

The letters pages

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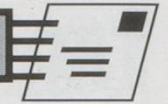
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From: Brian Mason - Reading

Re: Associazione 182

The report about this group in the January 2000 issue of Swiss Express indicates that the Bernina Krokodil Ge 4/4 182 will be cosmetically restored and placed on a plinth at Poschiavo. I believe this may have been the original intention and it may end up in Poschiavo for a while. However, according to their web site (www.club1889.ch) it is intended to bring the locomotive back into full working order and hopefully run it over the Bernina Route sometime during 2002.

It was intended initially to store 182 in the shed at Bernina Suot and carry out external cosmetic work but it will now remain in the works area at Landquart until the Spring. On the 19/20 May it will be moved as part of a special train to Poschiavo and a big celebration is planned. The website contains a lot of detail (in German) about the 'homecoming' and is recommended to all fans of the RhB.

Another website, originating in Italy, also contains information about 182 and the RhB and is in English. It can be found at www.mediacom.it/Vgss/rhb/

From: Phil Weaver - Cyberspace

Re: Luzern offer

Having just returned from a break in Luzern, I wondered if our members may be interested in an offer from the Luzern Tourist Board. The offer goes under the name of 'City Highlights'. A 3* hotel costs SFr. 145 for two nights B & B per person and extra nights B & B at SFr.60 per person. Also a pass for all the museums was included. Guess where we went on the first day ??? The offer runs the whole year round although in the summer it costs slightly more.

The details can be obtained from Switzerland Tourism or direct from the Luzern Tourist Board, Email: luzern@luzern.org <<mailto:luzern@luzern.org>>

I am not connected in any way with Switzerland Tourism or Luzern Tourist Board. Just a satisfied customer, with an eye for a good deal.

From: Peter Arnold - Milton Keynes

Re: Rowan Trains,

I am responding to David Baker's letter in Swiss Express Vol.6/1. May I add that I am delighted to see how successful the letters page has become, just what is needed for the exchange of information between members.

William Robert Rowan was an Englishman who was a director of the Danish firm of coachbuilders' Scandia in Randers. He developed his system with considerable success, particularly for steam powered tramways. (ref: "The Jungfrau Region" by Ralf Roman Rossberg - Published by Hallwag, first published 1983.) Similar trains ran on the Gornergrat Bahn from Zermatt. (ref: "Jungfrau Express", by Verena Gutner - first published by Orell Füssli, 1971). I believe that there are still five Rowan locos in service on the Jungfraubahn together with one complete Rowan train, this being No.6 built in 1903. Another complete tram, No. 1 can be seen in Lucerne Transport Museum.

Finally, I have spotted your deliberate mistake on the cover of this issue -January- instead of March. *Other replies were received from : Dr Donald Fry who mentioned in particular the model of A Rowan Train mounted in a glass case in the foyer of the restaurant at the top of the JungfrauBahn.*

From: Andreas Häsler - Cyberspace

About the BLS-coach at Zürich on page 53. As you have already written the BLS decided not to have any class 465 in advertisement livery but offered to use coaches instead. The one on the picture has an advert for the "Lauchernalp"-area which is famous for hiking and skiing. The Lauchernalp is situated in the Lötschental (bus from Goppenstein).

From: Martin Rice - Cyberspace

Re: Swiss railways for the under10s

I was interested to read the article 'Swiss railways for the under 10s' particularly as my family has regularly travelled on holiday to all parts of Switzerland. Particularly interesting would be information on how he was able to get return fares of only £109 from London to Basel. On more than one occasion I have considered travelling by rail to find it is considerably more expensive than by air. As an exercise I looked up european travel websites, eurostar and also contacted the STO - the cheapest rail fare to Basel for a date in July with all the discounted apex fares came in at £170.

Swiss vs the Rest - an Individual's View

Pressure of space has prevented publication of all the letters that I received on this subject. Steve Bratt made the point that Swiss Express should be about Switzerland and not about the UK and also that Swiss Railways are not perfect. They do get things wrong. Alan Snowdon compared the treatment of the Railways by the press between Switzerland (mostly favourable) and the UK (universally condemnatory).

From: Paul Russenberger - London

In the March 2000 issue of Swiss Express Professor Stevens expressed his views on the relative merits of Swiss and British railways, inviting those of us in both the railway industry and the Society to add our ideas.

Although we no longer have a truly unified railway system, a national timetable is published covering all trains operated by the Train Operating Companies (TOCs). The publicity from each TOC inevitably varies, but many of them issue their own in house magazines although these are not always available in Standard Class accommodation.

It has often been a source of disappointment that the Eurail Pass has never been valid in the UK. However, it is not valid throughout Switzerland either! There used to be a notice on the BOB platform at Interlaken Ost stating Railways of the Jungfrau Region. Eurailpass not valid. Happily, the Pass now provides a 25% reduction on the lines of that group.

Many of my railway colleagues have taken holidays in Switzerland. It is true that Switzerland rarely appears in advertisements in Railnews. To try to find out if this a Railnews matter or part of a more general advertising situation, I visited both travel agents in my local high street. In one only two brochures were on display mentioning Switzerland as one possible country among others; in the other a firm with a very long standing international reputation no brochures providing holidays in Switzerland were displayed and the assistant was obliged to search the stores for them. Part of the problem may be that Switzerland has a reputation for being expensive which may be no longer justified. I have professional friends, including a solicitor, who avoid the country for that very reason. I can think of at least 7 other Society members who are either active or retired railway personnel and they often take holidays in Switzerland.

Moving to some of the technical issues raised, the Advanced Passenger Train was abandoned in the early 1980s. A decade, not weeks, elapsed before the Italian Pendolino system was sufficiently developed to be tested. The derailment of a Pendolino in Italy last year is likely to have been caused by a speed limit being exceeded.

The train control system proposed by Professor Stevens is essentially a train stop system similar to that used by London Underground. It is only suitable for use where all trains are travelling at approximately the same speed and have the same braking characteristics. Ideally the running speed should not be more than 50 kph (30 mph). These features rarely occur on mainline railways and never where freight and passenger trains share tracks. The system described cannot distinguish between danger and caution and would thus bring a train to a stand on passing a signal displaying a cautionary aspect. This would create operational havoc. I am open to correction, but, as far as I am aware, no such system is in use in Switzerland.

Still on signalling, the TVM 430 system is much more sophisticated, requiring significant ground and train borne equipment, and was developed for operation at speeds in excess of 200 kph. At present it is not used above 300 kph (186 mph). It provides an in cab indication of the maximum speed at which the train may be driven in place of trackside signals. Advance warning of the need to reduce speed is also given. It is far more sophisticated than the Integra system in use in Switzerland whose operation is very similar to the British Automatic Warning System.

Lastly (yes, really), the emergency position of a brake controller will normally provide a deceleration rate of not less than 0.981 metres/second/second (3.2 feet/second/second if you prefer). Taking the maximum speed of an Re450 as 130 km/hr and allowing, generously, 2 seconds for the pressure in the brake cylinders to rise to its full value and assuming no braking occurs during this time, the Re450 will come to a standstill in 737 metres significantly less than a mile. If the several miles quoted for the emergency stopping distance were correct not only would the Zürich suburban service be inoperable, but the inadequacy of the brakes would make Swiss Federal Railways decidedly unsafe!

From: John Jesson - Cyberspace

Re: Swiss vs the Rest - an Individual's View

In the March issue, Dennis Stevens invited British railway workers to express their point of view about the privatisation issue.

I do not wish to delve too deeply into this subject, as I feel it is not one suited to the columns of a magazine primarily dealing with the railways of Switzerland. Nevertheless, there are some points which have not been made and which are, perhaps, of some relevance.

The nationalised railway system of Britain was saddled with a lack of investment that prevented it from developing from its post-war run-down condition into a modern means of transporting freight and passengers. Although it is easy to blame the railways for failing to achieve the high standards reached by railways of other countries, my personal view is that most problems could have been overcome with adequate finance. Badly designed, badly built and badly maintained sums up the overall situation, with most projects being built down to a price. I do not claim that lack of investment was the sole reason for poor performance, but it plays a large part in the condition in which the railways found themselves when privatisation was pushed through with such indecent haste.

The railways of Britain could have been split vertically. Thus, track, infrastructure, stock, staffing would all would be the responsibility of one company. Other companies could have running powers, as happens now in Switzerland. The government of the day chose instead a horizontal split, with one company being responsible for the track, signalling and infrastructure (Railtrack) and all train running in the hands of Train Operating Companies (TOCs).

There are arguments for and against but, like it or not, the railways, and its customers, are having to live with the consequences of the system imposed upon them by government. There has been much criticism of the various TOCs only being interested in making money. Of course they are, they would not be in business if they were not but to say it is their only objective is to do them an injustice. With the few exceptions of former BR employees who had the courage to lay out very large sums of money to acquire parts of the nationalised empire, then later sold out at a huge profit, the railway is in the hands of businesses who are trying to balance their books while, at the same time, cope with increasing passenger numbers, reducing subsidies and unreliable material and infrastructure. It takes a long time and a lot of money to introduce new rolling stock, rebuild stations and infrastructure, install new signalling even longer for the investment to be recouped. Much longer than the seven years initially permitted by government.

The dislike many people have for the railways of Britain is fuelled by the newspapers. The standard of reporting on railway matters is so inaccurate that I have to wonder how accurate is any press report, on any subject. The railway magazines are infinitely better in presenting railway issues in a balanced and informed way, but are not completely blameless. I can think of one monthly columnist who presents his views of the railways. If he has something genuine to comment on, all well and good, but too often he does not, falling back on nit-picking against the company that serves his home station.

Pride in ones job is out of fashion these days, nevertheless there are a lot of people, of all grades, working for the railway companies, who work extremely hard to provide the best service they can. My own job is to oversee the minute-to-minute operations of one of the TOCs, and I could not wish for better staff. It is often said that, when anything goes wrong, all the bosses disappear. This is not the case in my company, where everyone pitches in. The MD knows he cannot reassemble the train service himself, but is more than willing to pass the nuts and bolts while others do the job. I do not recall this ever happening pre-privatisation.

The situation in Switzerland seems to work so well that we wonder why the Swiss would ever contemplate changing it, especially to something that is apparently worse. The incident recounted by Alan Parsons in the same issue shows that no-one is perfect, and others have told me of instances where the SBB has responded inadequately to a service disruption. I have to say, somewhat cynically, that this is hardly surprising, as the railways of Switzerland experience so little disruption that the staff do not get enough practice in dealing with it.

There are aspects of the privatisation process worthy of consideration, such as splitting the passenger and freight functions and making them separately accountable. Our former President, Alfred Hauser-Gubser, in his recent letter, has noted this. The Swiss, I am sure, will choose sensibly, and I see little cause for alarm.

From: Michael Donovan - Gravesend

Re: Swiss vs the Rest - an Individual's View

On behalf of the many British railwaymen who are members of the Society and are visitors to Switzerland as often as we can afford it may I pick up on some of his points.

"Technical knowledge is lacking on the British side, but very competent in France, Switzerland, Germany and Italy. When our engineering planners abandoned hope for a tilting train...."

The decision to abandon the APT was political; BR asked for more time to overcome the failings of the manufacturers who did not provide parts exactly to specification - repeating short-comings even after they'd been asked to correct them. Naturally, others took advantage of this pioneering idea and work (I seem to remember the Swedes were the first to jump on the band-wagon after this decision, but it's a long time ago). As so often, British inventiveness was failed by political shortsightedness. BR was developing a MAGLEV system; the politicians abandoned it; the Japanese are now running a test-bed system at remarkable speeds, and the Germans were talking of building a MAGLEV route across northern Germany to Berlin. The lack of British political will to develop necessary infrastructure projects, while happily building roads, is legendary. How about the failure to build a route to the Channel Tunnel, and other infrastructure projects? Of course, the Swiss hold a referendum on such things, and vote the money to back-up their wishes! The British have the technical knowledge and are leaders in innovation, but everything in politics and industry seems to be about short-term profit, not investing for the future.

"....their driver were in the cab of a Swiss Re450 he would have to know that the emergency brake application would not bring the train to a standstill for several miles...."

Yes, it would take a distance but NOT several miles (probably one to one and a half miles, at a guess - but there are probably railwaymen in the society who can calculate it to the foot (or metre), depending on the gradient, type of vehicles in the train, and current rail conditions!

Why write to Railtrack about Eurail passes? Railtrack is the owner and maintainer of the infrastructure, not a vendor of tickets. If even rail enthusiasts do not understand this, what hope is there for the mass of the public? (ATOC is the umbrella organisation for the Train Operating Companies, and might be able to answer on behalf of all of them on policy matters).

Reverting to automatic train protection, everything is about what level of control you require. The German system, believed to be all-singing, all-dancing, is now shown to have a loophole. An intermittent control system was offered in Britain some years ago, similar to that used in Sweden, but, no, the system has to control every moment of a train's movement on the running line. No wonder it will cost so much! Incidentally, how many people realise that ATP would not have prevented the Clapham crash?

From: Michael Kemp - Wetherby

The cost of holidays in Switzerland

I have noted with interest recent articles about the cost of holidays in Switzerland and the emergence of low-cost airlines. The prices mentioned on page 26 on the "January" issue have prompted me to make my own comments.

Until about 10 years ago my wife and I had never considered Switzerland as holiday destination as everyone "knew" it was "far too expensive". When the last of our offspring had achieved financial independence we thought we might be able to manage a one off holiday in the Alps, both of us enjoying upland walking and railways. After looking at several brochures we discovered the Kuoni Swiss Summer brochure and were surprised at the reasonable prices, well below certain others. We booked Kandersteg in September 1992, were delighted with the good value and have returned every year in September since. This year we are staying in Kandersteg for the 4th time at the 3* Hotel Blumisalp, two weeks half board at £605 each, including Swiss Card, Fly-Rail luggage and Swiss Air scheduled flights.

This is still expensive for families, self catering would be cheaper. But, by using the other option of a budget airline and booking one's own accommodation in a similar hotel I still doubt that it would be possible to beat these prices. My estimates (per person) for this are:

UK-Zürich return flight - £50

Swiss Card & Fly-Rail - £72.50 Travel £112.50

14 Nights half board, low season at Hotel Blumisalp (booked direct) £592 (ChF 2.53/ £1)

Total cost of holiday £704.

Staying at more popular resorts does cost appreciably more and to be fair the choice with Kuoni is limited although comparable value can be obtained at Adelboden, Champéry, Château D'Oex and Davos. although all this sounds like a PR exercise for Kuoni I must stress that I am not in any way connected with the company. I just believe that members may be paying more than is strictly necessary and that looking at main stream packages can save money.

There was a proposal a few years ago to compare a list of hotels visited by members. I would be happy to assist and think it's a good idea.

From: Iain Dodd - Cyberspace

Dampfbahn Furka-Bergstrecke

I was wondering if the members could help me identify a locomotive seen at Realp in August 1999. When I visited an emergency timetable was in operation using No. 1 Furkahorn. Because I have walking difficulties I was not able to visit the depot but the tour leader reported that a locomotive bearing the number 9 was seen.

Locomotive number 2 has been recorded on various magazines as being rebuilt from Furka Oberalp (FO) number 2 whilst in other magazines it is recorded as being based on FO number 9. From Peter Arnold's article in Swiss Express it appears that FO 9 was in better condition than FO 2 so it seems to me that reports that number 2 is based on FO 9 is more sensible. Can anyone confirm if number 2 has been renumbered 9 to reflect its true ancestry or do both 2 and 9 exist? Also can anyone say where the other locomotives recovered from Vietnam are and if any work is taking place on them?

THE CLASSIFIED SECTION - Members Adverts

For Sale

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Wanted

Swiss Express Vol 1. Nos. 1, 3, 11 and 12. (originals - not photocopies). Please state price. Offers to: Brian Hemming, 3 Little Heath Road, Chobham, Woking, Surrey GU24 8RP (e-mail srssec@email.com)