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LETTERS

FROM: PHILIP ELWIN – NOTTINGHAM

The Misox Situation

I have just received the June Swiss Express and am replying to your request for info on the Misox line.

I passed through Castione-Arbedo station the other day (Sunday 18th July) on a southbound Gotthard train. There was certainly a Misox railcar loading in the station forecourt that morning.

The cars stored in the open alongside the main line have suffered badly from graffiti. There were small publicity pamphlets in black & white advertising SEFT services in the booking hall at Lugano station (I didn't pick one up!) where incidentally on the same morning I saw a special standard gauge train of two Rorschach-Heiden bogie coaches hauled by an Ae4/7.



Privately owned and preserved ex SBB Ae 4/7 10997 with two Rorschach-Heiden coaches on a special. 10997 ran round the coaches and departed south towards Lugano. See the advert on page 23 about this loco. Photo: Philip Elwin

FROM: RICHARD HAWKINS – ALRESFORD

Some Holiday Observations

I have just returned from yet another wonderful holiday in Switzerland, enjoying the freedom of a first class Swiss Pass. My wife and I stayed, for about the fourth time, at a hotel in Interlaken and travelled all over the place on trains, boats and post buses. This year however the Jungfraubahn group has its own travel pass and is offering only 25% discount on production of a Swiss Pass, rather than the 50% discount of previous years.

On 15th July 2004 Blick, the Swiss newspaper reported that a BLS class 450 (number not disclosed) caught fire at the southern portal of the Lötschberg tunnel, leading to the fire crew attending at Goppenstein station. The loco driver suffered from smoke inhalation and was taken to hospital. The loco suffered extensive damage. There is no report on the effect to services over the Lötschberg.

On 18th July 2004 a fellow guest at the hotel told me that a BOB motor unit derailed at Grindelwald station that morning, right up near the stop block. The railcar was re-railed and continued in service, apparently. I travelled on this route the next day and ABeh 4/4 II No. 310 was certainly suffering from the effects of wheel flats but whether this was the offending vehicle, I am unsure.

On 18th July also I saw the Ballenberg steam locos running their regular summer service from Interlaken Ost to Giswil via Meiringen and the Brünig pass, 1067 performing on the rack mountain section.

On 20th July 2004 my wife and I were sitting in the BOB motor unit at Grindelwald station waiting for the 1525 departure when the driver walked through the train, announcing there had been a major electrical power failure at Zweilütschinen and there would be a 10-minute delay. The conductor followed shortly with similar information. After precisely 10 minutes there was an announcement over the station pa that the train would be replaced by a bus service. Knowing how long it takes in the UK to organise replacement buses, I groaned. My wife and I walked up the platform to be greeted by the sight of a Grindelwald division Post Auto coach (rather than a bus) in which we occupied the seat immediately behind the driver for the non-stop run to Interlaken Ost. Two further buses followed but stopped, I think, at intermediate stations to remove passengers from stricken trains. The service was restored later.

It is some six years since I last visited Interlaken, having taken holidays (both summer and winter) in the meantime in Graubünden, based in Davos (which is of course RhB territory). Whilst I was aware of the construction of the BLS Lötschberg base tunnel, I was not ready for the apparent devastation of the valley between Frutigen and Kandersteg around the northern portal, and again in the Rhone Valley around the southern portal. According to the owner of the hotel where we stayed in Interlaken (who was born and bred in Kandersteg), the contractors, engineers and BLS are experiencing real problems in the construction of the tunnel and in removal of the spoil. A small mountain of spoil exists at Blausee Mitholz. A visit to the BLS base tunnel website gives no clue as to such problems. Do any of your correspondents have direct experience of the tunnelling operations to the extent that would satisfy a short article in a future Swiss Express?

(Note from ED. We do indeed have a contact. George Hoekstra lives in Kandersteg and has written a short piece in response. Lack of space has precluded its use in this edition.)

FROM: BRIAN HAGGETT – CRAWLEY

Accuracy or What

Brian recently forwarded some pages from a BBC magazine. Copyright laws ensure I cannot reproduce it but the picture is very similar to the one reproduced here, which is ©swissimage. Now read on:



A quick glance and you are wondering why someone is sending you a part of a Homes and Antiques magazine for February 2004. . . unless you have already seen it. It would appear that some major (very major!) engineering work has been going on, that we are unaware of, in Switzerland.

On page 111 of this magazine, we are informed that the Venice-Simplon Orient Express travels through the Lauterbrunnen Valley. Has the Bernese Oberland Bahn been converted to standard gauge? Is there a new tunnel at the mountain end of the valley?

I wish some people who write about railways knew something about their subject. That reminds me of the accident on the Schwebbahn at Wuppertal a couple of years ago, when the Daily Mail reported the engine and two carriages coming off the track!

Letters on any relevant subject are welcomed. Write in to the Editor at the address on the first page. Disc, email, CD, typewritten, handwritten or stone tablets.