

Reviews

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100 JAHRE SIMPLON TUNNEL

Authors: Thomas Köppel and Stefan Haas. **Published by** AS Verlag A.G., Buhnrain 30, CH-8052 Zürich. <www.as-verlag.ch>. **Languages:** German/French/Italian. **224 pages, 230 photographs, all (except for the historical ones) in full colour. Format** 9½ x 11¾ inches, **hardback. ISBN 3-909111-26-2. Price in Switzerland: SFr. 98.00 or 60.00.**

This is another big book for a big event.

100 years ago, on the 19th of May 1906, the then Swiss President Forrer and King Victor Emanuel III of Italy officially opened a large Iron Gate that had been erected at the border point in the tunnel. The railway route from the Romandie (the French speaking part of Switzerland) through the mountains to Italy and its Riviera was officially open! It has been an expensive book to produce requiring a lot of sponsorship from the French Swiss lottery, the Canton of Wallis and SBB Historic.

When they opened in 1906, the Simplon tunnels – yes, plural, there are two parallel tunnels – were the longest tunnels in the world. Simplon I, built between 1898 and 1906, is 19,803 m (65,000 ft. or 12.3 miles) long. Simplon II, the second tunnel built between 1912 and 1921, is only a few metres longer: 19,823 m. As the portals of both tunnels are situated at below 700 m (2,300 ft.) they could also lay claim to the title of the first base-tunnels in the world. Simplon I took only eight years to build, taking into account that a small bore of the parallel tunnel was also built at the time. With the equipment available at the time, it was a gigantic task. About 10,000 workers were employed on the task. Drilling of the boreholes for the blasting was done by water powered drills – there was nothing else at the time! It took 1,500 metric tons of dynamite to blast out the almost 1 million cubic metres of spoil. To give you an idea, that is half a square mile, piled almost 3 ft. high, of rock!! I make no apologies for these technical details: as a chartered civil engineer, I can only stand in awe at the achievement of a hundred years ago. You want to know more: read the book!

But the book is not only about the building of the tunnels. It starts with the history of the only way to cross the Alps before it, the mule track over the Simplon Pass. In 1805 the Pass route was improved and paved by order of Napoleon. Today it is a comfortable route for all traffic, open all year. Then there are all the railway topics: historical; today; and the future – with the opening of the Lötschberg base tunnel. Not forgotten are the people who make it all work. As has become the norm for the publisher AS Verlag, the photographs, both historical and topical, are beautifully reproduced. There are several aerial views of the track-layouts, which I always find particularly interesting. There are also some views of the block-post in the middle, sited by the crossovers between the two tunnels, which I have been privileged to visit several times. Texts have been contributed by eight authors, most of whom are members of the Swiss Railway Journalists. Of the editors, Thomas Köppel, born 1966, studied history. He worked at the Polytechnic Institute of Zürich and in the Federal Government, before leading the archive and information section of SBB Historic. Stefan Haas, born 1962, studied economics and journalism. After working as a professional Journalist and Editor, he now leads the PR section of the SBB.

Fittingly, the book is written in the three languages, which the Simplon Route connects: French, German and Italian. Even if you do not know any of them very well, the combination of the three - together with the pictures - will mean you can enjoy this book.

GMH.

DAMPBETRIEB IN DER SCHWEIZ.

Author: Peter Willen. **The 112 page German Language A4 landscape sized pictorial book published by EK Verlag - 29.50 - is produced in full colour to the usual high standard of this publisher.**

A full map of the railways of Switzerland is shown on the inside cover, including narrow gauge lines although they are not covered in this book. This edition covers the standard gauge steam locomotives that were in use on the various Swiss Railways after the



year 1957. A brief history of the particular company is given along with an explanation of the locomotive photograph under which it appears, including the name of the builder, works number and year of construction of the locomotive.

All SBB locos are shown in the front section of the book and listed by the major towns that they were based in. The photographs are mainly of locomotives at work with one or two hauling latter day specials, many photographs show old stock as well as visiting items such as the diesel unit of the SNCF with the roof mounted cabs. There are views of the old station in Bern along with coaching and freight stock that is now gone but not forgotten. Not to be forgotten are the replica and museum locomotives also covered. The section covering the Gotthard is split into the North ramp, Tessin, Chiasso and the Luino line. There are some spectacular views of the steam snow plough in action in and around the Göschenen station area being assisted by C 5/6 locos and of the diesel rotary snowplough Xrotm 99 being helped by an Ae 4/6 and C 5/6s' removing about a metre of snow off the line. Even the final days of the SBB steam loco are covered with views of some of the locomotives awaiting the breakers torch or being broken up.

After the SBB coverage comes the portrayal of the private railways with the various locomotives that were employed by them. Look out for the section on the Sursee - Triengen railway that shows views of their E 3/3 loco and the electrically powered SBB E 3/3 steam locomotive no 8521. For the editor of the *Swiss Express* Journal and other fans of the Bodensee Toggenburg are views of the steam festival that took place in 1965. In the SOB section are several views of the Knie Circus train hauled by a single Eb 3/5 with two Ec 3/5s as bankers. At the end of the book are views showing the German BR 03s, BR 23 hauling specials in Switzerland and those giants of the SNCF the 241P at Vallorbe and the SNCF 141 R 1244 on a special on the Gotthard.

The author Peter Willen admits that he caught the railway virus way back in 1948 and has had a very keen interest in the railways since that date which shows in the quality of the photographs used in the book. He has been involved with the railway industry throughout his working life. For the fan who enjoys looking at good photographs and studying the stock portrayed, this a book to have.

MH-R

LETTERS

FROM: A MEMBER (NAME AND ADDRESS SUPPLIED)

Swiss Pass at the Transport Museum

Although in the announcement in the March 2006 *Swiss Express* regarding the Swiss Pass it is noted that the pass is not valid for the Transport Museum in Luzern my experience is different.

I heard indirectly from a Tour Company representative in Luzern that the Swiss Pass *IS* valid for free entry to the Transport Museum. Subsequently visiting the Museum myself on 15 May 2006 I was readily assured that the Pass is indeed valid and I was given an entry ticket marked "Swiss Pass" and was waved through.

Although I knew of the 7% discount offer I actually bought my pass on arrival in Basel, rather than from London, but this shouldn't make any difference. I thought that it would be helpful to members if this could be clarified in the next issue.

FROM: GILES BAKER – BY EMAIL

Three items

1. Obtaining the Kursbuch

I usually buy one on Day 1 of my holiday in Switzerland. However you cannot now get the bus section over the counter and as I do not only travel by train this is inconvenient. The answer clearly is to follow the