's main southbound platform and I spent a very rewarding hour doing just that. To add to the photographic opportunities an operational problem occurred resulting in some southbound trains being routed "wrong line"

through the northbound main platform.

The problem was one that I had never encountered before despite having a life-long interest in railway operations spanning over 50 years. At 09.33 a southbound intermodal arrived in the main southbound platform with Re10/10 formation, 11151/11662, at the head. A careful study of the picture showing the shunter about to couple up the banking loco, Re4/4^{II} 11383, to the rear of this train, will reveal the actual problem. How are your observational skills, usually very good, but maybe not quite that good at the moment? Or perhaps the spectacular backdrop is putting you off?

Well the clue is in the buffers, those on the rear wagon being half a buffer lower than those on 11383 which could have had serious consequences once the Re4/4^{II} was exerting full power at the rear of the train on the 1 in 38 climb to Göschenen. The shunter arrived on the shunters' station bicycle, completed coupling up but radioed for assistance. Very shortly three personnel arrived, one carrying a long ruler. He measured the height of the loco buffers from the rail surface and then walked back checking the heights of other wagon buffers further along the train.

A plan of action was then formulated and carried out with the usual unflappable Swiss efficiency. Relevant instructions were relayed by radio to those concerned and the red tail lights on the rear of 11383 were changed to headlights. At 09.43 the loco drew forward with the

last four wagons of the train and crossed to the west side of the main line. Here the fourth from last wagon was re-marshalled as the last wagon and the ensemble then reversed back onto the main part of the train. By 10.00 the train was ready to depart, a very smart piece of work, the operational versatility of the layout at Erstfeld being used to best advantage in preventing delays to other services.

The outstanding weather conditions prevailed until sunset and indeed throughout the next day. I spent the late morning at Arth-Goldau where among a feast of trains I managed three shots of SOB (ex - BT) "456's" – well one has to keep the "Ed." happy! In the afternoon I returned to Sisikon and, requiring the very best of weather for photography purposes, finally achieved a goal that had eluded me on my last three Swiss visits, a walk to Flüelen along the Axenstrasse which I will describe in more detail in another piece.



Erstfeld 30/05/02 - Re4/4¹ 11383 waits to draw forward with the rear four vehicles of the S/B intermodal to start the re-marshalling move.

Photo: David Adams



The "Grey Mouse", ex - RAe-TEE set No 1053, now owned by the "SBB Historic" trust, is seen here in Spiez in June 2002. It is awaiting restoration and painting into the old TEE livery of burgundy and cream by the BLS carriage Works in Bönigen. The engines will be treated at the BLS Depot in Spiez. The BLS won the restoration contract on the open market, but it did raise some eyebrows within the SBB...

TEXT - George Hoekstra

PHOTO - Andrew Russell



One of the very few Re 4/4s to carry advertising livery, No. 11228, is seen here in Brig in June 2002. It carries "CFF Voyages" and "Kuoni" Logos, drawing attention to the partnership of the SBB with Kuoni-Travel. At the time, the other travel companies did not universally appreciate this partnership with the still state owned SBB. Photo: George M. Hoekstra

Recently I (George Hoekstra) spent a lovely afternoon with your Editor, David and his wife Debra, walking around the Rhine-Falls in Neuhausen. He might tell you how to get there. We then walked round the back of the SIG (Schweizerische Industrie-Gesellschaft) complex. Their famous bogie construction department now is part of the Alstom group. In 1995, together with SLM, ABB and Schindler Waggon (all since gobbled up by others), the group ran a specially constructed train set to test the tilting technology to be used in the ICN sets. Three ex - BR Mark III sleepers were bought, converted and crammed full of measuring equipment. With their much smaller BR loading gauge, the Mark IIIs could be tilted without fouling the SBB loading gauge. Photo: Neitec-Trains.

