

Letters

Objektyp: **Group**

Zeitschrift: **Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal**

Band (Jahr): - **(2005)**

Heft [2]

PDF erstellt am: **08.07.2024**

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FROM: MICHAEL FARR - CALLINGTON

Peter Parkes - An Appreciation

West of England Group members were sorry to learn of the death in early February of Peter Parkes who had regularly attended meetings at first in his native Exeter, and latterly travelling by train to Newton Abbot. Peter had visited Switzerland regularly over many, many years and had amassed a huge collection of photographs. He seemed to have contacts at railway installations all over the country – from standard gauge SBB to miniature lines like that formerly on Brienz Quay and was able to talk his way onto the footplate, into sheds, works and generally behind the scenes. It is to his great credit that Peter never allowed the results of his quite severe illness to prevent him making solo trips at home or abroad.

He was au fait with computer technology and each Christmas would produce a calendar of his own photographs, which he gave to local members. He used this expertise to produce many hundreds of tickets for the Plym Valley railway, which he had always supported, and he was also an active volunteer with the St John Ambulance service.

While the West of England Group met in an Exeter pub Peter looked after the television and video player which he had to bring to meetings by taxi, not an insignificant feat and one for which his fellow members will always be grateful. He also volunteered to act as a teller when votes had to be counted at the Society AGMs. We shall greatly miss his company and his comments on the historic and present-day Swiss railway scene.

FROM: GILES BAKER – ON HOLIDAY IN THE USA.

What Ever?

Re: the last part of the March 2005 editorial. I think this understates the society by forgetting members from Scotland to New Zealand, and indeed I doubt there are better groups devoted to railways on continents other than 'the continent'. Are we not the most successful worldwide railway group devoted to railways in a single country ever! Or perhaps if that's too much of a claim then we're the most successful English speaking railway group devoted to railways in a country in the non-English speaking world ever!

Yours globally!

Note from Ed: I missed out the word "speaking" from the text thus ensuring a somewhat xenophobic tone to the editorial! Thanks to the others who pointed this out.

FROM: ALAN PIKE – HEMEL HEMPSTEAD

Schilthorn cable problems: Glyn Jones. S.E. March 2005

When I worked in Switzerland some 30 years ago, I was often told with justifiable pride that Swiss cable railways, suspended and funicular, were the safest in the world because they were closed for a period each year for maintenance and an inspection by a government official.

I was told more than once that the old cables were offered for sale and that some of them found their way to Italian cable railways. Presumably some parts might be suitable for further use and it may have been malicious gossip in any case but I have yet to travel on an Italian funicular or cable railway.

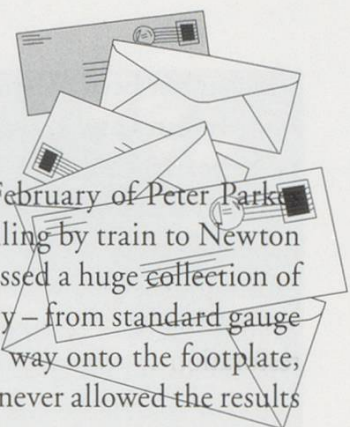
I wonder whether things have changed in Switzerland today and that either inspections are not so rigorous and/or financial pressures have encouraged managements to lengthen replacement times. Some consequences of such practises have been observed in the UK in recent years.

There will always be mishaps and I am sure that the Swiss sense of propriety will ensure that any steps needed to protect the Swiss systems' reputation for safety and reliability will be put into effect. I am not deterred from using these lines and neither should anyone else.

FROM: LESTER WEEKS - TEDDINGTON

Glacier Express

I read with interest Rice Signore's translation of the Glacier Express story. Millions of people have enjoyed travelling aboard the Glacier Express over the years. Nevertheless, I seem to be the only person I



who has not been pleased with the experience!

My sister and I, sometimes together with sundry friends and relatives, travelled to Switzerland by car twice yearly from 1965 until we started to use Eurostar...

Our first Glacier Express journey was from Klosters to Brig. We used it quite a few times, because this happened to be a convenient way, during our Klosters stays, to get to Brig to pick up our sleeper for the return journey. However, I have to say that we did not always find the Glacier Express comfortable, bearing in mind the 2+2 seating in First Class and lack of window blinds on warm sunny days. Moreover, the high load factor, although good for business, was not conducive to comfort in the prevailing cramped conditions. We were spared the Glacier Express on our outward journeys as we would leave the sleeper at Bern and tuck into breakfast in a restaurant car between there and Zürich.

From the outset I had written off the restaurant cars of the Glacier Express as probably being too gimmicky, so we never had a meal aboard. That is, until last May when I travelled from Brig to Chur as part of a group and were to have lunch en route. We did not go to the restaurant car, and I ruled out the prospect of anything grand or even cooked! What a surprise it was, therefore, when the stewards came and laid up the tables in the panorama car with starched, white tablecloths and gleaming cutlery and glassware, mercifully not the gimmicky, wonky glasses. It was a most memorable, beautifully prepared and served meal. Perhaps this was something of a preview of the forthcoming 'at seat' catering service

I must add that I do enjoy the Glacier Express route but prefer to cover it using ordinary trains. This is quite easy between Chur/St. Moritz and Brig/Zermatt, but the middle section from Chur to Brig is more difficult and needs a break in Disentis and/or Andermatt.

FROM: GARTH JENKINSON – AUSTRALIA

Ex SBB Locos

Thank you for publishing my request in the December 2004 *Swiss Express* for information on the ex-SBB locomotives we saw near Berlin. Thanks also to those who responded, and for publishing their answers in March SE. I've now also looked at the website quoted.

FROM: TONY BAGWELL – TAUNTON

AGM Picture

Thanks for publishing my photo on page 40 of the March 2005 *Swiss Express*. Unfortunately, somewhere along the line the title has got the wrong date - it may have been my initial caption or it crept in during publishing. As the photo was submitted for the competition at the AGM in March 2004, even the advances in modern cameras would not have allowed the photo to have been taken in May 2004. The date should have been 24.05.03. Sorry if it was my fault. (Note from Ed: It wasn't, neither was it the editor's!)

FROM: MIKE THOMAS – HAILSHAM

Wandering driving trailers

Further to Mark Fox's observations (letters, March 05 *Swiss Express*) regarding the wanderings of 'Arosa' driving trailers, I can confirm that his sightings are not due to excessive consumption of Calanda Brau! I enclose evidence of Steurwagen 1701 waiting at Preda on the Albula line with the winter Schlittelbahn service after carrying all the intrepid tobogganers up the hill from Bergün.

The Chur-Arosa line trains in winter are sometimes longer 'conventional' formations without driving trailers and often double-headed. This obviously releases the Arosa driving trailers for other duties. One can also see locos marshalled in the middle of trains on this line – see photo of the Arosa Express leaving (or arriving, I can't remember!) Arosa in March 2004.

On the subject of push-pull sets, I too have witnessed some strange formations, including the Samedan to Scuol-Tarasp service with the locomotive coupled to the front of the driving trailer, requiring it to be run round the train before departing on the return journey! I am sure that the RhB understand the concept of driving trailers and can only assume that the Steurwagen was in some way faulty. Or maybe it was just done to confuse visiting Schmalspurbahn enthusiasts!



See the letter from Mike Thomas on the previous page for the details of these photographs.

