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Peter Rose describes a recent visit to Switzerland by train the whole way and outlines several suggestions for amusing oneself in and around the railway system.



A Wengernalpbahn train descends from Kleine Scheidegg to Grindelwald. 17th July 2000.

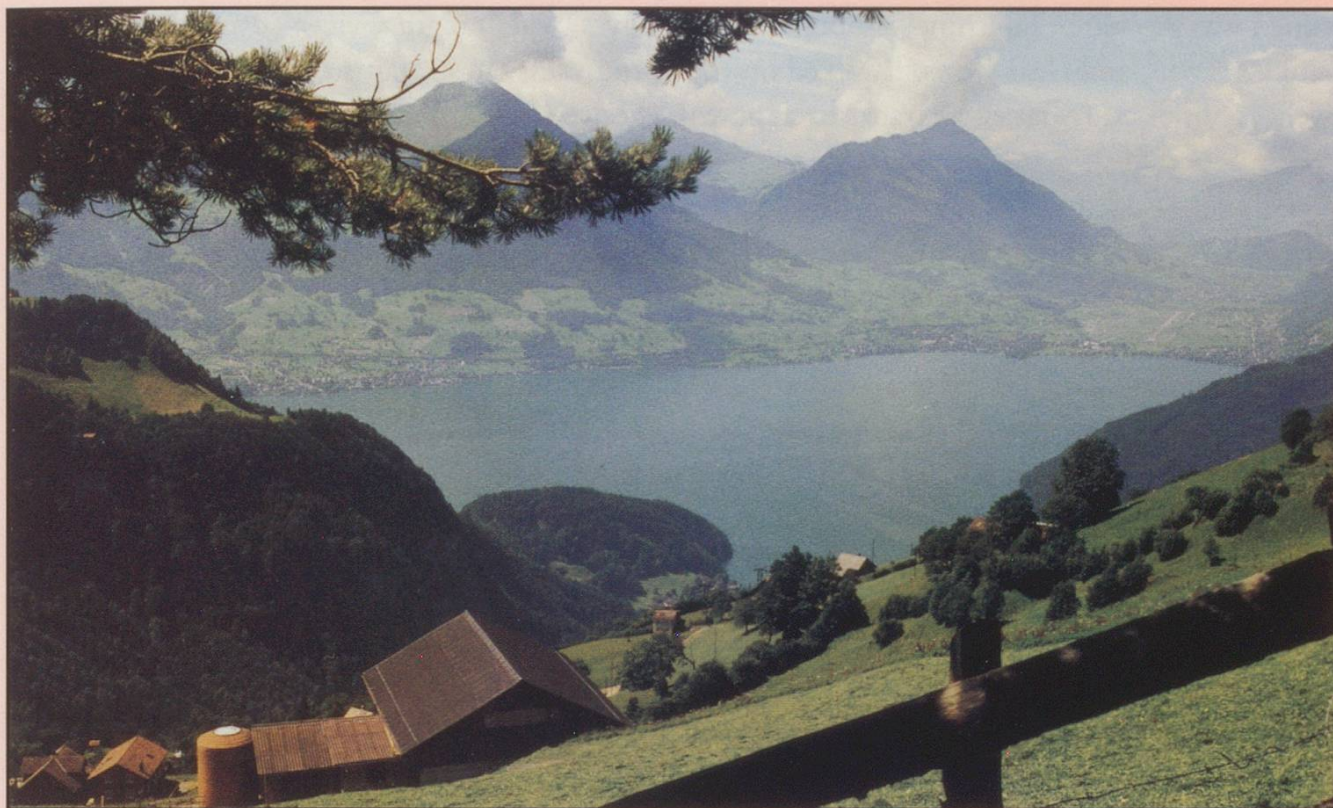
Photo: Peter Rose

On this particular visit outward travel was by Eurostar via Brussels, then overnight to Basel with arrival in the very early morning. As I proceeded to Chur and Bergün the scenery was hidden behind pouring rain. This was July so I was looking forward to some walks in fine sunny conditions. So it was with some trepidation that I stepped off the train onto. . . snow! I trudged to the Albula Hotel where the owner, amazed that I had come all the way by train, demanded, in German, to know all about the journey.

As the Preda-Bergün path has been written about before and the weather was less than perfect during my stay here I am going to start at the next location: Grindelwald. After the rural charm of Graubünden I suddenly remembered why I had never stayed in Grindelwald before!

It is, of course, a major tourist centre with all the inevitable results. On top of this it was pouring with rain and I had to force myself to think of the walking opportunities as I splashed down to the post office and dripped onto the floor of the "tea-room".

The following day dawned dull but at least it was not raining and I was determined to make the most of the visit. So I joined the 08:19 to Kleine Scheidegg. As we climbed light snow started to fall and visibility was poor. But onward. I strode out along the easy track down towards Wengernalp by which time I was walking in a July blizzard. By Wengen, after two hours, it had turned to rain and I finally gave up. I went to Bern for the afternoon to inspect the excellent stamp collection at the PTT museum. This is tucked away behind the large



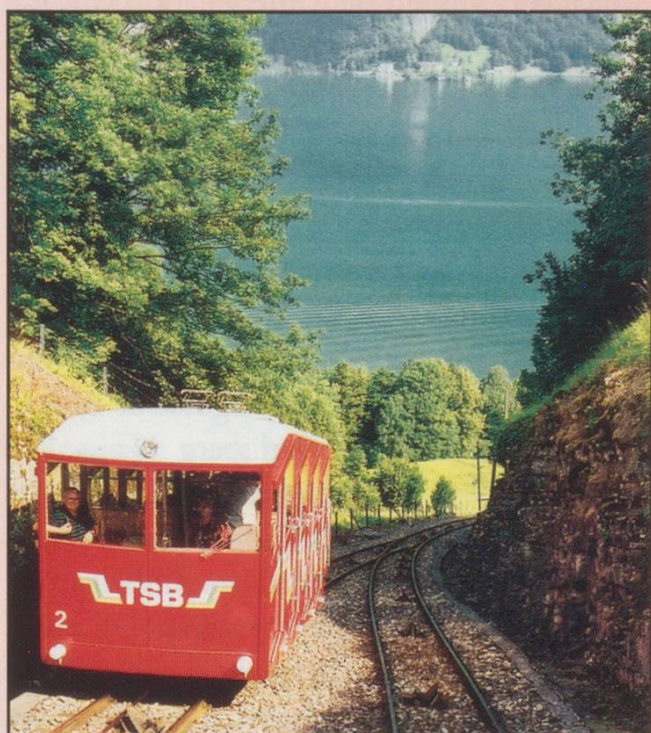
ABOVE: View from above Hinterbergen on Rigi across Vierwaldstätter See towards the Stanserhorn. 18th July 2000.

BELOW: Car 2 of the Treib - Seelisberg - Bahn. 19th July 2000.

Both photos: Peter Rose

historical museum at the Helvetica Platz tram stop and both make a good wet weather option. The former has a wide range of post and telephone related exhibits.

The next day also dawned wet and I began to wonder why I kept coming to Switzerland. I set off towards Spiez with no real idea other



than maybe spending the day on trains. But then, near Kandersteg: a glimpse of sunlight. The forecast was for the rain to ease so I turned back and headed to Lauterbrunnen. There was too much cloud around the mountains but I put together an enjoyable low-level walk along the Weisse Lütschine valley via Zweilütschinen to Wilderswil. This is nearly all on level riverside tracks although there are some quiet road sections around the pleasant village of Gsteigwiler. Then I took the train back to Zweilütschinen and walked along the valley of the Schwarze Lütschine to Lütschental where I was just in time to catch a BOB train back to Grindelwald. The walk starts off on a path through the village of Zweilütschinen, which I did not know was there. I had always thought of the place as a kind of Berner Oberland Trent Junction.

I awoke on departure day from Grindelwald to. . . yes, bright sunshine. So, there was a quick change of plan. I arranged to leave my bags at the Hotel Steinbok, (nicely away from the main centre, next to the First Bahn) and once again joined the 08:19. This

time I was greeted by sunshine, although a very chilly version, and clear views. I walked on the well - signposted (what else?) tracks back down to Grindelwald with superb mountain views of the Eiger, Wetterhorn etc. and across to the Grosse Scheidegg. Few people but various cows, goats and even pigs around Bustiglen. This takes around 3 hours at a good pace and after a lunch at the hotel (outside - amazing!) I set off for my next venue having now remembered why I keep coming.

The move started with one of my favourite bus journeys in Switzerland. The bus via Grosse Scheidegg to Schwarzwaldalp. It is not a post bus but the Swiss Pass is valid for a 50% discount. It connects with the equally enjoyable post bus to Meiringen. This now has a SFr5 scenic surcharge but is still worth it. My hotel was the Terrasse am See at Vitznau. I picked it because it is by the lake next to the stations, and I was delighted to be given a room with a balcony that had a panoramic view up and down the lake. I was to spend hours on it watching the paddle-steamers coming and going, and the sun setting behind the mountains. It is only a single room, but solo travellers should insist on Room 26! I knew all that "Ein zimmer mit balkon bitte" at evening classes would come in useful. The dining room is on a projection out over the lake with extensive views; the hotel has a lakeside terrace and the friendly staff speak good English.

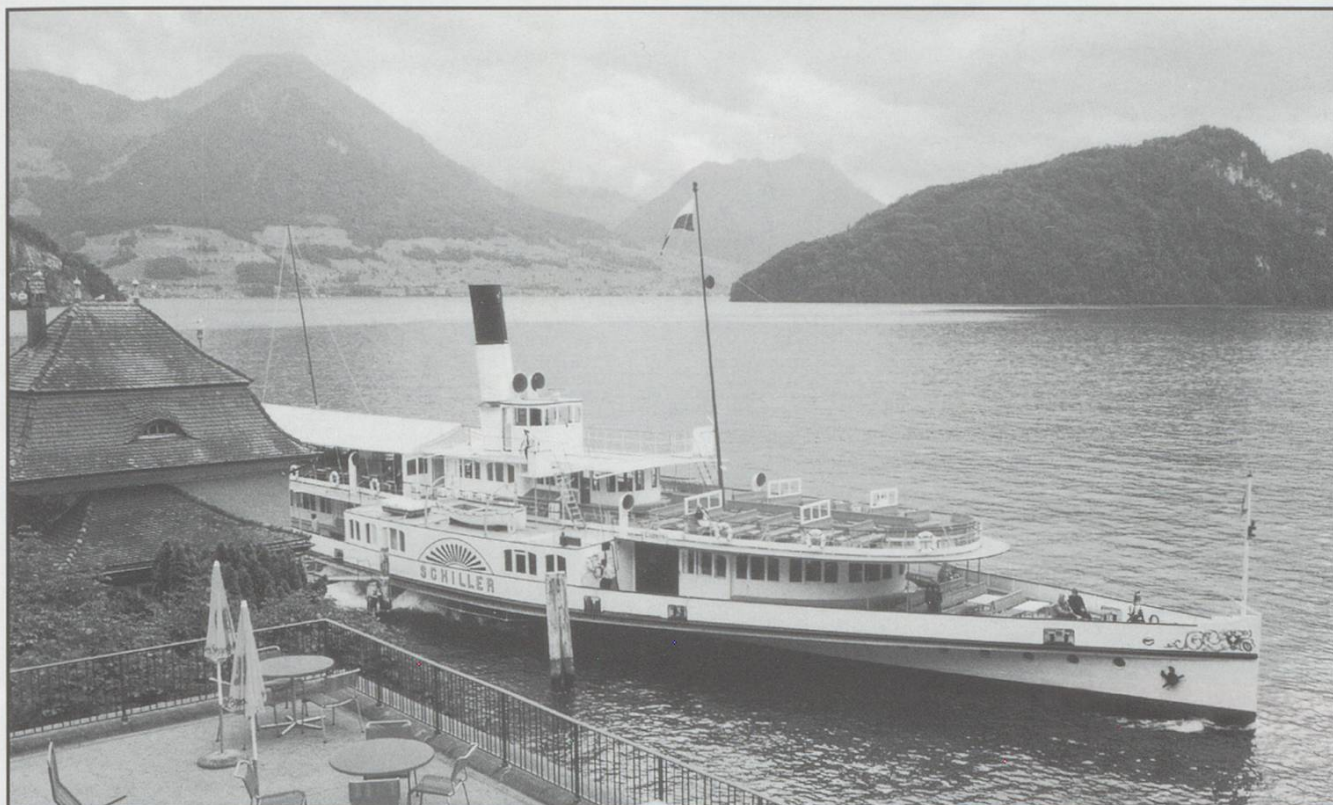
On the first day I decided to find some new paths on Rigi. I took an early train on the Vitznau Rigi Bahn to Kulm and had the summit to myself. There are many paths on the "Queen of the Mountains" and a map/timetable leaflet is available. This is adequate due to the usual high quality signposting with estimated walking times to the various destinations. I walked down to Staffel on the tarmac track, then across to First on good tracks before joining the Felsenweg. This is a cliff-face path with some sheer drops and should not be undertaken by anyone with a fear of heights but

gives wide-ranging views over the lake and countless mountains. I then followed the Seeweg. This starts off with a very steep but short climb, which must be taken slowly due to the altitude (or else like me you will need to sit awhile to admire the view) and drifts down by well-made tracks and trickier steepish paths to the settlement of Hinterbergen. Having left the summit at about 09:15 I was here about 13:30 but the time, as always, depends on speed and the number of stops. Here there is a café with splendid views from the terrace and I would recommend the "Wurst Salat Garniert". I would not dream of ordering a salad for lunch in the UK, but here we are not talking about a few leaves of limp lettuce. There is a small cable car down to Vitznau, which appears to run on demand, and is worth taking as the walk, which I did, is steep and mostly wooded with limited views. If you do go for it, do not be surprised to find yourself in someone's garden. The exit is hidden in the far corner.

I may give the impression that I just turn up and set off on these walks and that there are no hitches. I do, of course normally have maps such as the Kümmerly & Frey series and plan ahead before leaving home. I decided to walk part of the Weg der Schweiz (the Swiss Path), which goes around the Urnersee for 35km and was opened to mark the 700th anniversary of the Confederation in 1991, with access by train, ship and bus at numerous places.

Although there are special maps and books in English available on the lake ships, I decided that I would not need such things!

I left Vitznau on the appropriately named "Weg der Schweiz" service, which serves the path at numerous piers and alighted at Treib to take the funicular to Seelisberg (Swiss Pass 50%) and thus cut out a steep climb. Readers will have noticed that I do not tend to walk uphill much. I then applied sun block, put on the hat and set off along the signposted route. This drifted down to the lakeside at Rütli. Here I wandered around the sacred meadow and



A room with a view. The *Schiller* departs from Vitznau as seen from my hotel balcony. 17th July 2000.

Photo: Peter Rose

down to the ship station, then back to the meadow. No sign of the official path. I then returned to the ship station and looked more carefully at the map. A dim bulb now came on in my head; the path would obviously start at the meadow where legend has it that the Confederation was founded! So, I had cut out the steep walk up from the lake but then walked back down it to the start of the path. My lame excuse is that both "directions" go in the same direction, but one is level and one is down, but the moral is "get a proper map".

I considered a seemingly vertical path back up to Seelisberg before joining the next ship from Rütli back to Treib and re-ascended the funicular. At least I can now say that I have travelled in the entire rolling stock of this line, having been in both cars. I then walked to Bauen. The route goes up through the village and although there are some dedicated paths and views over the lake, much of this section is on roads or down the seemingly endless steps to Bauen. There must be more enjoyable sections. Maybe, the earlier events have clouded my opinion!

Once again I have tried to suggest ways in which the transport system can be combined with walking opportunities for which walkers do not have to go into serious training. An umbrella and snowshoes are all that is required if you go in July!



Kilian Elsasser of the Verkehrshaus, a very good friend of the

Society, has asked us via Alan Pike to mention the *Gnom* restoration project.

This is a project undertaken by volunteers on an old rack loco. On August 1st the loco was steamed for the first time under the new regime. From then until the middle of October every weekend the loco will be driven both by adhesion and rack at the Verkehrshaus. Specialist staff will be on hand to explain it all to spectators. If you visit the Museum during this time make a point of looking for the *Gnom*,

I will try to write a little more about this in the next edition, no promises though!



The photo shows *Gnom* on test at the OeBB.

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