

The letters pages

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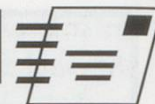
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Letters are welcomed on any relevant subject. Please ensure that when you send an email letter you include your address.

From: Bob Simmonds – Boston

Many Thanks

Please record my thanks to all those brave souls who helped me into and out of the AGM at the Midland Hotel, Derby with the half-a-timber-yard that is 'Surava'! I was not in the best of health, so perhaps I appeared a little grumpy!

From: John Eve – Hitchin

Some Recent Snippets

The following may be of interest to regular readers:

During a recent visit to Lauterbrunnen I noticed the BOB were operating two SBB Brünig line coaches on Lauterbrunnen and Grindelwald services. BOB driving trailer ABt 411 was in blue/yellow livery, is this the one shown in the June 2003 current Swiss Express? And two WAB He2/2 locos were in dark blue livery with 'Wengernalp' in a similar position and format as 'Jungfraubahnen'.

The Dragon ship is still 'alive and well' on the Thunersee. When we used it, it was about 10 minutes late into Interlaken, but by the time we arrived at Thun it was back on time at 14.08, (a lot of 'recovery' time?), and we caught the rail connection at 14.14, not quoted by SBB as a connection.

Also, although not specifically railways, but perhaps of interest was our trip out and back on Swiss (International Airlines.) We noted a downgrading of meals; the 0810 out provided only a croissant and yoghurt with tea or coffee. The 18.00 return had cheese or ham rolls with various drinks. Both flights provided sweets/chocolate before takeoff.

There is now a Lake Constance Card, for 3, 7, 14 days at SFr70, 90, 127. It is valid for lake and mountain railway travel and 150 other attractions in Switzerland, Austria and Germany. Available from tourist information offices in all the countries. Full details are available at <www.bodenseeferien.de> and click on the Erlebniskarte link.

From: Mike Bunce - Southampton

(The Editor apologises for the long wait before publishing this letter and the next)

Rail travel to Switzerland

We have just returned from a very enjoyable rail holiday to Switzerland. We have visited family in Switzerland regularly for 30 years, but had not used the train for our travel there and back since the 80's, so this year we chose to use the train to see how it had improved. Leaving home at 6am, and giving ourselves 2/3 hours for the change in Paris meant we could complete the travel to Meiringen in a day.

We were impressed with the Eurostar and TGV from Paris to Bern - if you can afford it go for 1st class - the comfort on these longer 'legs' of the journey is well worth it. The 'trickiest' part of the journey is the crossing of Paris. The RER from Gare de Nord to Gare de Lyon is very swift - but for a first time I would allow 2 hours so that you can find your way and buy your ticket. Beware of the many confidence tricksters offering to help you buy you a ticket from the ticket machines. They appear to use stolen credit cards to buy an overpriced ticket, and sell it to you. The journey only costs 1 Euro, so have some coins, or use the ticket office. To use the ticket machines click on the flag button to get English, and select the RER button.

Due to the nature of our visit we looked at the many different Swiss ticket options available and found that we could purchase a 1 month half fare card for 99SFr. This suited our travel plans best, and gave us access to the day card 52SFr. If you are planning to use the day card on the Furka-Oberalp line then plan your travel on Monday-Thursday to avoid a 10SFr weekend surcharge. I would also recommend using the local serv-

ices in preference to the Glacier Express trains as the local services are less used and you don't have to pay the 9Sfr Glacier Express booking fee.

We booked our tickets using the Internet. For the TGV we booked it with SNCF before we decided on the half fare card. Next time I would book it all through SBB, so gaining a half fare reduction on some of the journey. I found them very helpful, and they responded quickly to my Email questions. You can contact them at: <bestellungen.sbbcontactcenter@sbb.ch>

Reply to article – Discovering the Centovalli June 2002

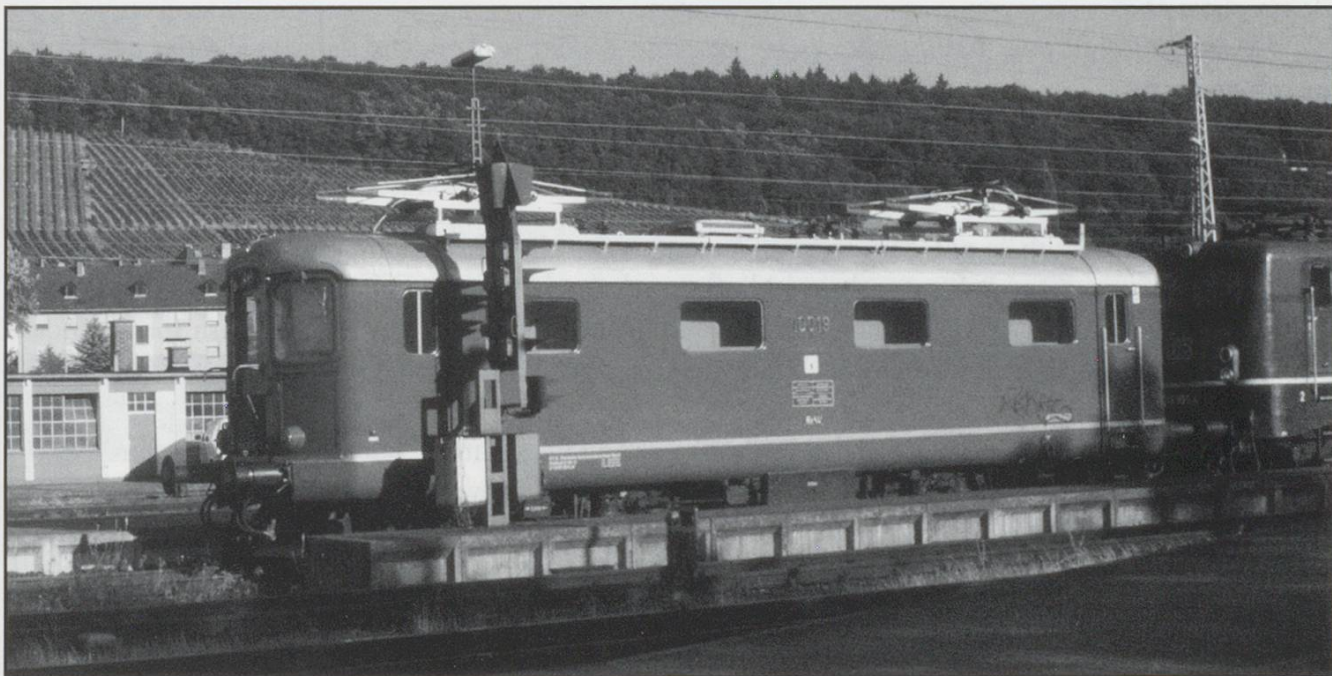
We did the walk from Camedo to Intragna in September 2002, and thought it might be helpful to give a bit more detail. The walk is very pleasant, and we were impressed with the peacefulness of the route. It is reasonably well signposted, and we did it without a detailed map just using the local leaflet, which shows the map as in the June 2002 article. The beginning and end of the route are on tarmac roads, but the middle section is on a narrow footpath, so 'sturdy' foot ware is recommended.

On leaving Camedo follow the road signs uphill to Borgnone and then towards Lionza. You don't actually enter Lionza; just after the old charcoal pits you will see a yellow Swiss footpath sign to Intragna – this is the one to follow. The section from here to the cut off point to Corcapolo Station is on a footpath, which includes 5 descents and ascents to cross mountain streams, and is the slowest section of the route. We stopped for lunch in this section and all we could hear was bird song – no traffic etc. with wonderful views across the valley. On our visit a new restaurant had just opened in the hamlet of Verdasio – it provided welcome refreshment after the ups and downs of the footpath section. The final road section is literally downhill to Intragna. Look out for the path shortcuts on the hairpin road sections.

The time estimate of 5 hours was realistic for us 50 year olds, the most time being spent on the middle footpath section.

From: Steve Horobin – Haverhill

One in Germany



I took this picture of ex SBB Re4/41 10019 at Trier last year. After doing a bit of surfing I have established that it was sold by SBB in 1998 to Nostalgie Express Berlin (NEB). It has worked extensively in the Mosel and Rhine Valleys since on charter trains.

Putting NEB into Google lead me to Transeurope Express Eisenbahn AG whom seem to be the parent company or the same as NEB.

Check out <www.lok011102.stellwerk.com> - click on Fahrzeuge.

From: Jeff Lawrence - Manchester

Hot or What?

On the 14th June I returned from my holiday in Interlaken, the temperature varied between 93 & 104 degrees, leaving with swollen feet, a powerful thirst and no intention of running around stations taking pictures of locos. However I did manage to have eight days out on my Swiss Pass. On my first day I went to Murten. When changing trains at Kerzers (home of the nicest signal box in Switzerland and now available as a Swiss Special Faller kit). No 1 E/E 3/3 was pottering around the station with a short train.

In Interlaken Ost on the 13th June I saw and photographed the Grey Mouse in TEE livery ex-works, while the other set sat forlornly in the yard. Also in Ost was a BOB driving trailer in the new blue and yellow livery, at Zweilütschinen was another driving trailer in RBS livery.

On the model front, according to Hobby Flash, the Liliput A3/5 is out in the autumn along with 3-2 axle and 3-3 axle coaches, plus some SBB and BLS bogie stock. In LGB the V51 AS RhB Ge4/4 241 looks very nice, if you can get one.

I was on Lucerne station waiting for my Brünig train near the end of the platform when I noticed a loco lurking behind the concrete pillars under the post office. It had a single pantograph in the middle of the roof. It was of course the Brünig 1992 *Giswil* minus nameplates. I was under the impression that it was cut up in the early 90's along with its sister 1991. How has this loco lasted so long and not been classed as preserved or mentioned in any books and is 1991 still in existence, behind it was an old Brünig observation car.

From: Peter Valentine – Chester

easyCrit

Probably quite a lot of members use easyJet for travel to and from Switzerland, (the editor certainly does) so maybe others will also bring the following item to your attention, but if not...

The In-flight magazine for July 2003, in the German language section, promotes the alleged superiority over train travel of a shuttle bus service from Basel to the easyJet terminal at Zürich Flughafen. The article translates as:

For our passengers from Basel, endless grime, expensive parking and crowded unhygienic trains will become relics from the past.

From: Lester Weeks - Middlesex

On the Rack

I believe Ron Smith is not quite correct in stating (in his information-packed article) that Niklaus Riggenschach's Vitznau/Rigi Bahn was the world's first rack & pinion mountain railway. It was nevertheless the first in Europe. In fact, it would appear that the honour should go to Silvester Marsh for his Mount Washington rack line in New Hampshire USA opened in 1869. Riggenschach visited Mount Washington during his own planning stages.

But the true originator of rack & pinion operation was an Englishman. John Blenkinsop applied a somewhat primitive format to a locomotive of the Middleton Colliery railway as early as 1812!

Where's the grub?

I have been reading with interest Malcolm Hardy-Randall's series on the subject of the 'Voralpen Express', At the VAE's inception the then SOB were to be congratulated on their elegant and tasteful refurbishment of the Mark I stock that included a well laid out Bistro and discretely installed air-conditioning. Curiously, however, the air-conditioning was omitted from the Bistro car. Now, however, the present SOB has removed the catering service, leaving just a very basic trolley.

It is odd that all this should happen at a time when, as a result of popular demand, the SBB (and the BLS) have had to re-discover the Restaurant Car. For example, the ICN, usually formed of two seven-car units, has an operating restaurant in both units! Restaurants are also to be found in numerous IC and EC train formations. Moreover, the new upper-deck restaurants will soon begin to appear in certain trains formed of the SBB ICDSW stock.

The variety of food and drink items on offer in Swiss restaurant cars is not what it used to be, but remains perfectly adequate and very reasonably priced. Now the service can usually be carried out efficiently by just one Steward(ess). I believe that people are finding out what a pleasure it is to have a meal, or even just a drink in a proper cup or glass, aboard a train.

According to 'Elvetino', the SBB's recently formed train-catering arm, 2003 marks 100 years of 'Bahngastronomie'

From: David Robinson – St Neots

Filisur Update

Having just spent another weeks holiday at the excellent Hotel Grischuna in Filisur, the RhB are carrying out a complete modernisation of Filisur Station. The original timber station building is being retained together with the existing loco shed and turntable, but the current 5-track layout is being changed to 4 tracks with raised platforms and an underpass connecting the platforms. There is going to be a canopy over the island platforms.

The current loop tracks closest to the station building have already been removed and new platform edges were being installed. A very large hole already exists next to the station building with some steel reinforcement and concrete in place for the new underpass to the platforms. They are also extending the main track loops slightly towards the Albula direction and installing double track towards the tunnel before the Landwasser Viaduct in the Chur direction. The cost is given as SFr 24,450,200 and the work is scheduled for completion in October/November 2004. It will be interesting to visit again in Summer 2005 to see the finished result.

If anyone is interested in further information I have taken some digital photos of the work so far and of diagrammatical track layouts and detail layout drawings that are on display in the station. I would be happy to forward copies. My email address is h5djr@ntlworld.com

From: Margaret Smith - Harrogate

The Rigi

I enjoyed reading the article 'Steam on the Rigi' by Ron Smith in the March 2003 Swiss Express. My husband and I did the journey from Arth-Goldau to Rigi Kulm on August 6 2001. On this occasion the steam engine was No 17. We thought the turnout of engine, coach and crew, who were in 'period' uniform helped to create a special atmosphere. (See enclosed photographs). The flat wagon was loaded with a baby buggy as well as stores. The electric unit departed at 10.10 and we followed at 10.11!

Our journey had several stops en route; at Kräbel we were passed by the descending service train, a photo stop of about 10 minutes was made at Fruttli and there was a refreshment stop at Klösterli, set up especially for the steam train - they were busy packing away as we departed. This was also where the loco took water.

