

Reviews

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REVIEWS

DAS GROSSE BUCH DER LÖTSCHBERGBAHN.

Authors: Patrick Belloncle, Rolf Grossenbacher, Christian Müller and Peter Willen.

Published by Verlag Viafer, P.O. Box 74, CH - 3210 Kerzers. Language: German. 400 pages, about 1000 photographs, mostly in b + w. but about 70 of the photos are in colour. Many illustrations and tables. Format 9 x 12 ¼ inches, hardback. ISBN 3-9522494-1-6.

Price: SFr.109 or €71.

It is clear, that with so much already written about the BLS Lötschbergbahn, most of the material has been dealt with before somewhere. The main point of this book is to bring it all together. As the whole book is printed on gloss-coated paper, the thousand photographs are all well reproduced. As many of the photographs are from the BLS archives, I have seen a few of the originals and I can say quite a few reproductions seem better than the originals...!

The full story of the BLS is presented. From the very beginnings of the "Bödelibahn", The Thunerseebahn and the Spiez - Frutigen Bahn, to the building of the main Lötschberg railway. Then came the other railways in the BLS group: The Simmenthalbahn, the Gürbetal - Bern - Schwarzenburg Bahn and the Bern - Neuenburg Bahn. And finally the big changes of the last years: The building of the NEAT base tunnel between Frutigen and Visp. The establishment of BLS-Cargo as a separate company within the group. Then the swap with the SBB: they are running all main line services, while the BLS runs all local services in the area bordered by Neuchâtel, Biel, Solothurn, Burgdorf, Langnau - Luzern, Thun, Schwarzenburg, Fribourg and Payerne, not forgetting regional services to Interlaken and Brig: a huge area with a lot more trains to run than ever before!

There isn't just a lot of information about the building of the line. Traction and rolling stock is also treated extensively. The BLS was and still is a railway where innovation is not just a PR phrase, but where they actually do develop new techniques. Then there are all the events, most memorable the celebrations for the 75th jubilee. The demanding gradients of the Lötschberg route are in great demand for testing. The management and operating departments have always been very co-operative and unbureaucratic in allowing manufacturers to put their engines to the test. Quite a few are shown in the book. Then the development of the Car-Transport through the Lötschberg tunnel. In Goppenstein, over 1.3 million cars a year are handled in an area of a few soccer fields - compare this with the incredible amount of space the Channel Tunnel seems to need. (*Ed: To be fair the BLS does not need to provide for Customs, Immigration and Security checks - and a shopping mall!*)

As the railway is 100 years old, a lot of the information in the book is necessarily of a historical nature. However, as I am almost of an historical age myself, and I know a lot of my readers are also - don't worry, you shall all remain anonymous - I am sure you will also enjoy seeing the photographs of events you have heard of, or maybe even have had personal experience of. But there are not only the photographs. The four authors and photographers have all had a close connection with the BLS; some still work there! Several have written books before and one edits the BLS Newspaper. Their very informative text thus has the benefit of inside knowledge. As a railway journalist and having lived right on the main line for over 45 years: first near Bümpliz Nord and then at Kandersteg, I am naturally quite familiar with a lot of the material in the book and I shall certainly treasure it. You could say, it is a pity the book is only in German, but with the full text in other languages as well, it would have been twice as big and you would not have been able to lift it. Also, with less text the book would have lost a great deal. So get out your dictionary and enjoy!

Patrick has warned me it is so ridiculously expensive to send a book this big and heavy to a foreign country, that the publishers would have to add about 40 francs to the price! All orders have to be prepaid, incl. of postage. In order to avoid this extra cost, there are two other possibilities. The best one is to come to Switzerland yourself and buy it here, or ask a friend to bring

it home for you. The other possibility would be for someone in Britain to get at least six orders together and make a bulk order. This person would then be responsible for collecting all the money and sending it to Switzerland with their order. This way, depending on the total order, there would be little or no postage to pay on the individual book. Now see below!

Editor's Note: If anyone is interested in purchasing a copy I am willing to negotiate with the publishers. It would need a minimum of six orders to make it viable. Let me know via the contact details on page 1.

KROKODIL – KÖNIGIN DER ELEKTROLOKOMOTIVEN

Author: Christian Zellweger, SBB Historic.

Published by AS Verlag, Buhnrain 30, CH-8052 Zürich. Language: German. 160 pages, 184 illustrations in b+w and colour. Format 9 x 9.6 inches, hardback. ISBN 3-909111-19X.

Price: SFr. 54 or €32.

The Swiss Crocodile locomotive is a living legend. First built in 1920, 33 locos were built as types Ce 6/8^{II} and Be 6/8^{II}, followed by a further 18 as Ce 6/8^{III} and Be 6/8^{III}. The book shows how the design was based on the articulated steam engines. The main characteristic of the electric engines were their very long noses - hence the nickname. They were very powerful and lasted a long time and their main role was pulling heavy freights over the harsh ramps of the Gotthard line. Here they ruled supremely into the fifties. But they did not only work on the Gotthard. I well remember being pulled by Crocodiles on several occasions while travelling on local trains between Bern and Thun in the late fifties. If you happened to sit in the first coach, you knew it was a "Croc": the thrusting motion was unmistakable!

No less than nine have survived to this day. Half a dozen times during the last five years, I have had the privilege of riding behind one. Always a great experience! Needless to say, I also have two running on my model railway: the equally legendary Märklin CCS 800, as well as a more modern example!

But back to the book. It is a mine of information. Clearly, the role of these engines on Swiss rails occupies the main portion of the book, but stints of SBB crocodiles in foreign countries are also covered. Not forgotten are "family members" in other gauges and countries. There is even a chapter on projects that were never realised. Some of this information has never been published in this context before. The text is in German, so a working knowledge of this language would be helpful. The almost 200 illustrations speak for themselves - in any language! If you have ever seen a Croc, you will enjoy the wonderful photographs in this book, about half of them taken by the author. In the dramatic one on pages 52/53 the Croc really pounces on the photographer. But there is also a sad one on pages 98/99 where a long line of Crocs, several of which have lost their number plates and manufacturer plates, wait for their last transport to the breakers yard. The information given in the photo-texts is short and to the point and thus easily understood as well. The book is well researched and written.

The author, Christian Zellweger, is a long time railway journalist colleague (and an electrical engineer) who obviously has had a special interest in the Crocodile. He has written two other books for SBB Historic. One about the electric TEE sets and another about the A3/5 steam engines Tigerli, Elefant & Co.

AUF DEN SPUREN DES GLACIER EXPRESS

Authors: Paul Caminada and Peter Pfeiffer.

Published by AS Verlag, Buhnrain 30, CH-8052 Zürich. Language: German. 160 pages, 140 illustrations in two-tone b+w. Format 9,5 x 11,8 inches, hardback. ISBN 3-909111-20-3.

Price: SFr. 88 or €54.80.

Not another book about the Glacier Express I can hear you say. Well, yes and no. It is not just a book about the famous slow express - but about the era it all started, in the first half of

what we can now call the last century! The beginnings of the (Brig) - Visp - Zermatt Bahn, The Furka - Oberalp Bahn and the Rhätische Bahn (on the Disentis - Chur - Albula - St. Moritz route) are all covered. But that's not all: there are also sections on both the Gornergrat and Schöllenen Railways. Even the old Riffelalp-Tramway, when it was still running on the same three-phase current of the Gornergrat, is not forgotten. The main part of the book is dedicated to what was for a long time the missing link, the 60-mile long stretch between Visp and Disentis. The routes from Visp into the Matter valley, as well as from Chur to St. Moritz and its branch from Reichenau to Disentis, were already operated by steam traction, but the formidable obstacles of the passes of the Furka and Oberalp were not conquered until 1926, when through traffic became possible in summer only. The formidable snow drifts on these passes prevented through traffic in winter until the Furka base tunnel, built with lots of money from the Central Government because of its strategic importance, opened in 1980. This event led the Furka Oberalp Railway to close the line over the summit, which was very expensive to maintain as can be seen from the pictures of the battle with the snow on pages 80 – 90. Also, while you are at it, look on pages 78-79 at the pictures of the Rhone Glacier, which after all gave the train its name, by The Hotel Belvédère in Gletsch in the old days and compare them with recent pictures. You will see how far the glacier has retreated in less than 50 years.

Since 1992 though, the Furka Bergstrecke volunteer railway is operating increasingly large parts of this old line with steam traction. Steam traction also plays an important part in this book. There are great old pictures of steam on most parts of the line. But early electric is also well documented – look at the rare photo of no less than three RhB Crocs below the huge Disentis monastery on page 129. The FO and (B)VZ Crocs are there too, together with other older types of all three railways, which you do not get to see very often in other books. The photographs, most of them from the combined archives of what is now the MGB (Matterhorn Gotthard Bahn), are the mainstay of this book. It consists mainly of beautifully reproduced old black and white photographs. In fact, I only counted just over a dozen pages of text. That is not to say the text is irrelevant. Far from it, if your knowledge of German is up to it, you will realise that the text is equally well researched. Even if you do not know German, the book is well worth the price for its wonderful collection of historical photographs!

Both authors are railway professionals. Paul Caminada is a civil engineer and Peter Pfeiffer works in traffic management. They have both also written railway books before.

ALLES BAHNHOF - GARE GARE – MAI DIRE STATIONE

Author: Klaus Koch. Photographer: Christoph Grünig.

Published by Editions Bellevues CH-2500, Biel. Languages: German, French and Italian.

288 pages, about 2000 (no, not a mistake) illustrations in full colour. Format 10 x 12 inches, hardback. ISBN 3-9523085-0-1. Price: SFr. 89 or €59.

This is a huge book in many ways: 10 x 12 inches and almost 300 pages. It was too heavy to measure on my kitchen scales! An undertaking of this magnitude needs a lot of money, so it is sponsored by, amongst others, the Federal Department of Transport, the SBB, the Lucerne Transport Museum, Post Auto Switzerland, several railway industries and private railways. The publishers call it a photo-reading book. The author, reflecting on my comment that even though it was in three languages it was mostly a photo-book, wrote in my copy: "There are more words than pictures". When the photographer saw this, and commenting on the fact my English readers could at least understand the pictures, he wrote "But the pictures are international". They are both right!

The first half of this book is about everyday life in the stations. Over 200 photographs capture people at work and play or simply waiting, as well as parts of the stations' architecture. I have spent a lot of time at some of the benches and chairs seen in the photographs - like in Zürich on

page 63; on the steps at Bern on page 94 (there are not that many seats at Bern); or at the buffet in Biasca on page 115 - watching people go by. Thus I can vouch for the fact there was no need to use posed photographs. Everything really happens at stations and if nothing else, this book will encourage you to spend more time observing the people there. If you are able to read the text, the stories are well written and although sometimes quite far out, others are very personal. All give impressions about life in the stations itself and about travel in general – fictionalised reality to protect the actual people involved.

The second half contains photographs of all of Switzerland's 1806 stations – a station is defined by having at least a passing track, the others are regarded as stops and are mostly not portrayed. The vast number means these pictures have to be quite small, in fact only 1½ by 2½ inches – about the size of the display on my digital camera! The ones I knew are all quite recognisable, though. The order in which they are printed is not alphabetically, or according to size or importance. Supposedly there is a logic, but this must be for insiders only. Luckily at the back of the book there is an Index, so you will be able to find your favourites. The list also gives Canton, operating railway, height in metres above sea level and postal code. As with any work of this size, there are a few inaccuracies (I noticed that the postal code for Kandersteg is wrong), but they do not in any way distract from the fact this is truly a hugely interesting book.

Klaus Koch is a freelance writer, who divides his time between living near Zürich and in Andalusia. The book was his idea and he thoroughly enjoyed visiting all those stations. Christoph Grünig is a freelance photographer, living in Biel. It should come as no surprise he likes people and architecture and apparently he took over 12,000 photographs for the book.

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